

Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2022



■ Teaching deaf learners through the Vietnamese sign language in C5 Learning Centre in Vietnam.

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on the socio-economic development of Vietnam. In the pre-pandemic context, Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth reached a peak of 7.08% and 7.02% respectively in 2018 and 2019. Amidst the pandemic in 2021, it went down to 2.58% (General Statistic Office - Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2021). By July 2021, 88% of households have had their jobs affected and 63.5% of households with their income reduced by 30% or more compared to the pre-pandemic period in December 2019. Households working in fields of tourism, food and beverage, and passenger transport were severely affected. Cutdowns in food costs, as well as food shortages, were reported among vulnerable households who lost their jobs for months, especially the migrants.

The pandemic situation also had adverse impacts on mental health, which is an emerging issue due to widespread and prolonged lockdowns. Two-thirds (66.4%) of households were worried about the impact of COVID-19. Notably, female-headed households had higher rates of mental health problems (81.6%) than male-headed ones (62.8%) (UNDP,

2021).¹ Out of the total of more than 16.9 million people, there were 0.9 million people who lost their jobs, accounting for 1.2%, 5.1 million people were suspended from business (equivalent to 6.7%), and 13.7 million (18.3%) workers had their income reduced (General Statistic Office, 2022).²

Education has been suffering from the impacts of the pandemic. According to the Vietnam Assembly, nearly 20 million children, pupils, and learners had to temporarily stop going to school and switch to online teaching. More than one million teachers had to teach via television for many consecutive months. More than 70,000 students could not graduate on time (National Assembly, 2022).³

1 UNDP. (2021). Rapid Assessment of the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact on Vulnerable Households in Viet Nam. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/publications/rapid-assessment-covid-19-socio-economic-impact-vulnerable-households-viet-nam>

2 General Statistic Office. (2022). Report on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Labour and Employment in the First Quarter of 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.gso.gov.vn/du-lieu-va-so-lieu-thong-ke/2022/04/bao-cao-tac-dong-cua-dich-covid-19-den-tinh-hinh-lao-dong-viec-lam-quy-nam-2022/>

3 National Assembly. (2022). A Comprehensive Assessment of the Impact of the COVID-19 on Educational Activities at All Levels is Needed. Retrieved from <https://quochi.vn/uybanvanhoagiaoducthanhnientheunienvanhidong/giamsat/Pages/giam-sat.aspx?ItemID=573>
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Learners, teachers, and parents faced many difficulties both in life and in learning activities. Learners lost a healthy environment to develop their knowledge and physical and mental health. The pandemic has shown the urgency to transform the education system into one that is gender-responsive, equitable, and resilient, with sufficient financing to implement the SDG 4 agenda.

II. EQUITY AND FINANCING EDUCATION AMIDST COVID-19

Since the beginning of 2020, the Government of Vietnam had quickly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and deployed strong measures to contain the virus and minimise the negative impacts of the pandemic on different sectors of the society.

In the education sector, immediate instructions issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to “continue learning despite school closure” had been disseminated widely to all the provinces in February 2020 when schools could not be opened after Tet or the Vietnamese lunar New Year. Early March 2020, in most provinces and schools, training for teachers on using information communication technology (ICT) had been conducted. In many schools, switching to an online learning mode seemed to be the solution. Twenty-eight (28) television channels, including national and local ones, had broadcasted lessons covering different grades of the basic education level. The school year plan was adjusted with adaptive changes in the time frame of the semesters, teaching and learning modes, and schedules and examination plan.

The results of online teaching in Vietnam are positively evaluated domestically and internationally. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published on 29 September 2020 commented that “Vietnam’s online learning to prevent and control COVID-19 has many positive points compared to other countries and territories.” Specifically, Vietnam has 79.7% of students learning online. This rate is higher than the overall average of OECD countries (67.5%).

a. Equity in learning

Despite the government’s rapid response to the school closure situation by quickly switching to online and television lessons, learning was still not possible for many. According to the Rapid Assessment report (MOET, 2020), in Ho Chi Minh city, the biggest city in Vietnam, 80.1% of grade 12 students attended online lessons, while this rate is only 15% in

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provinces with difficulties. This shows the large gap between urban and rural areas. The production of TV lessons was not nationally coordinated. This has led to the situation where, in remote mountainous and poor provinces, TV lessons were available for only a few subjects of a few grades. In the better-resourced locations, TV lessons covered more grades in basic education, but still not all.

While shifting to online modes, the most vulnerable groups of students and learners suffered the most due to the lack of IT devices and stable Internet connectivity. Parents also faced difficulties supporting learners in digital learning.

The following case study was conducted by the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA) in August 2021.

The lack of digital devices and internet connection hinders vulnerable learners, including deaf learners, to continue their learning online. Even if all the equipment needed were available, additional support will be needed, such as welfare for families and teachers and capacity building for teachers to be able to adapt and handle all the necessary adjustments brought about by the pandemic.

b. Mental health

The Government has established the National Mental Health Programme but it seems to cover approximately 30% of the country and address a narrow list of mental illnesses. According to the MOET, “social distancing, which has disrupted education, has greatly impacted the mental health and psychology of students, teachers and parents.”

In 2021, VAEFA supported the youth-led action research (YAR) on “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Deaf Youth in Vietnam.” This research is part of the Asia South Pacific Association on Basic and Adult Education’s (ASPBAE) regional project on building capacity for marginalised youth on the mental health issue.

VAEFA Country Case study on Distance/Online learning with Deaf Learners in C5 Learning Centre in Vietnam

C5 is a non-formal learning centre for deaf students in Hanoi City. It was founded in June 2019 by some parents of deaf children and a group of passionate deaf teachers, providing kindergarten preparatory classes and elementary education for deaf children and youth coming from different provinces. The pandemic caused schools to close, and C5 also had to close. Most schools in Hanoi have switched to online learning, but this has not been possible for C5. An online survey with 23 parents in August 2021 conducted by C5 teachers, under the support of VAEFA, showed that only 9 families had computers or tablets for their children for learning.

In the other 14 families, the parents lent their mobile phones for the children to study. The screens of mobile phones are too small for deaf students to see their teachers and friends signing in divided squares on the phone. Because they borrow parents’ mobile phones, deaf students’ learning was usually interrupted because parents had incoming calls. Parents could not afford to buy computers for their children as 69.5% of the families of C5 students had reduced or totally lost income due to the pandemic.

The government emergency support package should target vulnerable households, including households with persons with disabilities. Any equipment and/or facilities needed to ensure the continuation of education for learners from these households should be provided or covered in the package. The teacher training programme should be accessible so any teacher can register, including volunteer teachers, teachers working in non-formal centres like C5, and teachers working with marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities.

VAEFA Youth-led Action Research (YAR) on the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of deaf youth

The action research covered an online survey with 74 deaf youth and in-depth interviews with 14 out of 74 respondents. Findings from this research have shown that with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, young deaf people have become more vulnerable and have suffered from many seemingly invisible impacts that have serious consequences. 23.6% of the respondents in the survey always feel worried and fearful of the pandemic; 34.7% are having improper lifestyle, nutrition and eating habits that have resulted in insufficient or excessive sleep, obesity or weight loss; 6.9% are always with unstable mental status and have thought of committing suicide.

Financial resources should be made available to put in place and improve communication relating to pandemic prevention, where and how to seek health care and social-economic support and make this information available in Vietnamese sign language. Being able to access information will help reduce stress and inhibition for deaf people, as well as enhance proactive COVID-19 prevention and psychological stability for young deaf people in the context of a complicated and prolonged pandemic.

The Ministry of Health in Vietnam also warned of the “severe consequences” that caused a significant increase in mental health disorders and exacerbated the inequality gap in society (Ministry of Health, 2021).⁴

c. Education financing

One major concern in education financing in the country is the decrease from 20% in 2014 to only 17.6% of the State Budget allocated for education in 2019 and 17.5% in 2020. This declining and regressive trend in education financing will need to be prevented going forward. Since Vietnam became a lower-middle-income country in 2010, the majority of bilateral donors left Vietnam. Preferential loans from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank were also decreasing and will end soon.

With the anticipated decrease in the absolute value of the State budget on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, the financing for education is inadequate, especially if analysed with equity, gender, and inclusion lens. Further, the recent policies of decentralisation and socialisation of financial resources, which placed a greater burden on the parents and the local level government to contribute to supporting education, may expand the inequalities and marginalisation between regions and students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

4 See https://moh.gov.vn/tin-tong-hop/-/asset_publisher/k206Q9qkZ0qn/content/thu-truong-bo-y-te-ty-le-mac-cac-roi-loan-tam-than-trong-ai-dich-covid-19-gia-tang

strengthen public education to ensure that learners, especially marginalised groups, are able to access inclusive and equitable quality education.

III. KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dealing with the impacts of the pandemic has once again confirmed the central role of the public education system in ensuring the continued functioning of education even during a crisis. Meanwhile, it is important to be wary of the trend of education digitisation, which may lead to private companies and business groups stepping in for the profitable capture of education and has deepened the gaps in equity, making vulnerable groups of learners further left behind. The provision of adequate financial and other essential resources is extremely important as it will strengthen and enable the education system not to be shaken easily by any catastrophe.

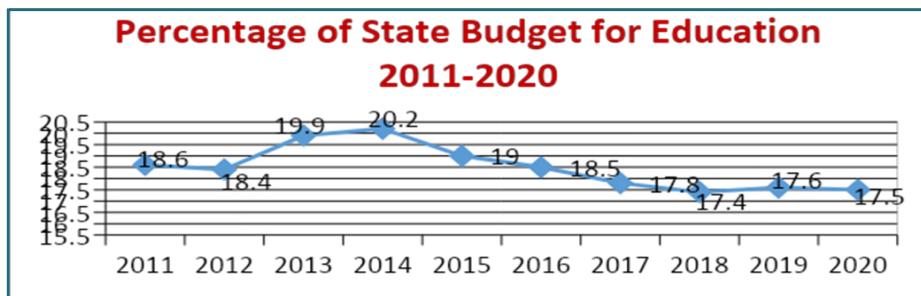
Together with the Government and key stakeholders, civil society organisations (CSOs) have been playing an active role in ensuring the right to education

In Vietnam, the State budget for education at the national and local levels is estimated and approved at the end of the previous year and there is very little flexibility in budget adjusting during the year. In 2020 and 2021, among other difficulties, most public schools reported difficulties in seeking resources to comply with the new requirements on hygiene and disinfection to prevent the spreading of Coronavirus.

Private schools faced serious financial constraints as all their incomes depend on tuition. While there was little to no income, they still had to pay rent and maintenance of the infrastructure, part of the salary for some key staff and teachers, and other core expenses. A survey from the MOET in 2021 showed that 95.2% of private kindergartens did not have an income for at least six months, while 81.6% of private kindergartens couldn't pay salaries.⁵ Many private schools have dissolved due to the pandemic. This situation highlighted the need to

5 Giải pháp nào “cứu” hệ thống giáo dục mầm non ngoài công lập? – Mega Story. Retrieved from <https://special.vietnamplus.vn/2022/01/13/giai-phap-giai-cuu/>

This situation highlighted the need to strengthen public education to ensure that learners, especially marginalised groups, are able to access inclusive and equitable quality education.



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



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for all amidst the pandemic. VAEFA in Vietnam has joined different consultation processes and made contributions to ensure gender-justness, equity, and inclusion in education. To achieve the SDG4 targets and to make education transformative, VAEFA recommends:

- 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. Provincial/City People's Committees must meet their share of at least 20% of the local budgets for education. An education emergency fund should also be established for risk prevention and for quick reaction in case of emergency.
- Improve the coordination of the National Assembly and Central Government with the ministries and sectoral agencies for the robust implementation of the economic recovery programmes, and policies to support the education sector, in particular, ensuring progress, quality, and effectiveness in accordance with Decree No. 43/2022/QH15 of the 15th National Assembly, ensuring deployment of preferential credit packages for students and

supporting policies for teachers. The implementation of the social support package is reviewed and revised to address the needs of marginalised groups including people with disability, ethnic minorities, and migrants.

- Invest in facilities and equipment for distance teaching and management in particular to ensure learning continuity and quality in emergency situations. Prevent the private sector capture of the digitalisation of education to ensure equity for the system. Develop a supporting plan with funding for marginalised learners to make sure they will not be left behind in terms of learning, skills development, and other opportunities in life.
- The Ministry of Information and Communication should provide guidance on information security for using online teaching software/applications as well as develop supporting packages for the education and training sector, enabling learners and teachers access to the best quality and safe service at the most reasonable costs.
- The Ministry of Health must develop guidance for schools and educational institutions to make a plan on

disease and pandemic prevention and control, ensuring the safety of all teachers, learners, and personnel.

- The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Training must cooperate to develop an effective national mental health support system, with human resources and funding investment to ensure that the most marginalised groups are able to access quality education. It is recommended to invest in improving the effectiveness of the network of psychological support services in general. Social workers, psychologists, mental health specialists, and school psychology counselling services should be made more available to all people, especially to youth and adolescents who are experiencing psychological difficulties, violence, and suicidal thoughts. The deaf community must also be provided access to psycho-social support through the availability of sign language interpretation.
- Partnership and collaboration with CSOs should be enhanced at all levels of education, including education sector planning, policy development, and implementation and monitoring. ●



The Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

Unit 106 Sterten Place Condominium, 116 Maginhawa Street,
Teachers Village East, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
Tel/Fax: 63 2 8441 4594
Email: aspbae@gmail.com | Website: www.aspbae.org

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Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA)

Room 2406, N03-T1 building, Xuan Tao
Diplomatic compound, Xuan Tao ward, Bac
Tu Liem district, Hanoi
Tel: +84 243 773 5303
Email: vaefa.edu.vn@gmail.com
Website: www.vaefa.edu.vn

The Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA) is a coalition of 50 local non-governmental organisations, research centres, community groups, and experts working towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on quality education. VAEFA also works towards the protection of rights, including the right to education of marginalised sectors in Vietnam. VAEFA is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).