



The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the primary international legal instrument that focuses on women's rights. State parties – which include all Southeast Asian countries – must submit periodic reports on their progress to the CEDAW Committee, which is a panel of independent experts. The Committee evaluates states' progress in implementing the treaty on the basis of those reports, as well as 'shadow reports' provided by NGOs.

Women as workers in CEDAW

CEDAW covers a broad range of concerns from the elimination of discrimination in political life, to equal access to education and healthcare. Gender equality in the workplace is primarily addressed through Article 11, which prohibits discrimination in employment, deals most directly with women and employment.

However, several other parts of the Convention also establish rights that are related to women and work generally. Most important among these are:

- Article 3, which is concerned with the advancement of women in political, social, economic and cultural fields;
- Article 13, which requires states to ensure non-discrimination in family benefits and loans; and

- Article 14, which requires states to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women, including their participation in the non-monetised sectors of the economy.

Women and work in Vietnam's reports

Vietnam ratified CEDAW in 1982, and has submitted five periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee setting out its progress in implementing the treaty.

There has been a gradual development of CEDAW jurisprudence and shifts in the way women's issues are framed internationally since Vietnam ratified CEDAW. Over the same period, the primary focus of the Vietnamese government's responses have remained consistent, although there has been more emphasis on women entrepreneurs in recent years.

In keeping with this broader trend, the themes raised by the Vietnamese government in response to Article 11 have been reasonably consistent over time, to the extent that they have all addressed the issue of workplace rights and conditions in detail. In its most recent report the Vietnamese government has also emphasised the need to establish adequate rights and protection for women migrant workers.

However, unlike many other countries, which have tended to place greater emphasis on International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions in their

Themes in Vietnam's reports to CEDAW

	Article 11			Article 3			Article 13			Article 14			
	2000	2005	2014	2000	2005	2014	2000	2005	2015	2000	2005	2014	
Women and work	x		x		x						x	x	
Labour migration			x										
Workplace rights	x	x	x										
Entrepreneurship					x	x					x	x	x
Economic empowerment											x	x	

responses to Article 11 in recent years, the Vietnamese government has only referred to the ILO once in 2000, and not in its more recent reports.

In responding to Article 3, the Vietnamese government has consistently emphasised the importance of gender mainstreaming; women-centred research; and the inclusion of women in its development strategy. In more recent years it has sometimes also raised themes on women and work especially the issue of women entrepreneurs.

The Vietnamese government's responses to Article 13 closely mirror the article itself, with each addressing social security, access to credit, and access to culture and sport. Unlike other countries' responses to this article, none of Vietnam's reports raise the issue of female entrepreneurship.

The Vietnamese government's responses to Article 14 all emphasised themes which are not directly related to women and work, particularly rural development, sanitation and education programs. However it also consistently raised the issue of access to credit for rural businesswomen.

A pattern is evident in the Vietnamese government's responses to Articles 3 and 14, namely its focus on the importance of female entrepreneurship. The government emphasised the role of the Women Entrepreneurs Council in its response to Article 3 in both 2005 and 2014. It also stressed the importance of rural women being able to access credit in all of its responses to Article 14.

While the Vietnamese government did not raise concerns related to female entrepreneurship in its responses to Article 13 - the article which is directly concerned with women's ability to access loans - the fact that it has emphasised women's access to credit for small business in its responses to the other articles indicates that it nevertheless considers this to be an important issue.

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