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**REPORT**

**“Study on gender issues in wood processing and exporting enterprises in the context of the implementation of the VPA-FLEGT Agreement and the EVFTA Agreement”**

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***Vinh, 7/2022***

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**ACRONYMS**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Acronyms** | **Meaning** |
|  | DN | Doanh nghiệp |
|  | EU | European Union |
|  | EVFTA | EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement |
|  | ILO | International Labour Organization |
|  | SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
|  | VPA-FLEGT | Voluntary Partnership Agreement/ Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade |
|  | WB | World Bank |

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VPA-FLEGT for short) between Vietnam and the European Union (EU) was signed on October 19, 2018, officially took effect from June 1, 2019 shows the great determination of the Vietnamese government in implementing forest governance as well as developing the wood processing industry in a sustainable way[[1]](#footnote-1). During implementation, the impacts of VPA-FLEGT on the livelihoods and safety of women and other social groups should be closely monitored. To monitor social impact, relevant indicators need to be gender-disaggregated, and sex-disaggregated data should be systematically collected and analyzed. Although gender is not specifically mentioned in the VPA, several key indicators in the Vietnam Timber Legality Definition have a built-in gender dimension, reflecting the way in which gender is now mainstreamed into many related areas of law and regulation, including indicators on land and forest use rights, and the labor code and social welfare rights (Annex II of the VPA). Gender issues in the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), which took effect from August 1, 2020, include commitments related to trade-related sustainable development issues including 17 articles (labor, environment...). More specifically, regarding labor performance of obligations to which Vietnam and the EU have committed as Members of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and labor standards in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental principles and rights in the workplace, including: The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining of employees and employers; elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor; effective abolition of child labor; and; elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

In addition, the "Strategy for development of Vietnam's forestry industry for the period of 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050", Vietnam aims to build the forestry industry into a specific economic-technical industry, in that ensures the broad and equal participation of all economic sectors, social organizations and communities in forestry activities. The “National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period” sets specific goals in the economic and labor fields (Goal 2) such as increasing the ratio of female wage employees to 50% by 2025 and about 60% by 2030 (Target 1), Reduce the ratio of female employees working in the agricultural sector in the total number of female employees with employment to less than 30% by 2025 and less than 25% by 2030 (Target 2), The ratio of female directors/owners of businesses and cooperatives will reach at least 27% by 2025 and 30% by 2030 (Target 3). Gender issues are also mentioned in other legal documents related to this study such as: Law on Gender Equality (2006) in Articles 4 and 6, Labor Code (2019), Law on Social Insurance Association (2014), Law on Occupational Safety and Hygiene (2015), Law on Vocational Education (2014).

As one of the first countries in the world to sign the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Vietnam is working to ensure economic growth with social justice and ensure women's rights in all fields in recent years. The Vietnamese constitution emphasizing the principle of gender equality and specifically prohibiting violations of women's rights is a testament to such efforts by the government. However, there are still some outstanding issues related to gender equality, especially in the forestry sector. For example, women account for only 10-12% of agricultural land use right certificate registrations and often have limited awareness of land access rights and traditional customs[[2]](#footnote-2). Some reports show that, out of about 5 million employees currently involved in the forestry production chain including afforestation, protection, use, processing and export [[3]](#footnote-3), women are the main labor force. Women also play an important role in forest management and protection with more than 10 million women living near and in forests [[4]](#footnote-4). Despite playing an important role in the forestry sector, women are still seen as disadvantaged object in this sector, a fact that women are rarely appointed to leadership positions. On the other hand, although forestry policy has made many commitments on gender equality, programs and projects do not have specific guidelines and monitoring systems on this criterion. In addition, the benefit-sharing mechanism and the provision of information on forest protection programs and projects rarely take into account the needs and accessibility of women.

Most recently, report of Edwin Shanks on "Analysis of the State of Gender and FLEGT in Vietnam" in 2020 shows that gender inequality in Vietnam's forestry still persists in aspects of division of labor, wage differentials and employment opportunities, forest and forest land tenure, and social and working environment benefits. Therefore, he proposes that more data analysis studies are involved to fully understand gender and other socio-economic aspects in different segments of the forestry sector, especially the wood processing and export group. Furthermore, the research in the future should be specific to each group of enterprises, and go into detail to find the root causes of gender inequality rather than general and unclear reports.

In our country, the wood processing and export sector plays an important role in the timber supply chain and attracts a large workforce. In 2020, the export value of wood and wood products in 2020 reached 12.01 billion USD, increased 16.3% compared to 2019. In the second half of 2020, export value increased sharply, averaging over USD 1.1 billion per month. In which, the four groups of export products that bring the largest value are furniture (USD 5.87 billion), chairs (USD 2.67 billion), wood chips (USD 1.48 billion), and plywood /laminated wood (USD 719.41 million) respectively[[5]](#footnote-5). Currently, the whole country has about 4,500 wood and forest product processing enterprises, of which private enterprises account for 95%, with about 3.5% have investment capital of over 50 billion VND. Domestic enterprises account for 65%, the remaining are enterprises with investment capital or associated or joint venture with foreign enterprises. The wood and forest product processing and export industry attracts 0.5 million employees, of which more than 50% are female[[6]](#footnote-6). Despite playing an important role in the forestry sector, women are still the disadvantaged group in this sector. Furthermore, there are few studies and projects that focus on gender issues in forestry production chains. This leads to the lack of gender databases in the forestry sector, thereby lacking a reference database for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the VPA/FLEGT and EVFTA agreements in Vietnam. This is also a gap in mainstreaming gender-specific content, with the aim to provide input for future National Forestry Strategy development.

Faced with these practical problems, this study was conducted to answer the current key and urgent questions including:

(1) Are there gender inequalities in economic benefits, employment, social welfare, occupational safety and health in different types of wood processing enterprises?

(2) If having, what are the causes of these gender inequality issues?

(3) What are the recommendations related to policy advocacy to promote gender equality in forestry production? And

(4) What indicators to support monitoring and assessment of the impact of VPA-FLEGT on gender issues should be proposed?

The study was conducted in relation to priority area 2 (LTP) “Gender issues in forest law enforcement, forest governance and timber supply chains in the context of EVFTA implementation” in the call for proposals to the third party of the project *"Promoting forest governance and legal timber trade through the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) - VM066".*

**II. GENERAL OVERVIEW**

**2.1. Vietnam's laws and policies on gender equality in enterprises**

Vietnam is one of the countries with a fairly comprehensive legal and policy framework to promote gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2020, Vietnam ranked 87th out of 153 countries surveyed in the world on closing the gender gap[[7]](#footnote-7). The universal principle of equality between men and women in the *Constitution* is concretized in many legal documents and policies in all fields, clearly demonstrating the views and policies of the Party and the State's legal policy as well as Vietnam's efforts in implementing the member country's commitments to international conventions and laws on GE, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Promoting GE is considered a central task to realize the country's socio-economic development goals and is increasingly being implemented strongly and effectively. In particular, the objectives of GE in employment and career opportunities have been expressed in many legal documents of Vietnam such as the Law on Gender Equality (2006), National strategy on gender equality for the 2021 - 2030 period, Labor Code (2019), Law on Social Insurance (2014), Law on Occupational Safety and Hygiene (2015), Law on Vocational Education (2014), etc.

Specifically, the Law on Gender Equality (2006) stipulates the principle of gender equality in the fields of social and family life, measures to ensure gender equality, responsibilities of agencies, organizations and families, individuals in the implementation of gender equality. In Article 11, the law stipulates that men and women are equal in terms of professional standards and age when they are promoted or appointed to the same management and leadership positions. In Article 12, the law stipulates equality between men and women in setting up enterprises, conducting production and business activities, and managing enterprises, and equal access to information, capital, market and labor resources. Accordingly, measures to promote gender equality in the economic field include: Enterprises employing many female employees are entitled to tax and financial incentives in accordance with law; Female workers in rural areas are entitled to credit support, agricultural, forestry and fishery extension according to the provisions of law. In Article 13, the law stipulates that men and women are equal in terms of standards and age when recruiting, and are treated equally at the workplace in terms of employment, wages, bonuses, social insurance, working conditions and other working conditions. In Article 14, the law stipulates equality between men and women in terms of age for schooling, training and retraining, equality in choosing majors and occupations for study and training, and equality in accessing and enjoying policies on education, training and professional development.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period sets specific goals in the economic and labor fields (Target 2) such as increasing the rate of female wage workers to 50% by 2025 and about 60% by 2030 (Target 1), reducing the rate of female employees working in the agricultural sector in the total number of female employees in employment to less than 30% by 2025 and less than 25% by 2030 (Target 2), the rate of female directors/owners of enterprises and cooperatives will reach at least 27% by 2025 and 30% by 2030 (Target 3).

Labor Code (2019), regulates labor standards; rights, obligations and responsibilities of employees, employers, representative organizations of employees at grassroots, representative organizations of employers in labor relations and other related relations directly to labor relations; State management of labor. Article 4 of the law clearly states that the State's policies on labor must ensure gender equality; stipulates labor regimes and social policies to protect female workers, workers with disabilities, elderly workers, and underage workers. Article 67 of the law stipulates that organizations must ensure gender equality, maternity protection, annual leave; Prevention and control of violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. Article 90 of the law stipulates that employers must ensure equal wages, regardless of gender, for employees doing work of equal value.

Especially, chapter X of the law has separate provisions for female employees and ensures gender equality, including specific regulations on state policies on female workers (article 135), responsibility of the employer (article 136), maternity protection (article 137), right to unilaterally terminate or suspend labor contracts of pregnant female employees (article 138), maternity leave (article 139), job security for employees on maternity leave (article 140), allowances during the period of taking care of sick children, maternity and taking contraceptive measures (article 141).

The Law on Social Insurance (2014) stipulates social insurance regimes and policies; rights and responsibilities of employees and employers; agencies, organizations and individuals related to social insurance, representative organizations of labor collectives, representative organizations of employers; social insurance agencies; social insurance fund; procedures for social insurance implementation and state management of social insurance. In particular, Section 3 from Articles 30 to 41 stipulates the maternity regime, including conditions for enjoying the regime, the period of enjoyment, enjoying the child-rearing regime, etc. for male and female employees to participate in insurance.

The Law on Occupational Safety and Hygiene (2015), stipulates the assurance of occupational safety and health; policies and regimes for people suffering from occupational accidents and diseases; responsibilities and powers of organizations and individuals related to occupational safety and health and state management of occupational safety and health. Article 21. Health examination and treatment of occupational diseases for employees. When having a medical examination as prescribed in Clause 1, which specifically prescribes for female employees to be examined by a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, a person working in a working environment exposed to factors at risk of occupational diseases must be occupational disease detection.

Law on Vocational Education (2014), which regulates the vocational education system; organization and operation of vocational education institutions; rights and obligations of organizations and individuals participating in vocational education activities. Article 62 of the law stipulates the policy of female learners and rural workers, when participating in elementary level training programs and training programs for less than 3 months, are supported with training costs under the Prime Minister's regulations.

Circular 10/2019/TT-BKHDT dated July 30, 2019 of the Ministry of Planning and Investment stipulates a set of national gender development statistical indicators, including criteria on Labor, employment, access to resources, leadership - management (Criteria 02, 03) such as the rate of labor force participation; the rate of trained laborers; the number of employees with additional jobs; the number of employees working abroad for a definite term in the year under the contract; average income of a employed employee; the rate of employees with informal jobs; the rate of of part-time employees; income gap by gender; the rate of female directors/business owners.

In addition, regulations on tax incentives and priorities to promote gender equality in enterprises are promulgated in the Law on Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (Clause 5, Article 5) “In case many small and medium-sized enterprises meet the conditions for support as prescribed in this Law, priority shall be given to selecting women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises, and small and medium-sized enterprises employing more female employees". The Labor Law (2019) stipulates that there is a tax reduction policy for employers that employ many female employees in accordance with the tax law in Article 135, Clause 4, Decree 145/2020/ND-CP stipulating that employers employing many female employees are entitled to tax reduction in accordance with the tax law; Additional expenditures for female employees, ensuring gender equality and preventing and combating sexual harassment at the workplace specified in this Decree shall be included in deductible expenses when determining the enterprise's taxable income according to the regulations of the Ministry of Finance in Article 83, Clause 2.

For the forestry sector, Vietnam aims to develop the industry into a specific economic-technical industry, which ensures the wide and equal participation of all economic sectors, social organizations and communities in forestry activities, reflected in the Strategy for Development of the Forestry Sector in Vietnam in 2021-2030 period, vision to 2050. Thus, in the above Vietnamese legal documents mentioned and stipulate a number of articles about the responsibilities and specific rights of gender. However, the legal documents of Vietnam only provide general provisions for sectors and for the whole society, and there are no regulations on gender issues in the forestry sector in Vietnam. In addition, although there are many policies, regulations and programs that address gender issues, there are limitations in practical implementation.

**2.2. Overview of gender studies in forestry**

***2.2.1. In the world***

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has introduced the concept of "gender"[[8]](#footnote-8), which is a social and cultural structure that distinguishes the different attributes of men and women, boys and girls, and thereby deals with the roles and responsibilities of male and female. Other roles and attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. Thus, gender does not refer to biological differences (called “gender”), but implies social differences between women and men. Accordingly, gender studies in the forestry sector often examine the roles of men and women in achieving sustainable solutions for effective forest resource management. Currently, this topic has become the focus of attention of not only leaders, developers, but also research scholars of various degrees.

In Asia, a study on the status of forestry, gender roles, gender structure, as well as the relevance and impact of gender issues in forestry up to 2020 was conducted in 4 countries including China, Japan, Mongolia and Korea indicate that women are the main forest users through their participation in food production, firewood and fodder production. Women also make great contributions to afforestation and forest protection. In the timber industry, women are mainly engaged in woodworking or furniture making compared to logging or transporting wood. In the forestry services sector, women mainly work in organizations or administrative agencies as researchers or in supporting roles and rarely provide input into decision-making on forestry. This study confirms that men still dominate the forestry workforce, where the participation rate of women is (relatively) very low in North Asia, and they do not yet play a large role in the wood industry. Similar results were found in a study in Nigeria and Central America, where the authors asserted that women's participation in forestry was limited[[9]](#footnote-9), women are often unskilled, underpaid, and work informally and part-time, which can leave them undervalued and have little influence in the decision-making process[[10]](#footnote-10). This is a major limitation to sustainable forest management. One of the reasons is due to the misconception that forestry is male-only activities due to the dangerous nature of the work. Social norms link women's roles with subsistence needs and family responsibilities, which relate to women's participation in small and medium enterprises in the forestry sector.

Regarding gender studies in the wood processing industry, a study in Indonesia[[11]](#footnote-11) analyzed the roles of men and women participating in the furniture industry value chain in 5 items (categories) including furniture retailers, furniture warehouses, furniture workshops, sawmills and timber retailers. Research shows that women are more concentrated in the warehouse area, where they do the polishing, hand-painting (rarely machine-painting), and wrapping products before shipping. In other stages, women also carve and source interior materials, mainly by phone. Some of the other jobs women often take on are bookkeeping and record keeping, managing cash payments and customer relations, and overseeing the quality of finished products. Men take on more work than women, they design furniture, source furniture materials by visiting in person, lifting wood or furniture pieces, milling wood, maintaining sawing equipment, carpentry, carving and packing of heavy items. Although women are a very important workforce in generating revenue, they are paid 50% less than men. Besides, they are also less involved in the decision-making process, weaker in resource control, product development and negotiation. Some of the reasons for this are that women are seen as unskilled in furniture manufacturing. Women are also considered risk-inappropriate while some jobs are considered too risky for women, for example operating complex machinery. One possible explanation is the cultural division of labor. Men make money while women tend to stay at home, cook food and educate children.

Another document related to the role of women in the wood processing industry is a report on gender in forest product processing in Ghana[[12]](#footnote-12). The report states that although women are involved in management work, are the labor force of the chain, in addition, they also play the role of investors in the value chain, but they are hardly recognized for their role in the chain, and can be forgotten. Some evaluation criteria such as: Jobs with the participation of women in the value chain, the size of enterprises with the participation and management of women, the recognition of women's role in enterprises. The document also shows that women's participation in the furniture manufacturing sector is mainly at the polishing and marketing stages of the product. Some other findings can be mentioned that men are more suitable for skilled or specialized jobs than women; jobs requiring the use of heavy machinery and equipment are more suitable for men than for women; high-risk jobs that are less attractive to women; in work requiring significant interaction (formal and informal) with authorities, men are more suitable to meet with authorities than women; due to the complexity of legal procedures, some illegal activities were carried out. Women do not want to face future law enforcement agencies; Women with meticulous and delicate character should be suitable for the final stage of the finished product.

Thus, through a number of gender studies in the forestry sector, a number of conclusions can be drawn summarized in Box 2.1.

|  |
| --- |
| ***Box 2.1. Summary of results of some gender studies in the forestry sector in the world***  (1) Women play an important role in the forestry sector, this role is not recognized and their participation is limited.  (2) Have disparities or inequalities in wages, division of labor and responsibilities between men and women in the value chain of forestry sector.  (3) Have many causes; one of the main reasons is due to society's conceptions of women's roles and responsibilities.  (4) Gender studies in forestry and forestry processing sector are still limited and sparse, leading to a lack of practical evidence. This makes it difficult to achieve gender equality target (No. 5) of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. |

***2.2.2. In Vietnam***

Along with the process of exchange and integration, in the early 90s of the 20th century, by many different ways, gender attitudes and approaches have been quickly imported and propagated into Vietnam. Since then, the topic of gender has been researched and developed in various fields, from micro to macro levels. However, gender studies in the forestry are still sparse. In 2006, the working group on gender in forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) carried out a study on “Gender issues in key areas in the forestry as the basis for gender mainstreaming in the national forestry strategy for the period of 2006-2010”. This report focuses on 5 important objectives including: (1) Land use planning, allocation of forest land and development of sustainable; (2) The role of women in the development of small and medium production, exploitation and processing of forest products; (3) The role of women in afforestation and nursery activities; (4) The dissemination of forestry laws and policies, the participation of women in forestry extension, forestry education and training activities; (5) Forest management and protection based on community, forest protection, conservation and environmental services; (6) Some gender issues in State Forestry Farms and the impact of the renewal policy on the lives of Forestry farms staff. The report makes three important conclusions that: (1) Land use rights are not clear. There is a serious shortage of cultivated land. The benefit mechanism is not clear, women's rights are still limited. (2) Women, especially ethnic minority women lack opportunities to access resources, and (3) The economic burden is still more heavily burdened on women than on men. Therefore, the authors recommend that there should be more studies on retirement and maternity regimes for women working hard and hazardous in the forestry and should develop a mechanism and process to monitor and evaluate gender issues in the forestry.

Until 2015, a report by Recoftc on “Understanding Women's Participation in Forestry in Vietnam” related to gender issues was recently updated. The report shows that while many women work in the forestry, their participation in decision-making at both national and local levels and their representation in leadership roles is limited. In addition, the report also mentions a number of existing issues in forestry management such as: (1) Contradictions in gender laws, policies and practices lead to the failure to ensure women's rights and women's leadership for effective forest use and management; (2) There is no specialized unit on gender in the General Department of Forestry of Vietnam; (3) Insufficient gender-analyzed statistics, limited technical capacity for gender analysis and gender mainstreaming among forestry staff have limited informed policy making.

In 2019, a number of issues about male and female workers, women's access to information were mentioned in the report “Gender issues in forestry production: Key findings from the results of the VPA-IM survey in 04 provinces” by Nguyen Thanh Hien and Vu Thi Bich Hop. The report shows that in small and medium wood processing enterprises, the proportion of male workers is higher than that of female workers and women have few opportunities to participate in advanced professional training courses in wood production and processing. In Vietnam, women make up 58% of workforce in agriculture, forestry and fishery, and provide more than 60% of agricultural products. In which, the number of Vietnamese women who are engaged in wood production, processing and marketing of wood products is 2-3 million. Most of them work in family or micro enterprises as owners, members of the household business or as wage workers. The report also shows that compared to men, women experience significant gender inequality in small and medium wood production enterprises. They have lower salary (usually 60% less, even for similar jobs), low job stability, less influence on decision-making, less access to credit and technical support, and less be represented in trade associations. In another report of the Center for Sustainable Development on “Research on the current status of afforestation households and small and micro wood processing enterprises before implementing VPA/FLEG” also shows that most businesses are now do not fully meet the regulations related to labor and social insurance.

A research by Forest Trends on Gender in 2019 and wood-based value chains in Vietnam also shows that women have many roles in the wood-based value chains. They can be owners of small enterprises, members of the household business or wage workforce, but the lack of accurate data on how women participate in these value chains has limited efforts to improve gender equality. The research also found that women experience significant gender inequality in wood-based businesses compared to men. In addition, the issue of labor safety and social insurance is also one of the issues that need to be concerned for small and micro wood processing enterprises.

Similarly, Pham Thu Thuy and Maria Brockhau of the Center for International Forestry Research[[13]](#footnote-13) raised four outstanding issues of gender mainstreaming in REDD+ and Payment for environmental services (PES) programs in Vietnam, including: (1) Many policies emphasize the need for gender equality and the importance of gender mainstreaming in REDD+ and PES, but there is a lack of guidelines on how to address gender issues in forestry policies. (2) Although a number of women are represented in the National REDD+ Steering Committee in Vietnam, they do not have a certain role and their participation is still passive, leading to a limited impact on gender policy in forestry. (3) Many REDD+ projects and PES national programs have proposed benefit-sharing mechanisms, but not enough effort has been made to understand women's preferences for receiving PES and REDD+ payments. This has resulted in ineffective, inefficient and unfair implementation of both REDD+ and PES. (4) Although there are a number of information channels related to PES and REDD+, many women lack the ability to access these channels. The authors also provide recommendations for detailed guidance on how to deploy gender mainstreaming in province, district and commune, along with clear indicators to monitor the deployment of government commitments to increase the participation of women in decision-making positions.

Most recently, Edwin Shanks[[14]](#footnote-14) (2020) presented and applied a framework to analyze the situation on gender rights and gender aspects VPA-FLEGT. His report provides an overview of gender and FLEGT information in Vietnam including the legal framework for gender rights, available statistical data sources and secondary information sources and other researches. He also studies key issues and trends related to gender and FLEGT and highlights gender issues in Vietnam forestry. The report also extensively assesses gender issues in society and economy related to the Timber Legality Definition and the Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS), which are central components of the VPA-FLEGT. This report uses a range of gender disaggregated indicators, for example, the number of male and female workers in the forestry, the wage gap between men and women, or the gender division of labor to analyze under three aspects of the analytical framework include: (1) The right to use forest resources and the right to use the forest; (2) Economic and employment opportunities in forest production and forestry; and (3) Social welfare, human resources and participation in forestry organizations. According to this framework, the author points out issues of: (1) Lack of updated information on the situation of young workers in the forestry and the extent to which underage employment is a problem today, and if so, what are the issues involved and what sections of the forestry are involved. (2) Female workers in the forestry continue to be disadvantaged in access to technical and vocational training opportunities. Women experience significant gender inequality in small and medium wood processing production enterprises compared to men. They also have less influence over decision-making, less access to credit and technical support, and less be represented in trade associations. And (3) lack of research and factual evidence on gender at all levels and in wood processing enterprises.

Thus, studies show that gender inequality issues still exist in wood processing enterprises in Vietnam as well as in some countries around the world. These inequalities are showed in the low participation of women in important decisions of wood processing enterprises, limited access to information and improvement of skills, stability and security in work and the wage gap between men and women. The above fact shows that there are still many unanswered questions about gender issues in the forestry, such as what are the root causes of gender inequality, due to limitations related to state policies and the company or due to the traditional psychological factors of the workers. Therefore, field evidence is needed to gain insight into gender issues across all chains of the forestry, from afforestation households to wood exporters. The wood processing and export sector plays an important role in Vietnam's timber supply chain and attracts a large female workforce. However, research on gender inequality issues in this field is still sparse and, as mentioned, more field trip is needed, leading to a lack of reference database for deployment and monitoring the impact assessment of VPA/FLEGT and EVFTA in Vietnam.

**III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, SUBJECTIVES, AND METHODS**

**3.1. Research objective**

- To identify gender issues in wood product processing and manufacturing enterprises (WPMEs) in terms of division of labor, employment, social welfare, opportunities to access information and to enhance professional skills;

- To consider the root causes and main factors driving gender inequality issues;

- To propose policy advocacy recommendations to enhance gender equality in the forestry sector;

- To suggest a gender-indicators framework to monitor and assess gender issues in WPMEs.

**3.2. Research subjectives**

This study focused on surveying gender issues in WPMEs in Vietnam.

**3.3. Research approaches and methods**

***3.3.1. Research approaches***

Three main approaches were used in this research including gender-sensitive approaches (GSAs); participatory action research (PAR); and enterprise approaches.

*- The GSAs:* were used to ensure that both men and women are equally surveyed regarding aspirations, opportunities, and capacities during project implementation. One of the important indicators of this method was that the male: female ratio is equal to 1. Furthermore, in order to really understand the causes of gender issues, the psychophysiology of gender in the GSAs was also applied.

*- PAR:* was the method commonly used in the forestry sector, especially social forestry. This method included a variety of tools and techniques for collecting field information. In this study, several techniques were used including involving local organizations (forest ranger, industrial park management board, etc.) to create contact and trust throughout the survey process. We also used an in-depth interview method by a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of diverse question types, from close-open to 5-point Likert-scales questions for respondents to easily participate.

*- Enterprise approach:* was basically understood as the way in which the research team approaches and collects information from businesses. In this vein, the two main methods the team uses to reach businesses included indirect and direct. In the former, the project was napproached through an online survey questionnaire sent to businesses, in which, the questionnaire was mainly a closed question with a variety of forms to ask including yes-no, 5-point Likert scale, and multiple choice questions. In the latter, the research team directly in-depth interviewed business owners or managers using a semi-structured questionnaire. This purpose was to delve deeply into gender issues and answer the question of why. Moreover, to confirm the answer, we also used some cross-check questions, and at the same time, the field observations at the factory were conducted and served as gender-based evidence.

***3.3.2. Research methods***

*- Desk review:* Documents related to research topics include gender studies in the forestry sector, and reports on VPA-FLEGT in Vietnam were systematically reviewed. Besides, we selectively inherited national policies, international conventions, and local socio-economic and political contexts. These sources were officially and up-to-date guaranteed by local authority agencies and other organizations. This work aimed to have an overview of the current status of wood processing enterprises in Vietnam and in the study area, thereby providing initial assessments and ideas on the research problem

*- Empirical fieldwork:*

*+ Sampling methods:* The study applied a non-probability sampling technique to select suitable enterprises. In this technique, the research used judgment and convenience sampling methods. Judgment here means that the number of businesses selected was based on the research team’s judgment of their suitability with the original research criteria. One of the important criteria was a WPME. The field survey and data collection process has experienced 6 main stages as introduced in Figure 3.1.

Step 2. A list of WPMEs (N=1925)

Step3. Sending online-servey questionanaires (N=100)

Step4a. Data analysis from online survey (N=21)

Step5a. In-depth interviews with WPMEs (N=17)

Step6. Data analysis

Step4b. Labors questionnaire design and experts consultation

Step5b. Labors interviews (N=83)

Step 1. A list of all companies in the forestry sector (N=5.379)

**Figure 3.1.** Sample selection and interview process

*+ In-depth interviews with local authorities and management agencies:* The study also conducted interviews with a number of relevant state management agencies.

*- Expert consultations:* During the process of research design and implementation, the consultations, shares, and comments from gender experts, forestry experts, and policymakers were recorded.

*- Data collection and analysis:*

*+ Cleaning and input data process:* Primary data collected was entered in excel, checked, and cleaned before being processed by R software. Some descriptive statistics such as percentage, quantity, average, etc. were used.

*+ Multiple linear regression analysis:* was applied to determine the dependent variables that have the most influence on two independent variables, namely the employee’s salary and their level of satisfaction about the working environment.

**IV. INFORMATION ABOUT ENTERPRISES PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY**

**4.1. Information and general background about enterprises participating in the survey**

*Regions and export markets*

There are 21 enterprises participating in the online survey answer sheet (online) in 6 provinces and cities: Hai Duong (3 enterprises), Hanoi (1 enterprise), Ha Tinh (1 enterprise), Thanh Hoa (3 enterprises), Dong Nai (6 enterprises) and Binh Duong (7 enterprises). Among them, there are 11 enterprises exporting at least to 01 European country (Spain, France, Denmark, UK, Belgium...) and 10 enterprises exporting to other markets (USA, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Canada) (Table 4.1). The export products of the European market are mainly interior and exterior wood furniture (Code 31), in addition, some enterprises export plywood , Finger joint board (construction wood), MDF board (Code 16). Interior wood furniture is also a major export item to the US, Japan, and Taiwan markets. The majority of enterprises producing plywood, woodchips and pellets export to Asian markets such as Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, Taiwan, Japan and China.

*Method of ownership, scale and operating time*

Export enterprises in this survey are mainly private enterprises, accounting for 57.14% of the surveyed enterprises, foreign-invested enterprises accounting for 33.33%, the remaining 9.53% are state enterprises. Most of the enterprises have capital scale of 20-100 billion dong. Enterprise scale size by number of employees includes 6 small enterprises, 7 medium enterprises and 9 large enterprises[[15]](#footnote-15). The characteristics of large enterprises are established and operatiod for > 10 years (mainly 15-20 years), exporting interior and exterior wood products to European and America markets; and method of capital ownership is mostly private and foreign invested capital. For small and medium enterprises, method of capital ownership is mostly private, the minium number of years of operation is 4 years and the maximum is 24 years (mainly 10-15 years). The number of small and medium enterprises exporting to non-European countries is more than enterprises exporting to Europe.

*Participating in professional association and social organizations*

52.38% of enterprises (11 enterprises) answered that they participated in the Professional Association, including 9 enterprises exporting to European and 2 enterprises exporting to other market. The remaining 10 enterprises did not participate in any professional association, of which there were 3 enterprises exporting to European and 7 enterprises exporting to other market. This result shows that the number of enterprises participating in the Professional Association of enterprises exporting to Europe is higher than that of enterprises not exporting to Europe. For Union organizations in the company, there are 18/21 enterprises having a trade union, 5/21 enterprises having a Women's Union/Branch and 01/21 enterprises having a Youth Union Branch.

**Table 4.1.** General information about online survey enterprises

| **Information** | **All export enterprises** | **Enterprise exporting to EU** | **Enterprises exporting to other market** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Enterprise at all regions** | | | |
| Northern region  (Hai Duong, Hanoi) | **4** | 2 | 2 |
| Central region  (Ha Tinh, Thanh Hoa) | **4 (\*2)** | 1 | 3 (\*2) |
| Southern region  (Dong Nai, Binh Duong) | **13 (\*1)** | 8 | 5 (\*1) |
| **2. Enterprise in the form of registration** | | | |
| One-member Limited liability company | **3** | 2 | 1 |
| Two-member Limited liability company | **9** | 4 | 5 |
| Joint Stock Company | **8** | 4 | 4 |
| Private enterprise | **1** | 1 | 0 |
| **3. Enterprise in the form of capital ownership** | | | |
| Private enterprise | **12** | 6 | 6 |
| State enterprise | **2** | 1 | 1 |
| Foreign Invested Enterprise | **7** | 4 | 3 |
| **4. Enterprise in the scale of capital** | | | |
| 3-20 billion dong | **6** | 2 | 4 |
| 20-100 billion dong | **10** | 6 | 4 |
| >100 billion dong | **5** | 3 | 2 |
| **5. Scale of enterprise according to number of employees** | | | |
| Small (10 to 100 employees) | **6** | 2 | 4 |
| Medium (101 to 200 employees) | **7** | 3 | 4 |
| Large (over 200 employees) | **8** | 6 | 2 |
| **6. Enterprises processing and exporting products** | | | |
| Interior furniture | **8 (\*1)** | 3 | 5 (\*1) |
| Exterior furniture | **1** | 1 | 0 |
| Interior and Exterior furniture | **4** | 4 | 0 |
| Interior Furniture and types of plank | **1** | 1 | 0 |
| Types of plank | **4** | 1 | 3 |
| Construction wood | **1** | 1 | 0 |
| Woodchips | **2 (\*1)** | 0 | 2 (\*1) |
| Pellets | **(\*1)** | 0 | 1 |
| **7. Number of operating year** | | | |
| >20 years | **4** | 3 | 1 |
| 10-20 years | **14** | 7 | 7 |
| 5-10 years | **5** | 3 | 2 |
| <5 years | **2** | 1 | 1 |
| **8. Participating in Professional Association** | | | |
| Yes | **11** | 9 | 2 |
| No | **10** | 3 | 7 |
| **9. Social organizations in company** | | | |
| Trade Union | **18** | 8 | 10 |
| Women's Association/Branch | **5** | 3 | 2 |
| Youth Union/Youth branch | **1** | 1 | 0 |
| \* Enterprises have actual survey information, but there is not enough information on the online form | | | |

*(Source: online survey,2022)*

**4.2. General information about enterprise managers and employees participating in the interview**

In this study, we conducted field survey trips at 17 wood processing and exporting enterprises in Hai Duong (3 enterprises), Thanh Hoa (4 enterprises), Nghe An (1 enterprise), Ha Tinh (1 enterprise), Binh Duong (2 enterprises) and Dong Nai (5 enterprises). During that process, we interviewed 21 managers of enterprises, of which 9 managers are women, accounting for 42.9%. The male managers participated in the interview has taken on different positions in the company such as director, administrative management officer, human resources, manager, technical manager, health - safety - environment manager (HSE); while female participated in the interview are mainly administrative - human resources officers, accountant and import/export sales staff (Table 4.2). Most of the interviewers have university degrees. The interviews revolved around the following contents: Production and export situation of enterprises; Labor situation, job position, salary and welfare regimes of the enterprise for male and female employees; Difficulties of enterprises and employees due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of Decree 102 to enterprise, etc.

The research team also interviewed a total of 83 employees in 17 enterprises, including 42 female employees (accounting for 50.60%). The majority of male and female employees in the wood processing and exporting enterprises interviewed were aged between 30 and 50 years old, with an average age of 41 years; graduated secondary school, High school (69% for women and 79% for men) and working time in enterprises from 1 to 5 years, account for the majority (55.8% for men and 47.5% for women). The interview contents for employees include main contents such as their current job position, salary level, additional income sources, labor contracts, insurance premiums, benefits received, their awareness of the working environment, impacts to health, opportunities to find other jobs, etc.

**Table 4.2.** General information about officials and employees participating   
in the interview

| **Information** | **Male** | **Female** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Management officials of enterprises participating in the interview** | | |
| **Total (people)**  Director, Deputy Director  Administrative, HR staff  Manager  Technical staff  Accountant  HSE  Sales/ Import-export | **12**  4  4  1  1  -  2  - | **9**  -  4  -  -  2  -  3 |
| **Employees participating in the interview** | | |
| **Total (people)** | **41** | **42** |
| **Employee's age (%)**  (youngest, oldest)  19 to 30 years old  30 to 40 years old  40 to 50 years old  50 to 60 years old | (27 to 60 years old)  7,0  39,5  41,9  11,6 | (19 to 60 years old)  17,1  24,4  36,6  19,5 |
| **Employee’s qualification** (%)  Ungraduated Primary school  Graduated Primary school  Graduated secondary school  Graduated high school  High School, College, University | 4,7  9,3  37,2  41,9  7,0 | 4,8  14,3  33,3  35,7  11,9 |
| **Number of years working at the employee's facilities**  (youngest, oldest)  < 1 year  1 to 5 years  5 to 10 years  > 10 years | (4 months to 12 years)  11,6  55,8  23,3  9,3 | (1 to 19 years)  15,0  47,5  10,0  27,5 |

*(Source: field survey, 2022)*

**V. GENDER ISSUES IN WOOD PROCESSING AND EXPORTING ENTERPRISES**

To analyze and identify existing gender issues in wood processing and exporting enterprises, the research team used three data/information sources as follow:

* Results of online interview sheets of 21 wood processing and exporting enterprises;
* Results of interviewing 21 leaders, managers of enterprises and 83 employees through direct survey at 17 enterprises;
* Results of interviews with 05 managers, local authorities, Associations and other parties related to the research contents

The results below present 7 main issues related to gender issues in wood processing and exporting enterprises including (1) enterprise leadership and manager positions; (2) labor source; (3) salary and job position; (4) insurance regime and labor contract (5) qualifications and opportunities to improve professional skills; (6) occupational safety; and (7) job opportunities. The report ends with an analysis of the factors affecting the salary and satisfaction of employee in the enterprise before making conclusions and recommendations.

**5.1. Enterprise leadership and manager positions**

The participation of women and men in leadership board and manager positions in 21 enterprises is shown in Figure 5.1. The results show that the number of women and men holding enterprise leadership and manager positions in the enterprise is 366 people, including the Board of Management, Board of Directors, Heads/deputy heads departments of sales/production, Quality controller, accountant, administrative staff, human resources staff. In which, the number of men holding positions in the leadership and management of departments is 242 people (66.1%), while this position for women is 124 people (accounting for 33.9%). ).

*(Source: online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.1.** Results of gender analysis of leadership and management positions in enterprises (N=21)

Here, we divide into two groups of different positions of enterprise: the group of leaders (including those holding positions in the Board of Management and Board of Directors) and the group of manager positions in different departments. For the first group, there are a total of 129 people holding this position in total of 21 enterprises, of which male account for 82.17% (106 people), compared to a very small ratio of women, only 17.83% (23 people), so on average, each enterprise has 5 male and 1 female participating in the enterprises leadership board. In addition, the difference is also reflected in the number of enterprises which have women in the enterprises leadership board. While 100% of enterprises said that having men participating in leadership position of company, only 55% of enterprises said that having women in this position (Figure 5.2). For the second group, women have the highest ratio and are higher than men in the administrative and human resources departments with the ratio of 57.89%, while men account for the highest ratio in the control quality department with the ratio of 76.60%. For the business/production and accounting departments, men account for a higher ratio of 55.81% and 54.55%.

The above results demonstrates the lack of representation and decision-making power of women in management positions at the highest levels in the enterprise. This disparity occurs in most Asian countries and is also a common problem for countries around the world (ILO, 2020)[[16]](#footnote-16). In Vietnam, according to data in the report of VCCI (2021)[[17]](#footnote-17), the ratio of enterprises owned by women tends to increase, from 21% in 2011, to 21.6% in 2015 and up to 23.4 % in 2020. However, this ratio varies by industry/sector, size and region[[18]](#footnote-18). In this study, the ratio of women in leadership board is 17.8%, which is 1.31 times lower than the national average in 2020. A number of misconceptions is considered as affecting the image and growth potential of women entrepreneurs and women-owned enterprise in Vietnam generally when women only focus on small business activities such as side jobs, women give birth who do not have time to lead the enterprise, etc. For the forestry sector, these notions will be somewhat "burdensome" when thinking that this the sector which is more suitable for men. A female official of the Wood Industry Association of a Southern province said, *"The leaders of wood enterprise today are mainly men, because that is the particularity of the profession".* However, the trend that *"women are participating more and more in management of departments and production workshops, especially: financial management, human resource management and product quality management"* shows that women are becoming to have more opportunities in departmental management roles.

*(Source: Online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.2.** Number of enterprises with women and men in the leadership board(N=21)

Some studies show that promoting a gender-inclusive environment creates more benefits for enterprise and for society. Specifically, the ILO’s report (2020) shows that in fact, Asia Pacific enterprises with an inclusive corporation culture are 8% more likely to have better business results. The ILO report also shows that enterprises in Vietnam led by women are 5% more likely to have a gender-balanced workforce than those led by men. From a gender perspective, the latest report of the IFC (2017), a member of the World Bank (WB), shows that women often tend to measure and analyze risks more meticulously instead of simply following intuition like men, they also understand psychology, health and are more gender sensitive. Therefore, the very low ratio of women in enterprise decision-making power may make the health, welfare and psychological benefits of female employees more limited. Furthermore, the low ratio of women in the leadership board leads to less opportunity for them to be represented in trade associations, action agendas and macro-negotiation conferences. Therefore, encouraging and facilitating for women to undertake leadership positions or increase the ratio of women in management of wood processing and exporting enterprises will bring more women's voices and contribute to promote gender equality.

**5.2. Labor source**

The results show that the total number of employees of the 21 surveyed enterprises is 8,282 employees (Figure 5.3). In which, the enterprise with the largest number of employees is 1,548 employees, and the lowest is only 14 people. The total of male employees in 21 enterprises is 4,906 people, accounting for 59.2%, this ratio is higher in enterprises exporting to Europe (60.9% or 3,407 employees) than in enterprises exporting to other markets (55.7% or 1,499 employees). Male employees account for a higher ratio than female employees in most enterprises (14/21 enterprises), 2.3 times more on average, and 9.6 times more in some enterprises (Figure 5.4). The difference between male and female employee shows that the wood processing sector attracts a large male workforce. Some managers said that this is understandable when the forestry sector is considered as a industry which is more suitable for men due to the nature of the work (mainly heavy work)" and the working environment in wood processing enterprises are often hot, dusty, (some positions) toxic.

*(Source: Online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.3.** Total number of employees by gender and by enterprise (N=21)

In order to understand better, we gave question for enterprises about the priority criteria when recruiting male and female employees among 8 standards of health, age, flexible time, experience/skills, no family ties, can work under pressure, and appearance. The results show that 100% of enterprises said that health is the most important standard. Also, the next priorities are age and experience/skills. In in-depth interviews, most of enterprises also confirmed this, that employees do not need to have high qualifications, Only having good health can work in these enterprises. Clearly, although appearance or segregation of men and women are not priorities when hiring, the health standards imply that male candidates will have more advantage than female candidates.

This shows that gender stereotypes in professional positions still exist. Although the enterprise managers do not admit it, however, the data recorded from the survey and in-depth interviews show that *“Women are only suitable for the job..., men are only suitable for the job... we don't have gender discrimination, we create conditions for both men and women to develop with their strengths”* (Source: in-depth interview, 2022). In-depth interview with another enterprise in the Northern with foreign investment, large scale, exporting interior furniture products to many markets in the world, including European countries, a ratio difference of men and women is relatively large (3.7 times), clarify this problem:

*“The company recruits employees according to job position so that the gender can develop according to their capacity. The products of enterprises are highly technical and aesthetic, so it is necessary to recruit skilled and agile employees that the men meets better in this problem” (Source: in-depth interview, 2022).*

Obviously, in spite of not admitting it, gender stereotypes in profession in wood enterprises are still very large. This makes the opportunities and access to jobs of female employees will be more limited than that of male employees. In particular, today's enterprises tend to invest in modern equipment and machines to increase labor productivity. With this trend, women are increasingly vulnerable by the opinion that technical positions are only suitable for men. This means that the opportunities for female employees to participate in enterprises will be getting less and less, and female employees are more likely to lose their jobs. This become available practically in the context of enterprise difficulties due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A male employee, when interviewed, told the research team that his wife had to quit her job due to the company's downsizing during the past difficult period and has not yet worked. Therefore, without adequate views and appropriate solutions, the labor disparity between men and women will not improve and may even become deeper.

*(Source: Online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.4.** Ratio of male employees compared to female employees (N=21)

**5.3. Salary and division of labor**

For salary and division of labor by gender, the results are based on two data sources: from online interviews provided by enterprises and from direct interviews with employees. Survey results show that the average monthly income of an employee is 7.33 million dong, of which male employees receive 7.50 million dong, while this figure for women is 7.16 million dong (Figure 5.5), the difference is 340 thousand dong/ a month, which means about 4 million dong/ a year. Employees working in enterprises exporting to Europe have a higher income than the average salary of enterprises, with a salary of 7.86 million dong for men and 7.54 million dong for women.

*(Source: Online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.5.**Salary of male and female employees (N=21)

This salary for employees working in enterprises exporting to other markets is 7.1 million and 6.74 million/month. The general salary difference in both 2 groups of enterprises is about 4-5%, of which 13/21 surveyed enterprises believe that there is no difference in salary between men and women (Men’s salary is equivalent to women's salary), there is 01 enterprise with women’s salary of about 9.1% higher than that of men, and 7 enterprises with a salary of 4 to 30% higher than that of men.

The salary of employees from the enterprise interview results compared with the average salary of the whole country (men is 6,922 million and women is 6,171 million), then employees work in wood processing and exporting enterprises have higher salary and salary difference between men and women is lower (the average difference for occupations in 2020 is 10.8%[[19]](#footnote-19)).

Meanwhile, results from direct interviews with employees show that the monthly average salary per employee received is 7.07 million dong, lower than the reported level provided by the company (see Table 5.1). Similar results show that the average income of male employees (7.95 million/month) is higher than that of female employees (6.13 million), but the difference is 1.82 million dong or 24,5%/month is very high, and in fact, it is much higher than the data reported by enterprises. This data is also much higher than the average salary difference between men and women in the country, 10.8%.

When comparing the incomes of men and women by job position, the results show that the position of manager and team leader has the highest salary (average 13.06 million/month), next is position of machinery operator (assembly employee, mechanician, operator, CNC), reached 7.21 million dong, meanwhile, pre-processing staff (dissecting, cleaning, sanding...) had the lowest salary, only 5,93 million/month/employee. It is quite surprising that female employees always have lower income than male employees in all positions. This has reflected the reason why there is a salary difference between men and women in the company. Moreover, while the two positions with the highest salary, mainly male employees (75% in the position of team leader/manager and 72.22% in the position of machine operator), the majority of female employees work in positions with the lowest salary such as pre-processing employees (60.71%).

According to the interview results, some enterprise managers said that *"men are suitable for hard work and able to learn quickly, so the salary is high, while women are meticulous and careful, suitable for sanding”*. In addition, according to our observations, some jobs are contracted by product, so the labor productivity of men is often higher than that of women. A female employee working in the woodworking and grading stage agrees: *“Men's salary are higher at this stage because they are healthier and work faster”.* Moreover, related to the additional source of income (overtime, bonus...), most (>60%) male and female employees reported that they worked overtime with the ratio of 30,000 - 45,000 dong/ an hour, 1.5 times higher compared to the basic salary (20,000 - 30,000 dong/an hour). On average daily, the employees work overtime for about 2 hours or is paid according to the product. However, due to the impact of the Covid epidemic, the increased income was not significant due to unstable sources of goods and lack of jobs. In addition, some enterprises believe that during the period of influence of the Covid pandemic, enterprises must implement solutions three on-site, in that case, women often face difficulties due to family work. Therefore, the ratio of women working in enterprises is lower than that of men.

Thus, there are 04 issues emerging from the analysis of job positions and salary from the gender view, including: (1) there is a difference in employee salary between the enterprise's report and the data interviewing employees; However, the main problem is that (2) the average salary of employees in wood processing and exporting enterprises is about 7 million dong, which is lower than the national average, and (3) the total income of male employees from the actual survey results are higher than female employees, the difference is approximately 1.82 million dong/month or 24.5%, much higher than the average of whole country. We also point out that (4) two reasons for this difference: it is due to the ratio of men working in high-income positions, while conversely, the majority of women working manual jobs has low-income; secondly, because men have higher labor productivity.

**Table 5.1.** Average salary by job position of male and female employees

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Job position | Quantity (\*) | | | | Average salary (million dong/month) | | | |
| Men | Women | Total | Men | | Women | Average |
| Pre-processing staff | 11(39,28) | 17(60,71) | 28(100) | 6,40 | | 5,54 | 5,93 |
| Machinery operator | 13(72,22) | 5(27,77) | 18(100) | 7,29 | | 7,00 | 7,21 |
| Assembling and packing staff | 8(44,44) | 10(55,55) | 18(100) | 6,71 | | 6,30 | 6,48 |
| Administrative, general staff | 0(0.00) | 4(100) | 4(100) | 0,00 | | 6,50 | 6,50 |
| Team Leader, Manager | 6(75,00) | 2(25,00) | 8(100) | 14,50 | | 8,75 | 13,06 |
| Cleaning staff, security guard, driver | 3(42,85) | 4(57,14) | 7(100) | 6,33 | | 6,25 | 6,28 |
| Average | - | - | - | 7,76 | | 6,36 | 7,07 |

*(\*)Note: figures in brackets () is unit %*

*(Source: field survey, 2022)*

**5.4. Insurance regime, labor contract and some employee benefits**

Regarding employees' rights, one of the important indicators is the ratio of employees signing labor contracts and paying insurance premiums in enterprises. Pursuant to the provisions of the Labor Code 2019 from January 1, 2021, a labor contract must be entered into one of the following two types: (1) An indefinite term labor contract: is a contract that in which the two parties do not determine the term, the time of terminating validity of the contract; (2) Definite term labor contract: is a contract that in which the two parties determine the term, the time of terminating validity of contract within not over 36 months from the effective date of the contract. The results in Table 5.2 show that the ratio of insurance contribution for wood processing and exporting enterprises is 90.50% which is 3.12 times higher than the ratio of the whole country's labor force participating in social insurance ( 29%, 2018[[20]](#footnote-20)). The ratio of employees signed with indefinite-term contracts is 85.56%, 62.3% higher than the national average (statistics on labour contract in 2020)[[21]](#footnote-21). The ratio of employees participating in insurance and signing indefinite term contract for the group of enterprises exporting to Europe is higher than for other groups of enterprises.

The survey results also show that the ratio of female employees participating in all types of insurance is higher than that of men. Specifically, 94.08% of female employees are paid social insurance, while that of male employees is only 88.04%. The results also show that the ratio of women who are signed an indefinite term contract (89.19%) is higher than that of men (83.06%). The difference is similar for the two groups of enterprises exporting to Europe and for other enterprises. This result is also reflected in the results of report on Labor Employment Survey 2020 of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, specifically, the ratio of employees signed-contract for men is 53.0% and for women is 74.4%, the remaining ratio is oral agreement or no contract.

Besides, some other welfares are shown through the results that 100% of enterprises have maternity leave regime for women, usually 6 months, while male employees are permitted to take 5-7 days off when their wives born. 18/20 companies allow employees to perform regular health check-ups at least once a year. In which, 11 enterprises have gynecological examination regime for women.

The results of this study are further clarified when performing in-depth interviews. Most of managers of enterprises have adequate knowledge of the legal provisions on insurance and contracts for employees. In addition, the strict supervision and management of the competent authorities along with the strict requirements of the importer have contributed to increase the ratio of employees who are guaranteed legal rights. Enterprises said that the European market has stricter requirements than other markets, especially related to working age and regimes for female (pregnant) employees. European customers will visit and audit the factory. This problem explains why the ratio of employees with long-term contracts and paying insurance premiums is higher in the group of European exporting enterprise. However, in reality, there are still difficulties and challenges related to labor contracts and insurance in wood exporting enterprises, the cause may come from employees' awareness, but also from the perception of employee. According to an enterprise in Dong Nai (with European market): “*Currently, enterprises have 15-20% of employees who do not agree to pay insurance, mainly Khmer people, male employees often do not like to pay insurance, older employees refuse to pay insurance.”*. With the same opinion, an enterprise in Nghe An also said that *"employees do not like to pay insurance because they think they lose a part of their salary every month"*. In-depth interview with a male employee in a northern enterprise who did not participate in insurance, said that: *"It is not really important to pay insurance because the monthly salary is not high, I do not want to be deducted and enterprise also don't ask."* Meanwhile, some employees in a wood enterprise in the Northern said that they do not have the opportunity to participate even though they really like to pay insurance. In another case, female employees working for enterprises in the Northern (with European market) said that they were signed labour contract and promised to pay insurance, but in fact, for 10 years, they were not paid insurance.

This shows that the wood processing and exporting industry has a high ratio of employees signed contract and paid insurance, compared to the national average. However, it is necessary to further increase the ratio of employees fully participating in contracts and insurance according to the Labor Code 2019. This requires to enhance the responsibility of enterprises, the participation and supervision of functional agencies and give awareness for employees, especially male employees, is essential to further increase the ratio of employees signed contract and paid insurance in wood processing and exporting enterprises.

**Table 5.2.** Ratio of employees who are signed contract and supported by the enterprise to contribute all kinds of insurance (N=21)

| Items | | All enterprises | Enterprises exporting to European market | Enterprises exporting to other markets |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ratio of paying social insurance, health insurance and unemployment insurance | Male | 88.04 | 92.37 | 78.19 |
| Female | 94.08 | 98.95 | 85.13 |
| Average | 90.50 | 94.94 | 81.26 |
| Ratio of signing labor contract with indefinite term | Male | 83.06 | 85.21 | 78.19 |
| Female | 89.19 | 91.40 | 85.13 |
| Average | 85.56 | 87.63 | 81.26 |
| Ratio of signing labor contract with definite term | Male | 4.97 | 7.16 | 0.00 |
| Female | 4.89 | 7.55 | 0.00 |
| Average | 4.94 | 7.31 | 0.00 |
| Ratio of employee unsigned contract | Male | 11.97 | 7.63 | 21.81 |
| Female | 5.92 | 1.05 | 14.87 |
| Average | 9.50 | 5.06 | 18.74 |

*(Source: online survey, 2022)*

**5.5. Qualifications and opportunities to improve professional skills**

Most of wood processing and exporting enterprises do not require any education qualifications. Specifically, the ratio of employees with university or college degrees is only 14.48%, and this ratio is very low in enterprises exporting to other markets, only 7.9%. The ratio of employees graduated high school is 57.41%, this ratio is higher for enterprises exporting to European (62.03%), and lower for enterprises exporting to other markets (43.40%). However, employees with high qualification often work in electrical engineering for men. For female employees, education qualification is only required in some administrative departments.

*(Source: Online survey, 2022)*

**Figure 5.6.**Education qualification of employees by gender (N=21)

In order to assess the opportunities to improve professional skills for employees in enterprises, the study conducted a survey of enterprise owners about the number of training courses, and study tours to improve qualification and skills for employees. The analysis results show that a high ratio of enterprises do not organize training courses and study tours to improve professional skills, 40% and 35% respectively. There are 6/20 enterprises that organize tours and training to improve their skills every year, while the remaining enterprises rarely organize or organize once time for every several years.

When being asked about which subjects or job positions are often prioritized by enterprises to participate in training and study tours, the two positions that are agreed by the majority of enterprises are production staff and quality assurance controller. This shows that the opportunities for employees to access and improve skills are low, especially for those working in other positions, such as manager, administrative - human resources staff.

In addition, the results of in-depth interviews (Figure 5.7) show that the ratio of men participating in training courses is 74% and that of women are 79%, the training courses for employees have many different contents, can be divided into 3 groups of content:

- The first group of contents related to fire prevention and fighting (PCCC) and occupational safety (ATLD) - this is the group with the highest ratio of employees and the participation ratio is 51% for men and 45% for women respectively.

- The second group of content is training courses to help new employees get acquainted with the job, usually guided by team leaders or skilled employees.

- The third group of content is a group of content related to production techniques to improve employees' skills to meet the needs of improving product quality and producing new products of enterprises.

To study the accessibility and improve skills of employees, we focus on training courses related to the third content. These training courses include specific contents such as: learning to operate new equipment, new models, learning to improve external skills and production techniques, etc. The ratio of men participating in these courses is higher than that of women. Specifically, for men, the ratio of employees participating in these occupational content is 18%, of which, 8% participating in training courses with the content of learning when new equipment or goods are available, 5% participating in courses related to job improvement and skill improvement, 3% of employees participating in technical training courses and 2% of employees are nominated to learn and improve skills outside the enterprise. This ratio for women is relatively low, only 9% of female employees are participated in courses related to production techniques. They mainly participate in fire prevention & fighting and occupational safety training courses, and the second group of contents - training to guide and familiarize with the work. We believe that the opportunity to access and improve skills plays a very important role, not only in raising income for employees (as above- analyzed, employees with higher skills will do at positions with higher salary), but also affects employees' ability to find a job with higher income.

*(Source: Employees interview, 2022)*

**Figure 5.7.** Ratio of participation in training courses of male and female employees (N=83)

**5.6. Labor safety**

The results show that the majority (82.4%) of enterprises provide labor protective equipment for employees participated directly at the factory. In which, there are 3 stages or work positions that are usually equipped with specialized labor protective equipment including processing raw materials, creating semi-finished products, and finishing products. Meanwhile, some positions are less equipped with labor protective equipment such as inspection of finished products and packing for exported shipment. This is quite understandable because these are positions that use many complex machines, are exposed to harmful chemicals in paints and glues, and have a high risk ratio. 18/21 enterprises have separatioly toilets and baths for men and women. Besides, the labor protective equipment that are often equipped are: clothes, shoes, masks and gloves.

With the particularities of the wood processing industry with cutting off, sawing, and planing activities, noise is also a pollutant factor that needs to be considered in monitoring the working environment, so employees need to be equipped with additional protection equipment to reduce noise impacting on the ears such as noise reduction button. However, in fact, the survey shows that only 8/17 enterprises equip employees with this devices, equivalent to 47.06%. These enterprises are mainly enterprises exporting to European market or the US. For some enterprises that have not yet fully equipped labor protective equipment for employees, usually small enterprise, which have export markets to China.

Regarding employees' perception on impact of production activities on health, the results show that 61% of female employees think that the working environment in the factory will affect their health, this ratio for male employees is 50%. While 29% of female employees believe that the working environment does not affect their health, this ratio is quite high for men with 40%. In particular, the number of men who answered unaffected often worked in position of cutting off, planing, sawing, painting... these are positions that we found quite dust, noise and unpleasant odors through our survey process.

*(Source: Employee interview, 2022)*

**Figure 5.8.**Perceptions of male and female employees about the impact of the working environment on their health (N=83)

In addition, the frequency of using labor protective equipment between men and women is also different, the results are shown in Figure 5.10. The frequency of using labor protective equipment by men and women in wood processing enterprises is quite high, over 80%, the remaining 20% of employees answered that they do not or rarely use them and sometimes use them. The ratio of female employees rarely/do not use is 2%, for men, this ratio is 7.3%. They have many reasons to explain their less use of labor protective equipment, for example: hot weather, need to use hands to check roughness, entanglement ...

**Figure 5.9.**Level of using labor protective equipment by male and female employees (N=83)

**5.7. Opportunities to find the job**

The results of an in-depth survey on job opportunities for male and female employees are shown in Figure 5.11. The results show that male employees are more likely to find a job than female employees. Specifically, when we asked to conduct an in-depth survey about the possibility of finding another job with a similar salary or higher, the answers were: impossible, difficult to be possible, don't know, yes, possible and have many opportunities. For the " impossible " answer, the ratio of female employees is 66%, while this figure for men is 49%, lower than that of female employees. Similarly, the ratio of employees who answered "afraid of difficulties", " difficult to be possible " and "don't know" of female employees is also higher than that of male employees. However, for the answers "yes", "impossible" and "have many opportunities, the ratio of male employees is higher than that of female employees, specifically: 23% of male employees answered "yes" in the survey, while this ratio of female employees is 15%, 13% of male employees answer "possible" and this ratio of female employees is 5%, for the answer " have many opportunities " the male ratio is higher that the female ratio which is 3%. The ratio of men who answered “ possible, yes and very high” most of them work in positions related to machinery (machine operator, mechanician, electromechanical staff, etc).

This problem is most evident in a wood enterprise in a rural area, the results of in-depth interviews show that when giving questions to all male employees in this company, they answered that they have many choices about the job because they have experience in operating machinery and equipment, and can go far to work, while giving questions to women, they are inconfident about their ability to get a new job, they explain that due to the particularities of the wood industry, women after the process of sticking to the job, the accumulated experience is mainly works related to the quality control of wood products, sanding, painting, etc. Meanwhile, there are less wood companies in the countryside, it is difficult for them to find a job that can guarantee all the employees' rights and suitable to their own experience, if they want to find a good job, they must go far. This is difficult for them to do because they want to spend time with their families, and take care of their children. Similarly, the story of a female employee working in a wood processing and exporting enterprise to European (in the Northern) (now stop working to take care of her grandchild), she said she worked in this industry for 10 years but being paid social insurance for 1 year and 11 months. She added that she can still find another job, but because she get used to work here, she is afraid of moving to another company, although it is still easy to apply for a job elsewhere. This shows that women are limited in employment opportunities due to factors related to professional skills, family entanglement, and fear of change.

*(Source: Employee interview, 2022)*

**Figure 5.10.**Possibility to find job by gender (N=83)

**VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**6.1. Conclusions**

EU is one of 05 main wood markets for Vietnamese wood products. In 2021, the export value of wood and wood products to the EU is nearly 600 million USD. Obviously, when the VPA-FLEGT and EVFTA agreements are officially signed, it has had a great impact on Vietnamese enterprise because it is legally binding in order to improve forest governance and promote the legal wood commerce, at the same time, it also issues social responsibility requirements on labor, safety and environmental issues.

This study focuses on employees in wood processing and exporting enterprises from a gender perspective in terms of leadership position and enterprise manager position; labor and wages; insurance regime and labor contract; qualifications and opportunities to improve professional skills; and occupational safety. Using gender-sensitive approaches and gender analysis data, several conclusions and analysis are as follows:

***Position of leadership and department managers:*** The ratio of men holding positions in the leadership and department management is 66.1%, while this position for women accounts for 33.9 %. Women have the highest ratio and higher than men in the administrative and human resources departments with the ratio of 57.89%, while men have the highest ratio in the quality control department with the ratio of 76,60%. The ratio of women in the group of leadership positions including those holding positions on the board of management or the board of directors is very low, only 17.83%. This demonstratios the lack of representation and decision-making power of women in management positions at the highest levels of the enterprise. Increasing the ratio of women in leadership roles has become one of the goals of the Vietnam National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period through Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP issued by the government dated March 3, 2021. Accordingly, the overall goal is to continue narrowing the gender gap, creating conditions and opportunities for women and men to participate and entitle equal benefits in all areas of social life, contributing to sustainable development of the country. The specific target set in the economic and labor sector is the ratio of female directors/owners of enterprises and cooperatives at least 27% in 2025 and 30% in 2030. To achieve this target, it is necessary to make an efforts of all industries, including forestry sector.

***Labor force***: Male employees are higher than female employees in wood processing and exporting enterprises, accounting for 59.2% of the total labor force. This ratio is higher in enterprises exporting to the EU with 60.9%. The difference between male and female employees shows that the wood processing and exporting industry attracts a large male workforce. Priority standards for employment (health is an important role) and occupational stereotypes are the main obstacles to promote the growth of the female workforce in this sector. This difference trend may become deeper when enterprises today tend to invest in modern equipment and machinery to increase labor productivity. With this trend, women are increasingly vulnerable due to the opinion that technical positions are only suitable for men. This means that the opportunities for female employees to participate in enterprises will be less, and female employees are more likely to lose their jobs. The State has issued preferential policies and tax incentives for enterprises employing many employees through legal documents such as the Law on Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, the Labor Law 2019, Decree 145/2020. /ND-CP. However, in reality, very few enterprises participating in the survey to grasp the information and pay attention to these support policies.

***Labour devision and salary:*** There is an imbalance in division of employees by gender in wood processing and exporting enterprises. Men often work in positions or departments that require high professions, skills and technical qualifications, in contrary, female employees often take on positions that do not require high skills and complex jobs, but requires meticulousness and ingenuity. This is one of the reasons leading to the difference in average monthly income between female and male employees in the enterprise (about 24.5%). Gender stereotypes in the division of employees by job position still exist, therefore, female employees are often only classified into positions that do not require professional qualifications, leading to disadvantaged in income and opportunities to improve skills.

***Contract and insurance regime:*** The ratio of employees participating in insurance contributions for wood processing and exporting enterprises is 90.50% and the ratio of employees signed with indefinite-term contracts is 85.56%. The ratio of employees participating in insurance and signing indefinite term contract with the group of enterprises exporting to Europe is higher than that with other groups of enterprises. The ratio of female employees who participate in all types of insurance and sign contracts of indefinite term is higher than that of male employees. The difference is similar for the two groups of enterprises exporting to Europe and for other enterprises. This result shows that the managers of enterprises have full knowledge of the legal provisions related to employees, along with the strict supervision and management of the authorities and strict requirements of the importer have contributed to the increase in the ratio of employees who are guaranteed legal rights. However, in reality, there are still difficulties and challenges related to labor contract and insurance regimes in wood processing and exporting enterprises, which may come from employees' awareness, but can also stem from the perception of compliance with legal regulations by the enterprise itself.

***Opportunities to improve professional skills:*** The opportunity to access and improve skills of employees is not equal and the opportunity to access and improve skills of female employees is lower than that of male employees. The reason is because prioritized position to improve skills which are often technical positions, in these positions, the ratio of women is lower than that of men. Besides, women do not have a lot of time studying and improving their skills because they are still busy with family work and children. In the context that today's enterprises tend to invest in modern equipment and machinery to increase labor productivity and meet customer tastes, with this trend, women are more vulnerable due to the opinion that position of technician, machine operator are only suitable for men. This means that the opportunities for female employees to participate in enterprises will be less, and female employees are more likely to lose their jobs.

***Labor safety,*** employees' awareness about the impact of production activities on health is different between men and women. Female employees are more interested in this issue than men. This can be explained because of physiological characteristics, men are healthier than women, so they are somewhat subjective, and do not pay much attention to this issue. The difference in awareness also leads to the difference in the frequency of using labor protective equipment by men and women, the ratio of women who do not/rarely use labor protective equipment is less than men. The fact shows that the working environment in the wood processing industry (loading, cutting off, sawing…) has many activities that are more likely to happen occupational accidents. Moreover, there are other factors affecting health such as toxic gas (from paint, glue, etc), dust, noise (from cutting off, sawing ..), so it is very neccessary to ensure and comply with employees' labor safety

***Job opportunities,*** the results show that male employees are more likely to find a job than female employees. As above-analyzed, this depends on the job position that they undertake, and on the other hand, it relates to the opportunity to improve their skill level. For male employees, they often work in positions of machine operator, CNC manufacturing which require high qualifications, and the opportunity to improve their skills is also higher, so they are more confident in assessing job opportunities outside when there is any change. On the contrary, women's employment positions are mainly simple employees, do not require high skills, and also limit opportunities to improve their qualifications, therefore, female employees often underestimate the job opportunities if laid off or the company went bankrupt. It can be seen that female employees are more vulnerable than men in terms of employment opportunities, especially women in rural areas, where wood processing and exporting enterprises are few. In addition, women are limited in employment opportunities due to family-related factors and fear of change.

***Impact of Covid 19:*** Although this study does not analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees, the research process has shown strong impacts of the pandemic on the wood processing and export industry. Most of enterprises believe that in the two years affected by the global pandemic, enterprises have to produce in moderation due to a decrease in the number of export orders and an increase in the number of employees resigning the job. In fact, some employees answered that, when the epidemic occurred, the government required to stop all crowded gatherings and restricted to travel, so enterprises requested employees to stay at factory to work. However, most of the employees who stay at the factory are men, there are very few women who can stay, partly because women have to "stay at home to take care of children and family", the other part because "problems with sleeping, resting place, … men can stay anywhere, women are often… more difficult”. For some enterprise, when it is imperative to reduce the number of employees, these positions are often female. This shows that, in the context of general difficulties, female employees will be more likely to vulnerable due to job loss as well as undertaking family responsibilities.

***Factors affecting the salary and satisfaction level of employees,*** The research reviews factors affecting salary and employee satisfaction level, two of the most important indicators to assess whether an enterprise is meeting the aspirations of employees or not. The results show that gender has a (meaningful to statistics) influence on the salary of employees, specifically, if it is increased by 1 times the salary for male employees, then female employees will decrease by 2.1 times. The salary factor also determines the satisfaction level of their enterprise, accordingly, the higher the salary, the higher the satisfaction level, and vice versa. This compared with the above analysis, shows that men seem to have a higher satisfaction level than women because men's income is higher. This reflects that one of the most important gender-related factors is the total income of employees. .Total income is related to the job position, skill level requirements, and even opportunities to improve skills. Accordingly, all women are more disadvantaged than men, in part because of barriers to gender stereotypes. Gender equality does not mean that male and female employees work equally and receive salary equally, nor mean that the ratio of men and women in the company must be equal, but it is the removal of barriers to women to be fully and equally participated in the workforce; is not gender discrimination in any profession, including leadership positions; is to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender. Some solutions and recommendations to promote gender inequality restriction in enterprises will be mentioned in the next section.

**6.2. Recommendations**

As analyzed, when the VPA/FLEGT and EVFTA agreements are officially implemented between the Vietnamese Government and the European Union, it will make a great impact on the forestry industry, especially the wood processing and export industry. In particular, it sets out goals to improve forest governance and promote legal wood trade, and also sets out social responsibility requirements on labor, safety and environmental issues. Therefore, based on the results of this study, we propose some recommendations to assist relevant parties in the implementation process to have a more detailed view of the labor sector from a gender perspective.

**Firstly,** Keep strengthening the dissemination of legal policies and raise the awareness and responsibilities of enterprises (especially human resource managers) about regulations related to ensure the rights of female employees, male employees such as the Labor Code (2019), the Law on Social Insurance (2014), the Law on Occupational Safety and Health (2015), etc.

**Secondly,** propaganda to raise awareness and disseminate policies and laws related to promoting gender equality in enterprises such as the Law on Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, the Labor Law 2019, Decree 145/2020/ ND-CP, Law on Vocational Education (2014) to promote job opportunities and vocational training for female employees and employees in rural areas.

**Thirdly**, raise awareness for employees in enterprises (especially male employees) related to benefits such as contracts, participation in insurance, etc. In addition, male and female employees need to be concerned and raised awareness of occupational safety through organizations such as Labor Union.

**Fourthly**, promote skill improvement and vocational training for female employees. Vietnam's wood processing industry is considered to have lower labor productivity than some countries in the region due to the lack of skilled labor resources. With the trend of promoting exports, this industry is also forecasted to be in great demand for a qualified workforce. Technical training for female employees is considered as a solution to improve the qualified workforce, contributing to reducing the pressure on human resources which is on a downward trend in wood processing enterprises. At the same time, it also contributes to ensuring 2nd goal of the National Strategy on Gender Equality: “Decrease the ratio of female employees working in the agricultural sector in the total number of female employees in employment to less than 30% by 2025 and less than 25% by 2030”.

**Fifthly,** strengthen linkages between the State and local organizations with wood processing and exporting enterprises in order to promote gender equality in enterprises. These recommendations will require cross-sectoral cooperation, not only with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Vietnam Administration of Forestry, but involving social security policy agencies, the Vietnam Women's Union, Vietnam Women Entrepreneurs Council (VWEC), Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs to address systemic inequality. At the provincial level, the Forest Protection Department, the Provincial Women's Union, the Provincial Labor Confederation, the National Committee for Advancement of Women in Vietnam under the Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, and The Local Timber Association are units which play important roles in supporting gender action in wood processing and exporting enterprises.

**Sixthly,** although Vietnam has promulgated legal policies to promote gender equality, however, Vietnamese legal documents only provide general provisions for industries and society as a whole, but there are no specific provisions on gender issues in the forestry industry. To promote gender equality, the forestry industry needs to have specific policies and at the same time integrate gender monitoring and evaluation criteria in enterprises to ensure the implementation of commitments related to the VPA- FLEGT and EVFTA Agreement.

**Seventhly,** it is proposed that five important gender indicators should be included in monitoring, including (1) the ratio of women participating in business leadership; (2) ratio of female employees in enterprises; (3) salary and wage difference of male and female employees (million VND/month/employee); (4) ratio of women participating in skill improvement courses and study tours (%); (5) ratio of male and female employees who are contracted and paid for various types of insurance.

**Finally, we acknowledge that this study has its own limitations.** On the one hand, this study only stopped at a small number of interview samples with only 21 enterprises and 83 employees, so the numbers are point-by-point rather than representative of the entire wood processing and exporting industry. However, we also added that the process of surveying to collect data and reach out to wood processing and exporting enterprises is not easy even with coordination with local departments. On the other hand, although the study used gender-based approaches to encourage disadvantaged groups to tell their own stories, due to limited resources and time, the research team mainly interviewed employees at the facility where they work, rather than interviewing at home or in more private places to create space and opportunity for them to have their say. Therefore, further studies should consider to avoid such weaknesses in the future.

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