

# Young People

United Nations Brief 2012-2016

## Background

The UN Viet Nam Brief on Young People 2012-2016 was developed by the UN Viet Nam Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth (WGY). The data contained in the Brief was collated from a number of sources and represents the UN's current thinking in relation to young people in Viet Nam<sup>1</sup>.

The objectives of developing this document are to:

- Provide a broad overview of issues affecting young people in Viet Nam
- Outline the UN's collaborative strengths in working with national counterparts to address issues concerning young people
- Summarize the UN's key directions in its work on youth for 2012-2016.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, throughout this document the term 'young people' refers to individuals aged 10-24 years. As per the WHO definitions: young people 10-24 years, youth 15-24 years, adolescents 10-19 years. The Vietnamese Youth Law (Law no. 53/2005/QH11) defines youth as 16-30 years.

Viet Nam is a second generation Delivering as One (DaO) country<sup>2</sup>, committed to the 'One UN Initiative' reform process. A multi-sectoral brief on issues related to young people is pertinent, considering the cross-cutting theme of young people in the One Plan (2012-2016). The Brief identifies major issues facing young people in Viet Nam and the holistic approaches UN agencies should take in addressing these issues.

As Viet Nam has entered the period of golden population with the highest ever percentage of young people in its population, effective and timely investment in young people is crucial for the equitable and sustainable development of the country. Through the WGY and joint programming, the UN in Viet Nam can take a more coordinated approach in tackling issues affecting young people and provide coherent joint support for the Government of Viet Nam.

<sup>2</sup> UN reform in Viet Nam is a tripartite undertaking by the Government of Viet Nam, the UN Country Team and the donor community. The strong commitment by all three parties has contributed to making Viet Nam one of the leading global examples of the UN's 'Delivering as One' approach.

## 1. Introduction

The UN Secretary General (SG)'s Five Year Action Agenda 2012–2016 (SG/SM/14081) defines a set of global community actions to ensure current and future generations benefit from increased opportunities and mitigated risks. The Agenda outlines specific measures for generating clear opportunities to improve people's lives, including *"Working with and for women and young people"*. Regarding young people, the Agenda stresses addressing the needs by deepening the youth focus of existing programmes on employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, as well as education and sexual and reproductive health.

The UN in Viet Nam is committed to strengthening the national capacity to meet young people's needs, set forth in the UN SG's Action Agenda. UN agencies have joined forces in 2012 through an inter-agency working group (WGY)<sup>3</sup>, to better cooperate together and with national counterparts to benefit young people. The WGY operates within the broader context of the UN reform process, known as the One UN Initiative. Viet Nam achieved the lower middle-income country (MIC) status in 2010 and has done well on many of the MDG indicators. However, the country continues to strive for a much needed balance between its rapid economic growth and sustainable human and social development. This Brief provides a summary of some of those challenges in relation to young people. It also outlines the collective UN strengths in working with

national counterparts, the international community and private sector to improve the lives of young people, summarizing UN's key directions in working towards better outcomes for young people in Viet Nam.

## 2. Overview of the Situation of Young People in Viet Nam

According to the 2009 Census, there were 24.6 million people aged 10–24<sup>4</sup> in Viet Nam, making up almost one-third of the total population. The figures translate into Viet Nam having entered a 'demographic bonus' period. During this unique period that will last for about 30 years, there are two or more economically productive persons for every dependent person. Such a period, if well managed, is a great opportunity to drive a nation's economic development.

Young people are key contributors to the productivity and sustainable economic development of Viet Nam. Greater investment in human capital development including education, training and professional skills as well as healthcare for young people is needed. Young people dominate migration flows and more enter the workforce each year. Their success and well-being require targeted policies and services to allow young people to reach their full potential, enjoy fulfilling lives and secure Viet Nam's capacity to sustain future generations.

This section's broad overview, compiled from numerous different sources, considers young people's access to different opportunities and services, as well as other issues impacting on Vietnamese young people's growth and development. It is acknowledged that young people are a diverse population with varying interests and characteristics, and that the needs of those at the younger end of the age range can be quite different to those in older age groups.

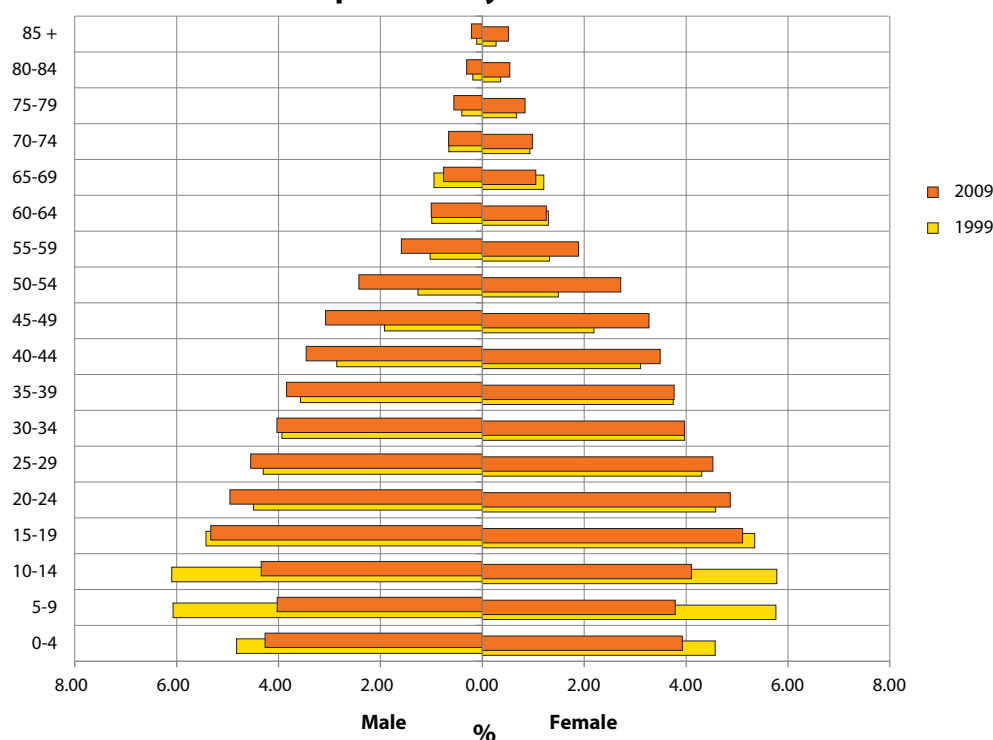
### COMPONENTS OF THE UN BRIEF:



3 In December 2012, the UN Viet Nam Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth (WGY) included nominated focal points from FAO, ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNV, UNWOMEN, WHO and a representative from the UN Viet Nam Communications Team.

4 2009 Population and Housing Survey, GSO. Unless otherwise specified, throughout this document the term 'young people' refers to individuals aged 10–24 years. As per the WHO definitions: young people 10–24 years, youth 15–24 years, adolescents 10–19 years. The Vietnamese Youth Law (Law no. 53/2005/QH11) defines youth as 16–30 years.

**Viet Nam Population Pyramids 1999 and 2009**



## Factors associated with vulnerability, growth and development

There are a number of factors that may increase young people's vulnerability<sup>5</sup>. The most at risk groups include young people from poor families, young women, ethnic minority youth, young people living in remote areas, young migrants and young people with a physical or intellectual disability or those living with HIV/AIDS. The lack of a comprehensive social protection system to support the most vulnerable young people is also a significant problem.

Poverty, in particular, is a factor that increases young people's vulnerability. Young people affected by poverty have fewer opportunities to receive good quality education and training, are more likely to be forced into hard labour, be homeless, fall victim to human trafficking, be in conflict with the law and engage in high risk activities such as sex work and drug use.

In terms of growth and development, there are various factors and issues that may hamper young people in

reaching their maximum potential as individuals due to limited access to the following opportunities and services:

### a. Access to education

In general terms, universal lower secondary education has been partially achieved in Viet Nam. However, deep-rooted disparities remain and the poorest and most vulnerable young people are falling behind their peers in terms of access to, and completion of, schooling. This is evidenced by the considerable gaps in completion and literacy rates in different regions and groups, as well as in higher education<sup>6</sup>. In addition, persons with disabilities (PWD) have difficulties at school e.g. because of disability-unfriendly school infrastructure and teachers' lack of skills to teach PWD. Young people living with HIV/AIDS also struggle to access education due to discrimination.

Other barriers to learning as a means of growth and development include an imbalance of theory and

<sup>5</sup> In 2000, Viet Nam committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015, as well as developed context-specific national goals as outlined in 'Viet Nam achieving the MDG' (2005). Goals most relevant to young people include universal education and improvements in education quality, employment creation, gender equality in education and training, access to SRH information and services, improved nutrition, and reducing HIV/AIDS.

<sup>6</sup> The secondary education completion rate in the Red River Delta was 96.3%, while in the Central Highlands it was only 79.2%. The literacy rate for the 15-24 age group in the Red River Delta and Northern Uplands was 99.3% and 92.8%, respectively, compared to the considerably lower literacy rates for the ethnic minority groups, such as Hmong (37.7%), Khmer (73.5%) and Thai (79.8%). 4.9% of the majority group (Kinh) aged 15 and older has junior college or higher qualifications while the proportion is only 1.1% for the other groups. Source: Viet Nam Population and Housing Census 2009.





practice in the existing school curricula, which lacks orientation towards skills development. Despite efforts to renovate teaching methodologies, a lecture-based approach remains common, limiting the use of interactive learning dynamics in the classroom. In general, curriculum content is seen as irrelevant in enhancing students' personal growth, knowledge and skills development. A prevailing bias also exists favoring formal education and university degrees over non-formal education and vocational training. Recruitment and retention of good quality teachers in remote and poor areas remains a challenge.

### **b. Access to employment and financial services**

Young people aged 15-29 accounted for 31.9% of the total workforce in 2010. New job-seekers enter the labour market every year, with the working age population growing by an estimated 1.2 million annually. However, young people constitute 66.5% of all unemployed people and the youth unemployment rates are 3.5 times higher than that of adults. More new jobs need to be created to meet the growing demand for employment, while young women and men need better opportunities to access jobs.<sup>7</sup> Viet Nam has been a World Trade Organization (WTO) member since 2007<sup>8</sup>, though the membership impacts on labour market opportunities and conditions have yet to be pronounced.

Factors underlying the difficulties that young people face in entering the labour market include unequal

access to education and training, a mismatch in labour market supply and demand, a lack of basic labour market 'navigation skills' and scarcity of labour market services, like job counseling and life/career guidance. There is also inadequate coordination of learning opportunities between the relevant ministries and between national and local levels. For rural youth in particular, the severe lack of access to rural finance is a big challenge if they intend to start farming. Financial institutions provide most services to adults with the perception that young people are a riskier client category than adults.

### **c. Access to protection from exploitation**

Internal migration is a growing trend among young people in Viet Nam, with a vast majority migrating for economic reasons and majority being young women<sup>9</sup>. With newfound autonomy and financial means, young migrants are at higher risk to substance use, the sex industry and illicit drugs. Migration can lead to disengagement from family and friends, as well as ineligibility for public services due to registration requirements. Migrants are often reluctant to use such services for fear of violating migration and registration rules, and can come into conflict with the law if they are found to have breached such rules. Illegal migration, particularly, makes people vulnerable to exploitation.

Even though Viet Nam ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (C182) in 1999, which indicates a strong political commitment in the fight against child labour, there is increasing concern about children and young people engaged in child labour, including the worst forms such as child trafficking

<sup>7</sup> Labour Force Survey 2010, GSO. Viet Nam Employment Trends 2009, MOLISA.

<sup>8</sup> Viet Nam is required to improve competitiveness, modernize business, management and production techniques and meet international standards regarding a safe labour environment ([http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/acc\\_e/a1\\_vietnam\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/a1_vietnam_e.htm)).

<sup>9</sup> There were 6.6 million internal migrants recorded in the 2009 Census, though the actual figure is likely to be much higher. The Census figures most likely exclude many seasonal, temporary and return migrants.

and commercial sexual exploitation of children<sup>10</sup>. Street children and young people deprived of parental care are particularly at risk of economic and sexual exploitation and as such, deserve special protection from the government and communities.

#### **d. Access to opportunity for healthy lifestyles**

Health and lifestyle play an important role in young people's development and ability to participate meaningfully in society. However, injuries have become the main cause of death, disability and serious morbidity for young people in Viet Nam, highlighting the need for injury prevention programs. Drowning is the major cause of death among the younger age group aged 10-14 years while road traffic accidents are the biggest killer among young people aged 15-19.<sup>11</sup>

Substance use, meanwhile, increases young people's exposure to health risks. Smoking and alcohol consumption have been identified as a problem predominantly for young men. Government estimates show that 50% of drug users are aged 16-29 years. HIV is becoming more prevalent, as only 42.5% of Vietnamese people aged 15-24 have comprehensive knowledge of HIV transmission. Among the reported HIV cases, there is a noticeable trend towards a younger average age and young people under the age of 30 account for 60% of new HIV infections.<sup>12</sup>

#### **e. Access to sexual and reproductive health**

Young people are at high risk of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy and maternal mortality and morbidity. Evidence shows that Vietnamese young people are becoming sexually active earlier than before. This tendency for more young people to engage in pre-marital and unprotected sex and get married later highlights the need for reproductive health services and information, including sexuality education and contraceptives.<sup>13</sup>

10 9.5% of children aged 5-14 were engaged in child labour in 2009, while the ILO estimated that 10.7% of youth aged 15-17 were engaged in hazardous work in 2006. In regard to sexual exploitation, children are entering prostitution at younger ages, at 12-15 years old. Sources: Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2011). ILO et al: Understanding Children's Work in Viet Nam (2009). MOLISA and UNICEF: Analysis of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Selected Provinces and Cities of Viet Nam (2011).

11 Hanoi School Of Public Health: Report to UNICEF on the Viet Nam Multi-center Injury Survey. Hanoi, 2003.

12 Ministry of Public Security: Report to the National Committee on HIV/AIDS, Drugs and Prostitution, 25.2.013. SAVY 2 (2010).

13 GSO-UNFPA: Unmet need for reproductive health and HIV/AIDS services: evidence from the analysis of 2010 MICS data (in press). The

The reality is one-third of Vietnamese young people face barriers when trying to access reproductive health information and services. The unmet need for contraceptives among unmarried young people is around 35%<sup>14</sup>. Internal migrants, in particular, experience difficulties in accessing SRH services. Furthermore, the available services are generally not tailored to meet the specific needs of younger age groups. As a result, a significant number of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions occur among young people, especially unmarried adolescents and youth.

#### **f. Opportunities for participation in policy development**

Notwithstanding the fact that Viet Nam has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>15</sup>, thus providing the foundation for children and young people to exercise their right to participation, the terms 'citizenship' and 'participation' are commonly understood in Viet Nam as relating merely to volunteerism and public campaigns. While these activities have a role in promoting participation in community activities, the concept of participation is much broader than this. The government and other development actors may not always recognize the importance of participatory approaches for young people as it poses a radical change for adult-children/youth relationships, given the socio-cultural mores of the society.

Many efforts to increase young people's participation in policy and program development have been made at different levels - within families, schools, communities and the legal framework. These include the joint UN effort to promote young people's participation through the Post-2015 consultations, the National Youth Development Strategy implementation and the upcoming consultations with children and young people on the Constitution revision. However, more efforts are still needed to create formal mechanisms to systematically engage with young people to participate in policy development and implementation, as well as to raise participatory process awareness and skills for both young people and officials.

study measures trends by comparing the data from three subsequent MICS surveys (2000, 2006 and 2010).

14 SAVY 2 (2010): The unmet need for contraception among young people aged 15-19 and 20-24 years is 35.4% and 34.6%, respectively, according to MICS (2011).

15 In 1990, Viet Nam became the first Asian state to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, agreeing to implement the non-negotiable standards and obligations of basic human rights of children and young people under 18 years of age.

## Summary

This situation analysis outlines the realities for young people at crossroads and calls for action. The need for investing in young people is clear. Investments in young people's education, training, life skills and health, including sexual and reproductive health, enable countries to build strong economic foundations, thereby reversing inter-generational poverty. Such investments, if timely and correctly targeted, can help Vietnamese young people to reach their full potential and contribute fully to the country's sustainable development.

## 3. National Policy Framework and Institutional Architecture

### Key elements of the policy framework and formal institutions for youth

The *Constitution of Viet Nam* (1992) enshrines equality between all citizens, containing specific provisions to protect the rights of children, adolescents and young people. The Constitution recognizes and protects young people's rights to protection, care and education, also recognizing the obligations of the family, the State and society to create favorable conditions for young people to “study, work, relax, and develop bodies and minds”.

One of the most significant developments for young people in Viet Nam was the enactment of the *Youth Law*<sup>16</sup> in 2005. The Law marks a major step towards

<sup>16</sup> Law No. 53/2005/GH11. The Law defines young people as aged 16-30 years. Numerous other laws and plans contain provisions for young people, including the Education Law (revised in 2005),

fulfilling the rights of young people and a number of action plans were introduced to enact the Law. Another significant development was the *Vietnamese Youth Development Strategy for 2011-2020*<sup>17</sup>. The Strategy assigned the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) as the designated State agency for youth affairs and provides a foundation for relevant ministries and sectors to respond to young people's needs holistically. However, it fails to define a clear multi-sectoral coordination or monitoring mechanism for implementation.

The main formal institutions directly involved in issues related to young people include the National Assembly (NA) as the law-making body, the MOHA as the coordinating ministry and State management agency on youth affairs, and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (YU) as the main institution on the Party side.

### Current national policy framework developments

Despite the existence of laws and policies, the capacity of institutions to implement and monitor policies specifically targeting young people is still weak in Viet Nam. While the *Youth Law* and the *Youth Development Strategy* address young people's needs and rights in various aspects of social and civic life, challenges for cross-sectoral responses to deliver policies and programmes to address the gaps remain and reflect the fragmentation in policies and interventions targeting young people.

Vocational Training Law (2006) and Law on the Protection, Care, and Education of Children (2004).

<sup>17</sup> The new Strategy that follows the first Vietnamese Youth development strategy (2003-2010), was developed with TA support from UN agencies (UNV, UNICEF, WHO, ILO, IOM, convened by UNFPA), and approved by the Prime Minister in 12/2011.

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