



*Garment workers during the pandemic:
The need and experience of finding
alternative livelihoods*

This research report is commissioned to provide input for the worker support platform project by CARE International in Vietnam & TUVA Communication.

TUVA Communication
9/2021

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• <i>Cover photo: Vietnamnet.</i>	

Introduction

Along with the economy ravaged by the epidemic, the life of workers in Vietnam, especially garment workers, faces great difficulties. Millions of jobs have been affected, some hundred thousand of people have lost their income and in turn, livelihoods. It is the beginning of a precarious situation with no way out.

This economic uncertainty is expected to continue, even if the epidemic is partly controlled and Vietnam enters the "new normal". Given that context, workers' demand for seasonal and alternative jobs to increase their income and improve their lives will certainly rise. Hence, CARE Vietnam is building an informational portal to support workers, first of all focusing on the need to find alternative livelihoods during and after the pandemic.

This report was made to understand the specific needs of the target group that the Worker support platform project is targeting, with the goal of accurately meeting their need to find alternative jobs, provided such job matching platform is unprecedented.

Through data analysis in worker recruitment/job search groups on Facebook and in-depth interviews, the report describes patterns in online job search behaviors of the blue-collar, with the focal point on garment workers. Due to limited data mining and small number of interviews with workers, these findings serve only as suggestions for the project team, and do not reflect general trends among garment workers.

The study was conducted by TUVA Communication, under the endorsement and supervision of CARE International in Vietnam.

September, 2021.

1. Background: Workers and COVID-19

Vietnam has approximately 3.5 million workers in the textile industry, according to estimates by the Vietnam Textile and Apparel Association in 2017.¹ They are employed in 6,000 companies of various sizes. Garment workers account for roughly 70% of this number, or 2.8 million people.

Preliminary statistics show that more than 1.3 million workers have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, as of August 2021.² Negative effects include termination, layoff, job loss, contract suspension, etc. Statistics of the Vietnam Textile and Apparel Association (VITAS) in July 2020 recorded that 80% of companies in the industry have laid off workers. The pandemic situation in the world has caused aggregate demand for the industry to decrease, and export orders to be delayed or depreciate. The trend of job cuts was predicted to accelerate in the last months of 2020.³

In May 2021, after months of keeping outbreaks in check, the fourth wave of infections began in Vietnam. For the first time, industrial zones became the epicenter of COVID-19. Production is now affected not only by the gloom economic outlook, but because infected cases were now spreading among workers, forcing factories to close.⁴ The wave of infections started with industrial zones in Bac Giang and Bac Ninh, and by June 2021 has spread to the South. Industrial parks and export processing zones (EPEs) in Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring provinces carried on under stressful conditions, since manufacture resumed just as another period of strict social distancing announced.⁵

At the time of reporting (September 2021), 19 Southern provinces still practice social distancing. In which Ho Chi Minh. City, Dong Nai and Binh Duong - three localities with the most industrial zones, are also the most affected, with a high number of infections and deaths.

Policies that prioritize maintaining production often decided on the adoption of "3 On Site" – the three being “Eat, Live, Work” at the establishment. Roughly speaking, this plan required workers to "camp" at their workplace and not coming home. After a period of implementation, this method proved challenging for both enterprises and employees.⁶ In an interview conducted by the research team with a human resources manager at a garment company in Dong Nai, he said out of more than 2,000 of their workers, only about one in ten signed up for the plan. Therefore, the company settled for shutdown and await reopening.

Policies supporting workers were set forth, but delayed in execution and eventually did not sustain. Thus far, the majority of workers in the quarantined areas have had to take two months off work. 7 out of 10 workers interviewed said that they received a support equivalent to the minimum wage in the first month of leaving, and in the second month, a notice of unpaid leave. They were altogether dependent on their union/company in finding support during the pandemic break.

¹ Vietnam Textile and Apparel Association, as cited in the report of Vietnamese Textile and Apparel Industry – Working Condition and Strategy for the Development, PGS. Nguyen Thi Lan Huong (2017).

² [Hơn 1,3 triệu công nhân bị ảnh hưởng tiêu cực bởi dịch Covid-19 - Nhip sống kinh tế Việt Nam & Thế giới \(vneconomy.vn\)](http://vneconomy.vn)

³ [Falling textile-garment exports in Vietnam threaten jobs - RMG Bangladesh \(rmgbd.net\)](http://rmgbd.net)

⁴ [Công nhân phải ngừng việc do COVID-19 cần được hỗ trợ kịp thời - Báo Công an Nhân dân điện tử \(cand.com.vn\)](http://cand.com.vn)

⁵ [TPHCM: 7 khu công nghiệp, chế xuất đang chịu ảnh hưởng của dịch Covid-19 | Báo Dân trí \(dantri.com.vn\)](http://dantri.com.vn)

⁶ [Một cung đường, hai địa điểm, ba tại chỗ và... khổ đủ đường - Tạp chí Kinh tế Sài Gòn \(thesaigontimes.vn\)](http://thesaigontimes.vn)

It worth mentioning that the salary of garment workers in Vietnam in normal conditions was already considered 'starvation wages.'⁷ In a study conducted in 2019, Oxfam showed that the average minimum wage of garment workers in Vietnam is 3.34 million VND, only about 37% of the salary of the Asian Wage Floor and 64% of the amount proposed by the Global Living Wage Alliance for Vietnam.

2. Workers seek seasonal jobs online

Analysis results are based on observations on 10 recruitment groups in 4 provinces. These groups are divided into two categories, (1) mass recruitment for multi-industry and (2) specialized recruitment groups for jobs in industrial zones. For details of the groups, please see Appendix 1.

Observations from groups dedicated to industrial worker recruitment on Facebook in the first eight months of 2021 show that the number of seasonal job searches appears high. The exchange was mutual: (1) employees post job search on their own and (2) job postings from employers and recruitment collaborators.

2.1. Job-seeker

In mass recruitment groups, the majority of job seekers are between the ages of 18 and 22 and aim to find seasonal opportunities. Common criteria are part-time, shift work, hourly/daily/weekly wage, immediate income, simple procedures, basic skill requirements, and low level of expertise.

The content of these posts is usually very short, many are under 10 words. Posts like "I'm looking for a job urgently" or "Need a job urgently" appeared popular. The comment section of such posts are job offering information from many people, with the format "If you are interested, please inbox".

Posts that are more detailed and attach photos get more comments. There are posts that attract up to 200 different comments.



Photo 1: A job posting and comments section, where recruiters post job search information. Photo taken from the group "Job search in Bien Hoa - Dong Nai".

⁷ Oxfam (2019). Tiền lương không đủ sống và hệ lụy: Nghiên cứu một số doanh nghiệp may xuất khẩu tại Việt Nam. [https://cng-cdn.oxfam.org/vietnam.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Tien%20luong%20khong%20du%20song%20va%20he%20luy%20-%20Nghien%20cuu%20mot%20so%20doanh%20nghiep%20may%20xuat%20khau%20o%20Viet%20Nam%20\(sreen\)_0.pdf](https://cng-cdn.oxfam.org/vietnam.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Tien%20luong%20khong%20du%20song%20va%20he%20luy%20-%20Nghien%20cuu%20mot%20so%20doanh%20nghiep%20may%20xuat%20khau%20o%20Viet%20Nam%20(sreen)_0.pdf)

Table 1: Statistics of job postings in 2021 in two mass groups

Group	Key words	Number of posts	Typical format
Job search in Bien Hoa and Dong Nai	Part time, daily salary, is anyone hiring, need a job	60	I am xx years old looking for part time job, daily or weekly salary, anyone hiring?
My Phuoc Industrial Park Worker Community (Binh Duong)	Seasonal job, is anyone hiring?	34	Anyone knows a place that are looking for seasonal workers? Only ID required to start working type of job. Please refer me. Hey everyone, is there any work to do this Tet holiday, looking to join... 🥰🥰 Or if you know any company that needs an extra hand for Tet, direct me. Thank you very much.

2.2. Job recruitment

Job postings on groups are usually made by recruitment collaborators. Content is copied and re-posted from time to time in not one, but many different groups

Table 2: The most advertised jobs in two mass Facebook groups

Group survey: Job search in Bien Hoa and Dong Nai province (114,900) - Group 1 and My Phuoc Industrial Park Workers Community (363,000) - Group 2

Period: January - August 2021

Types of job	Key words	Appearances (Group 1)	Appearances (Group 2)
Recruitment of seasonal jobs in industrial parks and factories	Seasonal	67	77
Official staff recruitment	Official, industrial park	15	53
Credit consultant, banking, finance, real estate, telesales	Consultant/ Sale	30	37
Sales staff, security guards, part-time service staff		25	32
Garment worker	Garment worker	62	42

Table 3: Job postings and some notable formats

Criteria	Description	Note
Format	Posts, caption with photos, comments posted under job-seeker posts	
Contact	Add contact via Zalo, DMs for more information, invitation to closed Zalo group	
Key words	Urgent hire, urgent recruit, no skill required, just need ID card to start working, daily salary, weekly salary, seasonal, start tomorrow.	Fraud risks. Scam accusations are posted on these same groups.

Table 4: Some samples of job postings:

<p>Online job work from home</p>	<p>Shinhan Finance</p> <p>[RECRUITMENT] Shinhan Finance Vietnam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Position : Staff  Quantity: 15  Office: 14th floor, Pegasus building, Quyet Thang ward, Bien Hoa, Dong Nai  JD: Finding, supporting and taking care of customers who need credit loans nationwide (via online application, no need to meet customers in person).  RIGHTS:  Income: 6-20 million VND  Signed official contract after 3 months if meeting sales KPI  Receive trainings on financial knowledge, skills, and experience  Comfortable and dynamic working environment  A clear promotion path, development orientation  Flexible working hours, can continue study while working...  REQUIREMENTS:  Men and women over 18 years old  Minimum: High school graduate  Preference: Sales with experience in the financial industry, students of banking and finance  Diligent, hardworking, eager to learn <p> CONTACT: 0917.16.36.16 Ms. Hoa</p> <p>P/s: Please read the information carefully </p>
<p>Jobs at industrial zones</p>	<p>TRIỆU AN PHÁT COMPANY</p> <p><i>URGENT HIRE 10 female workers at Amata industrial park. Start working immediately on September 3rd. Practice “3 On Site”, require original and copy of</i></p>

	<i>ID, COVID-19 test result. Contact now to schedule interview. 0977160606 Ms. Vuong</i>
Urgent hire, daily wage	<p>START IMMEDIATELY, DAILY WAGE</p> <p>URGENT URGENT URGENT HIRE</p> <p>10 Karaoke and 10 KTV Massage staff, from 17-30 years old (no regional discrimination), working in Saigon or Binh Duong branches, monthly income 30-70 million depending on competency, 4-5 days leave per month, fully furnished accommodation available.</p> <p>GUARANTEE NO_Heroin NO_Prostitute. Contact manager: Ms. Trang 0364924297 (Only reply via Zalo: 0364924297).</p> <p>THANK YOU!</p>

Photos 1, 2: Some notable recruitment pieces. Photo taken from the group looking for a job in Bien Hoa and Dong Nai province



Photo 1: Two identical job postings posted in 2 months by two different accounts



Photo 2: Two job postings are posted in the comments of other posts.

3. Close-up description of garment workers: In-depth interview results

The research team conversed with 10 people from different garment companies in 4 provinces: Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Tien Giang, and Thanh Hoa with the objective of pinpointing the needs of garment workers in finding alternative jobs.

10 out of 10 interviewees are female, working at garment companies, having participated in previous projects of CARE. 8/10 is experiencing a layoff following the company's shutdown due to COVID-19. One currently works three jobs at a factory, another is working half a day. For a more detailed description of the group interviewed, please see Appendix 2.

The content below is compiled from their responses.

3.1. Desired jobs

- **Craft works that resemble sewing skills.** 100% of respondents said they want to sustain their work at the garment company. If forced to find another job, they prefer manual work that matches their existing skills, such as taking home raw materials to do homemade tailoring, beading, knitting, making false eyelashes, etc.

“Doing manual jobs fits my available skills, and does not require much interaction. As of right now, I want to make wigs and false eyelashes with the ladies in my neighborhood, but I don't know if I can. Making rhinestone or embroidery paintings is also an option.”

(Ms. N., Thanh Hóa)

“Working at a sewing company means a lot of different machines are available. Us workers live in motel, impossible to set up tools. Some people only know how to run a specific machine but clueless about another, so if you work at home, you need neat, profitable and easy-to-do jobs. [...] An ideal work-from-home job with extra income that everyone can do is manual work, like beading, threading.”

(Ms. C., TP. HCM)

- **Online sale:** This job was mentioned by 5/10 interviewees as an option to earn extra income once social distancing measures lifted. Two of them have had experiences selling online before, but having to put on haul given limited transportation during the strict, nationwide blockade. A person in Dong Nai, an area that still allows shippers to operate, is keeping with her business. She said, thanks to online sales, she can overcome the epidemic strains.

“Garment workers hold an advantage when selling online. Firstly, they understand what peer workers need. Secondly, I also use Facebook regularly, knowing all the active groups for workers, so that is another advantage. It just takes learning a few more skills.

Right now, we are selling essential goods and necessities. Once the pandemic is over, I will switch to cosmetics, clothes, hair bands, masks, etc. You can also sell food. Asides from online sales, I also make offers to colleagues. If our company hinder bringing in packages, we can always deliver at the garage. [...]”

(Mrs. L., Dong Nai)

“Before, I used to sell online. Cosmetics, food, dry fish, etc. on weekends for extra money. Work is consuming so I only have weekends dedicated to this side-hustle. If I lose my job and it's easier to deliver in the future, I might be able to sell online again.”

(Ms. M., Tien Giang)

- While online recruitment for salespersons, real estate consultants make up the majority of observations on job search groups, the majority of workers **do not see these as top preferences**. Such tasks do not appear to match the available skills of garment workers, they are not confident to give it a try, and do not count on the prospect of sustainable income from these recruitment. Sales KPI is also a pressure to interviewed workers. There were three people answered that if they were trained, they could do it too.

"I did want to try out from time to time but my husband said it doesn't work, it's very petty money, not worth it. I also have a friend who worked as a real estate consultant, but I hear nothing [from her] after a while.

[...] Doing the manual work by myself, hand-delivered is still the best."

(Ms. N., HCMC)

"Not interested in such consulting work, because it's just the same as recommending to others a product that I'm not even sure is good. My customers are all my friends, because no one picks up call from strangers now. I'd rather sell, say, an egg that I know is of good quality, and then I'll tell everyone to buy."

(Mrs. L., Dong Nai)

List 1: Desired jobs

- Handicraft work from home: sewing, beading, gluing eyelashes, confetti, rhinestone paintings, embroidery pictures, etc.
- Online selling
- Telephone sales consultant
- Post promotion content to assist sale (no sales KPI pressure)
- Part-time jobs: clerk at supermarkets, convenience stores, serving dishes at restaurants, etc.
- Manicure, hairdo

List 2: Criterias of desirable jobs:

- Bring in regular income
- Craft work matched with existing skills
- Work close to home to help with transportation
- Can work from home for flexibility after official working hours
- Part-time job to work extra hours in the evening

3.2. Job search experience

- **Garment workers often look for jobs directly.** Under normal circumstances, garment companies often organized recruitment via direct channels. Namely, companies often post job notices in front of factories, on owned website, or rely on word of mouth.
- **Most of the respondents have seen online job advertisements but did not trust them.** 5/10 people answered since they do not find the ads trustworthy, they do not participate in job search on Facebook groups. One respondent said that her comments on job postings went unanswered, resulting in a loss of faith in their legitimacy. "It seems that people just post to get likes, but do not really operate," commented one respondent.

"I really want to work, but there are so many scams nowadays that I can't confide in online job searches."

Ms. C., Đồng Nai

- **Online job search makes workers subordinate to employers' demand.** 3/10 respondents have reached out to online recruiters and received a request that they have to pay in advance for materials, do a demo, then send it back for quality check. If passed, only then would they start officially. One interviewee complied, only to have her finished products disqualified by suppliers, making it a waste of investment.

"I used to make artificial flowers, they [suppliers] gave some guidance, and I spent evenings doing it. Finished a few hundred items and sent them away for quality check, but they only saw through a few. I wasn't there to intervene, so the whole batch went wasted [...] later I got demotivated and no longer sign up for such jobs."

(Ms. N., Thanh Hoa)

"I once asked to do home-made eyelash extensions, they told me I to pay upfront 500-600,000 VND for a trial [to be qualified], but I was not sure. Another thing is drug advertisement, the company told me to buy, try [the drugs], and then promote but that sounded sketchy too. Felt insecure, so I didn't do it."

List 3: Criteria that help with trust enhancement in a job posting:

- Have a trusted third party's warrant. Two respondents emphasized the role of CARE and supporting organizations in verifying employer information.
- Know an acquaintance who used to do this job and make referral
- Real accounts from someone who have experienced the job
- Employers based in the area, can meet onsite to discuss further

3.3. List of skill trainings in demand:

Skills training is not an outstanding need of the workers interviewed. This might be explained under the context of the interviews – the raging pandemic bringing work to a halt (8 out of 10 respondents are laid off) and living off meager benefits. The general mentality of the group is focused on regaining a stable job. Below is a summary of some of the answers when asked about the skills they want to hone:

- Communication skills to become more confident
- Digital literacy: using smartphones and social networks. E.g: Creating a slogan online
- Online sales skills
- Acquire skills for side jobs such as manicure, hairdressing, massage

3.4. Some other notes on the life and mentality of garment workers

- Most of the interviewees are still mentally dependent on their company. They try to hold out, hoping that factories will soon operate again. The majority of respondents said they had no other plans.
- Workers need stability and organizational security. A manager at a garment company shared that most workers, if they want to earn extra income, will choose to work overtime at their own company rather than looking for an outside job.
- Garment workers are not confident about jobs outside the industry or ones require soft skills (such as communication, persuasion). They like manual tasks using their hands, which makes them feel secured.
- The work of garment workers in large factories utilizes machinery and is divided by functions. This specialization can lead to narrowly focused, inadequate skill set, in

particular, people who know how to use one type of machine will not know how to use another. This can affect their mentality and lead to choices of very basic, low-skill jobs.

3. Some firsthand recommendations for the workers' alternative job search platform:

- Increase trust, reduce noises
- Since most workers fear being scammed when looking for work online, verification by reputable organizations like CARE makes a big difference.
- Be present on the platforms that workers are active. Considering an official Zalo account, or a trusted virtual consultant.
- It is advisable to invest in search optimization on Google, because Google search results return a lot of noises. One interviewer also confirmed that they searched jobs on Google but did not find information worth referencing.
- Focus on finding/instructing jobs that match the skills/forte of garment workers. The three big priorities are (1) work-from-home manual jobs (2) online sales (3) part-time jobs.
- Training in skills and knowledge for online sales can be a fundamental section of the website.

"We yearn for online jobs to bring in extra income - since now everyone has a smartphone, or an outsourced manual job that we are not afraid of being scammed. I cannot tell frauds on the internet.

Now, working with CARE, I really trust you to help workers, if CARE verify it, we can have faith. CARE can give a warrant and share publicly if it's legitimate hiring, then everyone will feel secured."

(Ms. C., is working three jobs at a factory in Hoc Mon, HCMC.)

4. Appendix

Appendix 1: List of surveyed Facebook groups

1	Thái Nguyên	Tuyển Dụng Khu Công Nghiệp - Điềm Thụy - Yên Bình - Thái Nguyên (Industrial Park Hiring at Điềm Thụy – Yên Bình – Thái Nguyên)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/2088180561304492/	28,000.00
2	Hải Phòng	Bạn bè Regina Hải Phòng (Friends of Regina in Hải Phòng)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/334942723692861	15,200.00
3	Đồng Nai	Việc làm Đồng Nai (Jobs in Đồng Nai)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/vieclamhanhbienhoa/	260,000.00
4	TP HCM	Hội Tuyển Dụng Thợ May, Xưởng May Gia Công, Nhân Hàng Về May TPHCM (Tailor Recruitment Association, Outsourcing Garment Workshop, Home Tailoring Ho Chi Minh City)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/126013164738929	34,000.00
5	Đồng Nai	TÌM KIẾM VIỆC LÀM TẠI BIÊN HOÀ & TỈNH ĐỒNG NAI (Job Search in Biên Hòa and Đồng Nai)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/jobvieclambienhoa/	114,900.00
6	Toàn quốc	HỘI TÌM THỢ MAY VÀ XƯỞNG MAY KHU VỰC PHÍA BẮC (Group for tailor recruitment and garment factories Northern areas)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/162885474259929	120,600.00
7	Bình Dương	Cộng Đồng Công Nhân KCN Mỹ Phước (Community of Workers of My Phuoc Industrial Park)	https://www.facebook.com/groups/congdongcongnhankcnmyphuoc	367200

Appendix 2: List of workers participating in the interview

No.	Name	Date of interview	Region	Occupation	Status
1	T	8/8/2021	TPHCM	Garment workers	Temporary layoff
2	N	9/8/2021	Thanh Hoá	Garment workers	Working hour cutback
3	Ng.	26/8/2021	TPHCM	Garment workers	Temporary layoff
4	C.	29/8/2021	TPHCM	Garment workers	Practice “3 On-site”
5	T.	29/8/2021	Đồng Nai	Manager	Temporary layoff

6	M.	29/8/2021	Tiền Giang	Officer	Temporary layoff
7	N. L	29/8/2021	Đồng Nai	Garment workers	Temporary layoff
8	L	7/9/2021	Đồng Nai	Garment workers	Temporary layoff
9	H.	7/9/2021	Đồng Nai	Garment workers	Temporary layoff
10	H. L.	7/9/2021	Đồng Nai	Garment workers	Temporary layoff