



## Gender and Labour in the Global South

### Audio Transcript

#### How COVID-19 impacted my life

NARRATOR: In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the garment industry is the leading manufacturing sector, employing around 28'000 workers and contributing to a third of Lao's Gross Domestic Product. The main body of the workforce are young, low-skilled women from rural areas. In recent years, the share of women working in the garment industry has increased. HiTEC Garment Company is a company in Vientiane, the capital of Lao. This firm employs 600 workers. Henly Sonmany, one of the workers, talks about her employment at the headquarters of the company.

HENLY SONMANY: My name is Henly Sonmany, I am 25 years old and I come from the Salavan province. I graduated from lower secondary school. I am married. I work as an Assistant to the Head of Unit. The company employs about 600 people. Each year, the company employs about 180 people because of the constant influx of workers. I work from 8 am to 5 pm. My monthly income is 1'300'000 Lao Kip. The form of monthly payment is paid twice a month. According to the garment company, men work harder than women, using lifting trucks, transporting textiles, lifting machinery, and so on, while women work lightly.

NARRATOR: The global garment and textile industry is an important component of world trade flows, especially for some countries in Asia, such as Lao, where clothing accounts for a large percentage of total exports. Asia accounts for approximately 60 percent of global garment exports. The garment sector employs around 40 million workers. Women make up more than half the garment sector workforce in Asia. They are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs in the lower tiers of global garment supply chains. Working conditions in the garment sector in Asia are generally characterised by long working hours and low wages, among other work deficits. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the garment industry hard by disrupting global supply chains, with lockdowns in some countries, partial factory shutdowns and raw material supply shortages. Billions of dollars' worth of orders were cancelled. As a result, millions of workers in producing countries have been laid off, often without being paid the wages they already earned. Henly talks about how she is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

HENLY SONMANY: The COVID-19 pandemic has had many effects, such as irregular income. It is difficult to go anywhere; I can't visit my hometown. In the past, the income was high enough to eat each month, but now it is not enough. Since the lockdown, COVID-19 has not allowed for overtime. In general, I



have to work 10 hours a day, including overtime. But during the COVID-19 lockdown, I worked only eight hours, so there was not enough for each month. I'm not satisfied with my salary because there is a lot of work and we have to follow the boss.

NARRATOR: Henley's statements show that the COVID-19 pandemic affected workers in the Lao garment industry – not only sewers, but also workers in administration. Looking ahead, it is important to recognise that labour market policies have different implications for women and men. To address women's and men's realities, gender-responsive policies are needed. Legal and social protection should be available for all workers and policies should guarantee working women and men a basic income and living wage.