Reaching the Apex

Strengthening Opportunities for Women's Leadership in Politics and Public Administration in Vietnam

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Louise Chappell
Lương Thu Hiền
Caitlin Hamilton
Fiona Mackay
Châu Mỹ Linh
Vũ Thị Thu

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The research team presented data from this report at international conferences, including the Women in Asia Conference in Sydney, Australia, in June 2019, the International Studies Association Asia-Pacific Conference in Singapore in July 2019, and the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Washington DC, United States, in August 2019. The valuable feedback that we received from these presentations has informed the report.

Above all, we wish to extend our gratitude to our research participants for their generosity in sharing their experiences with us.

The research team

The research team was comprised of a Vietnamese research team, an Australian research team, and an independent consultant.

The Vietnamese team was comprised of the following members:

- Dr Lương Thu Hiền, Executive Director of GeLead (Vietnamese research team leader)
- Châu Mỹ Linh, researcher at GeLead
- Vũ Thị Thu, research assistant at GeLead; and
- Trịnh Quế Anh, administrative assistant at GeLead.

The Australian team is comprised of:

- Professor Louise Chappell, Director of the Australian Human Rights Institute at UNSW (Australian research team leader)
- Dr Caitlin Hamilton, researcher at the Australian Human Rights Institute at UNSW.
- Professor Fiona Mackay from the University of Edinburgh was the independent consultant for this project.

Pre-data collection ethics approval

The Australian team sought and received ethics approval (HC number 180915) for this project from the Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel B: Arts, Humanities & Law at UNSW Sydney on 12 March 2019. It was considered to be low-risk research and we met all necessary requirements and conditions of this approval in conducting our research.

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Executive summary

Background

In Vietnam in 2020, women hold only 27.12% of National Assembly positions, 11.11% of Ministerial and Deputy Ministerial positions and 13.03% of government departmental positions (see also Appendix 1). These figures have remained static over the past decade despite the Communist Party of Vietnam introducing targets to increase the number of women in these positions, and additional Party and government policies and guidelines to support gender equality.

Women in National Assembly positions - 27.12%[1]

Women in Ministerial positions and equivalent - 11.11%[2]

Women in government departmental positions - 13.03%[3]

The aim of this research project is to understand why these targets – specifically those in relation to public sector appointments, including Party officials, mass party organisation staff, civil servants, and other government appointees (such as university staff) – have not been met.[4] It seeks to uncover the explicit and implicit barriers that stand in the way of increasing the political participation of women in Vietnam.

The project focuses on the Vietnamese public sector employment pyramid and assesses the barriers at each stage: **recruitment, the leadership pipeline, training, rotation, assessment and appointment to senior leadership**. It combines data from primary and secondary literature related to the Vietnamese public sector, focus groups and interviews undertaken with women in government positions in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in March 2019, and a workshop between public sector women leaders from both Vietnam and Australia in Canberra in August 2019.

It combines a **feminist institutionalist conceptual framework** – which identifies the interplay of formal and informal gendered rules and practices – with **a policy process approach**, to understand why targets have not been met at different stages of the policy lifecycle. In relation to the policy process, the report pays particular attention to two stages: **policy formulation and policy implementation**, while making a strong recommendation to support better **policy monitoring and evaluation**.

Identified barriers

The report identifies a number of factors across the employment lifecycle, many of which operate together, to reinforce barriers or limit opportunities for women's political progression. Some of the problems we identify include:

- inconsistent application of gender equality principles in laws and personnel policies
- the effect of a compulsory lower retirement age for women than for men that influences their

opportunity to undertake training and enter the leadership pipeline

- discrimination in training and rotation opportunities
- inadequate formal childcare and caring support for women
- lingering gender stereotypes about women's caring roles which limit the opportunity for women to participate in leadership and management; and
- limited access to networking opportunities.

Recommendations

To meet the targets and to make the Vietnamese government and Communist Party's commitment to gender equality meaningful, new strategies and policies must be introduced across all stages of the pyramid.

Recommendation 1: Gender Equality Index

To address the deficit in accountability for gender equality in the public sector the report recommends **the design and implementation of a system-wide gender equality index to measure all steps in the employment pyramid: recruitment, leadership pipeline, training, rotation, assessment and appointment.**

The index should be designed and implemented by the Center for Gender Studies and Women's Leadership (GeLEAD) under Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) and the University of New South Wales with input from the Central Organization Commission (COC), the Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly of Vietnam and Vietnam's Women's Union to gather gender disaggregated data:

- across all levels of promotion
- across all party bodies, government departments and organisations, including training bodies, and
- across all levels of government from the central, provincial, and district levels.

The index should clearly articulate:

- who is accountable for gender equality performance at all levels
- qualitative and quantitative measures for monitoring and evaluation
- sanctions and rewards based on performance, and
- an annual reporting process.

The reporting will allow the Party to rank gender equality outcomes in Party bodies, ministries, and organisations, and across all levels of government. It will also allow the identification of best practices across the Party, ministries, training bodies and mass organisations, and ultimately support more women to reach the apex of the leadership pyramid in Vietnam.

Recommendation 2: Overarching issues

The report identifies three fundamental issues that underpin the employment pyramid that need to be addressed: age restrictions, gender norms around care labour and exclusionary networks. To address these fundamental issues, it recommends:

- The removal of the age differential between men and women in retirement and other age restrictions in eligibility criteria at each stage of the employment pyramid. The change of retirement age in the Labor Code should be prepared by the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and submitted to the National Assembly. In developing steps for this change, MOLISA should consult specialised training and research bodies on gender and leadership such as the Center for Gender Studies and Women's Leadership (GeLEAD) under the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Institute of Family and Gender (IFG) under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS).

- The introduction of support for women and men to better share the care burden, including the provision of high quality and affordable childcare and aged care facilities, and flexible work practices. The development of these policies should be the responsibility of Vietnam Social Security in coordination with the Ministry of Healthcare and MOLISA. Research to produce detailed related policy recommendations can be conducted by research and training specialising in gender and family issues in Vietnam including GeLEAD and IFG.
- Creating new networking opportunities for women and men including mentorship and sponsorship programs for women. The Center for Gender Study and Women's Leadership under HCMA can design and provide training for coordinators, mentors and mentees from other ministries and provinces. It can organise a pilot mentoring program and deliver Training of Trainers (ToT) for all ministries and provinces and equivalent bodies. After testing the pilot, the mentoring program can be rolled out at all levels of government.
- More training across the public sector and more broadly on gender equality to encourage cultural change concerning men and women's societal roles and capabilities. This can be designed and delivered by GeLEAD under HCMA. Innovative training can be co-delivered by GeLEAD and UNSW and other international Universities and organisations when suitable.

Recommendation 3: **Recruitment**

Research and training bodies in Vietnam should be engaged to undertake a systematic review of the following issues for the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Ministry and COC should then develop evidence-based policies to submit to the National Assembly. The review should assess:

- All recruitment laws and policies to identify areas of existing and potential gender inequality; remove provisions that have direct discriminatory effects, including age restrictions.
- Gender and minority targets in laws and policies on the recruitment of public employees and cadres. This should include an analysis of the use of more specific targets and development of clearer quantitative guidelines.
- Options to improve gender balance provisions in recruitment committees.

Recommendation 4: **Leadership pipeline**

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Set a gender target for the leadership pipeline for all leadership posts.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism in the leadership pipeline.
- Increase the pool of women under 40 years who meet the criteria to be in the pipeline for heads of all public sector organisations and the Vietnamese Communist Party.
- Increase the number of women in Standing Committees of the Party at all levels.
- Consider a development program for young and talented women.
- Consider 'fast tracking' outstanding young women to enter the leadership pipeline.
- Provide gender sensitivity training to all men and women in the Party Committees and the pipeline.
- Introduce flexible working arrangements across the leadership pipeline.
- Build and provide high quality early childhood and elderly care at affordable prices for all public employees to reduce women's domestic work and care work.

Recommendation 5: Training

GeLEAD and HCMA should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop and provide evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Remove gender specific age requirements for training.
- Introduce new provisions to support care responsibilities of women trainees, including providing affordable childcare, and appropriate on site-facilities.
- Consider providing high quality and affordable aged care services for older people, to assist women trainees who are carers for parents and other elder family members.
- Support part-time trainees through flexible work practices and financial support.

Recommendation 6: Rotation

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Set a gender target for rotation.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism with regard to leadership training to ensure an equal number of men and women are selected to undertake ADP training.
- Provide practical support measures for employees with families (both male and female) going on rotation, including relocation funding, flexible work arrangements, allocation of locations closer to home and childcare provisions.
- Introduce the same age requirements for men and women in rotation, secondment and dispatchment.
- Ensure women are included on rotation selection panels.

Recommendation 7: Assessment

- Design and issue particular laws, policies and guidelines for the assessment of specific target groups: women in maternity leave, women with children under 36 months, and both men and women responsible for elderly care. The Ministry of Home Affairs would be responsible for preparing the draft law on Emulation and Awards and would then submit it to the government. Before being passed by the National Assembly, the Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly should be tasked with reviewing the draft law to make sure that it is gender responsive.
- Provide high-quality and affordable childcare and aged care facilities for civil servants and public employees, in order to ease the burden on domestic work and care work, which often falls to women. This policy should be jointly developed and implemented by various ministries such as Social Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and the Ministry of Education and Training. The Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly would be responsible for reviewing the draft law to make sure that it is gender responsive before it is submitted to the National Assembly.
- Different roles need to be assessed fairly, especially for administrative jobs which are overwhelmingly occupied by female employees. When considering the criteria to be assessed as “Grassroots Emulation Soldier”, Party Executive Committees and authorities need to be mindful of ensuring gender equality in the assessment process. Those occupying administrative roles need to be provided with the opportunity to be assessed as ‘outstanding’ if they perform their tasks well. Such policies would need to be developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the head of each organsation/ministry and province.

The Department/Division of Emulation and Awards under each ministry and province would play an important role in communicating the resulting gender sensitivity policy to the head of each ministry/province.

- The Committee of the Advancement of Women and head of each department/division under each ministry and province should encourage qualified female staff to pursue the title of "Grassroots Emulation Soldier".

Recommendation 8: Appointment to senior leadership

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Remove retirement age differences between men and women.
- Consider 'fast tracking' outstanding young women, allowing them to be appointed.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism in the leadership appointment process.
- Ensure women are included on senior leadership appointment committees.

Provide financial support and human resources to establish mentoring programs for female staff in ministries, sectors and provinces, and establish a formal network of women leaders and future leaders.

Part 1 Introduction and background

Since 1986, when Vietnam introduced major economic and political reforms, the country has transformed from a low-income country to a middle-income country. In addition to its thriving economic development, Vietnam has also achieved notable social progress, and enjoys relatively high levels of gender equality in economic participation, employment, health care and education.

The Communist Party and the State of Vietnam have demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality in political leadership. This has been seen through the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and through the design and dissemination of guidelines, policies and laws to promote gender equality in politics.

The Vietnamese Communist Party's commitment to promoting women's leadership and management is reflected in Party guidelines and government policies and laws including the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam which declares that '[w]omen and men have equal rights in all aspects of politics, economics, culture, society and family'.

Article 11 of the ***Law on Gender Equality*** further affirms that:

- men and women are equal in participating in state management and social activities
- men and women are equal in participating in the formulation and implementation of village codes, community regulations, and agency and organisation regulations
- men and women are equal in self-nominating as candidates or in nominating candidates to the National Assembly and People's Councils; and are equal in self-nominating as candidates and in nominating candidates to leading agencies of political organisations, socio-political organisations, socio-political and professional organisations, social organisations, and socio-professional organisations, and
- men and women are equal in terms of professional qualifications and age when they are promoted or appointed to the same posts of management and leadership in agencies and organisations.

The ***Law on the Election of National Assembly and the People's Councils*** also includes gender equality provisions. Most recently, the Secretariat issued a notification on 'Strengthening the Party's leadership on gender equality and advancement of women in the new situation'.[5] The Party's commitment to the implementation of gender equality measures is also included in various decisions and decrees.[6] In 2015, the Party Secretariat further affirmed that 'Party Committees, executives, Fatherland Front and People's Unions should identify the tasks of gender equality and the advancement of women as strategic, long-term and regular tasks at each level and sector'.

Alongside these laws and policies, in 2007 the Party issued Politburo Resolution No. 11 on 'Women's work in the period of accelerating national industrialisation and modernisation'. This resolution is particularly important as it sets **specific targets** for gender equality to be reached by **2020** (see Table 1).

These efforts suggest that gender equality is recognised as a strategic and long-term task of Vietnam.[7] Despite wide-ranging efforts, however, the proportion of women leadership in elected bodies and public administration has failed to meet the targets set by the Party and State of Vietnam. This failure has been recognised by the Secretariat of the Communist Party who concluded in a 2015 report that 'targets about women's participation in leadership and management… set by the Politburo are not met and have tended to decrease'.[8]

***Table 1:** Current targets for and status of women's representation in the political system of Vietnam*

Targets	Current status[3]
Party Committees: By 2020, increase the percentage of female participants in Party Committees to at least 25%.	• National Communist Party Committees: 13.3% • District Party Committees: 14.3% • Commune Party Committees: 19.69%
Elected Bodies: Increase female members in the National Assembly and the People's Councils to 35 - 40%.	National Assembly Term XIV: • 27.2% People's Councils Term 2016 – 2021: • Provincial level: 26.46% • District level: 27.51% • Commune level: 26.70%
By 2020, ensure that women constitute at least 30% of professional staff and leadership in all government agencies and organisations.	No statistics available
By 2020, ensure that women hold leadership positions in 95% of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, government-affiliated agencies and People's Committees at all levels.	Women hold leadership positions in 47% of ministries, ministerial-level agencies and government-affiliated agencies, and in 25.39% of provincial People's Committees.

The focus of this report is not on women in political leadership positions. Excellent analysis on the specific barriers to women entering politics has been undertaken elsewhere.[9] Rather, this report pays attention to an under-studied area, which is the position of Vietnamese women in administrative leadership positions across the public sector, where targets are also not being met (as Table 1 demonstrates). Like women in many other countries, they experience a 'glass ceiling' blocking their recruitment to the most senior levels; at best, they reach vice/deputy leadership roles, but rarely assume the Director or Chair role.

In 2021, the National Assembly and People's Council elections will be held at all levels and the National Party Congress will decree a new national gender equality strategy for the next decade. Therefore, there is an urgency in finding answers to why these gender leadership targets have not been met. It is the aim of this project to provide some answers to this question and make recommendations to improve gender equality outcomes for women across the Vietnamese public sector.

Part 2 Project details and design

This research project focuses on understanding the gap between policy and practice in women's administrative leadership in government, party and other public sector positions in Vietnam.

2.1 Research questions

The project is guided by three key research questions:

1. How well do formal policies work to advance women's political careers in Vietnam?
2. What are the barriers and informal rules that operate as obstacles to women's advancement in political careers, including in recruitment and promotion?
3. What are the 'best practice' examples for supporting women into politics and to progress through the political ranks to senior leadership positions?

2.2 Data collection

The research team collected data via a variety of methods. Specifically, it conducted:

- a desktop research of existing publications on women in Vietnamese politics available in English and Vietnamese
- a detailed analysis of all Vietnamese state human resources policies related to assessments across the leadership pipeline (see **Appendix 1**)
- focus groups in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC)
- interviews with women in mid- to senior-level positions in Hanoi and HCMC, and
- a bilateral workshop in Canberra with Vietnamese and Australian women public sector leaders.

Focusing on Vietnam's two major urban centres was a deliberate aspect of the research design. We anticipate that women's opportunities for recruitment and promotion to leadership positions differ across Vietnam's rural, regional and major urban areas. Focusing on two 'most similar' urban centres allowed us to develop a comparative baseline which the researchers will be able to use in future research into regional and district experiences.

In March 2019, the research team conducted the first focus group in Hanoi with 32 women and an additional four interviews with women in mid- to senior-level positions in Vietnam's political and governmental system. In Ho Chi Minh City, the team conducted a workshop of 30 women and interviewed five women in mid-to senior-level positions. In August 2019, UNSW hosted a delegation of senior female Vietnamese former and current civil servants in Canberra. The research team presented the preliminary analysis from the earlier focus groups and held a two-day workshop with leading Australian gender experts. Responses from this workshop have been incorporated into this report.

We intentionally chose a combination of focus groups and interviews. The focus groups were invaluable in allowing the research team to understand common themes. It also served a logistical purpose in terms of data gathering: it made it possible to collect many perspectives in one day, and allowed the team to better understand some of the areas that needed further exploration. The groups had an additional benefit: they provided the research participants an opportunity to network and to share their professional experiences with a group of professional peers.

Respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of focus group members and interviewees, each signed a participation consent form (in Vietnamese). To protect their anonymity and to allow them to share their

experiences frankly, this report and any subsequent publication does not identify any of the participants by name, position or affiliation.

Workshops were conducted in Vietnamese with simultaneous translation. The interviews were conducted with concurrent translation by members of the Vietnamese research team for all parties.

The researchers found that saturation was reached relatively quickly during the Hanoi workshop and interviews, with the same themes repeated by many research participants appointed across all levels. In response, in preparing for the HCMC focus group and interviews, the research team honed the topics of discussion, to conduct a more granular analysis of the specific barriers and opportunities that the human resources system created for advancement.

2.3 Conceptual framework

In conducting this research, we brought together a feminist institutionalist conceptual framework, a policy process approach and the Vietnamese public sector human resources management policies.

2.3.1. Feminist institutionalism

In this research project, we apply a feminist institutionalist framework.[10] By 'feminist' we mean that we are looking closely at the issue of **gender relations,** with a concern for women's equality; in this case, we are investigating why men and women seem to be treated differently when it comes to getting appointed and promoted into leadership positions in the Vietnamese public service. We are also interested in identifying normative and structural reforms that may help address these differences and improve women's opportunities to hold senior positions in line with Vietnamese official policy. The 'institutionalism' part means that we are looking at formally established rules as well as normative rules and established patterns of behaviour that shape outcomes within political organisations. Feminist institutionalists are interested in interrogating how the formal rules, such as quotas and targets and retirement provisions, operate alongside informal rules and practices such as who is responsible for care labour and who is invited to evening social networking sessions, for example.[11]

Formal institutions are 'official, visible and codified'.[12] They tend to be **intentionally designed** and **clearly specified**, and, if broken, are usually sanctioned through official channels. In the case of the public service this may mean through formal bureaucratic mechanisms such as evaluation processes and reporting, leading to lack of promotion, demotion or dismissal. Formal institutions can be found in codes of conduct, as well as policy and procedure documents or laws.

Informal institutions can be harder to identify, though are no less important than formal institutions in shaping outcomes. They are made up of a shared understanding of **norms, practices and narratives** that, while not formally stipulated, are still very powerful in encouraging some kinds of behaviour and discouraging others. Informal institutions are generally not written down like formal institutions are; they are instead **taken-for-granted** understandings about 'the way things are done around here'. In fact, they might be so taken-for-granted that they are rendered invisible. Breaches of informal institutions can be sanctioned as severely as breaches of formal institutions; while these infringements might not be investigated by the police or heard by a judge in a court, the infringer might be shunned, excluded from a group, or even face violence.

This project focuses specifically on 'gendered' formal and informal institutions. Taken together, the idea that institutions are gendered suggests that 'gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies,

and distribution of power in the various sectors of social life'.[13] Gendered institutions can be formal, such as the case in Vietnam of women having earlier retirement ages than men. This rule is codified and enforced through official channels.[14]

Gendered institutions can also be informal, relating to the patterns of behaviour, practice, or discourse which create a shared understanding of the roles that men and women can, or should, occupy. An example might be that some people see the role of President of a country as a 'man's job' – there is nothing in policy that says that a women cannot run a country, but ideas about the role are so bound up with masculine values (of power, aggression and ambition, for example) that some people find it hard to imagine a female President. Expectations that women should only work part-time, or are not as ambitious as men, are also examples of informal gendered institutions which influence leadership outcomes.

Vivien Lowndes has identified the different ways formal and informal institutions – the 'rules in use' – are gendered.[15] She notes firstly that there are **rules about gender.** These are rules that have distinct gender dimensions – Vietnam's retirement rules which stipulate women have a lower retirement age than men is an example of a formal rule about gender, while expectations that women undertake primary care responsibilities is an informal rule about gender.

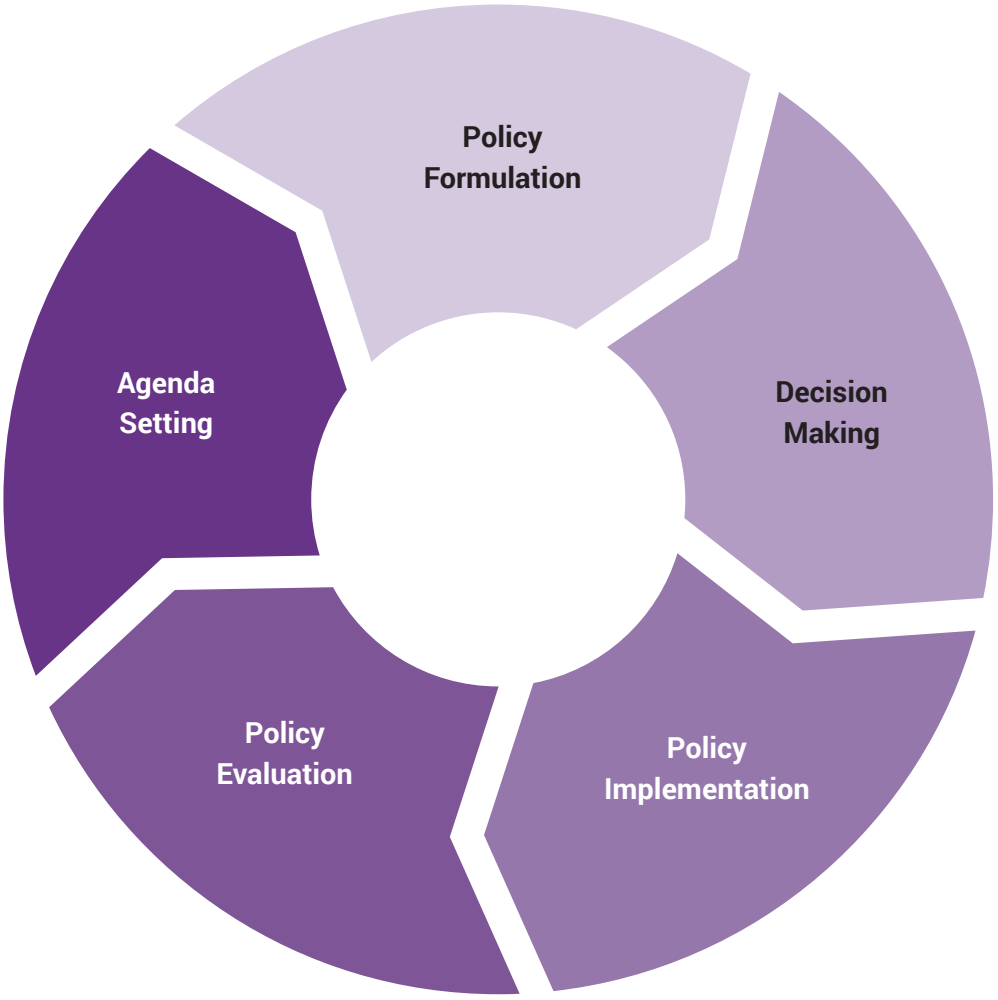
Lowndes also notes that there are seemingly 'neutral' rules which can have **gendered effects**. In Vietnam, an example of a formal rule with gendered effects is the time limit of being in the leadership pipeline. This rule does not distinguish between men and women, but because of the interaction with the wider institutional context, it discriminates against women in particular. In terms of an informal rule with gendered effects, an example is the Vietnamese networking practices where men often gather after work to enjoy socialising and sharing work opportunities, whereas women do not enjoy similar opportunities because they are usually involved in care labour.

Feminist institutionalists also point out that who gets to design and enforce the rules matters. As Lowndes notes, we need to understand **the gendered actors who work with rules**.[16] Where men are able to make rules for everyone, without the participation of women, they may well miss the nuances of women's lives – such as their caring responsibilities – that will help reinforce disadvantages. Including men and women in decision-making and implementation of rules is both just, and also likely to have a substantive effect on the 'the ways in which [we] create, interpret, communicate, enforce, shape, and comply with rules'.[17]

Through an interrogation of the gender rules and practices that operate in Vietnamese politics and public administration, this research aims to identify measures for overcoming the barriers that women face in terms of recruitment, career advancement and retirement.

2.3.2. A policy process approach

This project also engages with the literature on policy processes. Much of this literature is focused on understanding 'interrelated stages through which policy issues and deliberations flow in a more or less sequential fashion from "inputs" (problems) to "outputs" (policies)'.[18] This sequence of stages is understood as the policy lifecycle, which has identifiable stages including **agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation**, and **policy monitoring and evaluation**.



In this model, **agenda setting** refers to the process by which problems come to the attention of governments; **policy formulation** refers to how policy options are formulated within government; **decision making** is the process by which governments adopt a particular course of action or non-action; **policy implementation** relates to how governments put policies into effect; and **policy evaluation** refers to the processes by which the results of policies are monitored by both state and societal actors.

In this project we focus in on two specific aspects of this lifecycle in the Vietnamese context – **policy formulation** and **implementation**. Our research suggests that in the phases of policy formulation and implementation, very little attention has been paid to sanctions, or to evaluation, monitoring and reporting. We identify lack of sanctions and weakness in the evaluation phase as key explanations for why the Party, ministries and other public agencies have been unable to meet their gender targets. As an overarching recommendation, we suggest designing a new sanctioning regime, and the design of a government-wide monitoring and evaluation platform in the form of a gender equality index (see below).

2.3.3. The Vietnamese public sector human resources management system

A third framework is important for understanding the gender leadership outcomes from the Vietnamese public sector – the public sector human resources system.

The Communist Party of Vietnam oversees the whole political system, including the operation of the public sector and management of all public employees. This principle was restated in 2018 by the Party's Central Executive Committee, through the ratification of a new Resolution on 'Building of cadre contingent at all levels especially at a strategic level with sufficient capacities, qualities and prestige on par with their missions'.[19]

This resolution sets out that human resource management is of paramount importance to the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Party plays a decisive role in assessing candidates at every stage of the 'employment pyramid' (as illustrated in Figure 1). The pyramid includes five stages: recruitment, entry into the leadership pipeline, training, rotation, and senior appointment with assessment at each stage.

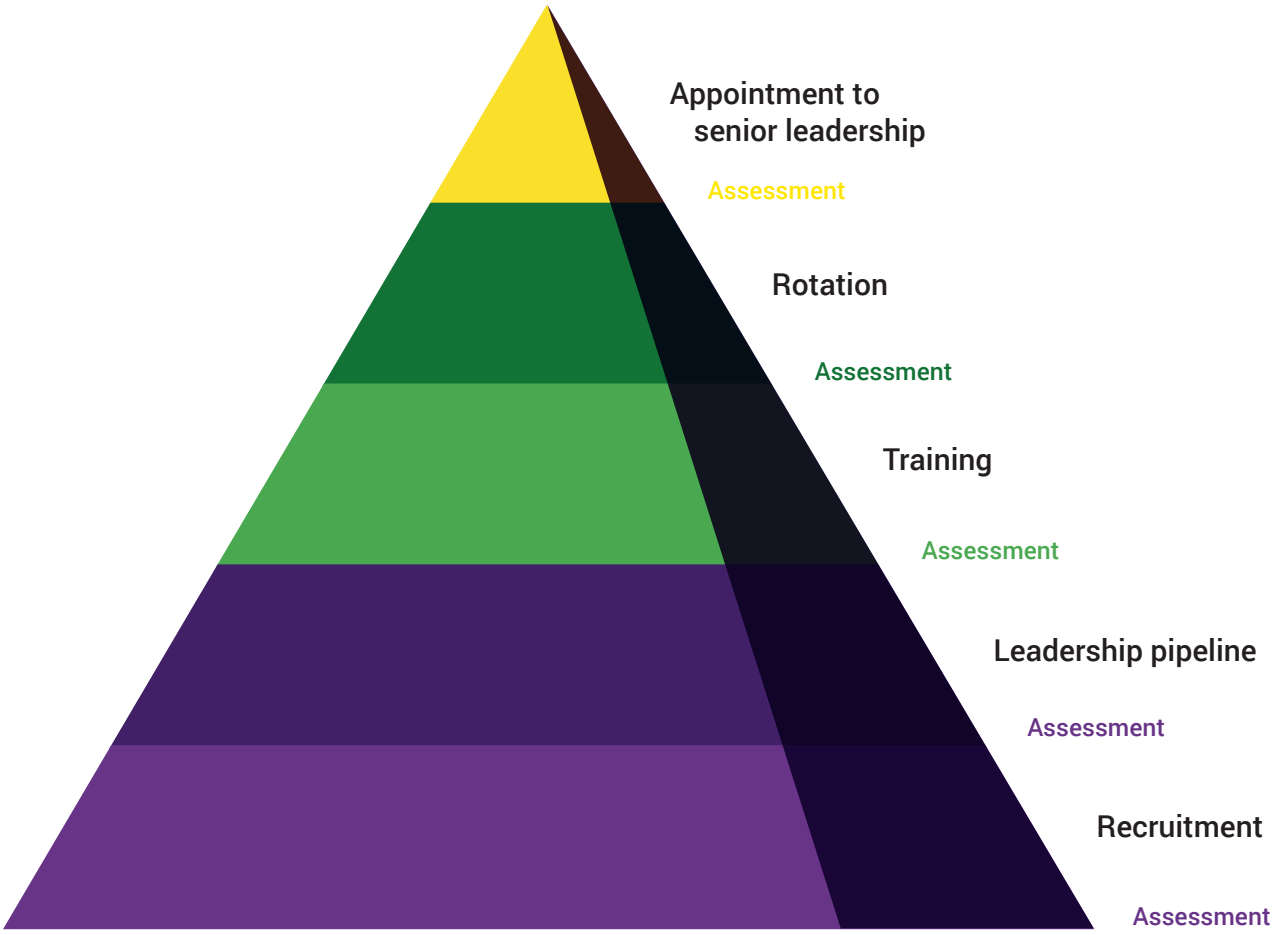


***Figure 1:** The human resource management process*

As the following discussion shows, women often struggle to reach the apex – appointment to a senior leadership position. Women face cumulative hurdles in the form of formal and informal barriers at each assessment point. Formal rules including age requirements operate as a significant barrier, which are reinforced by informal rules such as social norms and stereotypes, which have the effect of excluding women. There is no clear accountability system in place to ensure leaders at all levels are reporting on and complying with state-sanctioned gender targets.

Recommendation 1: Gender Equality Index

To address the deficit in accountability for gender equality in the public sector the report recommends **the design and implementation of a system-wide gender equality index to measure all steps in the employment pyramid: recruitment, leadership pipeline, training, rotation, assessment and appointment.**

The index should be designed and implemented by the Center for Gender Studies and Women's Leadership (GeLEAD) under Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) and the University of New South Wales with input from the Central Organization Commission (COC), the Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly of Vietnam and Vietnam's Women's Union to gather gender disaggregated data:

- across all levels of promotion
- across all party bodies, government departments and organisations, including training bodies, and
- across all levels of government from the central, provincial, and district levels.

The index should clearly articulate:

- who is accountable for gender equality performance at all levels
- qualitative and quantitative measures for monitoring and evaluation
- sanctions and rewards based on performance, and
- an annual reporting process.

The reporting will allow the Party to rank gender equality outcomes in party bodies, ministries, and organisations, and across all levels of government. It will also support the identification of best practices across the Party, ministries, training bodies and mass organisations, and ultimately support more women to reach the apex of the leadership pyramid in Vietnam.

Part 3 Barriers to advancement in the Vietnamese public sector: findings and discussion

The following discussion outlines the key formal and informal rules and their gendered effects, which operate across all levels of the Vietnamese employment pyramid: **recruitment, leadership pipeline, training, rotation, assessment, appointment and retirement.** The analysis pays specific attention to human resource management in terms of policy formulation and implementation while noting the significant absence of sanctions, monitoring and evaluation tools (for a detailed outline of the Vietnamese human resource policies and processes, please refer to Appendix 2).

3.1 Overarching issues

There are three overarching issues that stand out as primary barriers to women's ability to reach the apex of leadership in Vietnam. They are **the mandatory retirement age; social gender norms related to care labour;** and **access to networks.**

3.1.1 Retirement

In Vietnam, there is a formal rule that stipulates different retirement ages for men and women. Vietnam's Labor Code 2012 states that:

> ***The employee must satisfy the conditions of the social insurance payment in accordance with the law on social insurance to enjoy the pension salary when men reach 60-years-old and women reach 55-years-old.***

This formal rule about gender imposes a five-year differential treatment of men and women in relation to their retirement age. This rule has a cascade effect, negatively impacting women's rights and opportunities to participating in senior management at every stage of the employment pyramid. This five-year gap in retirement age means that a woman must be appointed into a leadership role by the time she is 50, while men have until they are 55.[20]

The fixed earlier retirement age for women shortens an already truncated career span (due to maternity leave and care expectations), providing women with a limited amount of time for career progression. As one research participant explained, in reality, the combination of caring responsibilities and the fixed retirement age "means that we [women] only have ten years for our career development and promotion – only 50% [of the time available] compared with men". Another told us, "[f]rom 32 to 35, at women's first opportunity for appointment or nomination [because of care labour], their male colleagues are already ten years ahead of them".

Succinctly summarising the negative impact that this cascade effect has upon women's careers, one participant stated:

> ***Women usually get into the government at 22. The average woman has two kids; to raise two kids you need at least five years. You lose five years to childbearing and rearing. Then there's a difference in retirement age. So, women lose about ten years. Succession planning takes into account age as well as family, experiences, and so on. Women find it hard to get into the promotion or succession planning consideration, because by the time they're "ready", they're already approaching retirement age.***

Some women can extend their working lives – specifically female cadres and civil servants holding the following positions:

a) the Deputy Chairwoman of Party Central Committee, the Deputy Chief of Office of the Party Central Committee, the Deputy Chairwoman of the Party Central Inspection Committee, and the Deputy Head of Steering Committee (Northwest, Central Highlands, Southwest)

b) the Vice Chairwoman of the President's Office, and the Deputy Chairwoman of National Assembly Office

c) the Vice President in charge of the Ethnic Council of the National Assembly, the Deputy Chairwoman in charge of Committees of the National Assembly

d) the Deputy Minister, deputy heads of ministerial-level agencies, and the head of a government agency

e) the Vice Chairwoman of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, deputies of central socio-political organisations

f) the Deputy President of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the People's Newspaper, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the Communist Review, and the Director of National Political - Truth Publishing House

g) Generals in the armed forces

h) the Deputy Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee and the City Party Committee, Presidents of People's Councils and Presidents of People's Committees of provinces and centrally-run cities

i) the Vice Chair of the People's Councils, and the Vice Presidents of the People's Committees of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; and

j) members of Standing Committees, and the Head of Party Committees of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City Party Committees.

2. Persons who are appointed as Judges of the Supreme People's Court, Procurators of the Supreme People's Procuracy.[21]

However, this only helps a small number of women who already hold leadership roles – and meet all necessary conditions like having good health, and not being subject to disciplinary review or investigation, prosecution, trial or discipline in the Party or the government[22] – to prolong their careers.

The participants in this research project on the whole acknowledged that there should be a choice in retirement age. Many believed that women working in jobs that required physically demanding labour should be allowed to retire at 55 if they want to, while they saw no reason why they wouldn't be able to continue to act in their roles until 60 or beyond.

3.1.2 Gender norms and care labour

The normative expectations placed on women for responsibility for the family was a second overarching key issue that participants raised in relation to women's progress and promotion in the public sector. The women with whom we spoke expressed society's particularly strong expectations around their roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Especially influential are the expectations around motherhood. The majority of women in the research cohort were mothers. These participants made it clear they are devoted to this role, and it is one they take extremely seriously. However, while it is a role "that is dearly kept by women", in the words of one workshop participant, "performing this role also requires a lot of time and effort away from work".

Another told us, "After today's workshop, I need to go back to the office and then cook dinner. We are like athletes". A different participant offered an alternative view: "There's a saying in Vietnam, 'behind every successful man is a woman', so the woman is always in second position in work and in family life".

Gendered social norms were seen to strongly influence women's career prospects. One participant shared her frustration that "[m]any men still think the biggest goal in a woman's life is kids – not personal or professional

development". One participant noted that women are "always seen as wives and mothers"; while another felt this association brought her professional capacity into question: "[m]any suggested that my having children meant that I couldn't do my job".

Given the extent of care labour expected from women, the support family provides is very important; many participants commented how their mothers and mothers-in-law took care of the children, allowing the interviewee to take on demanding work to support the family. Similarly, the support offered by husbands is important. Some women participants praised their husbands for supporting them in family life. A number of participants spoke of their partners taking children to and from school, washing dishes, washing clothes, and cooking. They spoke of the importance of sharing the load; that if one was busy, the other would help more and vice versa. One woman told us that her husband "sees the passion in my work and he steps behind so I can follow my passion".

However, many also commented that they or women they knew did not receive such support, which had serious career implications. As one participant explained: "if there is no support from [the husband], a woman can't join training or continue her career. Our opportunity depends on family members". Another simply stated, "Husbands can block the career progress of women". Participants mentioned how it could be for husbands for their wives to be in a comparatively superior position to them. We were told that "[i]f a woman gets promoted, the husband's friends might joke about his inferiority. The parents-in-law might do the same – they have certain expectations about women putting family before career". This appears to stem from gendered social norms. As one participant explained, "The traditional thinking in Vietnam is that husbands need to have higher positions and need to be important".

Participants also reported that some husbands, while not actively standing in the way of their partner's career, were oblivious to the amount of work it took to bring up children, maintain a household and pursue professional ambitions. One woman shared her experience of this:

> ***My husband doesn't know how difficult it was for me to raise my small children while I was a PhD candidate… People think that cooking a meal is quite simple; running the kitchen is quite simple; going shopping is easy. But it's hard work.***

An unsupportive family (or family-in-law) can also make life difficult for a woman seeking career advancement. One workshop participant gave us the example of her colleague, who held a Deputy Chief position in an important department. "Pressures at work were hard", the woman explained, "but pressures from [my colleague's] mother-in-law were harder. The mother-in-law couldn't stand the idea that she was always out of the house at work". Another attendee at one of the workshops said that the "attitude of family members can be difficult to manage, especially from the husband's side of the family: 'Why are you so busy? Why are you undertaking further study? Your priority should be your family'". While the pressure on a woman may not come directly from her husband, family or family-in-law can also prove to be an impediment to a woman's career progression.

For those women who had parents or parents-in-law who currently or formerly worked for the government, the situation seemed to be alleviated, as the family would understand what a public sector leadership position entailed. By contrast, where there was less understanding of the role, there were challenges, including that it might offer "temptations" to find new romantic partners, among other things: "In the eyes of the families, there are a lot of temptations… women may meet more interesting men, they are very busy, and don't have time to take care of their husbands".

3.1.3 Networks

Another set of informal rules that impact women's political leadership in the public sector is tied to networking opportunities, which are largely dictated by gendered social norms. Participants identified social resources, including networks, as being important to the promotion processes (as they also are in recruitment, as

noted above). One woman indicated that she had been successful despite her parents working in a factory, because she had worked very hard. However, she believes that her origins will limit how high she can climb in her career. She told us "if I had important parents, I would have been promoted faster". She noted that many people have the skills and the expertise to excel in their roles, but that for many important people in the public sector, their individual efforts were supplemented by "influence" – referring to their networks. Another noted, "If your parents work in a high position in the government, it helps your career".

Furthermore, women are precluded from participating in professional networks outside of the work environment in a number of ways. First, there is the matter of social propriety; one interviewee noted that "[it] can lead to gossip if [a man and a woman] meet in a café and [it] can be a sensitive issue for women to be seen socialising with men".

Networking during alcoholic drinking sessions also came up in both focus groups and interviews as a key impediment to women's career progression. One interviewee explained that drinking alcohol is a sign of capacity and effective leadership:

> ***In Vietnamese culture, a person should be good at drinking alcohol, wine. There's that expectation to drink and socialise; there's a drinking and eating culture within working hours. If you're not drinking, it suggests that you have a lower capacity… You should be able to drink very well.***

This puts women in a difficult position on multiple fronts. In order to be 'successful', people need to be able to demonstrate a form of social capacity, which is primarily done through networking over alcohol. "Men work at the drinking table", one of the workshop participants told us. It also creates further opportunities for informal networking. "Male colleagues can phone the leader any time of evening: 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock", said one participant, who said she did not feel that it would be appropriate if she were to do the same. Social norms preclude women from participating fully in this form of networking, and thus limit their opportunity to demonstrate their professional capacity.

In addition to social propriety is the matter of time; given the familial expectations noted above, women simply do not have time to go out and socialise after work. They are expected to go home and tend to the children, do the housework and feed the family. As one woman explained to us, "There are almost no networking opportunities for women – they have to go home and look after their kids and cook".

However, they did acknowledge the possibility of networking informally with other women at the weekends. One interviewee explained that:

> ***[W]e can connect with our friends at the weekends and get away from the city. This is relaxing but it's also good for our work – it helps our mental health, let's us share things with people, we help each other improve our skills, help with children and exchange expertise.***

While these networks are vital, they are unlikely to be as effective for career progression as the informal networks enjoyed predominantly by men in the work context.

Establishing more effective professional networks for women is something in which the research participants saw value. This was particularly the case where women had achieved senior positions and were in a position to include younger women in their networks; one interviewee suggested that "[n]ew and young women tapping into networks can use those networks to climb further". There is also space for mentoring. The more senior women that are in place, the more opportunities for connections and networks there will be. As one workshop participant noted, "Women as leaders are so few and far apart, they don't get connected easily. The higher you get in the administration, the fewer women you see, and it's really tough to get connected in that case".

Other kinds of networks were also considered to be an important resource for recruitment by some candidates – especially social networks. For instance, one research participant benefitted from one of her university professor's knowing her mother, a public servant. This professor was aware of a prestigious

internship opportunity and recommended her for the role, on the basis of her skills but also because her background meant that she "would have a future in government". Focus group participants also reported certain cases in which appointments were offered to candidates who did not seem suitably qualified but who were known to have particularly good family connections.

Together, formal retirement rules and gendered social norms reflecting expectations about women's caring responsibilities, skills, propriety, drinking capacity and ambition provide cross-cutting, underlying barriers to women's progression through the employment pyramid.

These three issues – the different retirement ages for men and women, social expectations around motherhood and care labour, and networking opportunities – impact women at all levels. There are additional challenges that women face at specific points in their career. The specific areas that we consider here are recruitment; entry into the leadership pipeline; training opportunities; rotations, secondments and dispatchments; and appointment.

Recommendation 2: Overarching issues

The report identifies three fundamental issues that underpin the employment pyramid that need to be addressed: age restrictions, gender norms around care labour and exclusionary networks. To address these fundamental issues, it recommends:

- The removal of the age differential between men and women in retirement and other age restrictions in eligibility criteria at each stage of the employment pyramid. The change of retirement age in the Labor Code should be prepared by the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and submitted to the National Assembly. In developing steps for this change, MOLISA should consult specialized training and research bodies on gender and leadership such as the Center for Gender Studies and Women's Leadership (GeLEAD) under the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Institute of Family and Gender (IFG) under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS).
- The introduction of support for women and men to better share the care burden, including the provision of high quality and affordable childcare and aged care facilities and flexible work practices. The development of these policies should be the responsibility of Vietnam Social Security in coordination with the Ministry of Healthcare and MOLISA. Research to produce detailed related policy recommendations can be conducted by research and training bodies specialising in gender and family issues in Vietnam including GeLEAD and IFG.
- Creating new networking opportunities for women and men including mentorship and sponsorship programs for women. The Center for Gender Study and Women's Leadership under HCMA can design and provide training for coordinators, mentors and mentees from other ministries and provinces. It can organize a pilot mentoring program and deliver Training of Trainers (ToT) for all ministries and provinces and equivalent bodies. After testing the pilot, the mentoring program can be rolled out at all levels of government.
- More training across the public sector and more broadly on gender equality to encourage cultural change concerning men and women's societal roles and capabilities. This can be designed and delivered by GeLEAD under HCMA. Innovative training can be co-delivered by GeLEAD and UNSW and other international universities and organizations when suitable.

3.2 Recruitment to public sector appointments in Vietnam

3.2.1 Key elements of the Vietnamese public sector recruitment process

The pathway to leadership and management in Vietnam's political system is a sequential process. To be recruited into the pipeline, the person must first be a Party member. Second, they must obtain the Political Theory degree offered by the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. Third, they must be selected into the leadership pipeline to a designated position. They must also have sufficient leadership experience. Finally, they must meet age conditions. Specifically, when a cadre is first appointed and nominated for leadership and managerial posts, they must have enough time before retiring to serve two or more terms. (with each term being five years).

In Vietnam, the Politburo and the National Assembly oversee the allocation of positions and personnel across all public sector organisations. Based on allocated slots, each organisation develops their own recruitment plan. Each organisation needs to make a written request to the Party Committee for approval. Upon approval by the Party Committee and the organisation's leadership, a recruitment notice will be posted. The recruitment procedure is organised into two examination rounds. The first round is undertaken online, consisting of language and computer skills and background knowledge about Vietnam's political system and structure of the State. The second round is either an oral exam or a paper-based exam, consisting of questions on expertise and skills.

Across the Vietnamese public sector, there exists a priority points-based recruitment scheme. Certain categories of people are given additional points on top of entrance test results to boost their opportunity for appointment. Bonus points are awarded for those in specific categories such as:

- Heroes of the Armed Forces
- Labor Heroes
- War Invalids
- Ethnic minorities,
- Military Officers
- Police Officers
- Professional Military Personnel
- Children of Martyrs
- Revolutionary Activists before the uprising (earlier than August 19, 1945)
- Offspring of Resistance War Activists infected with toxic chemicals
- Vietnamese Pioneer Young Union members
- Young intellectuals who have volunteered to participate in rural and mountainous development.

The policy outlining recruitment of public employees also indicates that priority should be given to "talented people, people who contributed to the revolution, and ethnic minorities". Further, the formal policy decrees that where two people have equal exam results, the head of the recruiting agency will decide the winner in order of priority.[23] There are 11 priority categories, including Heroes of the Armed Forces followed by Labor Heroes, and (at the bottom of the list) female candidates in Decree 29 in 2012. However, women candidates were removed from the list of priority in 2018 under Decree 161.

As a general rule, all members of the public sector and Vietnam's political system are (or have been) members of the Youth Union and are (or will become) members of the Party.

3.2.2 Gender barriers in recruitment

The recruitment process presents gender barriers to women seeking entry to the Vietnamese public sector. Undertaking an analysis of the policy and taking account of focus group and interview material, it is evident that a number of problems exist with the design and implementation of recruitment policies, and the interaction of these rules with informal rules and practice.

While the ***formal*** policies do not directly discriminate against women, they do have distinct negative effects on women's recruitment, and combine with ***informal rules and norms to*** make it difficult for women to gain entry to the public sector. For example:

- What is counted as 'having contributed to the country's revolution' does not reflect men and women's experiences equally. While men's services in the army is considered to be a contribution to the country's revolution, women's child-bearing, domestic work and unpaid care work that is necessary to the revolution are nevertheless not recognised as contributing to the country's development.
- The most highly-prioritised candidates in the recruitment process are those who have completed their military obligations. The majority of military personnel are men, which means fewer women are prioritised.
- Men tend to dominate the majority of recruitment selection committees. Many of these committee members consider that women's gender roles – including their care responsibilities – have a negative impact on women's productivity at work.
- Membership of the Youth Union and the Party are important for recruitment into the government leadership pipeline, and can provide training and other experiences for women to develop their leadership potential. However, without taking into consideration expectations about women's ongoing caring roles, women may not have the same opportunities as men to use these experiences to advance in the pipeline. This is an example of a formal rule with gendered effects interacting with informal gender rules to limit women's leadership pathway.

On the whole, many of the women to whom we spoke appreciated the training and support they received from the Youth Union. One woman told us that the Youth Union "helped people to develop good capacity" while also providing the opportunity for members to develop and demonstrate their leadership potential. A workshop participant noted that membership of the Youth Union can offer "a wealth of experience".

However, the commitment required to maintain good standing in the Youth Union prove a struggle, especially once women marry and have children. The research participants' comments demonstrated that these rules had a distinct gendered effect. As one workshop participant explained:

> ***I am a married, professional woman, and I find it quite a challenge to organise my work, my home tasks and to be able to join in [Youth Union] activities during the weekend. I was more appointable as a single woman… single women have more time.***

Another participant suggested that the expectations of the Youth Union can prove daunting and confidence-sapping. She said:

> ***When recruited in the Youth Union, women have challenges in finding confidence in themselves and in their position. They often feel inferior [to men] in terms of qualifications and experience.***

Similar issues concern Party membership. In principle, the leadership pipeline is 'mobilised and open'; however, in practice, this is not the experience for everyone. As one interviewee noted, the Party leadership pipeline can be particularly problematic for women, because it is so strictly implemented. A number of focus group members called for greater flexibility, with one arguing:

> ***If an excellent candidate deserves to be a leader but hasn't been fed through the [Communist Party] pipeline, there should be support for them to enter into a leadership position... The pipeline process is too stubborn – what should be most important is the effectiveness of the work and the person's reputation.***

These recruitment barriers are compounded by a lack of monitoring and evaluation of recruitment processes and no compliance and sanctioning regime. This view was expressed by many research participants. One interviewee captured the general response when she noted:

> ***The State and Party resolutions must be implemented strictly. There needs to be consequences if the targets aren't achieved. At the moment, there is no punishment. There needs to be a monitoring of the implementation..***

A similar response was given by a focus group attendee:

> ***It's very important for the heads of agencies to be made aware of their responsibilities. The system of law should be implemented because there are currently no consequences for those who do not meet the requirement. There is a need for implementation and consequences if there is a lack of implementation.***

Recommendation 3: Recruitment

Research and training bodies in Vietnam should be engaged to undertake a systematic review of the following issues for the Ministry of Home Affairs and COC. The Ministry and COC should then develop evidence-based policies to submit to the National Assembly. The review should assess:

- All recruitment laws and policies to identify areas of existing and potential gender inequality; remove provisions that have direct discriminatory effects, including age restrictions.
- Gender and minority targets in laws and policies on the recruitment of public employees and cadres. This should include an analysis of the use of more specific targets and development of clearer quantitative guidelines.
- Options to improve gender balance provisions in recruitment committees.

3.3 The leadership pipeline

3.3.1 Key elements of the leadership pipeline

Joining the leadership pipeline is a key aspect of the Party's human resources policy. This stage of the employment pyramid aims to prepare cadres and public sector personnel to assume leadership and managerial posts across the political system. The leadership pipeline serves as the basis for the next stages of the employment pyramid including training, rotation and appointment.

The leadership pipeline operates sequentially. A candidate will enter the pipeline for Deputy Head of Division, for example. If successful, they will be appointed Deputy Head of Division, and upon working effectively in this role, will enter the leadership pipeline for Head of Division. Upon being appointed into that role and demonstrating their capacity, they will enter into the pipeline for Deputy Director of Department, and then after appointment and entering the leadership pipeline for Director of Department, will be appointed the Director of Department.

Selection for the leadership pipeline is based on five criteria:

(1) political and ethical qualities

(2) practical capacity

(3) reputation

(4) health and prospects, and

(5) the specific qualifications and requirements for the relevant position.

Once in the leadership pipeline, a candidate is assessed annually on the first three criteria, and through the achievement of emulation awards for good service. The fourth criterion is determined by length of service: the candidate must have been in the position for a minimum of five to ten years to reach senior leadership . The last criterion relates to the specific qualifications of eligible cadres, their leadership experience, and their Party Committee membership within their organisation.

Each year, personnel who are not meeting set criteria are removed from the leadership pipeline, while new entries are added, meaning that the pipeline is always being refreshed. There are always more people in the pipeline than possible leadership positions, meaning there is in-built competition within the pipeline.
The Central Organizing Committee of the Party has set formal targets for women in the leadership pipeline – female candidates must make up at least 15% of the total number in the pipeline.[24] There is also a requirement that women be represented in the leadership structure of the Standing Committee of the Party Committee, the Standing Committee of the People's Council, the district-level People's Committee, and leaders of departments, ministries, and central agencies.

Adding further complexity to these formal rules around gender, the Party has decreed age limits for all cadres in the leadership pipeline:

- Under 40: not less than 15%
- From 40 to 50: 55-65%
- Over 50: 20-30%

3.3.2 Gender barriers in the leadership pipeline

As with recruitment, the formal and informal rules around the leadership pipeline are either gendered or have gendered effects, influencing women's ability to reach the apex of the employment pyramid.

The leadership pipeline has a formal rule about gender, given the 15 per cent target of women, while other seemingly neutral rules – particularly around age restrictions and assessment eligibility – have distinct gendered effects.

The combination of low pipeline gender targets, defined age limits, assessment requirements over a 5-year cycle and the compulsory retirement age limit (55 for women and 60 for men) present major barriers to women's leadership prospects. Some of the major barriers include the following:

- Women are unable to join the leadership pipeline after the age of 50, because they will be too old to complete the assessment cycle before reaching the age of retirement. This means that they are automatically excluded from the 20% to 30% of the pipeline positions that are allocated to this age group. As one participant noted: "If a man retires at 60, when he is 50, he can still aim for a leadership position; a woman at 50 has no chance… In order to get into the leadership pipeline, women need at least two terms, so women need to start at 45". Another noted: "The retirement age is too stubborn – it eliminates opportunities for talented people. If you don't have enough time to serve a full five-year term, you won't get in, and if you don't have ten years of pipeline experience, you won't get in either".
- Women find it almost impossible to be ranked as 'outstanding', which is necessary to progress through the ranks. Being on maternity leave, nursing young children or taking care of parents, which are all expectations placed on women, make it exceedingly difficult to fulfil the 'unexpected tasks' that often require missions away from home or outside of normal working hours without notice. This makes it particularly difficult to achieve a ranking above 'good' and especially so for young women. There are many obstacles for women to be assessed as 'outstanding' for sequential years in order to enter the leadership pipeline. By not entering the pipeline young, it becomes significantly more difficult to be offered senior leadership positions later on.
- Without consecutive years of an outstanding evaluation, which is almost impossible for women to achieve, they are impeded in their ability to advance through the pipeline or to receive financial bonuses.

These bonuses are not important so much because of their monetary value, but rather because of the prestige that is attached to them. As one participant explained: "Bonuses are not significant in terms of amount, but it's the recognition of the contribution and is a fact that would be taken into account in the promotion process".

- This problem is exacerbated by rules that employees must complete two five-year terms to get into the leadership pipeline. Many participants commented on this problem. While this may be a perception rather than a written rule, it is a view shared by many, and may have the effect of dissuading women from even trying to enter the leadership pipeline.

These formal rules are compounded by the influence of gender stereotypes and gender norms. Informal rules concerning women's responsibility for care labour and family support and (un)supportive leadership can also make an important difference to women's progress through the leadership pipeline. Examples of these include the following:

- One participant told us that women receive poor performance reviews more frequently than men, due to "the general perception that married women have to work at home as well which means they are not seen to be dedicated to their position". Furthermore, the notion of being 'dedicated to work', and other outstanding evaluation criterion translates to working very long hours, including at night and on weekends, which women may find hard to do because of their caring responsibilities.

- Women are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level administrative and clerk jobs. It is more difficult to be assessed as 'outstanding' in these roles, as the job descriptions allow little opportunity to demonstrate significant initiative, creativity or the development of new ideas and technologies.

- One interviewee indicated that her family was prepared to "make an investment" had she wished to pursue a particular public service role. She opted not to accept, instead taking an entrance exam. Another interviewee explained that the use of resources for entry is not a transparent process and, in her experience, it happened at all stages from recruitment and appointment through to promotion. Another interviewee stressed that resources can only get an applicant so far; it might help the applicant apply for a position, but they would still need to successfully pass their exams and meet all of the requirements of the role. This interviewee stressed that "money cannot buy a position". As this comment suggests, other factors, including exam success and support from co-workers, also contribute to a candidate's recruitment and promotion.

For the few women who make it through the pipeline, they are often not seen as appropriate for the most senior roles; rather, they tend to disproportionately occupy the 'Deputy' and 'Vice' positions. This point was raised multiple times during our qualitative research. "The Deputy President is always a woman, but it means the number one seat is always saved for a man", noted one interviewee. One participant suggested that being allocated a 'second in command' position can be fatal for a woman's career as "a Head might not want the Deputy to have more capacity and so don't nominate them for promotion".

This 'Deputy syndrome' represents a barrier for women to be appointed as members of the Standing Committees at all levels (district, provinical and national levels), and is compounded by a greater number of members of the Standing Committees being selected from the 'hard' departments (such as security, force, economy and trade or divisions) compared to 'soft' departments and divisions (education and healthcare) – within which more women are employed.

The leadership pipeline is regulated by Party Committees and they, along with the head of the relevant agency, play the most important role, followed by the Standing Committee and the agency's Board of Directors. It is therefore especially important for these stakeholders to be gender sensitive in enforcing laws and policies on human resource management, in order to create equal opportunities for men and women.

Leadership pipeline requirements and impacts

Requirements		Impacts
The three tiers of age principle	→	Reduces the pool of women in the leadership pipeline.
The sequential nature of the leadership pipeline	→	Reduces the opportunities for women to be in the leadership pipeline for more senior leadership positions, especially at the level of Director-General of department and higher,
The leadership pipeline for appointed posts must based on the leadership pipeline of Party Committees	→	Critically reduces the pool of women for leadership pipeline.
The successful appointee must be able to serve at least two terms, meaning that women must be appointed before the age of 45, and men before the age of 50.	→	Restricts the timeframe within which women can enter the leadership pipeline
The cumulative effect of all requirements regarding the leadership pipeline	→	Creates multiple levels of barriers for women in the leadership appointment stage.

Recommendation 4: Leadership pipeline

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Set a gender target for the leadership pipeline for all leadership posts.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism in the leadership pipeline.
- Increase the pool of women under 40 years who meet the criteria to be in the pipeline for heads of all public sector organisations and the Vietnamese Communist Party.
- Increase the number of women in Standing Committees of the Party at all levels.
- Consider a development program for young and talented women.
- Consider 'fast tracking' outstanding young women to enter the leadership pipeline.
- Provide gender sensitivity training to all men and women in the Party Committees and the pipeline.
- Introduce flexible working arrangements across the leadership pipeline.
- Build and provide high quality early childhood and elderly care at affordable prices for all public employees to reduce women's domestic work and care work.

3.4 Training opportunities

3.4.1 Key elements of training opportunities

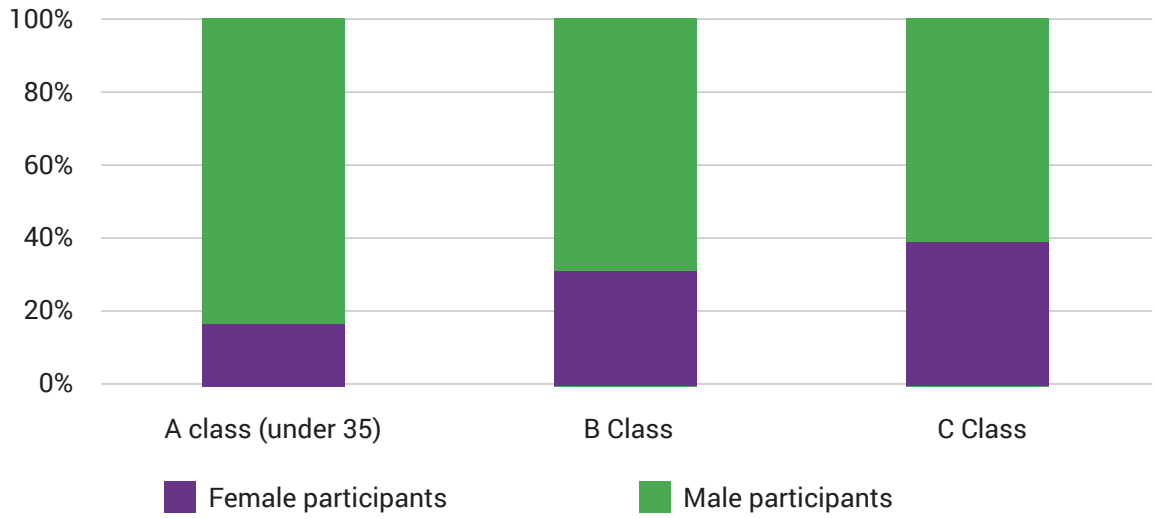
Training comprises a key aspect of the professional development and promotion processes for those in the leadership pipeline in Vietnam. In order for a person to progress in their political career, they must complete their Advanced Degree in Politics (ADP), which is only offered to people already in the leadership pipeline.

This training is offered on a full-time and part-time basis, depending on age. Men are able to enrol full-time until the age of 40, women until 35. After that, the ADP degree can only be undertaken part-time. This means theoretically, women can undertake part-time training from 35 until retirement.

Participants completing the degree full-time can undertake it on-site at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) – an institute dedicated to training in politics and public administration.

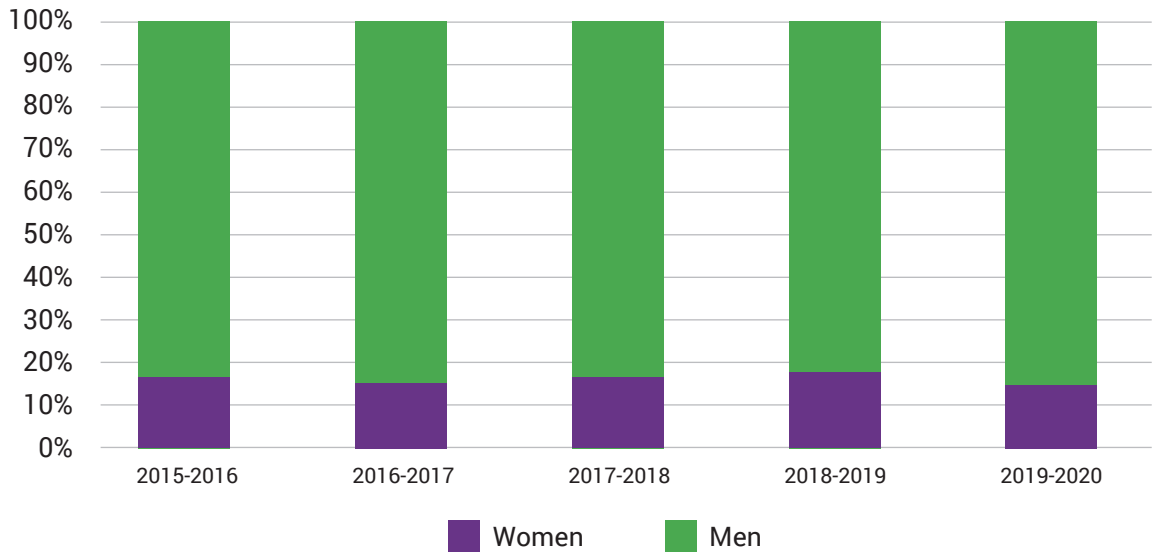
There is a 30 per cent target for women in the ADP, with additional funding to support women and ethnic minority people to attend training. However, the target has not been achieved (especially relating to women attending full-time ADP training), nor has the additional funding been allocated, and both are poorly monitored. Funding varies by province, while the number of women in full-time study falls well short of the 30 per cent target. As detailed in Figure 2, only 17 per cent of those in Class A (full-time study) are women, while the part-time classes B and C have almost double the percentage of women.

***Figure 2:** Total number of participants in HCMA Advanced Degree of Politics disaggregated by full and part-time and gender for academic years 2015/16 to 2018/19 (%)*



However, full-time study at the Academy enables participants the opportunity to study without their everyday workload. Also, full-time students' travel and accommodation costs are covered by their organisations and the HCMA, which considerably reduces the study-related financial burdens. No similar subsidies nor work adjustments are made for those undertaking part-time study.

Figure 3: Participants in the full-time ADP course from 2015 to 2020 disaggregated by gender



3.4.2 Gender barriers in training opportunities

Again, formal and informal rules work together to obstruct women's access to the training element of the employment pyramid. For example:

- As women struggle to be recruited and to progress through the leadership pipeline, it is a challenge for them to be placed in a position to make them eligible for training.
- The age restrictions on retirement, on full-time study, and on women and men's access to training gives men much greater access to training opportunities than women. As one participant explained:

  There needs to be more training, refreshers and education. No 51-year-old woman will be groomed [for training opportunities], but a man will be considered until he's 54.

  And another:

  My sister is too young to retire but is not being given the necessary training to do her job properly because she is within five years of the compulsory retirement age. She is very frustrated about being in this position.

- The timeframe in which women must complete full-time training coincides with the time when they are having children and when their family care roles and responsibilities are particularly onerous. This means they are less likely to be able to take up training opportunities(and especially full-time training opportunities).
- Gender bias was identified by research participants in limiting training opportunities for women. Many saw it as a question of outright discrimination; one participant reflected: "[l]eaders often send men over women to professional development and training. We may have more capacity and experience, but men still get sent to training and then get the promotions".
- Undertaking full-time intensive study for a number of months while looking after small children is challenging. In the absence of suitable and affordable childcare facilities, or when family members are not available or able to provide free childcare, women are directly disadvantaged by the rules around age when it comes to training. As one workshop attendee pointed out, "most women below 35 have small children. No men have to worry about this… really, it only affects women".

Participants also report that they face challenges accessing training because of attitudes of their family members. One participant commented that sometimes husbands are jealous that their wives have opportunities to learn when they may not, and raise concerns about women meeting other men. Beyond the husband's support, the broader family's support is vital. From the outset, a woman's family somewhat determines her career trajectory. As one woman explained:

If our family gives us an opportunity to study, we can go further but if they don't care, our life becomes to be a birth-giving machine: get married, have babies and care for the family.

While part-time training allows participants to attend training while continuing to work and take care of their family, and it adds some flexibility, it also raises gendered issues. It is difficult for women trainees who are primary caregivers at home and juggle responsibilities at work to simultaneously manage the logistics of training. Beyond the extraordinary effort required of trainees in this position, they may also incur a significant financial burden where government funding is not forthcoming.

Recommendation 5: Training

GeLEAD and HCMA should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam (COC) to develop and provide evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Remove gender specific age requirements for training.
- Introduce new provisions to support care responsibilities of women trainees, including providing affordable childcare, and appropriate on-site facilities.
- Consider providing high quality and affordable aged care services for older people, to assist women trainees who are carers for parents and other elder family members.
- Support part-time trainees through flexible work practices and financial support.

3.5 Rotations, secondments and dispatchments

3.5.1 Key elements of rotations, secondments and dispatchments

Rotations, secondments and dispatchments are an important step in the employment pyramid. This stage provides public sector employees with the opportunity for further training and knowledge building across the sector. The rotation scheme is directed towards young, competent and promising cadres in the leadership pipeline. Through rotations, they have the opportunity to move between central and provincial organisations, from higher to lower levels of authority, from one locality to another, and to hold leadership positions in other organisations for a definite term (the duration of rotation is at least 36 months).

Inter-organisational rotation applies for all agencies in the political system, including within the Party, the State, Fatherland Front, mass organisations, Armed Forces and Police, and state-owned service-providing organizations and state-owned enterprises.

The criteria for rotation and dispatchment are that the cadres must:

- be mid-ranking leaders in the leadership pipeline for higher leadership positions
- have at least ten years (or two terms) from the time of rotation until retirement (meaning that the age requirement for leadership rotation is 50 or under for men and 45 or under for women), and
- not be from the place of rotation.

A person may not hold positions for more than two consecutive terms in the rotation organisation.[25]

Secondments, dispatchments and long-term field trips are similarly structured. In addition, concerning secondment, Article 53 of the Law on Cadres and Civil Servants states that female civil servants who are pregnant or raising children under 36 months old should not be seconded. Other agencies, such as the Department of Justice, apply similar restrictions on women employees in relation to rotation.[26]

3.5.2 Gender barriers to rotation

There are many benefits to completing rotation, secondments and dispatchment; for example, those who undertake these development activities are prioritised in appointment, may enjoy an increase in salary, and may be offered further study opportunities, both in Vietnam and overseas. Many of the research participants with whom we spoke appreciated the value of rotation and secondments. One woman that we spoke to indicated that she saw rotation as a form of training, which allowed her to "enjoy more theoretical things", giving her a new perspective on her work. A workshop participant said that "[r]otation exposes people to new environments and experiences", and another agreed, stating that these "new positions can be very beneficial. Working in the same position for too long would lead to tunnel vision". Opportunities for rotation can also "provide opportunities for better performance in many cases".

However, formal and informal barriers exist to block women's access to rotation opportunities, including the following.

- The fixed retirement age of 55 for women acts as one barrier; one woman indicated that she would be happy to undertake a rotation but is not given the opportunity to do so because her superiors consider her to be too old.
- Logically, low numbers of women in the leadership pipeline, especially at the level appropriate for rotation, flows through to women's ability to access rotation and despatchment opportunities, while the lower retirement age limits the window for eligibility. Not only do women have to reach a senior role, they must also do so five years earlier than their male counterparts to be able to access the scheme.
- The formal gender policy on secondment rules out participation of women who are pregnant or have young children.
- Rotations do not have the same formal restrictions but nonetheless pose informal logistical difficulties for women. While some departments allow for rotation in an area nearby, other rotations, particularly at the provincial level, often require travel, leading to disruption to employees and their family. Being so far away from home can present a lot of challenges: "it takes time to adapt into new jobs, requirements, environments. It is easier to work in a familiar environment or team for most people. Adapting can take time sometimes as can getting settled into a team".
- Women with young children face particular challenges on taking up rotation opportunities. In such cases, we were told, a mother "could take her child with her for a year, but probably not her husband. She could send her child to the local kindergarten". Across both focus groups, participants raised concerns about the lack of available childcare facilities on rotation, including being without wider family support.
- Participants noted the absence of significant support from their employer to mitigate the challenges raised when on rotation, such as relocation funding, flexible arrangements (such as breaking the rotation into shorter stints) or other incentives that would make rotations more feasible for working mothers.
- An additional barrier is that some managers hold the gender stereotypical view that motherhood precludes women from undertaking a rotation or a secondment altogether and so do not offer them the opportunity, with the consequent negative impact on promotion. One woman recounted: "The decision of the leadership is normally based on very good intentions. Leaders think that women with small children would be reluctant to move. They just look at the family situation and make the decision".

Recommendation 6: Rotation

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam (COC) to develop provide evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Set a gender target for rotation.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism with regard to leadership training to ensure an equal number of men and women are selected to undertake ADP training.
- Provide practical support measures for employees with families (both male and female) going on rotation, including relocation funding, flexible work arrangements, allocation of locations closer to home and childcare provisions.
- Introduce the same age requirements men and women in rotation, secondment and dispatchment.
- Ensure women are included on rotation selection panels.

3.6 Assessment

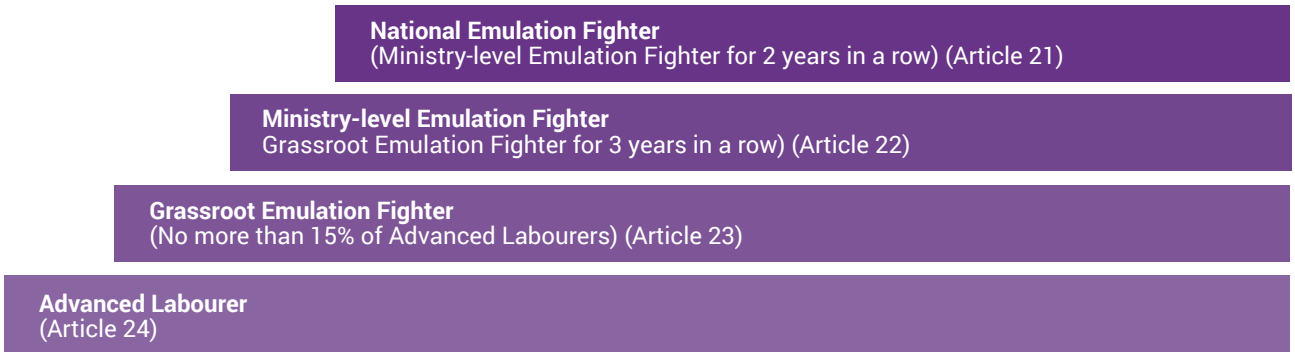
3.6.1 Key elements of assessment

A crucial stage in Vietnam's human resources system is the assessment of cadres, civil servants and public employees. The assessment process takes into account their performance, their morals and their potential for development. The assessment process involves self-assessment, the assessment of peers, the assessment of superiors (optional), and the assessment of subordinates.[27]

There are four levels of assessment: 'inadequate', which is the lowest ranking; 'satisfactory', which is the second-lowest ranking; 'good', which is the middle ranking; and 'outstanding', the highest ranking. The most common assessment ranking is that of 'good'. In order to achieve an evaluation of 'outstanding', employees must complete their tasks well, be dedicated to their work, perform work ahead of schedule, and complete unexpected tasks in a timely manner to a high quality.

The classification of performance of cadres, civil servants and public employees underpins the 'Emulation and Award' movement, which applies to all organizations and agencies in the political system. The 'Emulation and Award' movement is an important annual assessment tool of the Party Committees in human resource management, as it helps to identify and select qualified cadres and public servants for further progression. There are four titles that can be awarded, and the title that individuals receive is based on their annual assessment at the end of the year[28]

The title of 'Grassroots Emulation Fighter' is usually elected from cadres, civil servants and officials who are evaluated as outstanding. Also, it shall not exceed 15% of the total individuals who have been awarded the title of 'Advanced Labourer' or 'Advanced Soldier',[29] who are usually assessed with 'good' performance.



If a public servant receives the highest evaluation in three consecutive years, they receive a certificate of recognition, which will help them get a raise in their salary. This process may lead to a promotion, but it is not automatic.

3.6.2 Gender barriers in assessment

Formal and informal barriers make it very difficult for women to achieve the level of 'outstanding performance'. As we noted above, in order to achieve the title of 'outstanding performance of duties', civil servants must be able to complete unexpected tasks to a high quality and in a timely manner, be dedicated and devoted to work, and work ahead of schedule.[30] However, it is very difficult for female civil servants to meet these criteria if they are on (or have recently been on) maternity leave, are nursing young children or are taking care of ill parents. This is because 'unexpected tasks' may require missions far from home or working in the evenings or on weekends with little notice. This creates a barrier for women, especially given the traditional expectations around family roles and care labour.

One research participant recounted the stories of a friend, who had been appointed a Chief of Office. Her male leader frequently asked her to attend a dinner with guests. When she told him she couldn't attend because of her other responsibilities, he became angry and expressed his disappointment, saying: "I have already appointed you as the Chief of the Office – what am I supposed to do now?!" Another interviewee explained that dedication to work' is an important indicator of work performance:

> ***If you want to be highly assessed by your supervisor, you have to dedicate yourself to your work. For example, when I have had to finish an urgent report in a lunch time or an evening, several times I asked one of my female followers to support me in preparing the report in such a short timeframe. She said she could not do it in the evening and suggested that I delegate the work to a male follower. Then, I asked the male follower to prepare the report, and he did it immediately. Not being enthusiastic and dedicated enough to urgent work and work outside of working hours is the weak point of some woman civil servants.***

Furthermore, as the number of people who receive the title of 'Grassroot Emulation Fighter' is limited to only 15% of 'Advanced Labourer' titles, it is usually reserved for leaders of a unit or department. Having the title of 'Grassroot Emulation Fighter' then becomes the precondition for receiving higher-level emulation titles, such as that of Ministry-level and National Emulation Fighter. This has enormous implications for women's participation in leadership and management in Vietnam's political structure, as those who are working as administrative staff or clerks – who are disproportionately women – have little opportunity to demonstrate initiative and creativity or to develop new ideas and technologies. This means that their performance is unlikely to be assessed as outstanding, and in turn, that they have little chance of being awarded with the title of 'Grassroot Emulation Fighter'. Consequently, this represents a barrier for women progressing to higher levels of management and leadership.

There are also gendered implications for the assessment of leaders and managers in their term. In order for a leader to achieve 'outstanding performance' for their five-year term, they must be assessed as 'outstanding' for the first four years of their term. However, if during the course of their term, a female leader has been pregnant, on maternity leave, has raised young children or has cared for elderly or sick family members, then it is very difficult for her to meet this requirement. This affects the roadmap for reappointment or appointment to a higher position of leadership, and represents an obstacle to women occupying senior roles.

Recommendation 7: Assessment

- Design and issue particular laws, policies and guidelines for the assessment of specific target groups: women in maternity leave, women with children under 36 months, both men and women responsible for elderly care. The Ministry of Home Affairs would be responsible for preparing the draft law on Emulation and Awards and would then submit it to the government. Before being passed by the National Assembly, the Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly should be tasked with reviewing the draft law to make sure that it is gender responsive.
- Provide high-quality and affordable childcare and aged care facilities for civil servants and public

employees, in order to ease the burden on domestic work and care work, which often falls to women. This policy should be jointly developed and implemented by various ministries such as Social Security, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and the Ministry of Education and Training. The Committee of Social Affairs under the National Assembly would be responsible for reviewing the draft law to make sure that it is gender responsive before it is submitted to the National Assembly.

- Different roles need to be assessed fairly, especially for administrative jobs which are overwhelmingly occupied by female employees. When considering the criteria to be assessed as 'Grassroots Emulation Soldier', Party Executive Committees and authorities need to be mindful of ensuring gender equality in the assessment process. Those occupying administrative roles need to be provided with the opportunity to be assessed as 'outstanding' if they perform their tasks well. Such policies would need to be developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the head of each organisation/ministry and province. The Department/ Division of Emulation and Awards under each ministry and province would play an important role in communicating the resulting gender sensitivity policy to the head of each ministry/province.
- The Committee of the Advancement of Women and head of each department/division under each ministry and province should encourage qualified female staff to pursue the title of 'Grassroots Emulation Soldier'.

3.7 Leadership appointment

3.7.1 Key elements of leadership appointment

The final stage of the employment pyramid is appointment to a leadership position. This stage includes the selection of cadres from the leadership pipeline to the most senior management roles across all organisations of Vietnam's political system. Appointment of leadership across all public sector positions is the responsibility of the Party Committees within each organisation.

The process involves five stages:

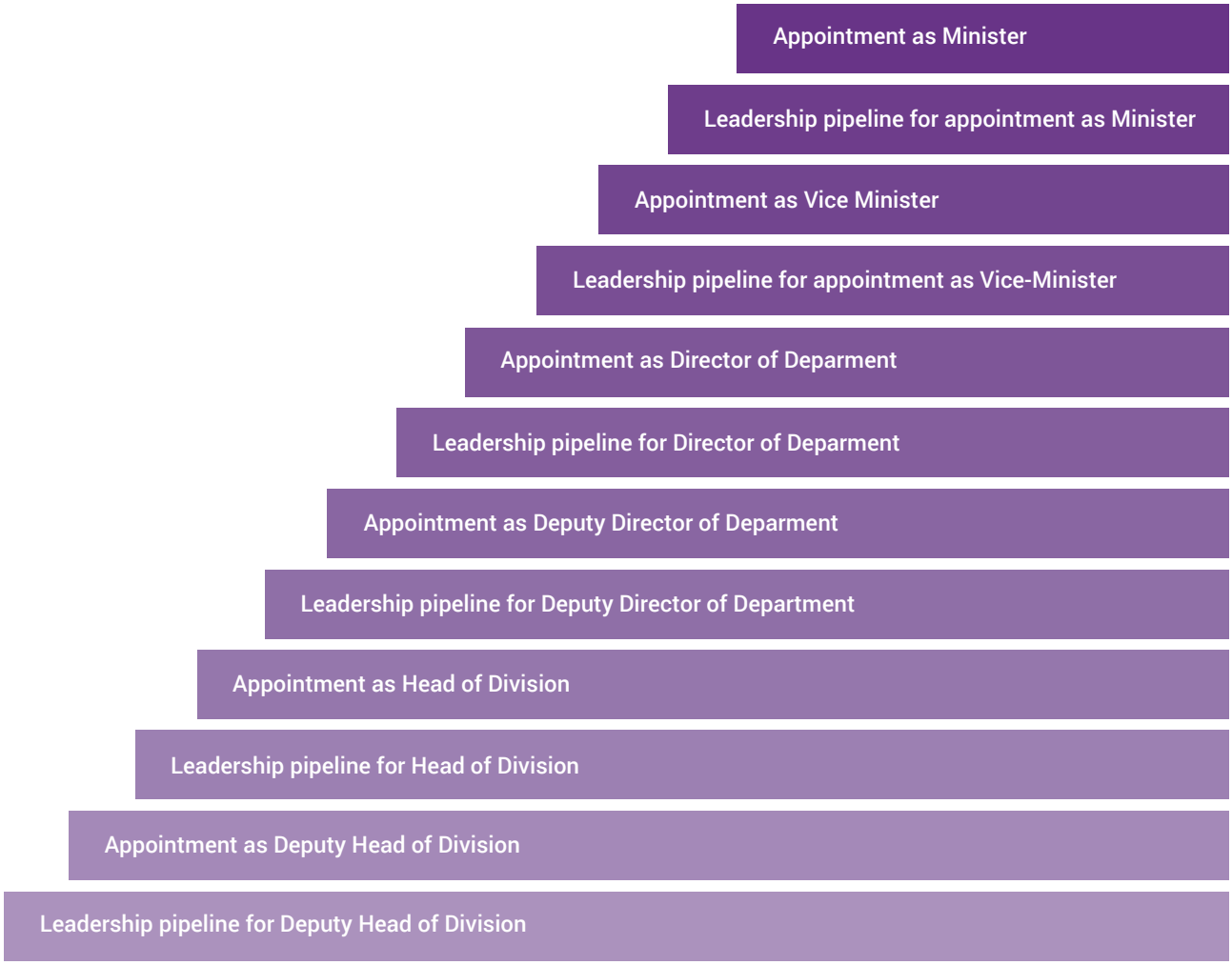
1. The organisation submits an official appointment request to the relevant higher Party Committee who will consider the request.
2. If the request is approved, the Party Committee organises a meeting to propose specific candidates for that position. The Party Cell within the department then holds a meeting with all staff, who vote confidentially to select leadership candidates.
3. Based on the results of step 2, the Standing Committee of the Party Committee will nominate the proposed cadres again through confidential vote.
4. Each Cell then puts forward candidates to the Party Standing Committee, including all managers and leaders, who hold another confidential vote to decide on the final short list.
5. The Party Committee then organises a plenary meeting to select the leader from the finalists by way of a confidential vote. The person who gains more than 50% of vote will be appointed. In case there are two people with the same number of votes, then one will be selected by the Secretary-General of the Party Committee.

The selection criteria for leadership positions is similar to those used for the leadership pipeline, and include six categories:

1. Membership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, having good moral and political qualities and lifestyle.
2. Professional qualifications in political theory and state management, meeting the requirements according to the regulations of the Party and the State; having adequate command of computer skills and foreign languages.
3. Having competence and credibility verified through annual assessments and achievement of emulation titles.

4. Be physically fit to perform the task and meet the age requirements as stipulated by law.
5. Be included in the leadership pipeline of the relevant leadership or managerial positions.
6. Have leadership experience and have successfully completed the tasks and duties of the leadership position at directly subordinate level or equivalent.[31]

The following diagram indicates the sequential steps in the pipeline to senior leadership in a ministry or equivalent body.:



3.7.2 Gender barriers to women's appointment to leadership positions

As with all other stages of the employment pyramid, the process and criteria for leadership appointment have profound gender implications. Both the nature of the formal rules and the informal rules combine to make it difficult for women to be selected for these positions.

- Leadership appointment challenges for women are similar to those they face entering the leadership pipeline. Formal rules relating to retirement mean they are very often ineligible for appointment on age grounds or because they have not been able to achieve the appropriate levels of training or experience in less senior leadership positions.
- Pervasive informal gender norms, which reinforce the view that women are not suitable for leadership, also strongly influence their chances of selection. This includes the problem of garnering enough votes amongst colleagues to support their nomination, and more senior level party officials voting for their appointment.
- Many focus group participants expressed the view that lack of leadership support was a barrier to

women's advancement into senior leadership. One participant said that her manager "made it clear that he preferred men to women" in leadership roles. Another noted that "[t]here can be a lot of prejudice [against women] from leaders – the heads of organisations". This was reiterated in the comment of another of our interviewees, who told us that "[m]any people – even the heads of agencies" – do not support women. Other participants noted that "[l]eaders of institutions in many cases don't want to employ women" and that "[m]any employers don't want to employ women – they'll have babies, come in late and leave early – so they create criteria that make it difficult for a female employee to be hired". Some women feel a great deal of pressure once they are in a role, knowing that any mistake could be used as a reason for dismissal by an unsupportive boss or team if they "do not want you to join them".

The research participants stressed that their careers often depended on whether or not they had a supportive leader. One participant said:

> ***It all depends on the head of the institution as to whether a woman gets promoted. If they don't care, there will be no promotions and no opportunities, no chance to improve capacity. Leaders of institutions are really central to who gets the opportunities.***

Many research participants felt that their professional opportunities came down to an element of luck; that no matter how hard they worked or how much they achieved, that their career progression lay squarely in the hands of their leader. One workshop participant explained that if candidates were being considered for a position, "if the leader looks at two CVs, one of a man and one of a woman, if he picks up the CV of a woman, she is very lucky. It all depends on the leader".

By contrast, supportive leadership was seen to be very important to women's advancement to the apex of the employment pyramid. One interviewee described her former [male] boss as "a pioneer". She told us that:

> ***He gave me a good image of a leader – that it takes knowledge-sharing, mentoring, experience, a willingness to listen to others, and being a source of motivation. He was willing to work… to encourage others.***

Another interviewee said that her former leader "became like a second father". He supported her to take part in a project, and appointed her even though many of her male colleagues did not agree with his decision to do so.

One workshop participant explained in detail the power of a supportive – and, in this case, female – leader. She explained that they used to have a male boss, and he was replaced by a female leader:

> ***After the new boss came into the office, two months later I took my maternity leave. So we had a shortage of human resources at the time. Work was quite heavy as well. However, my boss was very understanding and shared the workload and showed her empathy and sympathy to me. I took my six months of maternity leave, and shortly after coming back, I received the decision to send me to a two-year political and professional training program and at the same time, two other women got the same decision. We got sent to higher education training programs. Our female leader took all of our hard work into account, and sent three women from my team knowing that this would create more work for everyone else. But she said she recognised the challenges faced by women in government positions. She told us to live up to the challenge and take the opportunities… I used to think working for a male boss would be easier. Many would prefer a male boss rather than a female boss. We believe that women need to support women. If we don't support us, nobody else will. I feel very thankful and this is a very good example for me. So, if I am promoted and find myself in a leadership position, I will do the same thing for my female team members.***

An interesting finding from this research were the views expressed by the participants about women's health. Some participants suggested that women were not able to be appointed as senior leaders for health reasons. Some believed women were less physically robust than men, while others suggested that this was a widely held perception, which held women back.

One participant noted: "Women do not have very strong physical health compared to men, and there are positions that require very good physical health – these roles are usually saved for men". Another noted that "generally speaking, yes women have to bear children and give birth to children and this can actually create a lot of physical health problems for women".

Health also came up in relation to women's ability to build networks. At one of the focus groups, participants explained that there was a perception than women did not have the physical health to be able to keep up with men's drinking at after-hours networking sessions and so were not invited along. Difficulty in accessing these networks was seen to be a barrier to women's leadership advancement and appointment.

Leadership pipeline requirements and impacts

Requirement		Impact
Appointment must be from the leadership pipeline	→	Reduces the likelihood of a woman being appointed, as the number of women in the leadership pipeline is very low.
The sequential nature of the appointment process	→	Reduces the likelihood of women being appointed to more senior leadership positions, especially for roles at the Vice Minister level and higher, due to the 'glass ceiling' that exists.
The leadership appointment must be based on the leadership pipeline of Party Committees	→	Reduces the opportunities available to women to be appointed to a leadership role, as women currently make up less than 20% of Party Committees at all levels.
The successful appointee must be able to serve at least two terms, meaning that women must be appointed before the age of 45, and men before the age of 50.	→	Restricts the timeframe within which women can be appointed to a leadership position.
The cumulative effect of all requirements regarding appointment to leadership positions.	→	Creates multiple levels of barriers for women in the leadership appointment stage.

Recommendation 8: Appointment to senior leadership

GeLEAD should work closely with the Central Organizing Commission of the Communist Party of Vietnam to develop evidence-based human resource policy recommendations for the Party Secretariat and the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This will include developing policies to:

- Remove retirement age differences between men and women.
- Consider 'fast tracking' outstanding young women, allowing them to be appointed.
- Strengthen the gender equality monitoring mechanism in the leadership appointment process.
- Ensure women are included on senior leadership appointment committees.
- Provide financial support and human resources to establish mentoring programs for female staff in ministries, sectors and provinces, and establish a formal network of women leaders and future leaders.

Part 4 Lessons from the Australian experience

In Australia, white women were given the right to vote in 1902, while Aboriginal women were not included in the franchise until 1962. In 1920, Australia became one of the first countries to formally allow women the right to stand for Parliament; while some women sought election early on pursuant to these rules.[32] none were elected until Edith Lyons and Dorothy Tangey in 1943.

Australia's government is bicameral in nature, made up of a House of Representatives and a Senate. As of the time of writing this report, women make up a little under half of the Senate (48.68%), while 46 out of 151 members of the House of Representatives are female.[33] Achieving 50% representation in the Senate has taken a number of years; in July 1991, for example, there were only 18 women senators out of a total of 76 senators.[34] Despite this progress, it remains the case that men are overrepresented in politics in Australia, particularly in the House of Representatives, in which the Prime Minister sits.

In terms of the percentage of women in national parliaments, as of September 2019, Australia ranked 47th in the world, while Vietnam ranked 62nd.[35] The issues that we have discussed in this report are therefore far from unique to Vietnam; in Australia's public service, women are under-represented at a senior level, and they face many of the struggles that we have outlined above, especially with regard to care responsibilities and networking.[36] The public sector in Australian has not been known for being especially hospitable to women; from the sexism and misogyny that then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard spoke out about in 2012, to recent allegations of bullying of women ministers by their male colleagues, Australia's political culture is problematic from a gender perspective. Furthermore, 'female lawmakers say the comments and treatment they receive can often be explicitly gendered in nature, can border on abuse or intimidation and do not happen to their male counterparts'.[37]

Given that Australia is therefore still in the process of establishing gender equality across its public service, this section is not so much a discussion of 'best practice' as it is of 'the Australian experience'. In this section, we outline four such areas that we suggest may have potential application in Vietnam; they are gender targets, strategies for balancing political life with care responsibilities, training opportunities for women and the establishment of networks for women.

4.1 Gender targets

There are no formal, across-the-board gender quotas in Australian politics. Instead, political parties have been left to implement policies with regard to gender as they see fit.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) is one of the two main political parties in Australia (the other being the Liberal Party). In 1994, the ALP voluntarily adopted affirmative action gender targets in which the party committed to having women occupy 35% of winnable seats by 2002.[38] In 2012, ALP's Constitution set out a 40:40:20 model:

> ***The ALP is committed to men and women in the Party working in equal partnership. It is our objective to have equal numbers of men and women at all levels in the Party organisation, and in public office positions the Party holds. To achieve this the Party adopts a comprehensive affirmative action model of 40:40:20, as set out below, whereby a minimum of 40 per cent of relevant positions shall be held by either gender.***

As Joy McCann explains, '[t]his means that 40 per cent of seats held by Labor will be filled by women, and not less than 40 per cent by men. The remaining 20 per cent may be filled by candidates of either gender'.[39] Since then, the ALP has unanimously adopted to have women occupy half of ALP parliamentary positions by 2025.[40]

Though the quota was voluntarily adopted, it was by no means a straightforward implementation process. Mark Butler, who was a senior figure in the Labor Party when the policy was implemented, recently explained the challenges:

> ***It was hard, because men are pretty good at fighting for their traditional roles; running everything and winning everything. But then it became easier. We got to a place of critical mass where there's been so much cultural change in the show that it's not a struggle. The first 20 per cent was a lot harder than the next 20 per cent.***[41]

A quota alone is therefore not enough; it needs to be accompanied by ongoing monitoring and evaluation, which can ultimately help drive cultural change.

Another intervention worth noting comes from the Australian Greens Party (The Greens), which has an extensive list of principles and aims around gender equality and the empowerment of women. This policy includes an aim of 'equal representation of women and men in public life, including women from diverse backgrounds' and a commitment to 'actively promote women to stand as candidates for election'.[42] While this policy establishes expectations rather than formal rules accompanied by sanctions, it is nonetheless a powerful public statement about the values of The Greens and a means of clearly expressing the values that they expect from their party members.

While there are clear challenges, the benefits of having an increase in women in parliaments cannot be understated; as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (of which both Australia and Vietnam are members) explains,[43] 'A gender-sensitive parliament is… a modern parliament; one that addresses and reflects the equality demands of a modern society. Ultimately, it is a parliament that is more efficient, effective and legitimate'.

Beyond parliament, the Australian Government's Australian Public Service Commission is a government agency based in the portfolio of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; as such it is an important public sector entity. In 2016, it released 'Balancing the Future: The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2019', which was

> ***focuse[d] on changing culture through leadership, flexibility, and innovation. To do things differently an honest stocktake is required. The A[ustralian] P[ublic] S[ervice] workforce must reflect contemporary reality – one in which men, as well as women, have both caring and work responsibilities, and where everyone is given the same opportunities to develop and to lead.***[44]

In 2019, it published an update: 'Are We There Yet? Progress of the Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy', which reported that 'in April 2018, the Australian Government achieved the milestone of gender parity at the most senior level of the public service, with half of all (nine of 18) departmental Secretary roles now occupied by women'.[45]

Specific government departments have also implemented strategies designed to effect gender equality. The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for example, published their 'Women in Leadership Strategy: Promoting Equality and Dismantling Barriers' in 2015. They found that, in 2015, while over 57% of staff in the department were women, fewer than 34% of the Senior Executive Service staff were female, and only 27% of the heads of missions and posts were women.[46] Recognising a need to create a more inclusive leadership structure, their equality promotion strategy consisted of four action areas: leadership and culture; accountability and inclusion; the embedding of substantive equality provisions; and the mainstreaming of flexible work and the dismantling of barriers for carers.[47] Each of these areas was made up of tangible action items with specific targets and timeframes. As of 2019, the strategy seems to be paying off: women now make up an increased proportion of staff at the Senior Executive Service level (at 40%), while 40% of heads of missions are now women.[48]

4.2 Balancing political life and care responsibilities

As we indicate in this report, it can be exceedingly difficult to balance working in the public service with care responsibilities (of children, family members or older relatives, for example). This is a dynamic that is present in both Vietnam and Australia.[49] In recent times, however, the Australian Parliament has introduced measures intended to ameliorate the pressure, particularly on parents.

In 2008, for example, the House of Representatives adopted a resolution to allow nursing mothers to vote by proxy if they are caring for young children at the same time as discharging their parliamentary duties. Then, in 2016, Australia's parliamentary rules were again revised. In announcing the change, then-Leader of the House Christopher Pyne, explained, 'No member, male or female, will ever be prevented from participating fully in the operation of the Parliament by reason of having the care of a baby'.[50] As a result, a member of Parliament in the House of Representatives can now bring an infant into the chamber; this is 'not age-specific in terms of the infant, or gender-specific in terms of the member, nor does it require that the member be feeding the infant'.[51]

There is also a childcare provider inside Parliament House – Capital Hill Early Childhood Centre. Their openings hours vary depending on if it is a parliamentary sitting day or not (7.30am-9.00pm in the case of the former, and 8.00am-6.00pm in the case of the latter), providing a practical option for those with young children who are working at Parliament House – whether as a parliamentarian or otherwise – to combine their work and family obligations. The Australian Government also offers a childcare subsidy, which reduces the cost of childcare for eligible parents.[52]

The Australian Public Service Commission also notes the need for flexible working arrangements to not only be supported within the public sector, but to be valued. It says:

> ***As a response to the call from the Gender Equality Strategy to adopt work arrangements that balance choice with operational requirements, "all roles flex" policies have been implemented extensively, however their application is inconsistent across and within departments. There is a need to value flexible work and make it accessible to everyone.[53]***

This should be made available to both women and men, and can take multiple forms, including working part-time, job sharing, working from home or remotely, and varying the ordinary start or finish times.[54]

Establishing flexible, parent-friendly workplaces is therefore one way in which the public sphere can reduce the impact of care responsibilities on parents, including those working in the political sphere, as is providing convenient, affordable and quality childcare.

4.3 Development opportunities

The Pathways to Politics Program for Women is currently offered by the University of Melbourne and Queensland University of Technology (QUT). QUT describes their program as:

> ***a nonpartisan initiative that seeks to increase female participation in all levels of government by equipping women with the skills to succeed in being elected to public office, and to thrive as political leaders. The program is designed to provide participants with the networks, training and support required to advance their political career.[55]***

Inspired by Harvard University's 'From Harvard Square to the Oval Office: A Political Campaign Practicum',[56] the University of Melbourne, in partnership with Women's Leadership Institute Australia and the Trawalla Foundation, also offers a graduate program for women. These programs include presentations from senior figures in Australian politics, hands-on skills development and networking opportunities.

Launched in 1996, EMILY's List Australia is another organisation that offers women professional development training in political skills, strategic campaign planning, government lobbying, social change advocacy and affirmative action strategies.[57] EMILY's List is a political civil society group, which supports progressive Labor women seeking election into Australia's parliaments. Beyond training, EMILY's List candidates can receive financial support (either via lump sums or direct donations), practical and personal support via mentoring, and campaign resources (such as volunteers who distribute leaflets on behalf of the candidate).

Education providers and civil society can therefore contribute to efforts for a political system and public sector that is more representative, and should be seen by governments as potential partners working toward a shared goal – that of gender equality and meaningful representation.

4.4 Networking

Political parties in Australia have established networking frameworks for women in politics. The Labor Party has the ALP National Labor Women's Network, the Liberal Party has its Federal Women's Committee, while the Nationals (a party that represents itself as the voice of regional Australia) has a Women's Federal Council.

The National Labor Women's Network is designed to 'increase membership and involvement of women at all levels of the Australian Labor Party through training and communications strategies'.[58] It seeks to increase and enhance the representation and participation of women in public office and public life respectively, and also has a communicative role, of liaising with policy committees as appropriate. (There is also a parallel National Indigenous Labor Network designed to further promote diversity in the Labor Party).[59]

The Liberal Party's Federal Women's Committee was established in 1945 and incorporated into the Party's Constitution the following year.[60] The Committee 'has been active in promoting women for elected office, advocating policy, advising on a wide range of issues, assisting in election campaigns and performing a vital role in the enduring success of the Liberal Party'.[61] Established in 1959, the Nationals also have a women's committee – the Women's Federal Council. The Women's Federal Council primarily 'considers policy issues, undertakes research and presents motions to Federal Conference and Council'.[62]

There are parallels between these networks and the Vietnam Women's Union, indicating that the VWU has an integral role to play in supporting the government's objective of increasing the representation of women in Vietnamese politics and public administration.

4.5 Cultural change

While there are immediate and short-term actions that the government can take to address some of the issues that we raise in this report (see our recommendations for more details), an ongoing issue for many countries – and Vietnam is far from alone here – is how to effect broader recognition of gender equality in societal norms. A UNDP report, for example, identified that, in Vietnam:

> ***Patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted gender stereotypes with respect to the responsibilities and roles of women and men in the family and in society result in subordinate roles of women… The social norm that men are natural leaders, decision makers and risk takers pigeonholes men into, and limits women's access to, certain types of careers and expected roles.***[63]

Although in our report we focus specifically on promoting women's participation in the political system, themes of training opportunities, care responsibilities, motherhood and family dynamics came through clearly in the conversations we had with women working in politics. Therefore, while measures can be taken to increase women's political representation specifically (such as the enforcement of quotas, and the creation of networks and training opportunities for women), establishing a level playing field for women on a long-term basis will require more sustained and wide-ranging measures – though it goes without saying that this is no easy task. Shifting the culture ***within*** the public sector is, however, an important step in demonstrating commitment to gender equality.[64]

Part 5: Conclusion

It is clear that the human resources management process for public sector employees in Vietnam presents many barriers to women's advancement. This includes obstacles in recruitment, entry into the leadership pipeline, access to training and rotation, and, ultimately, appointment to senior leadership positions.

The report shows that the problems facing women's access to leadership positions operate at different stages of the policy lifecycle. Policies have not been adequately designed with women or gender relations in mind. Further, there exist significant gaps in implementation because of the absence of clear accountability and compliance processes, and due to inadequate sanctions for non-performance in reaching gender targets.

Some of these barriers arise from formal rules about gender, others from formal rules with gendered effects and others still from informal gender rules, norms and practices. In the case of women's leadership pipeline in the Vietnamese public sector, all three interact and intersect to produce complex and persistent barriers to women's recruitment and promotion, which flow through to retirement.

A general point made by participants was that due to the combination of these factors across the employment pyramid, the Vietnamese public sector is increasingly having a problem with retention. In the view of some of our participants, talented and highly educated women are making the decision to enter the private sector workforce to which is not seen to have the same barriers to women's advancement into leadership because gendered formal rules and informal norms are not as pervasive.

In order to retain the best and the brightest of Vietnam's women, the government and the Party needs to urgently find ways to make the system fairer for women to be able to retain talented women in the public sector.

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7 See Notification 196 of 13 June 2015

8 Conclusion Notice No. 196-TB / TW on the Project "Strengthening the Party's leadership for gender equality and for the advancement of women in the new situation"

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22 Article 4, Decree No. 53/2015 / ND-CP dated May 29, 2015 of the Government stipulating retirement at a higher age for cadres and civil servants.

23 Article 10, Decree 29/2012 / ND-CP

24 Regulation No. 15/BTCTW/ 2012

25 Regulation No. 98/QD-TW/2017

26 Department of Justice Decision No. 328 / QD-BTP of March 1, 2018,

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Appendix 1: Data on women leaders in Vietnam

All the data is counted as of 31 December 2017 and is based on the 'Report on 20 years of implementing the Strategy on Cadres in the period of strengthening industrialization and modernization', Hanoi, 2018, released by the Central Organizing Commission.

I. Women leaders among central organisations (central government)

1. Strategic leaders (from Vice Ministers (and equivalent) and higher)

Strategic leaders who are managed by the Politburo, the Secretariat and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam include positions from Vice Ministers (and equivalent) and higher.

Stategic leaders: Number of female strategic leaders as of 31 December 2017[1]			
	Total	**Number of female leaders**	**% female leaders**
Central and provincial levels	585	65	11,11
Central level	359	44	12,26
Provincial level	226	21	9,29

2. Middle-ranking leaders (from division to directorate levels)

Women leaders in the central level (from division to directorate levels)[2]			
Levels of leadership	**Total**	**% Women leaders**	
Total	29.093	13,03%	
Leaders at the directorate level	660	Head of Directorate	1,52%
		Vice Head of Directorate	6,65%
Leaders at department level	9.741	Director-General	8,27%
		Vice Director-General	15,63%
Leaders at division level	18.692	(No data available)	

1 Central Organizing Commission. Report on 20 years implementing the Strategy on Cadres in the period of strengthening industrialization and Modernization, Hanoi, 2018. [Ban Tổ chức Trung ương: Báo cáo tổng kết 20 năm thực hiện Chiến lược cán bộ thời kỳ đẩy mạnh công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước, Hà Nội, 2018, tr.13.

2 Ibid., pages 11, 16 [Ban Tổ chức Trung ương: Báo cáo tổng kết 20 năm thực hiện Chiến lược cán bộ thời kỳ đẩy mạnh công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước, Hà Nội, 2018, tr.11, 16.]

II. Women leaders in the local government (from provincial, district and commune levels)

1. Women leaders in public administration

Women leaders in local level (from division to department levels)[3]		
	Total number of leaders (male and female)	**% female leaders**
Total	233.269	
Provincial level	65.513	12,28%
District level	128.056	9,98%
Commune level	39.700	10,37%

2. Women leaders in Party Committees at the local government level.

Women leaders in Party Committees at local government/local level Term 2015 - 2020[4]		
	Number of women	**% female leaders**
Total		
Provincial level	448	13,17%
District level	5.014	16,91%
Grassroot/commune level	32.228	21,12%

3 Ibid., pages 11, 16 [Ban Tổ chức Trung ương: Báo cáo tổng kết 20 năm thực hiện Chiến lược cán bộ thời kỳ đẩy mạnh công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước, Hà Nội, 2018, tr.11, 16.]

4 Ibid,, tr. 19.

Appendix 2: The six steps of the human resource management process in Vietnam's public sector

The human resource (HR) management process in Vietnam's public sector is made up of six phases: recruitment, entry into the leadership pipeline, training, rotation, assessment and appointment.

1. Recruitment

Recruitment is the first phase of the HR process in the public sector in Vietnam. It involves the employment of qualified Vietnamese citizens who then occupy ranks, job positions and titles of organisations and agencies in Vietnam's political system. The recruitment process is made up of two rounds of examinations. The first round is computer-based, consisting of language and computer skills, as well as background knowledge about Vietnam's political system and the structure of the State. The second round is either an oral exam or a paper-based exam, testing the knowledge and skills required for the specific position. Those who are successfully recruited into an organisation are called 'civil servants' or 'public employees'. Civil servants and a proportion of public employees are on a permanent payroll and receive wages and allowances from the state budget (see Law on Cadres and Civil Servant 2008; Law on Public Employees 2010; and Decree 161/2018).

2. Leadership pipeline

After multiple years of performing strongly in Vietnam's public sector, a small number of civil servants and public employees are selected into the leadership pipeline. This is the shortlist or the pool of particularly talented cadres, civil servants and public employees who have demonstrated sufficient potential to be competitive for appointment to a leadership position. Depending on the morality, qualifications, work performance and the age of the shortlisted candidates, they will be assigned to undertake training and/or rotation in order to be eligible for the appointment of a specific leadership position (Instruction No.15/2012).

The positions in Vietnam's political system are hierarchical and divided into governmental levels: National, Provincial, District, and Commune. There are a further three components within each level: Party organisations, State organisations and social and political organisations.

- From the administrative perspective of each level, the national level includes the:
- Vice-Head of Division
- Head of Division and equivalents
- Vice-Director General
- Director General and equivalents
- Vice-Minister and equivalents, and the
- Minister and equivalents.

The provincial level includes the:

- Vice-Head of Division
- Head of Division and equivalents
- Vice-Director
- Director and equivalents
- Vice-Chair of the People's Council and equivalents, and the
- Chair of the People's Council and equivalents.

The District level includes the:

- Vice-Head of Division
- Head of Division and equivalents
- Vice-Chair of the District People's Council and equivalents, and the
- Chair of the District People's Council.

The Commune level has a Chair and a Vice-Chair of the Commune's People Council. These leadership titles are appointed.

From the Party's leadership perspective, each level has its own Party Committee. In the Party Committee, there is a Party Secretary (Bí thư), a Vice-Secretary (phó Bí thư) and members of the Party Committee (cấp Uỷ viên). The number of members of the Party Committee depends on its size and level. These Party leadership titles are elected among Party members of each unit.

From a social and political leadership perspective, all the levels have the following leadership titles:

- Head of the Father Front
- Head of the Labor Union
- Head of the Youth Union
- Head of the Women's Union
- Head of the Veteran Union, and
- Head of the Farmer Association.

Again, these leadership positions are elected.

A leadership pipeline is created for every leadership term (which usually last five years) and is added to or refined every year for all leadership and management positions of all levels and for all perspectives: administrative, party, and social and political. Leadership and management candidates must be selected from the leadership pipeline for each specific leadership title.

3. Training

The training opportunities available to the contingent of cadres, civil servants and public employees is based on the leadership pipeline for each title. The aim of the training is to provide them with the knowledge and skills to prepare them for when they are eventually appointed to a leadership position. The training knowledge includes:

- Marxist-Leninist political theories
- the directives and resolutions of the Party and the laws and policies of the State
- knowledge and skills about State management, and
- national defense and other up-to-date interdisciplinary topics (Decree 101/2017).

4. Assessment

The assessment of cadres, civil servants and public employees is made up of the evaluation of their performance, morality and potential for development within an organisation. Assessment lays the groundwork for the selection of public servants for training, leadership pipelines, leadership rotation and, eventually, leadership appointment. Unlike the other stages of HR management, assessment is conducted annually at the end of each year based on a five-criteria framework:

- political ideology
- ethics and lifestyle
- qualifications
- capacity and prestige, and
- health, age and work experience (Instruction No. 15/2012).

There are also assessments for cadres, civil servants, and public employees without leadership titles, and for those who are leaders and managers. For the latter, besides annual assessment, they also are assessed at the middle of their leadership term and towards the end, during the fourth year of their five-year term.

5. Rotation

Rotation is designed to offer a promising cadre who is already in the leadership pipeline a leadership position in another province's organisation or agency for a defined term. The purpose of rotation is to train and foster the pool of promising cadres through practical leadership experience (Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008).

6. Appointment

Appointment occurs when a cadre in the leadership pipeline assumes a leadership or management position at a higher level in the organisations and agencies of Vietnam's political system (Law on Cadres and Civil Servants 2008). Appointment follows strict rules and policies, including that appointment must occur from the leadership pipeline, and that a person can only be appointed to one level higher in the leadership hierarchy per appointment.


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