

The good news is the constitutional and legal framework for gender equality has existed in Vietnam since 1945. The law provides the opportunity for equal participation in politics by women. However, in practice they are underrepresented. Most of the top leaders are men. There is only one woman in the Politburo. Fortunately, women are better represented in the National Assembly, where more than one-fourth of the 450 members are women. Other Vietnamese women hold some important positions in the government. For instance, the Vice President is a woman as are several ministers and vice ministers. More recently however, limited resources combined with economic reforms emphasizing economic growth and infrastructure, have had detrimental effects on social programs, including gender equity.

Meanwhile, there is growing awareness in Vietnam that neglect of women's role in the economy will place constraints on economic success. In response the government upgraded the National Committee for the Advancement of Women and is now chaired by a Vice-Minister, with participants from key central ministries. Vietnam's Plan of Action following the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing recognizes a continuing need for policies and programs that will maintain and increase women's role in economic and social development. As a result of these actions and the renovation process that is transforming Vietnam's economy from central planning to market principles, women have strong representation in the economy. They are significant contributors - making up 65% of the agricultural, 43% of the industrial and 70% of the informal labor force.

In urban areas many women have shown great entrepreneurship and become the main income earners for their families, running thousands of home-based businesses generated by the market. Other women have not been so fortunate, the victims of public sector retrenchment under economic reform, which has had a disproportionate impact on women in lower-paid jobs. In rural areas the shift in control of agricultural production from cooperatives to households has placed new emphasis on the labor power of each family member. As men migrate to the towns and cities for work, much of the increased burden for farm production is falling on women, many of whom must also sell products in nearby markets to meet daily needs. Reductions in the social services previously subsidized by the state further increase the workload for women. In addition, women often have less access to productive resources such as credit, tools, labor-saving technologies, technical services and training.

The status and position of women in Vietnam have undergone significant improvements in the last fifty years. Social indicators show a high degree of literacy (84% for women and 93% for men in 1992) and life expectancy (67.5 for females and 63 for men). But fundamental and widespread economic and social changes occurring since 1986 are presenting critical choices and challenges for Vietnamese men and women alike. There have been opportunities for women to add to the gains they have made in the last five decades, but on the other hand, there is a danger that they may be marginalized and even lose ground on their past achievements.

While there is no legal discrimination, women face deeply ingrained societal discrimination. Despite extensive provisions in the Constitution, in legislation, and in regulations that mandate equal treatment, and although some women occupy high government posts, few women compete effectively for higher status positions. The Government has ratified ILO conventions on Equal Remuneration and Discrimination in Employment. The Constitution provides that women and men must receive equal pay for equal work; however, the Government does not enforce this

provision. Very poor women, especially in rural areas but also in cities, perform menial work in construction, waste removal, and other jobs for extremely low wages. Despite the large body of legislation and regulations devoted to the protection of women's rights in marriage as well as in the workplace, and Labor Law provisions that call for preferential treatment of women, women do not always receive equal treatment.

International NGO workers and many women reported that domestic violence against women was common. The law addresses the problem of domestic violence, and officials increasingly acknowledge the problem; however, authorities do not enforce the law effectively. Many divorces reportedly are due to domestic violence, but many women likely remain in abusive marriages rather than confront the stigma and economic uncertainty of divorce.

Prostitution, although officially illegal, appears to be tolerated widely. Some women are forced to work as prostitutes. The Ho Chi Minh City people's committee recently has acknowledged that more than 10,000 women in the city engaged in prostitution. Hanoi, the port cities of Danang and Haiphong, and smaller cities such as Can Tho and Nha Trang also have large numbers of women engaged in prostitution. There are reports that some exploiters in Ho Chi Minh City addicted young girls to heroin and forced them to work as prostitutes to earn money for drugs. Many more women are compelled to work as prostitutes because of poverty, a lack of other employment opportunities, or because they are victimized by false promises of lucrative work (see Section 6.f.). The Vietnam Women's Union and Youth Union, as well as international and domestic NGO's, are engaged actively in education and rehabilitation programs to combat these abuses. Trafficking in women for the purpose of forced prostitution, both domestically and internationally, is a serious problem. Women and girls are trafficked from southern delta and highland provinces to Cambodia, and from northern provinces into China. There are reports that some women from Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta who married men from Taiwan were forced into prostitution after their arrival in Taiwan. Women and girls frequently are misled by promises of well-paying jobs in those places.

The party-controlled Women's Union has a broad agenda to promote women's rights, including political, economic, and legal equality, and protection from spousal abuse. The Women's Union operates micro-credit consumer finance programs and other programs to promote the advancement of women. International NGO's and other international organizations regard the union as effective, but they and Women's Union representatives believe that much time is required to overcome societal attitudes that relegate women to lower status than men. The Government also has a committee for the advancement of women, which coordinates intra-ministerial programs that affect women.

Source:

Human rights situation in Vietnam

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eap/index.cfm?docid=819>

The status of women in Vietnam

[http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cida\\_ind.nsf/852562900065549a85256250006cbb1a/5249356b8800431485256547005642c5?OpenDocument#sec1](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cida_ind.nsf/852562900065549a85256250006cbb1a/5249356b8800431485256547005642c5?OpenDocument#sec1)