

## Viet Nam

Viet Nam has achieved rapid economic success and remarkable social progress for the country's approximately 26 million children, who make up roughly one-third of the population. The country was the first in Asia, and the second in the world, to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990.

However, significant challenges remain, in particular persistent multidimensional child poverty and inequality, especially for ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. Natural disasters impact many lives, including about one million children in 2017. Violence against children remains a significant issue and has caught the attention of the public, press and Government.

### Workplace

Viet Nam scores in the enhanced due diligence category the [Workplace Index](#). The government has ratified just half of the 22 international treaties and ILO conventions measured in the Index. Particular challenges are reflected in indicators measuring the government's capacity to enforce labour laws, and the prevalence of hazardous child labour.

- **Decent work for parents and caregivers**

Viet Nam has not yet ratified ILO Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protections, although national laws provide for a [paid maternity entitlement of 6 months](#). This entitlement is more generous than the 14 weeks stipulated in the Convention, and one of the longest maternity leave periods in Asia.

Nevertheless, social insurance payments during maternity leave cover only basic salary, and not overtime or bonuses. Without overtime and bonuses, [workers' incomes can fall below living standards](#). Furthermore, national laws do not provide any entitlement to paternity leave, and according to [ILO data](#), in practice less than one-third of women are covered by maternity leave entitlements in practice.

Affordable childcare is critical to ensure that mothers can continue their employment after maternity leave, giving them the security that their child is protected and has access to early childhood education. Decree 85, enacted in 2015, provide tax incentives for employers to provide on-site or near-site nursery schools and kindergartens. However, the decree does not make childcare provision a legal requirement.

Under national laws, working mothers with children under 12 months are entitled to 60 minutes of paid breaks for breastfeeding during the working day. However, in practice many workers stop breastfeeding before coming back to work after their maternity leave. Just [24% of infants are exclusively breastfed](#) for the first six months, as recommended by WHO and UNICEF – far below the global average of 40%. In the absence of optimal breastfeeding, children face a higher risk of malnutrition and illness, and promoting child health in the workplace can also be an effective means of reducing absenteeism and sick leave among working parents.

The country has made progress in reducing poverty rates – just [2.6%](#) of the population lives below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, which is one of the lowest rates in South-East Asia (average of [5.8%](#)). The country's minimum wage is adjusted each year and ranged from VND 2.76 million (US\$118) to VND 3.98 million (US\$171) in 2018. Average earnings are [US\\$227 per month](#) according to

ILO data, and workers perform on average [41 hours per week](#). Nevertheless, a significant portion of parents in Viet Nam have difficulty earning a living wage. Migrant parents are least likely to earn a living wage because they bear higher expenses on necessities than local parents. The cost of childcare, schooling, housing and food can easily exceed workers' monthly salaries.

- **Child labour**

Viet Nam is making progress on eliminating child labour. The government has ratified both International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 138 on Minimum Age and No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour. The minimum age for full time employment is 15 years, and adolescents aged 15-17 are protected from hazardous work under the labour law. Regulations specify the types of hazardous work that are prohibited for adolescents.

A 2012 government and ILO survey indicated that 9.6%, or 1.75 million children aged 5-17, are in child labour in economic activities only. The latest Multiple Indicator Cluster (MICS) survey conducted by the government and UNICEF in 2014, reveals that [16.4% of 5-17 year olds](#) were involved in household chores and economic activities, being classified as child labourers.

Child labour rates are higher in rural areas (19.3%) than urban areas (9.6%), and higher in the northern (36%) and central highlands (25.3%). In urban areas, an unknown number of adolescents migrating from rural areas, either alone or with family members, present false identity documents to obtain work in factories. The risk for adolescent workers is thought to be particularly high among left-behind children, who migrate to urban areas to join their parents in factory work and may borrow the identity documents of older siblings to obtain employment. Child labour remains an acute problem among subcontracting factories and in informal, home-based workshops.

Although there is limited available data, there are also [reports of the worst forms of child labour](#), including hazardous work, sexual exploitation and trafficking. According to data compiled by Understanding Children's Work, nearly [30% of adolescents aged 15-17](#) in child labour are engaged in hazardous work. In 2017, the [ILO Committee of Experts](#) expressed concern about the number of children subjected to hazardous working conditions and urged the government to intensify its efforts to eliminate child labour in the country.

## **Marketplace**

Viet Nam scores in the enhanced due diligence category in the [Marketplace Index](#). The greatest challenges reflected in this Index are in enforcement and outcome indicators measuring children's online safety, and protections from harmful marketing and advertising.

- **Online safety**

Viet Nam has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. The country is also a member of the [We Protect Global Alliance](#), an international movement dedicated to national and global action to end the sexual exploitation of children online. Viet Nam endorsed the #WePROTECT Child Online Summit Statement of Action in London in 2014 and the second #WePROTECT Summit in Abu Dhabi in November 2015.

Viet Nam has enacted [a number of laws related to child sexual abuse and exploitation](#); these laws include offenses relating to pornographic materials and obscenity against children. The revised Penal Code criminalizes the production, sale and distribution of pornographic material, and provides for aggravated penalties when the offence is committed against someone under 18 years of age and/or through the internet or technological means (i.e., digital devices). National laws also prohibit and administratively sanction the use of ICT to disseminate obscene materials. However, there is no clear definition of child pornography in any of the legislation and no law criminalizes the full range of acts relating to child abuse materials.

Sexual grooming of children through the internet is not criminalized. There is currently no law relating to cyberbullying, however the Penal Code punishes humiliating a person (seriously infringing upon a person's dignity or honour) and slander, both of which carry an aggravated penalty if committed through ICT. Internet service providers (ISPs) are required to supervise and eliminate prohibited content, including obscene material when it is found or at the request of competent authorities, but obscene material is not clearly defined and [internet service providers are not required](#) to report instances of child sexual abuse material.

- **Marketing and advertising to children**

Viet Nam has ratified key conventions on marketing to children, such as the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. National laws limit children's exposure to harmful marketing by prohibiting the advertising of tobacco and alcohol products. Viet Nam has [fully adopted](#) the International Code on Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes into national law.

There are few provisions restricting the marketing of high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods to children and adolescents, therefore the rising levels of obesity in Viet Nam, may be linked to the marketing of high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods to children and parents. According to [WHO data](#), in 2016 9.7% of children and adolescents aged 5-19 years were overweight, compared with 3.7% in 2006. Although the rates are rising, Viet Nam has one of the lowest obesity rates in Asia, especially compared with Thailand (22%) and Malaysia (26.5%).

National laws were recently revised and no longer require mandatory food fortification, which could be detrimental for women and children. Viet Nam is one of the last remaining countries in the world with iodine deficiency. The 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey indicated that only 45% of households in Viet Nam were consuming iodized salt, which is far below the 90% global recommendation on universal salt iodization. According to a 2014 government survey, 13% of children under five and 35% of breastfeeding women are suffering from clinical vitamin A deficiency. Nearly 30% of children under 5 and 37% of pregnant women are anaemic. Zinc deficiencies are also very high in children (69%) and pregnant women (80%).

## **Community and Environment**

Viet Nam scores in the enhanced due diligence category in the [Community and Environment Index](#). Viet Nam is making progress towards full domestication of the CRC, and the country has ratified 14 of the 19

international treaties measured in the Index. However, particular challenges are reflected in indicators measuring preparedness for natural disasters and the impacts on children and communities.

- **Natural disasters**

Viet Nam is vulnerable to natural disasters, especially floods, cyclones, tsunamis and droughts. Viet Nam scores [7.3/10 for natural disaster hazard and exposure in the Index for Risk Management](#) (INFORM), a risk index for humanitarian crises and disasters, and 10/10 for flood risk in particular. The Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) estimates that there were [over 600,000 people displaced](#) by natural disasters in 2017. Displacement due to natural disasters can increase the vulnerability of affected children to health risks, school disruption, displacement and separation.

- **Environmental protection**

Viet Nam has made progress on environmental issues, having signed and ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Paris Agreement. However, the country has some progress to make on environmental policies and protections. Viet Nam scores [1.16/3 in the Environmental Democracy Index](#), below the global average 1.42/3.

Poor air and water quality are particular concerns in Viet Nam, especially in major urban areas such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The country has significant, but comparatively low child death rates due to ambient air pollution ([1 death per 100,000 children](#)) and unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene ([2 deaths per 100,000](#)). According to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the main sources of air pollution are transportation, industrial production, construction, agricultural production and improper waste management.

- **Education and healthcare**

Viet Nam has made significant progress towards achieving universal access to education for all children. National laws provide for universal access to pre-school, primary and lower secondary education. Primary and lower secondary education must be free of cost for all children. According to the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), primary school attendance rates in Viet Nam [exceeded 97%](#), and 98% of children completed primary school transition into lower secondary school. Reflecting this progress [Vietnam scores 0.704/1](#) in the KidsRights Education Index.

The country has also made similar progress in relation to health outcomes. National laws entitle all children under the age of six to free primary health care, and the universal insurance scheme has expanded to cover approximately 60% of the population. As a result, the country has achieved [immunisation coverage of 95%](#). Improving health outcomes are also reflected in [Vietnam's score of 0.824/1](#) in the KidsRights Health Index.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of workers may lack coverage, especially for children over six years old, where their employers fail to make mandatory social insurance contributions on their behalf. For instance, according to [Better Work Vietnam](#), 16% of its participating apparel and footwear factories have workers without labour contracts, and nearly 40% failed to comply with laws on contributions to social, health and unemployment insurance funds.

Of critical concern in Viet Nam are the economic, social and rural-urban disparities in access to quality education and healthcare, particularly for ethnic minority and migrant children. According to

government data, [one in three rural children and one in five minority children](#) experience multi-dimensional poverty. A [2016 government and UNICEF report](#) shows that Viet Nam halved the number of children out of school from 2009-2014, but there are still 750,000 children who remain excluded. Children from marginalized groups are most likely to be excluded, including children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, migrant children, and children from poor families. For instance, in [Ho Chi Minh City](#), migrant children make up the majority of out-of-school-children aged 5 years and in primary schools (92% and 86.4%, respectively). The “no fee” policy for access to education does not cover migrant children or children from migrant families.

### **Further reading**

UNICEF Viet Nam

UNICEF, State of the World’s Children, 2017

UNICEF Viet Nam, The apparel and footwear sector and children in Viet Nam, 2017

UNICEF Viet Nam and Ho Chi Minh People’s Committee, Situation Analysis of Children in Ho Chi Minh City, 2017

UNICEF, Child protection in the digital age: National responses to online child sexual abuse and exploitation in ASEAN Member States, 2016