

Vietnam

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2023



I. Country Context

Vietnam has experienced an impressive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate peaked at 8.02% in 2022, the highest in the period of 2011-2022 (General Statistics Office, 2022). The significant GDP growth from 2.56% in 2021 and 8.02% in 2022 has made Vietnam a spotlight in the grey picture of the global economy post-COVID-19. Vietnam's unemployment rate also fell from 3.22% in 2021 to 2.32% in 2022 (General Statistics Office, 2022). The estimated percentage of the population living under the poverty threshold of US\$1.90 a day stood at 0.77%, which is the lowest in the last twelve years (SDR, 2022). However, the top export industries of Vietnam may face challenges starting in 2023 because regional and international markets have not fully recovered from the COVID-19 impacts. As a consequence, the picture of the labour market will not be always bright in the coming years.¹ Despite a challenging context, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,

1 (<https://vneconomy.vn/nua-cuoi-nam-2023-thi-truong-lao-dong-van-chua-het-kho-khan.htm>)

climate change, economic fluctuations at regional and global levels, and so on, the Vietnam government seems to remain strong in its commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

II. Progress towards the SDGs and SDG 4

The Government of Vietnam has devoted efforts to improving the implementation of SDGs and SDG 4. In 2019, the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam issued a circular on the Sustainable Development Statistical Indicators of Vietnam. The set of indicators includes 158 statistical indicators tracking, monitoring, and measuring the progress of the implementation of SDGs, but 30 of these indicators have no information or statistics. All the SDGs targets have also been mainstreamed into Vietnam's socio-economic development strategies and plans, but there has been no clear assignment for local authorities in SDG implementation.

The Sustainable Development Report 2022 showed that Vietnam was on

track to achieving almost all indicators in SDG 4, including the targets on literacy, net primary enrolment, lower secondary completion and so on. The country, however, has faced challenges in quality education, inclusion and equity. In the Education Management Information System (EMIS), some data, for example, on the access of learners with disabilities in education, have been collected but have not been analysed for use. Some data have also been missing, including data on non-formal education, out-of-school children and marginalised groups incorporated with SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities. Much of the missing information, especially qualitative can be found from the data of CSOs. This source, however, has not been fully acknowledged and used. A mechanism should be developed to take full advantage of this source.

Inclusive education for learners with disability and ethnic minority learners

Political efforts have been made by the government of Vietnam to make its educational system inclusive and equitable. However, challenges still remain in providing quality education

to disadvantaged groups of learners. Learners with disabilities and ethnic minority learners are among the groups of learners that have been “left behind” in education (Vietnam National Institute of Educational Science - VNIES, 2021).

Learners with Disabilities. Vietnam’s National Survey on People with Disabilities in 2016 revealed that 2.79% of learners have disabilities. However, the facilities and human resources in schools are not suitable for them, with 90% of primary and lower secondary schools not being accessible to learners with disabilities (Vietnam General Statistics Office, 2019). Only 1 out of 6 primary and 1 out of 10 secondary teachers are trained to teach those with disabilities (VNIES, 2021).

The Ministry of Education and Training’s (MoET) Statistical Yearbook on Education and Training shows a lower ratio of learners with disabilities at different levels of education- from daycare and kindergarten level to primary level and beyond, with no available statistics on higher education participation. This shows that although Vietnam has reached universal 5-year-old preschool education and primary education, many learners with disabilities are not attending daycare and kindergarten and many have not been facilitated properly for the higher level of education.

There are more out-of-school children with disabilities than children without disabilities. Upper secondary education recorded the highest peak when nearly half of the total learners with disabilities did not attend any high school. Data is also a concern, and it is crucial that data collection systems be improved to ensure that disaggregated and timely data are readily available.

Deaf learners: Having a network of membership that includes schools, educational centres, associations and clubs of the deaf, the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA) has been kept up to date on the challenges and barriers faced by deaf learners in attaining education, such as the lack of teachers trained in sign language, lack of investment in appropriate teaching methodologies to facilitate learning of the deaf, and lack of sign language interpreters are among the many challenges. There are very few schools where deaf people can study. Higher education for deaf people is currently provided by only two institutions in Vietnam: The

The Centre for Studying and Promoting Deaf Culture under Dong Nai University is an educational institution for deaf people and is one of the only two institutions providing both basic and higher education for deaf learners using bilingual education based on sign languages in Vietnam. The Centre is where Vietnamese deaf students could study beyond primary education for the first time in 2000 and where the first batch of deaf teachers were trained.

It has had 11 deaf learners finishing intermediate degrees in education and 37 deaf learners receiving bachelor’s degrees in primary education so far. Three deaf students graduating from the Centre are pursuing or have completed their Master’s degree at Gallaudet University and RIT University (NTID) in the United States (Report on education and training activity in sign language by the Centre). The Centre, however, is now struggling to maintain this model due to legal, financial, and human resources problems. If the problems cannot be addressed, the Centre must be closed. This would mean a cease of quality learning opportunities for deaf learners who are studying there and reveals the alarming scarcity of opportunities in Vietnam for the deaf to pursue education beyond primary level up to tertiary education.

Support Centre for Inclusive Education Development (SCIED) under the National College of Education in Hanoi and the Deaf Culture Research Centre under Dong Nai University in Dong Nai Province. It is very challenging for these two institutions to maintain their deaf education model due to the lack of support, as well as financial resources.

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) promulgated Circular 20/2022/TT-BGDĐT on the establishment and operation of Inclusive Education Resource Centres, which is among the efforts of the government to improve access and strengthen the quality of education for people with disabilities in Vietnam. The government is also finalising a master plan for a national system of educational institutions for learners with disability.

Ethnic minority learners. Learners from ethnic minority backgrounds face barriers to education in Vietnam despite a great number of supporting policies to encourage them to participate in the national education system, such as tuition exemption, language support at the beginning of primary schools, the development of semi-boarding and boarding schools and so on. Some of the barriers include the long distance of their homes to the school, the need to participate in economic activities, early marriage and pregnancy, and the admission records.

The number of learners aged 7 to 14 who do not have reading and numeracy

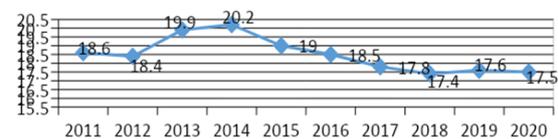
skills was higher than that of Kinh and Hoa (the dominant ethnicities in Vietnam) learners. This number was remarkably high in the Mong ethnic community. Out-of-school rates present a similar situation when ethnic minority learners not engaging in education outnumbered Kinh and Hoa learners.

Education financing

As stated by the Vietnam Ministry of Finance, education and training are given the top priority in the overall investment of state financial resources.² The National Assembly promulgated the Law on Public Investment 39/2019/QH14 which also regulates public investment in education and training. With the anticipated decrease in the absolute value of the State budget on account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the financing for education is inadequate, especially if analysed with an equity, gender, and inclusion lens.

The report on educational activities and the government’s implementation of the education budget in 2022

Percentage of State Budget for Education 2011-2020



Source: Education Sector Analysis Report, Vietnam National Institute of Educational Science (2021)

shows that the estimated recurrent expenditures in the educational sector this year were VND 275,709 billion out of VND 1,784,600 billion worth of total state expenditures. This accounted for 15.45%, far below the target of 20% of the total budget expenditures. In 2021, the total regular spending of the whole country decreased by 1.9% and the educational sector decreased by 3.4%.³ Moreover, there is a lack of budget lines for education for LWD as well as adult education, resulting in blank data on public financing invested in these two segments of education. There has been a need to strengthen public education to ensure access to inclusive and equitable quality education, especially for marginalised groups of learners.

² (https://mof.gov.vn/webcenter/portal/ttptc/pages_r/chi-tiet-tin-ttptc?dDocName=MOFUCM227073)

³ (<https://vietnamnet.vn/en/state-spending-on-education-far-below-target-2092342.html>)

Adult Education

Vietnam's concept of adult education is "continuing education" rather than "adult education." Continuing education (CE) offers equivalent programmes to formal education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Khuu, 2020). Data on continuing education/non-formal education are lacking and additional information and data on vocational education and training from the Ministry of Labour- Invalids and Social Affairs is needed. According to a VAEFA study in 2020, there is an overlap in the management of the district-level vocational and continuing education centres, which has been very challenging for the effective operation and development of the centres, while it also negatively impacts local adult education programmes, such as literacy classes (VAEFA, 2020). In addition to these district-level centres, a system of community learning centres (CLCs) in Vietnam has been well developed for a long time but has not been effectively mobilised and used.

Gender-responsive adult education among disadvantaged groups including ethnic minority women is also an issue to be improved in Vietnam. The lowest literacy rate in Vietnam (83.2%) is recorded in the group of ethnic minority women (UN Women, International Labour Organisation, Asian Development Bank and Australian Aid, 2021). The results of a survey by VAEFA in 2023 also illustrate this fact. The lack of time to practice literacy skills, and the lack of available literacy courses that suit their daily schedules and reality, have made these ethnic minority women suffer from the double burden of gender and ethnicity-related constraints.

Education-related issues of youth

The young people in Vietnam account for 22.5% of the population and 36% of the labour force (National Committee on Youth of Vietnam) and they are the drivers of the country's development. However, they face numerous challenges, including school violence, discrimination, and limited opportunities to voice their opinions.

Young people in the community feel that their opinions are not fully appreciated, with 55% of young participants in the Research on the Youth of Vietnam saying that they did not have many opportunities to raise their voices (British Council, 2020). They often use social networks as an alternative



■ Literacy class of Thai ethnic women in Dien Bien province (May 2023)

communication channel to avoid judgement. Unfortunately, there is a low engagement of young people in national emerging issues, especially political ones.

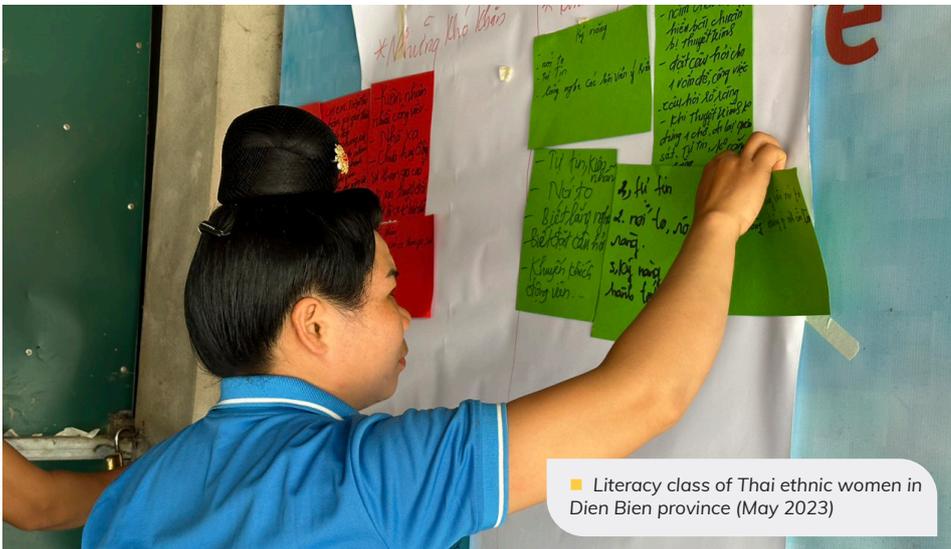
In 2020, 27% of Vietnamese students reported being exposed to school violence, including physical, mental, and emotional forms of violence more than once a month (British Council, 2020). LGBTQI+ youth are particularly vulnerable, with 71% experiencing physical, 72.2% verbal, and 65.2% mental violence (UNESCO, 2017). VAEFA's 2018 study highlights the negative consequences of discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ students, such as the impacts on their mental health, learning performance, school attendance, and personal life (VAEFA, 2018).

Youth's mental health is also a cause for concern. According to UNICEF Vietnam, 15% - 30% of Vietnam's adolescents suffer from problems in their mental health (UNICEF Vietnam, 2022). VAEFA shared similar results in its qualitative research on the mental health of deaf youth amidst COVID-19 in 2021. The research revealed a series of mental problems faced by Vietnamese young deaf people due to various reasons, including limited access to information about COVID-19, poor communication in their families, and challenging online learning for the deaf. Over twenty per cent (23%) of research participants reflected that they often felt worried, stressed, and scared, while 25% of married respondents complained about too much housework and childcare, which led to increasing family conflicts

and physical and mental domestic violence. In addition, 6.9% of the research participants admitted that they had thought of committing suicide (VAEFA, 2021).

III. Civil Society Engagement in the SDG 4 Implementation, Follow-up, and Monitoring

The Government of Vietnam has been more open to CSO engagement from the early stage of the drafting process and the consultation for the VNR. The first draft of the VNR report recognised the role of NGOs and CSOs in contributing to the implementation of SDGs. However, there is a lack of full openness for CSO participation in the planning and monitoring of SDGs in the way that CSO data and research have usually been underestimated by the government because it is deemed small-scale. Quantitative data is usually more appreciated by the Government, although this kind of data, in many cases, excludes marginalised groups in society and thus cannot ensure inclusion in the research. In SDG 17, there has been no discussion of the role and contribution of CSOs and the partnership between the government, CSOs, and businesses. This will limit the full recognition of the role and contribution of CSOs as important partners for the successful implementation of the SDGs, which will serve as a challenge for CSOs to play their crucial part in the SDG implementation, monitoring, and



■ Literacy class of Thai ethnic women in Dien Bien province (May 2023)

evaluation.

In Vietnam, VAEFA has been actively advocating for inclusive, equity and quality education and currently is engaging in SDG implementation and monitoring. A recent example in 2022, VAEFA has strongly engaged in the development of Circular 20/2022/TT-BGDĐT, which aims to pave the way for the establishment as well as help strengthen Inclusive Education Support Centres in Vietnam. VAEFA has worked closely with the Steering Committee for Education of Children with Disabilities and Children in Difficult Circumstances-MoET to ensure a wide-open consultation and the participation of CSOs in the development of the policy. VAEFA has also participated in regional and global events and forums to advocate for SDGs and SDG 4.

IV. Recommendations

1. Policy focuses and frameworks

- The National Action Plan on SDGs should include more specific tasks at provincial, district, and communal levels, including prioritising resources for the implementation of the plan at the local level to ensure actual investments and interventions.
- The National Action Plan on SDGs should ensure the rights to inclusive and quality basic education for marginalised learners from ethnic

minorities, poor areas, and those with disabilities. It should also ensure equal access to vocational education for disadvantaged groups.

- Maximise the role of adult non-formal education in the implementation of the SDG 4 Plan of Action. Improve the effectiveness of continuing education and community learning centres to reach out to disadvantaged groups who are hardly reached by the formal education system.
 - A national system dedicated to ALE management and monitoring of ALE implementation governed by a designated government body and involving different stakeholders and key actors should be in place to improve ALE and lifelong learning.
- ### 2. Budget mobilisation and allocation
- Promote proper budget allocation to SDGs implementation at different levels.
 - Develop financial mobilisation mechanisms to achieve the SDGs and estimate the finance gaps to achieve the targets in the medium term and by 2030.
 - Strengthen the central role of public education that will protect and sustain the system through any challenging circumstances.

Ensure the allocation of at least 20% of the State budget (or 6% of GDP) for education. All the provinces must meet their share of at least 20% of their local budgets for education.

- The allocation of budget to improve education for the groups that are identified as “left behind” including learners with disabilities, ethnic minority learners, and migrant learners should be ensured and prioritised. Good models of effective and quality education for learners with disability in general, deaf learners, blind learners, and deaf-blind learners should be invested in and/or replicated to ensure the right to education of these most marginalised groups.

3. Data

- Recognise and include the data of CSOs in the evaluation of SDGs implementation and develop a mechanism to include CSO data in the long term.
- Integrate the data on SDG 4 into the current national data system in order to collect formal data from the community.
- Improve the data collection system to capture the situation of disadvantaged learners and out-of-school learners to improve the effectiveness of policy making and planning.
- Include data on continuing/adult non-formal education in the SDG 4 picture. Information and data on vocational training and education from the Ministry of Labour- Invalids and Social Affairs and related ministries should also be included and shared among the ministries for collaborative actions.

4. Participation of civil society

- Partnership and collaboration with CSOs should be enhanced at all levels of education, including education sector planning, policy development, and implementation and monitoring.
- Recognise CSOs as formal development partners and give preferential treatments to encourage their participation (in the establishment, operation, sponsorship approval, funding, taxes, among others). •