

## **PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS ON GENDER EQUALITY, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING AGAINST WOMEN IN VIETNAM**

The Center for Women and Development (currently renamed Center for Women's Development<sup>1</sup>) was established in 2002 with the mission of promoting peace and development for women, with a particular focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged women. CWD operates on the core values of Cooperation - Innovation - Professionalism - Effectiveness. It is financially autonomous and concentrates on two main areas: (1) implementing social initiatives to support women and children, especially vulnerable groups, across various sectors; and (2) delivering business services to maintain its operations and fund community and social development activities.

CWD's social programs include gender-based violence prevention; communication campaigns to raise awareness among women and the general public about legal rights and issues concerning women and children; capacity building and empowerment of women in various fields; and employment and entrepreneurship support for women, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds. This includes vocational training courses, capacity-building workshops, forums, seminars, trade fairs, exhibitions connecting producers and markets, and support for product distribution through both online and offline channels.

One of CWD's flagship initiatives is the Peace House Shelter (PHS), established in 2007 as a pioneering safe space for survivors of gender-based violence. Now officially licensed and renamed the Social Assistance Center – Peace House Shelter, its mandate is *“to receive, manage, care for, and support women and children survivors of gender-based violence and to provide appropriate assistance based on their health conditions.”* Since its inception, PHS has provided 27,995 counseling sessions to 20,531 individuals<sup>2</sup> and has housed and supported nearly 1,800 women and children survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking (an average of over 100 people per year). Its beneficiaries come from 56 out of 63 provinces and cities and 17 ethnic minority groups across Vietnam. PHS has established partnerships with relevant ministries and agencies<sup>3</sup> for referrals and victim support and has developed a service coordination network involving hospitals, legal aid providers, vocational training centers, and job placement services. Notably, an increasing number of foreign nationals living and working in Vietnam have

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<sup>1</sup> Renamed on January 1, 2025

<sup>2</sup> On issues related to gender, gender equality, women's and children's rights, marriage and family, response to gender-based violence, psychological and legal support, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA); Ministry of Public Security; Command of the Border Guard...

sought support services from the Peace House Shelter. Based on its practical work, CWD actively contributes to legal and policy development, engages in public oversight and social criticism, and conducts awareness-raising campaigns to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence among women and communities.

Leveraging its infrastructure, including hotel rooms, restaurants, and conference facilities, CWD also operates business and service activities, ensuring an average annual revenue growth of 10% or more to maintain financial sustainability, reinvest in operations, and support social initiatives.

In 2014, CWD was granted Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In accordance with regulations, CWD has complied with the submission of two periodic reports and has actively participated in policy advocacy and consultation activities to promote gender equality, particularly in preventing gender-based violence against women and children in Vietnam, as well as in several international forums. Representatives of CWD attended and delivered statements at the sessions for the adoption of Vietnam's UPR outcomes at the 41st and 57th sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council. At the conclusion of these sessions, the Human Rights Council reached a consensus to adopt the outcomes of Vietnam's Fourth Cycle UPR, marking the completion of the fourth review cycle on the protection and promotion of human rights in Vietnam and the beginning of the implementation phase of the recommendations.

In its capacity under ECOSOC's Special Consultative Status, CWD recognizes the efforts of the Government of Vietnam in promoting gender equality in general and addressing gender-based violence in particular. From the perspective of practical interventions in gender-based violence prevention, this report will focus on evaluating the Government of Vietnam's efforts to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and actual implementation of gender-based violence prevention measures for women and children in recent years.

Specifically, in terms of gender equality, Vietnam promulgated the Law on Gender Equality in 2006 (effective in 2007), which sets out principles and measures to ensure gender equality in the family and society. The National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2011–2020 period (Decision No. 2355/2007/QĐ-TTg) was replaced by the 2021–2030 Strategy (Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP dated March 3, 2021), setting goals to narrow gender gaps, increase the proportion of women in leadership, and achieve international targets on women's rights. The Government annually reports on gender equality indicators to the National Assembly. Other legal documents such as the Labor Code, the Law on Enterprises, and the Law on Education also incorporate gender mainstreaming provisions. Many initiatives and action plans have been implemented, including campaigns encouraging men

to share household responsibilities, training projects for women, and programs supporting women’s entrepreneurship.

Two legal documents in the field of gender-based violence prevention have also been revised to better reflect the realities in Vietnam and the global context. The amended Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control was approved by the National Assembly on November 14, 2022 (effective from July 1, 2023, replacing the 2007 law), and the amended Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control was approved on November 28, 2024 (effective from July 1, 2025, replacing the 2011 law), with many new provisions as follows:

- The revised Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control consists of 6 chapters and 56 articles. (1) The law adopts a human rights-based approach, centering victims of domestic violence, and expands the definitions of domestic violence to include acts such as: *Neglect, lack of care or support for family members who are children, pregnant women, women nursing children under 36 months old, the elderly, people with disabilities, and persons unable to care for themselves; failure to educate children; stigma or discrimination based on physical appearance, gender, sex, or ability; forced pregnancy, abortion, or sex selection.* (2) The law supplements many provisions to enhance proactiveness in the prevention of domestic violence. Specifically, it amends and supplements regulations on communication and education information; counseling content, target groups requiring focused counseling; and the responsibilities of People's Committees at all levels in providing training on knowledge and skills for domestic violence prevention and control. It also revises regulations on mediation to prevent misuse of mediation as a means to evade handling domestic violence acts; adds the provision for the “National Hotline on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control,” the responsibilities of the Chairman of the Commune-level People’s Committee in handling reports and denunciations of domestic violence acts, and the use of audio and visual evidence regarding domestic violence. (3) The law strengthens measures to protect, support, and handle violations in domestic violence prevention and control. Specifically, the law includes measures requiring perpetrators of domestic violence to report to the police station of the commune where the violence occurred; grants authority to the Chairman of the Commune-level People’s Committee and the Court to independently issue restraining orders, simplifying the procedure. Additionally, it provides regulations for monitoring the implementation of restraining orders; measures for education and support to change violent behaviors; community service penalties; protection for those participating in domestic violence prevention and control as well as those who report or denounce domestic violence. (4) The law encourages socialization of domestic violence prevention and control efforts and enhances the State’s responsibility in allocating resources for domestic violence prevention and control, aiming to build and develop professional and effective support

facilities for domestic violence prevention and control. Specifically, it regulates support facilities for domestic violence prevention and control, and service providers offering assistance in this field. Furthermore, it supplements regulations on conditions ensuring the implementation of domestic violence prevention and control, such as funding for domestic violence prevention, databases on domestic violence prevention and control, inter-sectoral coordination in domestic violence prevention, and skills for participation in domestic violence prevention and control. (5) The 2022 Domestic Violence Prevention and Control Law revises and supplements regulations on the responsibilities of the Government, state management agencies for domestic violence prevention and control, and related agencies and organizations in domestic violence prevention and control. Specifically, it adds the Government's responsibility to report to the National Assembly every two years or on an ad hoc basis regarding domestic violence prevention and control work, as well as the responsibilities of relevant agencies in performing domestic violence prevention and control tasks.

- The amended Law on Prevention and Combat against Human Trafficking consists of 08 chapters and 63 articles, in which: 1) The principles of the State in preventing and combating human trafficking have been revised and supplemented. The Law adds important principles to meet practical needs and align with international treaties to which Vietnam is a party, such as: (i) Respecting and protecting the lawful rights and interests of victims and individuals in the process of being identified as victims; adopting a victim-centered approach; ensuring gender equality. (ii) Ensuring that victims and individuals in the process of being identified as victims can use a language they understand and receive support appropriate to their beliefs and religion within the framework of Vietnamese law, and suitable to their age, gender, health status, and personal characteristics. (iii) Depending on the specific case and in accordance with relevant laws, victims who commit unlawful acts as a direct consequence of human trafficking may not be subject to administrative sanctions or criminal prosecution for such acts. (iiii) Strengthening international cooperation in the prevention and combat against human trafficking based on compliance with the Constitution, in accordance with Vietnamese law, and consistent with international law and customs; 2) Additional State policies on preventing and combating human trafficking are introduced, such as: (i) Protecting and supporting agencies, organizations, enterprises, and individuals participating in anti-trafficking activities and supporting trafficked victims in accordance with the law. (ii) Prioritizing the application of science and technology and digital transformation in anti-trafficking efforts; supporting training and capacity building for personnel working in this field. (iii) Annually, the State shall prioritize budget allocation for ethnic minority areas and areas with particularly difficult socio-economic conditions to support anti-trafficking work; 3) Prohibited acts are revised and

expanded with stricter regulations, including the prohibition of "agreeing to the purchase or sale of a person while still in the womb"; condoning, covering up, assisting, obstructing, interfering with, failing to handle or improperly handling acts of human trafficking; obstructing the rescue, reception, protection, verification, and support of victims and individuals in the process of being identified as victims. These additions ensure adequacy and relevance to the actual work of combating human trafficking in recent times and meet future requirements, while also aiming to prevent, intervene early, and effectively address human trafficking-related acts; 4) Revisions and additions have been made regarding the rights and obligations of victims and individuals in the process of being identified as victims; 5) The scope of protection has been expanded to include: victims, individuals in the process of being identified as victims, individuals under 18 years old accompanying them; close relatives of victims and individuals in the process of being identified as victims; individuals participating in anti-trafficking efforts or supporting victims; 6) The support regime has been expanded for victims, individuals in the process of being identified as victims, and individuals under 18 years old accompanying them, such as: medical support, interpretation, legal support, legal aid, vocational training, employment counseling, initial hardship allowance, loan support, and health insurance coverage for the first year if the victim has not yet obtained health insurance. Other contents include: adding provisions on the rescue, reception, and verification of victims abroad; revising and supplementing regulations on documents and the authority to issue certification of victim status; adding provisions on the content of state management of anti-trafficking work; and supplementing regulations on international cooperation in the prevention and combat against human trafficking.

The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), a socio-political organization representing and protecting the rights and interests of women, operates a four-tier organizational system from the central to the commune/ward/town level. Its responsibilities are clearly stipulated in both legal documents, focusing on key tasks such as: monitoring and providing social feedback; participating in the development and implementation of policies and laws through social supervision and feedback; conducting public communication, education, encouraging and mobilizing members and the public to comply with laws on domestic violence prevention and relevant legal provisions; organizing communication and skill education; and coordinating with relevant agencies, organizations, and individuals to protect and support women and children who are victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. These specific provisions have strengthened the role of the VWU and created favorable conditions for the Union to implement efforts in domestic violence and human

trafficking prevention, gender equality, thereby ensuring the legitimate rights and interests of women and children.

In practice, the PHS, operated by CWD, is a real-life model demonstrating the protection of the lawful rights of women and children in Vietnam. CWD has welcomed many international delegations, including ambassadors from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and leaders of UN agencies, to share practical operational experiences. Journalists and media frequently engage with PHS for stories of real-life cases (with strict adherence to confidentiality principles and victims' informed consent) to raise public awareness on eliminating violence against women and children. PHS is also the first social work practice model in Vietnam approaching regional and international standards.

With the goal of providing timely, emergency, and comprehensive support to women and children who are victims of gender-based violence, helping them recover physically and mentally, protecting their legal rights, and enabling safe and sustainable community reintegration, PHS offers a comprehensive, free support service package. This includes safe accommodation; medical support and primary healthcare; counseling/psychological support; legal advice and assistance; life skills and knowledge development; educational and childcare support; vocational training, employment, and livelihood counseling; and follow-up for safe, sustainable reintegration. PHS provides safe shelter for up to three months for women and children survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and six months for trafficked women returning from abroad. If reintegration conditions such as safety or livelihood are not yet assured, the stay may be extended. After leaving PHS, survivors continue to receive reintegration support for up to 24 months, including psychological and legal assistance, and linkage to local services to resolve issues related to violence, post-divorce matters, or to support sustainable reintegration. PHS services are considered comprehensive, ensuring safety, confidentiality, accessibility, and tailored intervention planning with clients based on individual needs and circumstances in both the short and long term. The PHS model operates with three main components:

- The hotline 1900969680 operates 24/7, providing telephone counseling and playing a critical role in receiving, supporting, and coordinating emergency rescues. In 2020, the 1900 96 96 80 hotline was officially listed as an essential emergency support service for women, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, helping maintain access to social assistance services for women and girls.

- Counseling room: This service offers direct and online consultations via social media platforms. Located at CWD's headquarters, it also connects with other community-based counseling services and hotlines within a referral network. Key topics include gender, gender equality, rights and protection of the legitimate interests of women and children,

family and marriage, and responses to gender-based violence. This is also the initial screening and intake point for shelter services at PHS based on specific criteria and needs.

- The three PHS shelters are located at confidential addresses in Hanoi and Can Tho to ensure the safety of victims and provide free, 24/7 support services to women and children.

100% of beneficiaries receive counseling and in-depth psychological therapy depending on individual case needs. 100% of trafficked survivors receive examination and treatment for sexually transmitted infections. 100% of victims are equipped with knowledge and skills related to rights, law, and violence response. 85% of cases have been connected to local authorities and relevant agencies for legal resolution. Over 60% of women at PHS have been supported in education, vocational training, and job placement suited to their capacity and circumstances. 95% of children are ensured their right to education during their stay. By providing services holistically and rooted in the real needs of survivors, empowering them physically, mentally, and with the necessary skills to address their challenges and build independent, sustainable lives, over 90% of those reintegrated have reported satisfaction with PHS services.

With a rights-based approach, multisectoral and interdisciplinary coordination, and adherence to fundamental principles of gender equality (*as outlined in Article 6 of the Law on Gender Equality*), PHS has implemented the State's gender equality policy by providing a comprehensive support package for women and children seeking temporary shelter, along with counseling services and resource mobilization for community-based cases. This has contributed to the protection of the legal rights and interests of women and girls, while helping to reduce prohibited behaviors as defined in the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, and the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control. Specifically:

- For individuals: PHS helps change perceptions and eliminate gendered habits, thoughts, and stereotypes regarding roles of men and women in family relationships, such as “valuing sons over daughters” or “husband is lord, wife is servant”, root causes of domestic violence and associated social problems like human trafficking. Women and girls are empowered to understand their legal rights, speak out, and gain access to education, employment, social participation, shared household responsibilities, and child care. This also helps increase men’s sense of responsibility.

- For families: PHS ensures the safety of women and children within family relationships, improves relationships among family members in both nuclear and extended families, prevents and reduces gender-based violence in families, and reduces divorce rates.

In cases where divorce does occur, PHS helps protect the legal rights and interests of women and children, who remain vulnerable groups in society.

- For society:

- + Changes the mindset and awareness of some individuals and segments of the community (neighbors, friends, colleagues, and responsible parties like police officers and Women's Union staff) where survivors live and work. This helps reduce victim-blaming, fosters support and protection for survivors, and facilitates their access to services to uphold their rights and legal interests. It also raises awareness about domestic violence and human trafficking prevention.

- + Provides evidence for the VWU to perform its roles in oversight, social criticism, and public advocacy per *Article 29 of the Law on Gender Equality; Articles 19 and 20 of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control; and Articles 53 and 54 of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control.*

In supporting victims, PHS highly values the involvement and coordination of relevant ministries, sectors, and local authorities in law enforcement and ensuring the safety of women and children survivors. A typical example of effective coordination is the case of L.H.G.L (case code 1193L)<sup>4</sup>, a 15-year-old girl who was discovered to be a victim of sexual abuse by her stepfather while temporarily residing at PHS with her mother - herself a domestic violence survivor. Case N.H.N (case code 1192N) had suffered severe abuse by her abuser, Mr. T, known for being violent and aggressive in his area. Ms. N had repeatedly been threatened with death but was unable to escape due to tight control. At PHS, during assessment and psychological evaluation of child L, in-depth therapy sessions revealed that the abuser had been sexually abusing her for the past two years - a secret she kept out of intense fear, which had led to post-traumatic stress disorder. Recognizing the severity of the case, PHS focused on stabilizing and providing psychological support for the girl to prepare her to report the perpetrator. PHS promptly coordinated with the National Children's Hospital (under the Ministry of Health) for forensic examination and evidence preservation. Local police immediately took up the case and arrested the perpetrator within 24 hours of receiving the report. During this critical time, various agencies raced against the clock to collect evidence quickly and ensure the safety of both mother and child. PHS social workers provided constant psychological support, helping the girl feel secure and enabling her to speak up during police interviews and forensic examinations. As a result, the perpetrator was duly punished for acts of domestic violence, and Ms. N successfully obtained a divorce to live a safer life. The abuser was also prosecuted for the crime of "rape of a person under 16." The swift, flexible, and interdisciplinary coordination, along with a

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<sup>4</sup> Encoded case information per PHS confidentiality regulations

professional and trauma-informed investigative process, allowed the girl to share critical information while minimizing further psychological trauma.

In recognition of these efforts and results, since 2014 the Government has annually allocated partial funding to support the operations of PHS in providing public services.

Despite the Vietnamese Government's efforts in recent years to improve legal frameworks and policies to promote gender equality and prevent domestic violence and human trafficking, many challenges remain in practice. The National Survey on Violence Against Women<sup>5</sup> revealed that 2 in 3 (62.9%) ever-married women have experienced violence at least once in their lifetime, and nearly 1 in 3 (31.6%) have experienced violence in the past 12 months, perpetrated by their husbands or intimate partners. About half of the women interviewed (49.6%) never told anyone about their experiences, and the vast majority (90.4%) did not seek help. Public awareness of gender equality and gender-based violence prevention remains uneven, both within communities and among some law enforcement officers. The enforcement of relevant laws is still ineffective and inconsistent across localities—particularly in mountainous, remote, and economically disadvantaged areas. Access to information and support services is limited in some regions, and there is a lack of qualified personnel as well as an underdeveloped social work system to effectively support activities aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting victims.

Therefore, in the coming time, the Government should consider implementing the following solutions:

- Launch a national communication campaign aimed at changing social norms rooted in gender stereotypes. Communication efforts must be tailored to target audiences, be accessible and easy to understand, and should emphasize the active engagement of men.
- Train and build the capacity of staff at all levels involved in preventing and responding to domestic violence, with a focus on skills related to identifying forms of violence - especially less visible ones such as psychological, sexual, and economic violence - and supporting victims to speak up, providing counseling, psychological support, and facilitating access to essential social support services so that victims of domestic violence and human trafficking can stabilize and recover promptly.
- Prioritize and invest resources (both human and financial) to effectively implement legal provisions and policies on domestic violence and human trafficking in high-risk areas and socioeconomically disadvantaged regions. Strengthen the delegation/contracting of public service provision to political-social and non-governmental organizations to more effectively deliver support services to gender-based violence survivors.

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<sup>5</sup> Survey of 2019

- Enhance the availability and quality of essential multi-sectoral services that are coordinated and victim-centered, dedicated to women and children experiencing violence.
- Invest in and strengthen the role of the social work workforce and social services in protecting and supporting victims, promoting gender equality, and preventing and responding to gender-based violence.