

Research Report

COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
IMPACTS ON WORKERS IN VIETNAM'S APPAREL AND FOOTWEAR
SECTORS

A Report by the Center for Development and Integration (CDI) for The Rosa-Luxemburg-
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ABBREVIATION LIST

CDI: Centre for Development and Integration, Vietnam

CMT: Cut, Make, Trim

CVN: Care International in Vietnam

FDI: Foreign Development Invest

FOB: Free on Board

GDP: Gross Domestic Production

GSO: General Statistics Office of Vietnam

LEFASO: Leather footwear and Handbag industry

NGO: Non-governmental organization

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SME: Small and Medium Enterprise

VGCL: Vietnam General Confederations of Labours

WHO: World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study aims to document the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on female migrant workers in Vietnam's garment industry during a period of six months, from February to July 2020, focusing on (i) economic impacts (employment, income); (ii) health impacts (access to health services, health care and infection prevention); and (iii) social impacts (constraints on families and individuals; need for support in the future). The study will contribute to helping stakeholders (governments, businesses, mass organizations, and social organizations) recognize the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to build measures to minimize them, improve lives and jobs for workers in the garment industry, especially female migrant workers, both during and after the pandemic.

This report is in two parts. Part A, the Desk Review, a summary of secondary sources, draws on published material that addresses the structure of Vietnam's clothing and footwear industries and the impacts of the economic downturn on businesses and workers in those sectors. The Desk Review was conducted as an end in itself and as a basis for designing and implementing the original research described in Part B of the report. Not only does it detail short-term impacts on businesses and workers (through 2020), the Desk Review also outlines structural challenges affecting the sector and suggests policy responses by government to address longer-term issues. Part B of the paper summarises key results of social surveys of workers displaced from apparel factories in three of Vietnam's Provinces. The survey results essentially confirm the impacts indicated in the Desk Review whilst adding qualitative details regarding the apparel sector, illustrating the struggles which workers of the sector's factories are facing due to the rapid, massive, and of course unforeseen changes to their lives.

Part B is based on findings from interviews conducted by the CDI research team. The data reported in Part B of the report comes from field research conducted in three provinces of Vietnam on the impact of Covid-19 on female migrant workers in the textile and garment industry. CDI conducted complementary social research in three provinces, where clothing and footwear factories are concentrated: Hai Duong, Dong Nai and Da Nang city. The survey research is funded by Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. Part B of the paper also reflects some key result of a social survey conducted by Care International which covered 1280 workers from 126 textile and footwear companies in 5 provinces (Hai Duong province, Hai Phong city, Da nang city, Ho Chi Minh city, Dong Nai province) through face-to-face and

telephone interviews. Six textile enterprises and 88 people across those three provinces were interviewed.

Information from these two surveys has been shared and coordinated with a Public Private Partnership (PPP) Initiative to explore the impact of the Covid-19 induced impact on businesses and workers in textiles and footwear sectors.

This report is made by researchers including Dr. Ngo Minh Huong, Nguyen Thi Loi, Kim Thu Ha of Center for Development and Integration under Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung support for conducting research on the impact of Covid on female migrant workers in garment sector in Vietnam from June 2020 to December 2020.

From the social surveys, the survey results systematically confirm the range of impacts summarised in the Desk Review and add much detail on those impacts on the lives of real workers. During the interviews, a special attention was paid to the adequacy or otherwise of government policies in cushioning the impact on workers of the downturn.

- Based on the Desk Review and the Social Surveys, the following policy suggestions should be advocated to government to support post-Covid recovery and to cushion the impact of similar events in the future:
 - (a) Criteria for access to current government-funded relief should be adjusted so that more workers can access support. In addition, the policy should extend the period of entitlement.
 - (b) Government should establish policies to create favourable conditions for businesses to borrow with the aim of paying employees' salaries when customers cancel their orders or fail to pay, causing enterprises to fall into a situation where they cannot afford to pay salaries. The State can lend to businesses at minimal or zero low or no interest rates to support businesses, to revive and ensure the lives of workers.
 - (c) Government needs to expand the bailout program for workers by linking with credit institutions that have credit products to help women deal with outstanding debts.
 - (d) Government should consider allowing businesses to delay payment of social insurance premiums during times of zero production and new orders in production due to natural disasters.
 - (e) Insurance policies need to be revised so that workers are able to purchase their own health insurance to ensure that they will be covered whenever they get sick, even when they lose their jobs.

PART A - DESK REVIEW¹

Introduction

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a flurry of studies and commentaries on its impacts on Vietnam's economy, businesses and workers. The Desk Review draws on those commentaries and data to delineate the impacts, known to date, of the economic downturn on Vietnam's apparel and footwear industries. These sources have served as a framework to guide the design and implementation of social research on those impacts funded by Oxfam Vietnam and conducted by Vietnamese NGOs, CDI and CARE. The Desk Review is in four sections. The first sketches economy-wide impacts on businesses and employment of the pandemic. The second summarises information on the impacts of jobs losses and reduced working hours on workers in the apparel and footwear sectors. The third section summarises actual and proposed short term responses by the Vietnam Government and the private sector to workers and businesses under financial pressure. The fourth section makes some observations about on-going worker's rights issues in the sector, and the need for it to develop more sustainable industry models with respect to the rights of female workers.

Section 1: Pandemic-induced economic downturn

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak as a global pandemic. As of August 2nd, 2020 (when the Desk Review was completed), c.24 million Covid-19 infections have been reported in over 210 countries and territories, with a death toll of c.822 thousand people.² Whilst people the world over remain quarantined under government-mandated 'lock down' rules along with widespread testing and contact tracing, the number of those infected continues to increase. However, the government of Vietnam acted early, strongly and effectively to contain the spread of the virus [August 26 2020: c.1000 reported cases and c.29 deaths reported]. Nevertheless, the national economy is being heavily impacted by the failing economies of trading partners. As of March 24, 2020, preliminary estimates suggested that 20 percent of Vietnam's business enterprises have either suspended or downsized their operations. Millions of

¹ This report is made by researchers including Dr. Ngo Minh Huong, Nguyen Thi Loi, Kim Thu Ha of Center for Development and Integration under Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung supports for the the research on impact of Covid on female migrant workers in garment sector in Vietnam (June 2020-Oct. 2020)

² <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-cases/>

workers have been severely affected, especially unskilled, low-income workers in both formal and informal sectors of the economy.³⁴

The full extent of economic damage from the pandemic is unknowable at this stage. However, there is widespread agreement amongst economists that impacts on the global economy into the foreseeable future will be severe. Early estimates predicated that most major economies will lose at least 2.4 percent of the value of their gross domestic product (GDP) over 2020, leading economists to already reduce their 2020 forecasts of global economic growth down, from around 3.0 percent to 2.4 percent.⁵ Moreover, these predictions were made prior to Covid-19 becoming a global pandemic, and before the implementation of widespread restrictions on social contacts to stem the spread of the virus, so the reality could be even worse.

The garment and associated footwear industries pre-covid were characterized by hyper flexibility, resulting from pressure to deliver low-cost products at short notice. This led to retailers and brands negotiating low prices, extending or delaying payment terms, refusing price increases to cover wage increases or other costs to improve working conditions, deviating legally binding commitments to suppliers and planning short lead times with frequent, last-minute order changes. In addition, existing power structures give brands the ability to pass on this pressure to their suppliers. The industry standard is for contractual agreements and payment terms with limited responsibility of the brand along with placing financial burden on suppliers. On one hand, factories, as employers, have the primary responsibility for labour conditions. On the other hand, brands have passed on to suppliers and factories, the responsibility to pressure production to meet orders and timing. Therefore, they opted to put low wages, excessive working time, casualised employment or subcontracting.

Code of Conduct violations are identified by brands but lack of visibility to consumers and retailers and fragmented nature of supply chains. Where there are efforts to combat these Code of Conduct violations, these are usually coordinated by the sustainability or CSR team of a retailer or brand. Their interventions, such as audits or training, are often not integrated in and at times, contradict actions by the sourcing department and top management, whose key performance indicators and bonus schemes are primarily aligned with commercial

³ GSO, Press Release available at <https://www.gso.gov.vn/Default.aspx?tabid=382&ItemID=19557>

⁴ Tác động của dịch COVID 19 đối với một số lĩnh vực xã hội (impacts of COVID 19 on some aspects society); 24 March 2020; available at <http://quochoi.vn/tintuc/Pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-quoc-hoi.aspx?ItemID=44379>

⁵ <https://www.statista.com/topics/6139/covid-19-impact-on-the-global-economy/> [accessed by Dec 30 2020]

interests. This dilemma greatly jeopardises the ability of sustainability teams to improve working conditions in their supply chains.⁶

Recently, a consensus about the enormous influence of business practices on labour conditions had started to build. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (*OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector*) explicitly calls upon companies to adopt responsible business practices. A brands' business practices are often not, however, human rights Due Diligence programme are usually not integrated and tackled as a root cause of poor labour conditions among brands' business practices and its supply chains. Brands and retailers have been arguing that the lack of a level playing field and the highly competitive nature of the industry prohibited them to make necessary changes, leaving supply chains locked into unrealistic pricing and lead time structures.

The Covid-19 induced economic crisis has exacerbated these existing challenges. Lockdown measures in most European countries and economic uncertainty for consumers led to a sharp decline in retail activity, increasing further pressure on retailers and brands to remain commercially competitive and minimise long term commitments.

During the Covid crisis, retailers meeting their contractual obligations have not been enough to protect workers. Suppliers, who were already working with limited margins and pre-financing production, suffered severe economic consequences. In order to behave responsibly, brands and retailers have needed to work with their manufacturers as partners looking for joint solutions, highlighting the need for these more engaged business practices to become standard. In many cases, retailers have fallen short of even meeting contractual obligations. Journalists, unions, civil society organisations and researchers have documented practices of brands and retailers during the crisis, such as refusing to pay for already produced goods or orders in production, cancelling upcoming orders and extending payment terms or demanding price reductions. This behaviour has compounded existing problems and directly impacted the ability of many factories to pay wages and maintain employment. Millions of workers have suffered from losses of income. Wage levels in key garment producing countries have been below living wage estimates, meaning that most workers have been unable to build savings before the crisis. In addition, most countries do

⁶ Anner '[Predatory Purchasing Practices in global apparel supply chains and the employment relations squeeze in the Indian garment export industry](#)' (International Labour Review, 2019); [Better Buying Index Report](#) (2019); Kashyap '[Paying for a Bus Ticket and Expecting to Fly](#)' (Human Rights Watch, 2019)

not offer adequate social protection. This has left many workers without any or very limited financial resources.⁷

At the time of writing, it is impossible to predict how the ongoing economic crisis will continue to impact the industry. Retailers and brands will be even less likely able to give reliable forecasts. Health and safety measures at factories will mean additional investments in equipment, sick leave and reduced capacity. Yet, there is no guarantee that brands and retailers will cost for these increases in their pricing.

Migrant workers were among the first to lose employment during the crisis, as they were often only employed informally in the first place. With many brands not placing stable and predictable orders, factories often opt to hire more marginalised workers such as migrants, on an informal and flexible basis.

Social security systems were at times limited to residents and did not include migrant workers, leaving them without any support. When factories were able to pay (delayed) wage or settlement payments after receiving delayed payment for some orders, many migrant workers had already left to return to their place of origin. A rapid survey by the Centre for Development and Integration, Vietnam (CDI) (conducted between January and March 2020 during the Covid-19 social distancing period) and CVN's rapid gender analysis (conducted between April and May) confirmed that female migrant workers have been most affected by the pandemic.⁸ Being unable to return to their homes due to lock-down restrictions, workers have been forced into insecure situations in the urban/industrial zones where their factories are located.⁹

Female workers in textile industry become more vulnerable. The garment industry is characterized by a high proportion of females in the workforce. Already before the crisis, the industry had benefited from having a flexible, disciplined and pliable workforce at hand, which easily absorbs the effects of unpredictable business practices. Women workers

⁷ Anner, '[Abandoned? The Impact of Covid-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of Global Garment Supply Chains](#)' (Center for Global Workers' Rights 2020); '[The Emperor Has No Clothes](#)' (Asia Floor Wage 2020); '[Live-blog: How the Coronavirus affects garment workers in supply chains](#)' (Clean Clothes Campaign 2020); '[Timeline - How coronavirus is impacting the global apparel industry](#)' (just-style 2020); '[Cost and Cost Negotiation and the Need for New Practices](#)' (Better Buying 2020), '[COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses](#)' (International Labour Organization 2020)

⁸ Care Vietnam. 2020. Rapid Gender Analysis for Covid-19: Vietnam. <https://www.care.org.vn/project/care-rapid-gender-analysis-for-covid-19/>

⁹ '[COVID-19 Briefing Note: Migrant Workers](#)' (Ethical Trading Initiative 2020); Bedi '[NGO: Include undocumented migrant workers and refugees in Covid-19 response plan](#)' (The Star 2020)

subsidise the industry by taking home low wages and working and living in poor conditions. The Covid crisis has enhanced these dynamics, leaving women workers particularly affected. Workers are facing job losses, a lack of insurance or sick pay coverage, an increased burden of unpaid care work, additional barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and increased risk of gender-based violence. Pregnant women workers and those with young children were less likely to be re-employed as factories restart operations.

In Vietnam, the impacts on the country’s economy in the first half of 2020 were very significant: year on year (y.o.y) GDP growth rate in the first 6 months of 2020 was 1.8 percent, the lowest in the past decade; the inflation rate was 4.96 percent, the highest in the last 5 years (GSO 2020). By the end of April, over 41 thousand enterprises had temporarily closed down (GSO 2020), 28.4 percent of enterprises resorted to lay-off, 21.3 percent furloughed workers.¹⁰

Section 2: Viet Nam’s apparel and footwear sectors

During the pre-Covid 19 period, Viet Nam’s Apparel industry accounted for 2.6 million workers i.e. 5 percent of total labor force and contributed 15 percent of total exports (2019). The number of factories almost doubled to 11,959 between 2011 and 2019 (textiles 37 percent, garments 63 percent.) Only 11.7 percent of businesses were driven by FDI, which contribute to 63 percent industry’s capital. However, FDI counts for 95 percent while Vietnam garment and footwear mainly focus on Cut, Make, Trim(CMT)- Free on Board (FOB) I, FOB II. This made the profit margin for the industry in Vietnam get low profit level in the value chain. In 2019, the apparel industry exports were worth 34 billion USD, which double increased compared to 2011, with 17 percent average growth during the period of 2000-2018.

Table 1: Industry

Sector	No, of firms	Labor force	Wage/ Income level per worker (VND) (2019)

¹⁰ Source: GSO Survey of 123,000 enterprises, April 2020. Báo cáo tình hình kinh tế xã hội tháng 4 và 4 tháng đầu năm; Bộ Kế hoạch và Đầu tư (2020) (Report on socio-economic situation in April and the first 4 months of 2020 ; Ministry of Planning and Investment); available at <http://www.mpi.gov.vn/Pages/tinbai.aspx?idTin=46109&idcm=293>

Apparel (textile and garment)	11,959 (2019)	2,600,000 (2019)	4.225.000 (183 USD)
Footwear	2,095 (2018)	1,300,000	7.600.000 (+/- 1.800.000) 330 USD +/-80 USD)

Source: Viet Nam Statistical Book (2018,2019), LEFASO, VITAS (2019)

Covid has impacted on apparel inputs and outputs. From March 2020, materials imported from Korea and China dropped sharply. Since April 2020, orders cut or cancelled as well as forfeited contracts start widely leading the cut of labor contracts. In the first 6 months, there was no new contract.

Garment exports from Vietnam are in high intensity when penetrating big markets like the US, EU and Japan, which account for 70-75 percent of total exports. The garment industry workforce has contracted 20 percent compared to 2019, and the textile sector contracted down to 24.5 percent compared to 2018 (according the survey of GSO on 3143 enterprises in garment). Revenue of textile companies reduce to 61.6 percent and garment companies reduced to 78 percent compared to the same period of the year 2018.

Vietnam's apparel and footwear sectors are, for several reasons, especially vulnerable to global economic downturns. An article in the East Asian Economic Forum discusses these reasons (Nguyen, and Le, 2020). Garment and textile industry becomes the most vulnerable amongst other industries. The survey of Mekong-China Strategic Studies Program (MCSS) (2020) on 2881 garment enterprises in Vietnam showed 58 percent of FDI and 56 percent of private companies have to apply the current cost cutting, 30 percent of FDI and 37 percent of private companies have to reduce labour. Furthermore, the method often applied is: 45 percent of companies apply rotating off-work, 35 percent reduce labor force, 15 percent of FDI let workers on non-pay waiting status quo contract.

Lack of diversification: Vietnam has traditionally focused on garment production with little capacity for fabrics manufacturing. It is estimated that Vietnam imports up to 80 percent of fabrics. This reliance on fabric imports impacted in the early weeks of the pandemic due to disruption in supplies from China.

Focus on low value-adding part of supply chain: “Vietnamese garment manufacturers predominantly focus on the simplest ‘cut-make-trim’ (CMT) model where foreign buyers own and control all the pre- and post-production processes. CMT production contributes 65 percent of Vietnam’s total exports, while the more advanced Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) and Original Design Manufacturing (ODM), that allow for higher profit margins account for only 35 per cent.” This situation is more of an opportunity foregone to achieve higher profits and higher quality jobs, than a financial risk.

Relatively high dependence of local Small and Medium size Enterprises SMEs: 24 percent of firms in the textiles and garments sectors are foreign owned, contributing to 76.6 percent of export value (Vietnam Statistic Book 2018). Textiles and garments firms are also predominantly SMEs, whereas electronics firms are mainly large (>USD50millions output by value per annum). Smaller, locally owned firms have much lesser financial capacity to withstand prolonged downturns in demand for their products. “The Vietnamese textiles industry remains largely driven by SMEs, working as contracted manufacturers to foreign clients in Europe, the U.S. and China.” This means that Vietnamese firms are heavily reliant on international supply chains to keep them afloat.

This section provides the implications of the narrowly based structure of the apparel and footwear industries. They will be highlighted as a potential focus for industry policy designed to insulate the sectors from future economic shocks.

Impacts on businesses

In a short space of time, business enterprises in Vietnam’s apparel and footwear sectors were greatly impacted by the pandemic. Vietnam’s index of industrial production (IIP) showed that in the first 4 months of 2020, output from apparel and footwear factories decreased by 6.3 percent, compared to a 8.8 percent increase during the same period in 2019.¹¹ The downturn resulted first (as noted above) from a severe contraction in the supply of raw materials and accessories from China (owing to factory shut-downs there as part of measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 infections from Wuhan). Supplies have now been restored but the sectors have been hit by severe and on-going demand reduction from major markets in Europe, US and Japan and elsewhere. There have been widespread

¹¹ <https://www.gso.gov.vn/default.aspx?tabid=630&ItemID=19505>

cancellations of orders as well as delayed deliveries and payment schedules.¹² The Vietnam Textile and Apparel Association (VITAS) estimates that nearly 100 percent of businesses in the sector have been affected, regardless of enterprise size and product type. Seventy percent of enterprises were estimated to have been forced to immediately cut jobs in March and 80 percent of enterprises were expected to make further job cuts in April and May.¹³ Consequently, more than 3 million workers (over 80 percent of them are female) in the sectors are at risk of losing jobs or experiencing reducing working hour and wage.

According to Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOIT), apparel and footwear sectors were identified as seriously negatively impacted by the Covid 19. ¹⁴ Vinatex estimated that the apparel sector lost 50 percent of orders in May, 2020. In addition, supplies have increased while demand has reduced, which may cause for the prices of textile products to reduce down to 20 percent all over the world. Nguyen and Le (2020 n.p.) noted that: 70 percent of garment manufacturers started reducing shifts and rotating workers in March [2020], with an additional 10 percent following in April or May. By June 2020, the estimated loss to the industry could reach US\$508 million [in sales]. Data from Vietnam's Custom's Agency suggest that imports and exports of all textile and garment products fell massively in the first quarter of 2020. Exports of garments totalled US\$7.03 billion, a 1.4 percent year-on-year reduction compared to 2019 and 34 percent lower than the expected growth of 50 percent prior to the pandemic.

Do (2020) made a number of pertinent observations related to the sector's dependence on international markets and contractors. One of the key reasons for the devastating impacts on the industries is the fact that a number of international brands have quickly cancelled or postponed their orders while refusing to make full payment for the purchased materials and the cut-make-trim cost of the finished products. By resorting to '*force majeure*' clauses in business contracts, the brands have pushed the risks to the most vulnerable sections of the global supply chains: the assembly suppliers that operate on thin profit margins and their poorly paid workers. Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) estimated that collectively global fashion brands have potentially cancelled in excess of £20bn of orders worldwide from

¹² Báo cáo tình hình phát triển ngành Công nghiệp và Thương mại tháng 4 và 4 tháng đầu năm 2020; Bộ Công Thương (Report on the development of Industry and Commerce in April and the first 4 months of 2020; Ministry of Industry and Trade); available at <https://www.moit.gov.vn/web/guest/bao-cao-tong-hop1>

¹³ <https://www.fairwear.org/covid-19-dossier/covid-19-guidance-for-production-countries/covid-19-impact-and-responses-vietnam/>

¹⁴ <http://thoibaotaichinhvietnam.vn/pages/kinh-doanh/2020-07-10/nua-dau-nam-det-may-da-giay-suy-kiet-vi-dai-dich-covid-19-89373.aspx>

major garment producing countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.¹⁵ Do (2020) also noted: “In reaction to this business practice, the textile industry representatives from six Asian countries including Vietnam, issued a joint statement on April 9th, urging clothing brands to fully compensate suppliers when cancelling orders.¹⁶ Do (2020) further noted: WRC and the Center for Global Workers’ Rights (CGWR) at Pennsylvania State University have also tracked down the garment and footwear brands that have committed or not to pay in full for orders completed and in production.¹⁷ According to the survey by CGWR in Bangladesh,¹⁸ 45.8 percent of garment suppliers have had their orders cancelled and among them, 72.1 percent of buyers refused to pay for raw materials (fabric, etc.) already purchased by the supplier, and 91.3 percent of buyers refused to pay for the cut-make-trim cost (production cost) for the supplier. As a result of order cancellations and lack of payment, 58 percent of factories surveyed report having to shutdown most or all of their operations.

Job losses and reduction in working hours

For garment and footwear factory workers, the impacts of the pandemic have been devastating, particularly, as noted above, for women. Workers are facing job loss, lack of insurance or sick pay coverage, an increased burden of unpaid care work, additional barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV).¹⁹

The Investment Journal June 2020 indicated that the Covid 19 Pandemic has had negative impacts on employees of the apparel and footwear sectors. Over 1 million out of 4.3 million lost their jobs. The remaining have worked with 50-60 percent of their capacity only, which led to the fact that their incomes were reduced by 40 percent. Moreover, 75 percent of the mentioned group are female workers, which affected nearly 3 million households of this industry²⁰

¹⁵<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/15/arcadia-group-cancels-over-100m-of-orders-as-garment-industry-faces-ruin>

¹⁶<https://vietnaminsider.vn/vietnams-textile-sector-is-reeling-from-a-sudden-loss-of-orders/>

¹⁷<https://www.workersrights.org/issues/covid-19/tracker/>

¹⁸Anner, M. (2020). *Abandoned? The Impact of Covid-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of Global Garment Supply Chains*. CGWR Research Report (March 27, 2020)

¹⁹ <https://www.care.org/newsroom/press/press-releases/new-covid-19-global-rapid-gender-analysis-addresses-concerns-women-and>

²⁰ <https://baodautu.vn/xuat-khau-det-may-da-giay-co-the--tuot-14-ty-usd-vi-covid-19-d124756.html>

Domestic migrant workers (c.90 percent), mostly women, who have moved from rural areas and small towns to factories in the cities and industrial zones of Vietnam, have been identified as the most vulnerable group within the broader population of affected factory workers. A rapid survey by CDI (conducted between January and March 2020 during the Covid-19 social distancing period) and CVN's rapid gender analysis (conducted between April and May 2020) confirmed that female migrant workers are most affected by the pandemic and have less access to government support given their migrant status. Though workers have faced a complete loss of income, or significant income reduction, they still have to cover their basic needs (food, housing, childcare etc.). Being unable to return to their home provinces due to lock-down restrictions, workers have been forced into insecure situations in the urban/industrial zones where their factories are located. A compounding problem is that Vietnamese supply chain workers (as noted above) are not directly employed by the brands for whom they produce goods, hence, they can be left destitute when the work stops. Consequently, this forces workers to search for an even more precarious work which exposes them to an even higher risk of exploitation (Kaine, Payne and Conybeer, 2020).

Given the regency and suddenness of these events, it is to be expected that there is little systematically collected data on the plight of displaced workers (and indeed factory owners). An early intervention in this respect was a survey funded by Australian Aid: Investing in Women. Impact of Covid-19 on employees in Vietnam (Baird 2020).

The survey was commissioned by the Vietnam Business Coalition for Women's Empowerment and Investing in Women. The survey interviewed samples of 300 men and 300 women who were employed at the time of the survey in large private sector firms across all industries (data are not broken down by sector). The survey shows 61 percent have financial concerns, 10 percent have mental health problems, 10 percent have physical health problems, 8 percent have work performance problem, 7 percent have time management problem and 4 percent face family pressure.

A majority of survey respondents reported that their work hours had been reduced and/or that they had received pay cuts; some employees had been required to take unpaid leave or had been suspended. On the positive side, at the time of survey, 40 percent of employees reported that the pandemic had had no impact on their jobs, and nearly 70 percent of employees reported that they were able to be equally productive during the crisis. Some

respondents reported being offered full paid leave, with more men than women receiving this support (28 percent compared with 15 percent), and accommodation during quarantine (10 percent men compared with 4 percent women).²¹

Among those who felt that their productivity had decreased, men were more likely to report anxiety and stress, while women mentioned increased housework and childcare. Domestic duties and childcare increased for everyone, but women were disproportionately affected. Importantly, 50 percent of respondents said that the pandemic had had a negative impact on their mental well-being, and 34 percent said that their physical well-being had been adversely affected (more on this below). Obviously, the scale and significance of these impacts will play out over the coming months and, as noted, the survey did not focus on the apparel and footwear sectors or on workers who had lost jobs.

Health and well-being impacts

Another rapidly assembled perspective on the pandemic's impacts on workers is:

UN Women's Action Brief: *Guidance for Action: addressing the emerging impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on migrant women in Asia and the Pacific for a gender-responsive recovery*. As the title implies, the report is generic in nature and not specific to Vietnam or the apparel and footwear industries. Based on existing knowledge of the problems faced by female workers, especially migrant workers, and ad hoc reports after the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, the report provides a set of benchmarks that may be used to guide empirical research. Key emerging issues for female migrant workers described in the report are:

- Restrictions on freedom of movement
- Termination, expiry and non-renewal of contracts
- Deteriorating working and living conditions
- Occupational health and safety breaches
- Violence

Regarding violence, as a case in point, the report notes that "During emergencies, rates of gender-based violence including domestic violence increase. Levels of gender-based violence spike when households are placed under the increased strains that come from security, health and money worries, and cramped and confined living conditions."

²¹ <https://investinginwomen.asia/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IW-Vietnam-COVID19-Employee-Survey-24Jun2020.pdf>

According to one recent study of the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam, 99 percent of couples experienced marital/domestic conflicts during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 80.9 percent of women said that they suffered from controlling behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic; 34 percent experienced economic violence; the rate of women being abused psychologically and physically are 87.8 percent and 59 percent respectively²²

Investing in Women Survey (May 2020) revealed that when it came to their health, almost half of all respondents (46 percent women and 51 percent men) reported a negative impact on their mental well-being due to the economic effects of pandemic-induced work and incomes shifts. Furthermore, about one third of respondents reported a negative effect on their physical well-being (32 percent of women and 37 percent of men). This increased to two thirds of respondents when both their own and their spouses' employment status was affected.²³

Do (2020) reports the result of another rapid survey of pandemic impacts on workers in the textiles, clothing and electronics sectors. The worker survey conducted on 166 workers from 11 provinces (Ho Chi Minh city, Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Soc Trang, Tien Giang, Tay Ninh in the South; Nghe An in the Central; and Hai Duong, Bac Giang, Ha Nam, Bac Ninh in the North). As their survey focuses on the GSCs, 97 percent of the workers are from exporting companies and only 3.0 percent from the household businesses, which, as claimed by the workers, sub-contract to the exporting firms. 10.2 percent of workers in the three industries had lost their jobs by the time of interview. These workers include both new workers and those who had up to 15 years of experience with the companies. The companies they used to work for, range from household businesses to bigger companies (employing over 500 workers), and both domestic and FDI ones. This means that the impacts of the pandemic have not only hit the smaller businesses but also the bigger ones in these industries.²⁴

²² Research on the impacts of COVID-19 on domestic violence against women in Hanoi, Vietnam, Sep 2020, https://rosaluxhanoi.org/en/publications/publication_details/475.html

²³ <https://investinginwomen.asia/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IW-Vietnam-COVID19-Employee-Survey-24Jun2020.pdf>

²⁴ Do (2020) survey data will serve as a comparator for results of the Oxfam funded CDI/CARE survey.

The income of 96 percent of surveyed workers in garment and footwear had been reduced or totally lost; this rate in electronics is 81.4 percent. Nearly half of the workers in the three industries lost between 20-50 percent of their income. It should be noted that the proportion of workers who lost all of their income is much higher in electronics than in garment and footwear. This reflects the divergence within the electronic industry with the producers of phones and computers performing much better during the crisis compared to the manufacturers of other consumer electronic products (such as cameras, printers). Among the workers who have suffered from income reduction or job loss, 66.2 percent reported that the cancellation/postponement of orders by the buyers has been one of the most severe impacts of the pandemic on the company. In other words, the loss of employment and income of 66.2 percent of the surveyed workers are the direct impacts of the brands/buyers' practices towards their supply chains during the pandemic.

To understand the impacts of the pandemic on the expenses of workers and their families, we classify the expenses of workers and their families into three categories of food, housing and other basic expenses (such as clothing, transportation, education etc.) using three benchmarks of 'basic', 'minimum', and 'below minimum' (Ankers 2015). In particular, when expenses are 'cut to basic level', the nutrition/housing/other living standards are maintained at the minimum acceptable level; when expenses are 'cut to minimum level' the nutrition/housing/other living standards are only enough to sustain life, and below which the life and safety of the worker can be threatened; and when expenses are 'cut to below minimum level', the nutrition/housing/other living standards are at such low level that workers and their families suffer from hunger, homelessness, or acute shortage of other basic necessities. The non-food and non-housing expenses suffered from biggest reduction, with 80 percent of workers cutting on this group (this rate is the highest among footwear workers with over 90 percent making expense reduction). This means that the expenses on transportation, social life, education (for children) and healthcare have been reduced, mostly to the basic level. Housing is the least affected as for the local workers who own their houses, this group of expense is small whereas for the migrants, it is difficult for them to move to a new apartment quickly. Instead, workers tend to thrift on their food expenses: 75 percent of the surveyed workers have reduced food expenses, mostly to the basic level. However, there is also a small proportion of 2.4 percent that have reduced their food expenditure to below minimum level, meaning that they suffered from hunger.

The pandemic and cost-cutting measures by enterprises have got extensively negative impacts on workers' psychology. On average, 83 percent of workers experience constant

feelings of anxiety, depression, or insecurity about their future. However, it is interesting to note that the impacts on footwear workers are slightly less severe than those on electronics, even though the former industry has suffered from heavier impacts from order cancellation and postponement. According to the footwear workers, they are often consulted well in advance before decisions on their wages and employment are made; therefore, they had time to get prepared. On the other hand, the practice of labour-management dialogue has not been common among the electronic factories. An electronic worker told: *'I may go to work tomorrow and may be laid-off at the end of the day. This is really a time of uncertainty'*.²⁵

The cost-cutting measures due to the pandemic have got mixed impacts on the workers' family relationships: over half of the workers reported no impact and 11 percent claimed that their family relationships improved because they were able to spend more time with family. However, the reduction of income and job-loss risks have had negative impacts on the family relationships of 34 percent of workers.

Section 3: Actions to ameliorate impacts in the short run

The urgent and on-going need is for governments at all levels to take action, not only to cushion the financial and consequent impacts of job losses and reduced incomes for workers, but also to ensure that their rights as workers and citizens are protected.

In response to the pandemic's economic impacts on workers, the Vietnam Government issued Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP regarding supporting measures for people facing difficulties due to Covid-19 pandemic, which was passed on April 9th, 2020 (Decision No. 15/2020/QĐ-Ttg). The aim is to support those whose income has decreased significantly and who thus, find it impossible to maintain a minimum living standard.²⁶ Workers who lost jobs are entitled to 1.800.000VND (80 USD) per month for a period of 3 months commencing 1st of April 2020. Circulars No. 01/2020-NHNN (dated 13/3/2020) and 02/2020 (dated 31/3/2020) aim to support enterprises with business difficulties (loan repayments). They are not explicit regarding other costs, notably insurance. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) proposed postponing social insurance and unemployment

²⁵ Cited from Do (2020). Responsibility in the time of crisis? Brands' practices during the Covid 19 pandemic and impacts on factories and workers in the garment, footwear and electronic supply chains in Vietnam.

²⁶ Read at http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?class_id=1&mode=detail&document_id=199898

insurance payments to support laid-off workers and to support companies that had to lay off more than 50 percent of their workforce. Other policies in the pipeline at time of writing relate to tax and payments to insurance as well as trade union funds.²⁷

Do's survey (2020) regarding impacts on workers shows that sources of support for the affected workers are limited. Among affected workers in the three industries, 83 percent received no support at all from their employers. The rest received cash-based and in-kind support from the factories such as one month's salary, rice and cooking oil. Only 29.5 percent of workers surveyed received support from other sources. Of these, 26 percent received cash transfer from the Government package (a total of 62 trillion VND (approximately 2,700 million USD) package). The biggest source of support has been from families and friends. According to CDI's interviews with local unionists and media coverage, an increasing number of affected workers have either sold their own social insurance books on the black market or have borrowed from 'black creditors' at high interest rates.²⁸ To support workers in need of low-interest loans, the Social Policy Bank has tried to persuade companies to allow the Bank to debit from workers' wages to pay for loans. However, so far, this attempt has not been successful with export-oriented firms, as the practice may be in conflict with sustainability codes of conduct that the international buyers require them to comply with.

Review of policies established shortly after the Covid outbreak reveals that both workers and enterprises cannot get access to policy provisions as expected. Credit schemes have not been provided to enterprises in need. Companies are not benefitting from tax reduction aimed to support business recovery. Moreover, regulations to defer contributions to social insurance and unemployment funds have not been proved to be realistic. In fact, few workers are getting cash from the laid-off allowance fund due to many infeasible related procedures.

In addition to government programs, some NGOs and trade unions run activities to provide on the spot support for workers. Trade union activities in many provinces focus on raising

²⁷ In March 2020, Ministry of Trade and Industry recommended: Delay tax payment of the company income tax for 2019, 2020. Delay VAT collection until Quarter 4/2020, Delay collection of land tax. Patent for industrial zones, waste water fee during factory postpone business due to Covid19. Support in credit term and bank loan repayment to 11 months including staff cost due to Covid-impact and clients' delayed payment.

²⁸ http://congan.com.vn/doi-song/ro-tinh-trang-mua-ban-so-bao-hiem-xa-hoi-de-truc-loi_91191.html
<http://tapchitaichinh.vn/ngan-hang/ngan-tin-dung-den-sau-mua-dich-322067.html>

awareness and prevention in regards of Covid-spreading, as well as providing food for the most vulnerable workers. Other non-government support has been shown across the country, including providing free rice and prevention equipment for people affected by the pandemic.²⁹

CDI (2020)³⁰ conducted an assessment based on the work of over 30 NGOs in Vietnam supporting workers during the pandemic. These NGOs mainly provide basic daily needs such as preventive masks using funds raised from individual sponsors and organizations. NGOs and local Trade Unions are also collaborating to support requests to landlords into reducing rent for migrant workers (about 50,000-100,000 VND (2 – 4 USD)/month). In addition, there are charitable groups which provide very prompt supports to workers.

Despite enormous efforts and significant additional resources by the government, businesses and civil society, it is unlikely that the scale and depth of workers' needs can be met fully.

Government mandated that comprehensive information needs to be distributed to workers on:

- Risks associated with Covid-19 infection and prevention
- Access to healthcare services in case of job loss or no health insurance
- Access to food security, shelter and other services
- Policy support and how it functions

Section 4: Long run issues

In the longer run, Covid 19 has starkly revealed the need for governments to address on-going workers' rights issues in the apparel and footwear (and other) sectors. Government also needs to encourage industry restructuring to ensure greater resilience in the face of future economic upheavals.

National industry policy

Policy needs to consider ways of supporting firms to surmount structural barriers to diversification and higher productivity.

²⁹ <https://congthuong.vn/thanh-hoa-ho-tro-nguoi-lao-dong-vuot-kho-khan-sau-dich-137042.html>

³⁰ Rapid assessemnt, CDI, 2020 based on the survey of over 30 NGOs working with laborers and migrant workers.

Nguyen and Le (2020) list three key steps which industry policies need to take into consideration in order to remain robust in the face of economic shocks, but also to be more profitable for companies (and by extensions workers). (i) Establish a resilient supply chain of fabrics and other raw materials, which relies on the development of domestic fabric production; (ii) Diversify the demand base to reduce over-reliance on a few key customers; (iii) Invest in Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and Original Design Manufacturer (ODM) capacity.

Regarding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of global fashion brands, Do's (2020) survey results provide some recommendations: The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the limits and impacts of responsible business policy and practices in the fashion as well as electronics industry on firms and workers at the bottom of the global supply chains. It is therefore very important to study how the major brands have reacted to their suppliers and workers amid the crisis, while identifying the good practices of brands supporting their suppliers. The lessons learnt from such research will be crucial to improve responsible business policy and practices in the global garment, footwear and electronics supply chains. Do's study implies that there should be measures to address the level-playing field problem, including unfair trading practices that lays more pressure on suppliers in the supply chain.

Workers' rights

New provisions of the Labour Code 2019, EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and the ratification of ILO Convention 98 create good conditions for Freedom of Association (FOA) at factory level and scaling up social dialogue efforts in the garment sector. The new Labour Code also provides room for independent trade unions (i.e. operating outside of the VGCL's umbrella). However, the key problem in Vietnam is the implementation of a legislative framework and yet, lacks of independent trade unions and workers' capacity to organise themselves as well as the as the monitoring mechanism for the Convention.

A report published in April 2019 by CDI, FES & EU - *Labour issues in the garment, footwear and electronics supply chains in Viet Nam: Access to remedies* – flagged endemic issues in the sectors. “The report uses the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGP) to assess existing remedy mechanisms of violations against labour laws of business community in Viet Nam.” It is fair to assume that the salience of these issues has been significantly accentuated as a result of Covid-19 impacts.

Two other recent reports pertinent to the issues of rights in the apparel and footwear sectors in Vietnam are: (1) Covid-19 and women's economic empowerment.³¹ This research was undertaken for Investing in Women/Australian Aid (IW) by Marian Baird and Elizabeth Hill from the University of Sydney. It provides analysis from a rapid but extensive literature review around the impacts of Covid-19, previous pandemics and recessions on women's position in economy. The report covers actual and potential impacts in Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines and Vietnam, and details further risks and opportunities.

(2) Gender norms and changes: resources to support campaign interventions to shift gender norms.³² This report provides an overview of evidence on recent program interventions which address gender norms. Its purpose is to provide a summary on how these interventions have sought to influence gender norms and the lessons learned from these efforts. This report is a resource that will be shared with IW's Influencing Gender Norms (IGN) partners, to inform their campaigns, as well as for other IW partners working on positively shifting gender norms.

Conclusions and policy implications

The desk review identifies many policy implications and needs for further evidence-based research to under-pin short term and long term policy to support Covid recovery by workers and businesses:

- Policy needs to be re-examined to cope up with both short term and long term scenarios due to Covid. Amongst others, there are proposals on policies to waive social insurance for all enterprises for at least 6 months of 2020. VGCL should consider waiving trade union fees for 2020 or authorising enterprises to use trade union fees from 2020 to support workers in difficulties and/or to retain jobs. Bank credit policies, including repayment terms and interest rates, should be made most favourable and accessible to enterprises.

³¹ Download here: <https://investinginwomen.asia/knowledge/covid-19-womens-economic-participation-report/> [Accessed 20 September 2020]

³² Download here: <https://investinginwomen.asia/knowledge/gender-norms-change/>. The report was prepared by My Linh Nguyen and Shane Harrison for IW. [Accessed 20 September 2020]

- Among short term policies, the main targets should be lending and credits to support enterprises in order to maintain minimum work, hence avoiding work lay-off for workers.
- Support allowance during crisis time should be feasible to accommodate all migrant populations, including women, men, girls and boys, regardless of their migration status. Full protection of their human rights should be guaranteed during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond, without prejudice or discrimination.
- Ensure that all migrant workers are included in national and local crisis response plans to ensure full protection of labour law.
- Recruitment agencies should work together to ensure accountability regarding employment conditions of workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ensure that service directories are updated and effective referral pathways are identified to grant access to essential services (including healthcare, policing and justice services, psychosocial support, reporting and complaints mechanisms, and other necessary support) for migrant workers, regardless of their migration status.
- Increase capacity of workers to understand, negotiate and report on employment conditions and access to social protection in line with protections guaranteed in the national law.
- Provide immediate economic relief to all workers, including migrant workers, including income replacement measures such as cash transfers, micro loans, and deferral of existing loan payments.

PART B - REPORT ON SOCIAL SURVEYS

Part B of this report, based on social qualitative survey by CDI³³.

The report documents the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on female migrant workers in Vietnam's garment industry over a period of six months, from February to July 2020, focusing on (i) economic impacts (employment, income); (ii) health impacts (access to health services, health care and infection prevention); and (iii) social impacts (constraints on families and individuals; need for support in the future). Field research was conducted in three provinces of Vietnam (namely Hai Duong, Da Nang City and Dong Nai province) on the impact of Covid-19 on female migrant workers in the textile and garment industry. Information and data for this report is also sourced from a social survey conducted by CARE International in Vietnam during 2020 which examines further the impacts of the Covid-19 on businesses and workers in textiles as well as footwear sectors.³⁴

The results will further assist stakeholders (governments, businesses, mass organizations, and social organizations) to recognize the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to build measures to minimize impacts, improve lives and jobs for workers in the garment and footwear industries, especially female migrant workers.

The questions guiding the research are:

- What are the economic, social and health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What policy measures and stakeholder support have been available to assist migrant workers and how effective have those policy measures been?
- What are the implications and perspectives on solutions to meet current needs of displaced workers and to assist their recovery?

³³ The field research was conducted from July to Nov. 2020 by research team of Dr. Ngo Minh Huong, Nguyen Thi Loi, Kim Thu Ha of Center for Development and Integration under Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung supports for the the research on impact of Covid on female migrant workers in garment sector in Vietnam.

³⁴ The qualitative research was carried out by CARE International in Vietnam with 1280 workers from 126 textile and footwear companies in 5 provinces through face-to-face and telephone interviews based on the survey.

Research method

Quantitative research was conducted in 3 provinces/cities representing 3 regions: Hai Duong, Da Nang and Dong Nai. Six apparel enterprises and 88 people were interviewed. (Appendices 1 and 2 provide questionnaire and method of research surveys).

Structure of report

This report is in three parts. Part 1 snap-shots the range of impacts the Covid-induced economic downturn has had to-date on female migrant workers in the garment industry. Part 2 details policies and forms of support available for displaced workers. Part 3 considers Post-Covid recovery's needs and strategies and suggests a range of possible policies.

Section 1: IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ENTREPRISES AND MIGRANT WORKERS IN APPAREL INDUSTRIES

1.1 Business impacts

The economic impact has been heavy in the textile and apparel industries. CDI's research in Hai Duong, Da Nang and Dong Nai confirmed this 'grey' picture. Dong Nai, for example, has a total of 32 industrial parks, with > 590,000 employees. There are 1356 foreign investment projects, of which 1161 entered into operation; 482 domestic investment projects/372 went into operation; 57 percent of workers are employed in the garment and footwear industry. Of these 59.9 percent are female. Migrant workers constitute 52 percent of all workers.

For the garment industry, Hai Duong province has the highest number of employees among 10 enterprises in the case study industrial park. Up to 40 percent of workers have been affected. Some have had their contracts terminated or not signed. Companies have cut all overtime work to reduce costs and still-employed workers have been receiving minimum wages (i.e. no overtime). Some businesses have reduced production by up to 70-80 percent with a parallel drop in numbers of employees.

Most firms contacted by CDI at the time of the interview, had expected no new orders until August 2020; in the interim, many switched to sewing masks. Order cancellations have

been more abundant since July 2020. If there is no solution, it is difficult for enterprises to maintain their productivity and the jobs of their skilled workers. It should be added that, in the case of recovering the intensity of productivity back to the pre-pandemic period, enterprises will face the difficulty of re-employing their skilled workers that were laid off, over a short period of time without any anticipation beforehand.

Government established the corporate lending policy (according to Circulars No. 01/2020-NHNN (dated 13/3/2020) and 02/2020 (dated 31/3/2020) which aims to support enterprises with business difficulties (loan repayments). This policy is very necessary but has been no longer applicable after July 2020. Enterprises have therefore fallen into a very difficult situation in which they can no longer hold on.

1.2 Economic impacts on workers

The economic impact on workers (especially migrant workers) has been heavy. Many workers have lost their jobs and/or experienced reduced incomes. The job situation is not stable due to companies' labour reduction and/or production rearrangement, shutdown or bankruptcy. In addition, it is very difficult for individuals to find new livelihood opportunities.

Most workers surveyed reported a 30 to 40 percent decrease in their incomes during the Covid period; down from pre-covid average incomes in 2019 ranging from VND7,000,000 (c.300 USD) VND 8,000,000 (c.343 USD) per month. The average income of the first 6 months of 2020 reduced about 22-27% compared to 2019. Over 50% have affected from reduction of work or absence without pay.

“ The most significant impact of COVID to our lives is income reduction. We have almost 50% income cut so we have to spend all income on our living expenses, with no saving to send to our family in our native town” .³⁵

As salaries decrease, family expenses become an increasing burden. For married workers with children who need to attend school, the biggest impact is when both partners are factory workers but one of them is laid off. In such cases, one person's income is not enough to pay for family life including the costs of children attending school, medical expenses, food, and rents. In addition, because workers are forced to use mask in factories but only receive 1-2 per month, the cost of buying masks is also a burden.

³⁵ Interview worker (Ms. L, Hai Duong province)

“I have a lot of fear of losing my job, not having money to pay interest and money to send back home so that my grandparents can pay school fees for my children. I am afraid of not being able to find a new job”³⁶

The reduction of long-term income set against the constant burden of spending requirements has caused many families to adopt the measure of one person quitting their job, sending their children back home or both.

“Currently, most of the workers do not have enough money to pay for their rented rooms, some have not paid for a few months, some workers in this inn have to borrow money from friends to spend and to send home to pay school costs for their children. All spending must be reduced as much as possible because there is no income”.³⁷

There has been a marked shift of workers from factories to the informal sector. Main reasons are: (i) they have lost their factory jobs; (ii) they do not have enough income from their factory jobs because working hours have been reduced. Under-employed and unemployed workers have had to find alternative sources of income: working as street vendors, cleaning services, shopkeepers, provision of personal services (e.g. hair dressing and manicures). Even for workers who have not lost their jobs, it is not easy to find a supplementary work in the informal sector. This is due to the fact that they still have to comply with the number of working hours required from their factory, which are often not planned in advance. Moreover, side jobs and informal jobs are also becoming more difficult to find and more competitive. This combination of circumstances has forced many workers to return to their hometowns.

1.3 Changes in labor relations

The research investigated whether there have been changes in terms of industrial relations due to Covid-19 effects.

Labor relations are under challenge because factories lose orders without plan and advanced informed as the result of Covid. The impact of Covid-19 has led to the cancelling of orders from partners; sometimes orders are cancelled without notice as factories did not communicate any further order placements. As a matter of fact, many factories have been forced to reduce and re-arrange their workforces but have not followed consultation processes with workers and grassroots trade union representatives. Simultaneously, factories have reduced labor requirements in an unsystematic way and without consultation

³⁶ Interview worker (Ms. H, Hai Duong province)

³⁷ Interviews with workers group (Hai Duong province)

with workers. The following insights were obtained from research field work from interviews with both workers and the management:

- Workers are usually not informed in advance of weekly work requirements.
- Enterprises announce the list of people who have been laid off to unit managers or directly to employees.
- Enterprises do not normally consult with their workers.
- Enterprises re-arrange work by transferring workers to other production lines, rotating leave, or giving employees leave.
- Enterprises borrow money from banks to sustain and pay basic salaries for employees, but this solution cannot be a long term approach. The situation of borrowing money exceeding a period of 3 months has made business very difficult as banks do not allow debt relief and do not apply credit policies to businesses under the VND62 billion (2,597,370 USD) government relief program.
- Enterprises agree and create conditions for employees to quit their jobs and receive unemployment insurance packages.

Criteria for termination of employment include: an employee violates employment conditions; an employee's contract is about to expire; low productivity; long-term employees being reallocated to inappropriate work and effectively forced to leave voluntarily. In the case of forced labor cuts, often newcomers with low productivity and low awareness will be laid off.

"The company forces workers to make many products in a short time, if anyone does not meet their targets, they will be fired. The company resets the target that is too high to be met, as a reason to fire us".³⁸

When a firm's orders have ceased, the whole production line of the factory is required to take leave, even pregnant female employees must take leave because there is no job, but will agree to leave according to the case of termination of the labor contract work to receive severance pay and unemployment insurance.³⁹ This results in workers being passive in knowing what conditions they will be in, waiting for a job or losing their job.

Despite all of this, most employees evinced sympathy with enterprises in their decisions to stop or quit their jobs. The quantitative survey showed that most employees (76 percent) "sympathize and agree" with the labour reduction policy of enterprises, but most are not satisfied with the process followed by firms. 62.3 percent of workers in 101 companies with opposing opinions said they were listened to, negotiated with and had their work adjusted accordingly by enterprises, of which 37.6 percent succeeded thanks to the role of trade union representatives.

³⁸ Interviews with workers group (Hai Duong province)

³⁹ Interview of representative of Case Concept Company, Đồng Nai.

Nevertheless, interviewed workers expressed the need for enterprises to share information and promptly consult about the possibility of workforce reduction. Workers also expect grassroots trade unions to be able to assist them in working with employers.

A number of firms have handled lay-off situations through grassroots trade unions. Grassroots trade unions play an important role in building industrial relations through various forms of workplace bargaining. A typical case is when a business consults and makes an agreement with workers about having to terminate labor contracts; grassroots trade unions, departments employees work in and industrial management are involved.⁴⁰ This approach has engendered trust and sympathy on the part of workers. In other cases, companies have informed workers of the situation they faced before terminating or postponing worker contracts.⁴¹ Employees whose labor contracts are suspended are less vulnerable than the number of employees who completely lose their jobs.⁴² There are also many cases where enterprises have received complaints because they have delayed payment of social insurance and have reduced their labor force without consulting and negotiating beforehand with employees.⁴³ This shows that, despite the difficult situation of enterprises and employees' sympathy with enterprises, employees are not fully satisfied with labor reduction processes. Transparency is essential to the policy of labor cuts and layoffs.

Accepting the reality of large-scale job losses, workers recognise that they must find solutions by themselves.⁴⁴ Methods include:

- Reduce consumption (e.g. not buying diapers and reducing milk consumption of children)
- Work additional part-time jobs
- Take children out of school (e.g. the 10-year-old stays home to look after the 4-year-old)
- Do small scale businesses, selling things at the markets
- Trading, selling lottery tickets
- Borrow money, especially when a child is sick, or as deadline approaches to pay school fees
- Borrow money from landlords
- Stop sending children to kindergartens and mothers often take time off to look after them. Not allowing children to take extra class to reduce living costs.

⁴⁰ Sited from interviews of Epic Designer Co. Ltd.

⁴¹ Interview with representative of Vina Company

⁴² Interview with Trade Union of Da Nang City

⁴³ Interview with Trade Union of Hải dương

⁴⁴ Interviews with workers group in Dong Nai

1.4 Social and gender impacts

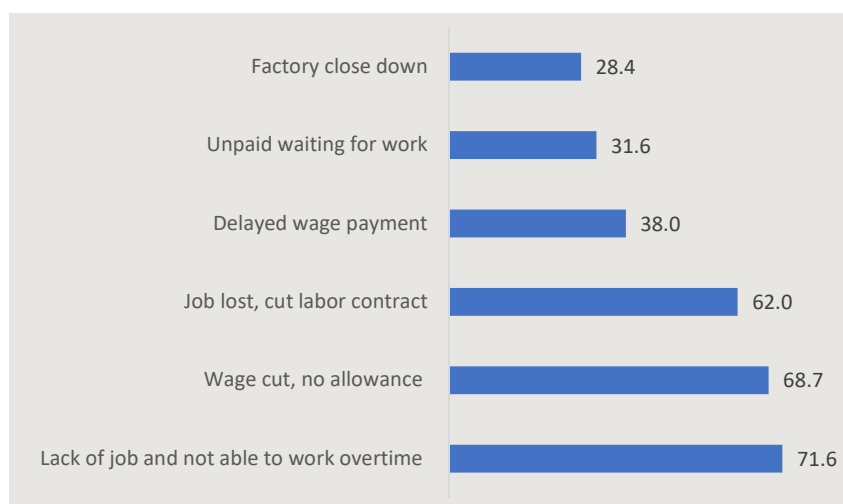
Concerns mainly revolve around the burden of living costs, which is a great pressure on migrant worker families. Quantitative research suggests that family stress is more common in households with a large financial dependence on one spouse.

The impact on women is quite evident, as women, rather than men, often choose to quit their jobs to look after their children, especially during the lockdown period. Thus, women carry an increased burden of unpaid housework.

Older female workers have been at heightened risk of losing their jobs. Apart from management positions, elderly female workers have often been entangled in labor rearrangement as they have been forced to take leave due to their newly arranged jobs that were not suitable for their expertise or health.

Reduced employment and incomes have caused workers, especially migrant workers, to change their living patterns. Most worry that they will not have enough income to live on if they are unemployed for a long period. They take measures to tighten their belts, reduce spending, deplete their savings, call for support from families in the countryside and back home. The quantitative survey showed a marked increase in the number of workers who borrowed after Covid 19 (23 percent of workers interviewed) to support basic needs such as food, housing, electricity and water. Lack of a living income leads to temporary poverty.

Chart 1: Workers's worries under Covid's time



Source: Results from quantitative survey by CARE International Việt nam (Oct 2020)

Sample size: DMDG (n=738, %)

Section 2: POLICIES AND FORMS OF SUPPORT FOR WORKERS

2.1 Access to social security and insurance programs

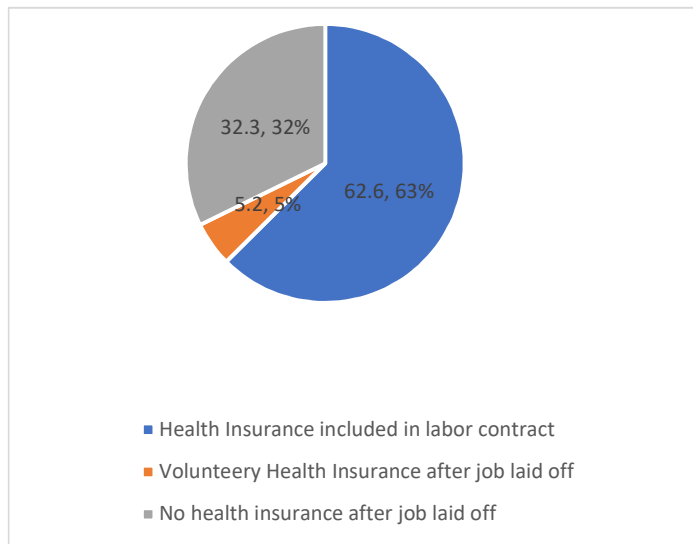
Migrant workers, especially female workers, are in desperate need of an inclusive social security protection policy in the face of contract termination. Quantitative and qualitative investigations show that, when workers are laid off (reduced to less than 15 days/month) or terminated, insurances, especially health insurance, are no longer available. The difficulties of having to seek medical treatment without insurance become severe. Many workers have lost their jobs and share that they do not dare seeking for medical treatment. The cost of sickness becomes a huge expense, especially for families with sick children. Many workers interviewed said that it is difficult to access healthcare without insurance. When they are still at work, they can go to factory health care facilities, or buy medicine themselves. It is difficult to go for medical examination and treatment without insurance because the hospital is far away and it is not easy to take time off to go to the doctor. People often buy drugs from outside or when they treat their children, they go to the hospital for service.

The finding in the survey shows that social insurance is not yet optimal for benefits and entitlements from social insurance and health insurance for those who do not have a job, leave a job, or wait for a job. The issues of fragility of social security scheme including unemployment insurance and retirement pension are becoming more exposed as the results of Covid impact on job and laborers. Job loss and the termination of labor contracts lead to cutting health insurance, easily pushing workers into situations of personal insecurity, inadequate medical and health care.

As many enterprises were opted to let laid off or forced employees unpaid leave, employees could not get health insurance when they get sickness nor unemployment insurance. There are cases where a company applies government policy which allows enterprises to delay payment of social insurance during the Covid period. When the company owes social insurance, health insurance, employees could not get access to health insurance, neither pension under social insurance scheme at their retirement age. Some companies' delays paying social insurance and health insurance referring to government's non-tax support policy to corporate during Covid, as a result, some employees panic because they run out of health insurance when being allowed to quit job.

*"The company let me go on leave without pay since May 2020. Now for the last 3 months, I do not work enough working days that is entitled for a health insurance. I got sick but I did not dare to go to hospital because I do not have health insurance card."*⁴⁵

Chart 2: Health Insurance for workers under Covid impact



Health insurance coverage situation of workers (sampling N=1280, %)

Source: Results from quantitative survey by CARE International Việt nam (Oct 2020)

Unemployment insurance is necessary for employees when they are laid off from their jobs, or are unable to get a new job immediately. Unemployment insurance in particular has become important during the pandemic, when ten thousands of workers in the same province and thousands of workers in a factory enterprise had to quit their jobs. However, according to many workers, they only heard about unemployment insurance and did not know the procedures to get it. The limitations in obtaining unemployment insurance are: (i) workers do not know the procedure; (ii) enterprises do not cooperate to support procedures; (iii) many enterprises owe social insurance or are bankrupt, so the insurance agency cannot insure workers; (iv) the status of waiting for work, long-term resignation, has not actually terminated the labor contract, so workers cannot obtain unemployment insurance. Many

⁴⁵ Interview with representative of *Unipak, Company*

companies temporarily suspend labor contracts, hence, employees are not eligible for insurance.

When it is not possible to access unemployment insurance, workers fall into a situation of not having enough income to live on during a long period of unemployment.

Access to public services:

It is more difficult for migrant workers than it is for local resident workers to access public services, especially public education for their children.

"Public schools are difficult to apply to. C1 must know, C2 must be excellent 5 years. Children of poor workers all go to private schools; public schools only allow the rich. So the richer the rich, the poorer the poor".⁴⁶

Migrant workers often feel lack of belonging and find job in factories in industrial areas to be short term for earn livings, they do not find the job in factory a life time job.

"I may need help in finding a new job. Actually I just want to save my job in this factory to earn a little more money to send home to my family. Though I do not intend to stay here and work for a long time, or work forever in a factory like this".

⁴⁷

2.2 Access to social support programs

There are many types of assistance for workers, including government subsidies, unemployment benefits, and provincial union assistance. Their adequacy and access to them is another matter.

Support from friends, family members, and social organizations can be important. Support is available in different forms: (i) accommodation support, whereby landlord' can reduce the rents; (ii) food assistance; (iii) money assistance; (iv) assistance with Covid preventive items such as masks; (v) assistance with job placement. For local authorities, in difficult cases, the government also mobilizes the generosity of the community and businesses to enable provision of rice, water for hand washing and masks. However, these supports cannot solve the long-term problem of job shortages and job loss.

⁴⁶ Quotes from interviews migrant workers group in Dong Nai province

⁴⁷ Interview with worker (Ms. L) in Hải dương

The state and social support package for a typical group of workers is the government's support package under Resolution No. 42 / NQ-CP dated April 9, 2020 and Decision No. 15/2020 / QD_Ttg on policy, supporting people facing difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The provinces assigned the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs to list and support funding for impacted people, including employees who had not signed labor contracts and had lost their jobs, employees who terminated their labor contracts but were not entitled to unemployment insurance and employees with labor contract postponement or leave without pay.

As always, migrant workers find it more difficult to access support for the following reasons: i) Criteria do not take into account migrant workers despite the fact that they are more vulnerable; ii) lack of information; iii) difficulty in verifying local documents; (iv) they are considered to be the subject of a labor contract that provides social insurance. As at present, accessing benefits: employees have to quit their jobs in enterprises that have no revenue to benefit from this policy while most businesses only reduce a part rather than all of their production. The government's VND62,000 billion support package is inaccessible to many because conditions of access cannot be met. Many workers who have had their contracts paused rather than terminated have neither insurance nor income, but if they want to access support, then they must have no revenue. While 100 percent of businesses in Hai Duong were not closed , they lost 90 percent of their revenue.⁴⁸

Based on the interviews, workers reported that the locality had instructions to make declarations to be supported under the government's support program, but no one was accepted. As one worker reported: "Due to regulations, I have to be laid off to be accepted, but I still have a little work at the factory so I cannot receive it." The portion of employees who received this support package is very small. Da Nang data shows over 154 000 workers were affected by the Covid epidemic, but only about 800 eligible workers were supported.

Local governments in places such as Dong Nai, Hai Duong, Da Nang have received support from other programs outside of the government's program. The Labor Confederation also has programs to support provincial funds. Supports are usually provided in cash and in kind, focused on those workers who are disadvantaged and affected by job loss, and regardless of whether they are migrant workers or not. Women Unions in local communities also have programs to support the poor and unemployed. Such mass organizations (womans union,

⁴⁸ Interview with a representative in textile factory in Hải dương

youth unions) often lack formal/government resources. Therefore, they mobilize generosity from businesses and individuals to support people in difficult circumstances, mainly food and masks. This kind of support is very small and unable to significantly help affected unemployed workers.

The review of supporting policies of the government shows that the state policies are not synchronised and have been implemented more slowly than the situation demands. The Government did not foresee Covid's extension and did not have a timely and appropriate policy against Covid's extension. Notably, business support policy was only applicable for 3 months (March-June 2020).

Migrant workers face more difficulties in living expenses while the wages are cut. Migrant workers more are affected than other groups because they have to rent accommodation and provide meals on their own. Some local communities and support in reducing house rent costs have helped workers in financial burdens in case of job reduction or job wait during Covid period. There were some good initiatives from local women unions or trade unions to convince reduction of accommodation rent to migrant workers like in Hai Duong province. While in Dong Nai, 40 % are migrant workers but community support on reducing rent is uncommon. Migrant workers have to pay rent rather than own their own housing thus it adds burden on workers and their families.

Section 3 POST-COVID RECOVERY NEEDS AND STRATEGIES

Both employees and businesses need to borrow money. There are many loan schemes, Government support fund for employment retaining and loan for housing. There are also private run saving and credit revolving schemes, that serve the needs of members to borrow up to 100 million so women or workers as members can save money with a 0.8 percent interest per month or borrow loan at 1 % interest per month. However, migrant workers cannot access to them. Many interviews with workers in Dong Nai province also revealed that they had to borrow short term loans from private with high interest of 10% per month. After 3 months of unpaid job, they fell into the burden of debt cycle.

Both interviews with workers and management reveal not much hope in terms of prospect of job recovery, soon for the foreseeable future. The situation is complicated, unpredictable and worrying.

Interviews seek to find out what workers need over the next 2 years with the impact of Covid-19. Workers shared their needs and made recommendations as following:⁴⁹

- Need access to vocational training to be able to apply for good jobs thus having stable income.
- Need job search and placement job system for the unemployed and those seeking to change jobs
- Access to capital to start new business
- Access to health care provide by government funded system through insurance cards for all
- Access to affordable housing

Section 4: POLICY FRECOMMENDATIONS

The section 1,2,3 above of Part B in this report have provided information on situation of Covid-19 impact on migrant female workers in garment and textile sector from finding of interviews with stakeholders. The analysis in gaps regarding policy implementation toward migrant workers during Covid-19 period have led to some key policy recommendations as following.

1) Regarding improving access to insurance scheme:

- Insurance policy needs to be universal and to address the needs of workers in the formal and informal sectors despite the crisis and job shocks. Therefore, insurance scheme should become an automatic mechanism of health insurance for workers while waiting for a job or experiencing job loss.
- Renovate voluntary health insurance is needed. Voluntary health insurance during a job loss should be encouraged with the affordable fee. Many workers wait to have a job in order to buy voluntary insurance while waiting for unemployment insurance. However, the voluntary insurance premium is still quite high (850,000 VND (37 USD) / year / person), thus few families participate in this insurance. The Government should especially support workers whose contracts are terminated to buy voluntary health insurance.
- **Unemployment benefits:** Trade unions and businesses can support workers to access unemployment benefits by providing information to workers, and assisting workers in the process of applying for unemployment benefits.

⁴⁹ Conolidation of all workers interviews

2) Regarding **enhancing emergency assistance to laborers**

- Government and social organizations can consider to provide cash support for households that have to cut costs deeply (less than 30 percent). Due to the increasing number of people with emergencies or extremely difficult needs, the Government is expanding help to a larger group of people (eg. Including person of aged over 30, educated under level 3, single parents, migrants, not have jobs, ethnic minorities, have young children).
- Enlarging the role of Trade unions in facilitating access to social safeties support for workers. It is possible to expand the role of the labor unions to provide the employment status verification for workers and redundant workers, so workers who lost jobs as assistance seekers can receive a social insurance or other support scheme under the government laborers cash support programme. This actually can facilitate the process of receiving assistance from such programs.

3) Regarding **improving the effectiveness of the Government emergency support program**

- The government's support policy of 62K billions dong subsidy package (62.000 trillion Vietnamese Dong as Decision 15 and Resolution 42) can be amended by widening the conditions for workers and enterprises so that more workers and businesses that are really affected can receive support. In addition, the policy should extend the period of providing assistance, because according to the decision, the employees are only entitled to from April to June, while at present there are many employees losing their jobs. Consequently, the situation is even more difficult than the previous one.
- The Government should have policies to create feasible conditions for businesses to borrow loans on emergency case for the purpose of paying employees' wages when customers cancel orders or fail to pay, causing enterprises to fall into a situation where they cannot afford to pay their workers' basic salary. With fast track emergency loan scheme to business, enterprises can keep employees on basic conditions. Thus, they will not be forced to stop working, neither suspend or terminate labor contracts with employees. The Government can lend businesses with low or no interest rates to support businesses to secure and ensure the lives of workers.

- The government needs to expand the bailout program for workers by linking with different types / credit institutions that have credit products to help women deal with outstanding debts.
- The government allows businesses to delay payment of social insurance premiums during times of no production and orders in production crisis situations.
- Insurance policies need to be revised so that employees can buy health insurance themselves, so they can ensure that though they are jobless, they will still be covered whenever they get sick.

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The CDI study was conducted in 3 provinces / cities representing 3 regions, including: Hai Duong, Da Nang and Dong Nai. Each studied province conducted in-depth interviews with guiding questions for 11 units and representatives of the following units:

- Representative of Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs of the city:
- Representative of the Provincial Confederation of Labor
- Representative of the company (2 enterprises / location)
- Trade union representatives of 2 companies
- Ward / commune staff in charge of social issues
- Ward / commune health station
- Representatives of ward socio-political organizations (Women's Union)
- The innkeeper provides active support to migrant workers
- Representative of the management board of the industrial park

The study conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with migrant workers in the three provinces for a total of 54 persons (see table below).

The target group is the employee	Number (in 3 provinces)	number of participants in FGD
Mixed group (including male + female, married and unmarried)	3	3 FGD x 8 people = 24 people

Female group, garment industry (including women, married and unmarried)	3	3 FGD x 8 people = 24 people
In-depth interviews with garment workers (including female, married and unmarried)	6	2 people x 3 provinces = 6 people
total		54 people

Direct data collection was conducted through focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews (IDIs) of key informants (direct and by phones) based on structured and guided questionnaires respectively according to research questions.

- o Interview respondents: Qualitative research has been conducted in Hai Duong, Da Nang and Dong Nai. An estimated number of approximately 88 participants in IDIs and FGDs (c.a 28 people at each province: workers (including 2 FGS, 4 IDIs, with a group of female migrant workers and a mix group); factory management and trade unions, local authorities (DOLISA, Labor Union, factory health staff and DOH, commune leaders, landlords, CSOs/CBOs (e.g. Women Unions)
- o In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with some disadvantage groups such as migrant workers, female migrant workers and ethnic minorities to explore COVID impacts in their more vulnerable situations.
- o Qualitative data collection tools: Guidances for IDI and FGD with each type of informant will be developed. These were used to facilitate for IDI and FGD with respondents.

APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research sought the following information from both qualitative and quantitative surveys:

1) Health and well-being impacts

- Are workers aware of COVID-19 risks, symptoms and preventative measures; and how to access testing and health services?

- How do workers practice COVID-19 preventative behaviours in their workplaces, homes and communities?
- Do workers have access to personal protective equipment at work and at home (i.e. including masks, hand sanitizer, washing stations)?
- How do workers have access to COVID-19 related and basic health services within their factory and/or in their community?
- How do health insurance problems associated with insurance status and contracted working status impact on preventive and treatment in case of having health problems?
- What are the challenges/difficulties in accessing basic needs (food, shelter, water and electricity etc.)? and social and health services which might associate as impact by government lock-down/social distance measures and worker's income reduction?
- What other problems have been experienced? e.g. mental health problems (depression, anxiety, emotional disorders, stress) resulting from job uncertainty, income reduction (debts), unpaid care work at home?

2) Economic Impacts

- Are workers being paid on time and the correct amount during the period of Covid-19?
- Have worker's wages reduced due to reduction in production time / overtime? What are likely or any difference between female and male and for migrant workers?
- What are worker's income sources (including their main works and extra income generation activities)? How does worker's income reduce? Any influences on reduction in remittance (for migrant workers) and savings?
- Who are more likely to be suspended or fired in the factories/companies? Any associations with age, gender, migration, job seniority, working skills)?
- How do workers access to information regarding to their employment status and working situation?
- How do workers take part in decision making at their workplaces (including work status, insurance, health care and protective measures) during Covid-19 time? Any implications on formal and informal bargaining and negotiation with employers that help to ensure job security? Any case of good practice?

3) Gendered Social Impacts

- Are women workers facing increased threat of violence in the workplace or within the home? If yes, describe how
- Do workers have access to GBV-specific support services in their workplace or communities?
- Are women facing barriers to women health rights (e.g. access to services for chronic health problem, maternal health, sexual and reproductive health)?
- Are women facing an increased burden of unpaid care work? What is the impact of that on them and their families? How are men's engagement into unpaid care work at home during the crisis?

4) Coping strategies and supports

- What have new/alternative livelihoods been established during and post the crisis? Any associations with social capital such as social network, self-help group, family supports, savings and loans?
- Any changes related to household expenditure and consumption behaviors: reduction in food expenses, education expenses...
- Have suspended or fired workers received their legally entitled benefits (i.e. severance pay, bonuses, overtime payments, unemployment security, annual leave payment etc.)?
- Are workers able to access government emergency responses (e.g. Decision No. 15/2020/OĐ-Ttg)? Any associations to awareness of benefits, inclusive criteria, application procedures, timing delay and other challenges? Any other implications on relevance, transparency, responsiveness and accessibility of government emergency supports?
- Any other supports are accessible to workers (from employers, NGOs or charity groups, local authorities, trade union, women union and others)?

5) Needs and recovery

- What are the needs of workers (migrant, female, laid-off) for recovery (e.g. cash, in-kind, discount of basic need services, shelter and housing, health-care costs, job vacation and opportunity)? What are needs for short term and need for long term support?
- Do migrant workers intend to stay back for job seeking or new livelihood? Do laid off workers intend to return to the garment sector? Why/why not? Do laid-off

workers see opportunities for upskilling/reskilling outside of the sector? Any implications for job opportunities, information, job agency, job fair?

- How do workers perceive their recovery capacity (job, income) compared to pre-pandemic?
 - Any implications on timeline for such immediate and long-term recovery?
-

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