

UNICEF Viet Nam 2022-2026 Country Programme Evaluation

Evaluation Report

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UNICEF Viet Nam 2022-2026 Country Programme Evaluation

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Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

June 2026

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List of acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ADAP	Adolescent Development and Participation
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AI	Artificial intelligence
AMP	Annual Management Plan
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AWP	Annual Work Plan
CBO	Common Back Office Initiative
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEP	Costed Evaluation Plan
CFCI	Child-Friendly Cities Initiative
COAR	Country Office Annual Report
CP	Country Programme
CPD	Country Programme Document
CPE	Country Programme Evaluation
CPiE	Child Protection in Emergencies
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSDE	Child Survival, Development and Environment
CSI	Core Standard Indicators
CSO	Civil society organisations
CWDs	Children with disabilities
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EA	Evaluability Assessment
EAP	East Asia and Pacific
EAPRO	UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EM	Evaluation Matrix
EMNCH	Electronic Maternal and Child Health
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards
ET	Evaluation Team
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
F&JC	Family and Juvenile Courts
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEDI	Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
GHAJ	Global Health Advocacy Incubator
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GRASSP	Gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection
GSO	General Statistics Office

HCA	Healthy Cities for Adolescents
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HNWI	High-net-worth individual
HQ	UNICEF Head Quarters
HUPH	Hanoi University of Public Health
IECD	Integrated Early Childhood Development
IERC	Integrated Early Response and Care
IMEP	Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan
JULE	EU Justice and Legal Empowerment Programme
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice Studies
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and Intersex
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
LTA	Long-Term Agreement
MAE	Ministry of Agriculture and Environment
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MDCP	Multidimensional child poverty
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MTBBE	Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education
NA	National Assembly
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
NPAN	National Plan of Action on Nutrition
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOS	Out of school children
OR	Other Resources
ORE	Other Resources Emergency
ORR	Other Regular Resources
PARMO	Partnership and Resource Mobilization
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PME	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPPs	Public-private partnerships
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
PSFR	Private sector fundraising

PWD	People with disabilities
RAM	Results Assessment Module
RBA	Rights-based approach
RCO	UN Resident Coordinator's Office
RR	Regular Resources
SAM	Severe acute malnutrition
SBC	Social and Behavioural Change
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025
SEDS	Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2021–2030
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SP	UNICEF Global Strategic Plan
SPG	Social Policy and Governance
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence
SSB	Sugar-sweetened beverages
STEAM	Science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TOC	Theory of Change
TPM	Third-Party Monitoring
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nation Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USD	US Dollar
VAC	Violence against children
VAW	Violence against women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
VCCI	Viet Nam Chambers of Commerce and Industry
VCO	UNICEF Viet Nam Country Office
VDDMA	Viet Nam Disaster and Dyke Management Authority
VGCL	Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour
VND	Vietnamese dong
VNIES	Vietnam Institute for Education Sciences
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The UNICEF Viet Nam Country Programme of Cooperation 2022–2026 (CP) reflects a strategic partnership between UNICEF and the Government of Viet Nam. The CP is guided by the Government's 5-year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021–2025) and supports the Government's Socioeconomic Development Strategy (2021–2030) and the National Action Plan for Children (2021–2030). It aligns with national sectoral frameworks and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while addressing cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, climate change, disability inclusion, migration, and adolescent development. Emerging issues (including mental health, digital inclusion, and digital transformation) are integrated. The programme aims to accelerate the fulfilment of child rights, ensuring that no child is left behind. It promotes the inclusion of poor and marginalised communities, particularly ethnic minorities, with subnational programming focused on disadvantaged regions. CP activities fall under four thematic outcome areas, and a fifth component on programme effectiveness:

- **Outcome 1:** Pregnant women, children and adolescents have equitable, quality health care and immunization, access to safe water and sanitation, adequate nutrition and mental health support services, live in safe and green environments and have the skills to practice healthy behaviours.
- **Outcome 2:** Children and adolescents, especially vulnerable girls and boys, have equitable access to inclusive, quality learning and digital and transferable skills development, opportunities for participation in a clean, green and safe environment
- **Outcome 3:** Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable girls and boys, are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and unnecessary family separation, through inclusive and effective child protection, child - care and justice systems, empowerment with knowledge and skills against harmful social norms practices and improved mental health and psychosocial support.
- **Outcome 4:** Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from evidence based, equitable, climate - resilient, environmentally sensitive and participatory policy, planning and public expenditure and an expanded child - sensitive and shock -responsive social protection system.
- **Programme Effectiveness:** UNICEF programmes are effectively planned, coordinated, monitored, and implemented and well -resourced, including in emergencies, through strong communications and social -norm change, operations and partnerships, including with the private sector.

This Country Programme Evaluation (CPE), which is both summative and formative, assesses the performance of the current programme and generating lessons to inform the next cycle (2027–2030).

2. Methodology

Through ten evaluation questions (EQs), the evaluation examines the programme's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability, as well as the integration of cross-cutting priorities such as equity, human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, and child rights. It also reviews UNICEF's strategic positioning within the development landscape and among national partners. The evaluation focuses on the **four key strategies of the CP: (i) Policy advocacy**. The evaluation mapped UNICEF's advocacy efforts across programmatic areas, and selected case studies from significant advocacy areas for further analysis in the field. The methodological approach to assessing policy advocacy emphasises participatory methods with key stakeholders and is based on the UNICEF Global Communication and Advocacy Strategy. Contribution analysis was applied to this component. **(ii) Innovation and digital transformation**. The evaluation explored UNICEF's overall approach to innovation, including definitions, metrics, strategies, processes, and organisational capacity, along with how effectively the CP implementation fostered innovation with partners and beneficiaries. **(iii) Evidence generation efforts**. These were analysed, identifying stakeholder engagement and dissemination strategies. This provided evidence to inform the EQs, recommendations and lesson learning on this component, and fed into the assessment of the other interlinked change strategies. **(iv) Communications for behaviour and social norm change**. The evaluation examined key communications strategies, audiences, campaigns, and selected examples to assess contributions to broader programme outcomes, including policy advocacy, innovation, and evidence generation, generating insights for recommendations and lessons learned.

Conducted in line with UN evaluation guidelines, norms and standards,¹ the evaluation applied a theory-based, utilisation-focused, and participatory approach. Mixed methods combined qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources to ensure evidence-based findings. Primary data was collected between April and June 2025.² The sampling strategy was based on purposive selection and actor mapping, considering geographical diversity, intervention maturity, and local partnerships. The

¹ Including the UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2023), UNEG Norms and Standards (2016), and UNICEF ethical guidelines

² Field missions visited Hanoi at national level, and at sub-national level the provinces of Gia Lia, Dien Bien and city of Da Nang.

sample of key informants included beneficiaries and community members (such as families, youth, and vulnerable groups). A total of 115 informants were consulted, through interviews and focus group discussions, the highest proportion being beneficiaries and community members (18%). Of the informants, 67% were female, 33% were male, and 18% were members of ethnic minorities. Primary data collection with children³ was not undertaken, however, youth⁴ and vulnerable populations were engaged.

3. Key Findings and Conclusions

3.1 Relevance

The CP demonstrates strong relevance to advancing child rights in Viet Nam, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised populations. Its design and implementation align closely with national development priorities, sectoral policies, and the UNSDCF, as well as UNICEF's global mandate and Strategic Plan (2022–2025). The CP reflects commitments to the SDGs and the UN's "Leave No One Behind" agenda.

The CP's context-sensitive approach combines national-level policy influence with community-level action in prioritised areas, producing measurable results. Locally adapted interventions address systemic service gaps, empower vulnerable groups, and respond to provincial priorities in culturally appropriate ways. Flexible, innovative models in health, nutrition, WASH, education, and child protection have strengthened provincial strategies and improved child well-being. Initiatives such as midwife training, life skills education, and emergency nutrition have filled critical gaps, reinforcing UNICEF's reputation as a trusted partner in underserved regions.

UNICEF's strategic positioning is a key asset. Its five-decade partnership with the Government of Viet Nam has built trust and credibility, enabling effective policy engagement and grassroots delivery. Stakeholders consistently recognise UNICEF's comparative advantage in technical expertise, financial agility, and leadership within the UN system. However, recent government restructuring will test the resilience of child-related policies and service delivery.

Conclusion: The CP is highly relevant to the rights of children, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised. Its strategic design reflects a strong commitment to equity and inclusion, aligning with national priorities and deliberately targets systemic service gaps in disadvantaged provinces and among ethnic minority communities. Its context-sensitive, locally adapted interventions have produced measurable improvements in child wellbeing through models that balance national-level policy engagement with community-level delivery. The CP is strategically positioned to respond to the country's evolving development landscape, demonstrating relevance through its technical expertise, financial agility, and trusted partnerships.

3.2 Coherence

The CP established strong partnerships and coordination mechanisms with key actors, particularly government counterparts at national and subnational levels. UNICEF Viet Nam also plays a pivotal role within the UN system, advancing child rights through targeted interventions and joint platforms. To enhance coherence and scale results, stronger institutional mechanisms for inter-agency learning, joint planning, and impact measurement are needed.

The CP reflects alignment with international commitments on child rights and equity and demonstrates gender-responsive programming, with emerging gender-transformative practices in sectors such as WASH, education, and social protection. Notable achievements include menstrual health initiatives, gender integration in social protection, STEM opportunities for girls, and gender-sensitive justice reforms. However, gaps remain in the availability and use of data linking gender and disability with intersecting factors such as poverty and ethnicity, as well as limited evidence of norm and behaviour change.

Conclusion: UNICEF's CP has effectively leveraged partnerships and coordination to advance child rights and equity, while contributing to UN coherence. To fully realise its transformative potential, the programme should deepen gender integration and strengthen mechanisms for joint learning and accountability across agencies.

3.3 Effectiveness

a. Contribution of outputs to desired programme outcomes

Child survival and development: In health, UNICEF contributed to immunization of over 1 million children under two, through technical guidelines, health worker training, and cold-chain improvements, thus

³ under 18 years

⁴ over 18 years

helping Viet Nam recover from the pandemic-induced drops in vaccination coverage. Over 81,000 mothers received skilled birth attendance, and over 74,500 newborns were provided with essential early care by health workers trained in UNICEF-supported activities. Training of village midwives supported over 18,600 pregnant women and directly assisted over 10,200 newborns in underserved areas. In **nutrition**, UNICEF's integrated efforts saw over 9 thousand pregnant women reached with micronutrient supplements and 500 children treated for severe acute malnutrition. Through policy advocacy, regulatory reform, capacity building, and strategic partnerships, the CP helped build a resilient nutritional framework for children and adolescents. **WASH** efforts saw more than 89 thousand children access safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and 36 schools and 12 healthcare facilities provided with climate resilient WASH infrastructure. The CP's success reflects the power of combining infrastructure support with normative advocacy and capacity development. In the area of **safe and green environments**, UNICEF progressively mainstreamed climate resilience and disaster preparedness across sectors. The impact of Typhoon Yagi catalysed a strategic pivot from localised risk analysis towards integrated approaches that consider child sensitivity, social vulnerability and low-carbon development. Outputs included supporting child-focused climate risk assessments, promoting school and health facility preparedness, and policy dialogue on adaptation—critical steps toward embedding resilience in national systems. Despite progress in child survival and development, persistent bottlenecks—exacerbated by COVID-19—continue to affect immunisation, maternal health, nutrition, and WASH access, particularly among ethnic minorities and climate-vulnerable regions.

Learning and skills: Strong partnership between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) enabled systemic reforms in curriculum, teacher training, and assessment. UNICEF supported integration of digital literacy and socio-emotional skills, contributed to Viet Nam's participation in regional learning assessments, and advanced a rights-based early childhood education curriculum. While strong progress was achieved in policy and capacity building, evidence gaps exist for innovative pilots, and inclusion of children with disabilities and ethnic minorities, and utilization of parents as resources, requires deeper attention.

Child Protection: UNICEF efforts saw over 9 thousand alleged child offenders and victims access specialized family and juvenile courts. Child friendly investigation rooms were institutionalized across all provinces and 1,500 children were interviewed using gender-sensitive and trauma-informed techniques. A major policy achievement in 2024 was the approval of the Law on Justice for Minors under the EU-JULE project, establishing a strong legal foundation for children's access to justice. Systems-strengthening efforts expanded protection services to over 15,000 vulnerable children, including victims of violence and child labour. Interagency protocols addressing violence against women and children are being piloted nationally, reinforcing integrated service delivery.

Social policy and governance: UNICEF advanced child-centred social policy and governance through public finance advocacy and institutionalisation of child-focused indicators in planning and monitoring frameworks. The child benefit scheme increased from VND 360,000 to VND 500,000 during the programme cycle. Provincial action plans supported by UNICEF introduced costed sectoral strategies and participatory mechanisms, securing People's Committee endorsements, measurable planning gains, and visible youth-led contributions to urban services. Addressing fiscal disparities, disaggregated government spending data for children, participation quality, and shock-responsive financing will be pivotal to consolidate these gains and sustaining impact.

Conclusion: The CP has been effective in delivering outputs that strengthen systems, influence policy, and improve services for vulnerable children. While progress is evident across all outcome areas, sustaining and scaling results will require deeper integration of equity principles, stronger evidence for innovative models, and enhanced government capacity at subnational levels.

b. The contribution of internal and external factors to achievements

While UNICEF has demonstrated strategic agility and programmatic responsiveness, the extent of its achievements is mediated by external conditions that lie beyond its direct control. The coming year will be critical for recalibrating implementation strategies and supporting government efforts to stabilise service delivery systems in newly configured administrative units.

External Factors: Programme implementation was influenced by multiple external challenges, including the lingering impacts of COVID-19 and Typhoon Yagi, fiscal and structural changes that made approval processes for partnerships and resource mobilization demanding, while data gaps constrained evidence-based planning. Geographic isolation and socio-cultural norms further complicated service delivery and behaviour change outreach.

Internal Factors: Internally, organisational configurations and uneven inter-unit coordination have occasionally diluted cross-cutting initiatives. However, successes in Child Protection and Social Policy demonstrate that collaboration thrives under clear mandates and systemic approaches. UNICEF's

technical expertise, flexibility, and culturally adaptive capacity-building remain core strengths, enabling strong engagement even in remote or emergency contexts.

Factors influencing achievement vary in controllability. **Fully within UNICEF's control** are partner engagement models, training quality, staff responsiveness, programme design features such as equity targeting, and internal coordination for integration and monitoring. **UNICEF can partially influence** financing modalities, policy, and infrastructure investment through partnerships, though influencing cultural practices remain a challenge. **Constraints largely beyond UNICEF's control** include national and provincial budget cycles, fiscal limitations, administrative restructuring, geographic remoteness, and government-set remuneration policies for frontline workers.

c. Use of key strategies to achieve results

UNICEF has effectively employed four core strategies to advance child rights and inclusive development: innovation and digital transformation, behaviour and social-norm change, policy advocacy, and evidence-based programming. Context-sensitive innovations (such as nutrition clubs, village midwife networks, and school-based rainwater harvesting systems) have improved maternal health, child nutrition, and hygiene practices. However, the absence of robust indicators to track normative change and sustained adoption risks limiting long-term impact. UNICEF's strategic convening power and normative expertise are essential to embed child-rights safeguards, data-protection standards and accountability across Viet Nam's digital reform agenda—ensuring that ethical considerations, transparency and inclusive governance prevent marginalisation and empower all children. High-level advocacy has delivered notable policy gains, particularly in child-focused reforms and inclusive service delivery. Further clarification of roles and coordination between advocacy and communication functions would help maximise influence. Pilot initiatives have generated valuable insights and demonstrated relevance and scalability, but challenges persist in documenting results, defining exit strategies, and translating local evidence into national policy.

Conclusion: UNICEF's strategic investment in technical assistance, policy dialogue, and institutional capacity-building has positioned it as a trusted advisor and catalyst for systemic change. While pilots have proven innovative and impactful, stronger mechanisms for measuring transformative outcomes and integrating lessons into national systems are essential to sustain and scale progress.

3.4 Efficiency

UNICEF has demonstrated strong capacity to mobilise public finance and expand private sector fundraising, with clear potential for growth in the next CP. Funding utilization and delivery timelines have been shaped by external factors—such government planning and approval processes, regulatory requirements, and evolving implementation modalities—within which UNICEF has demonstrated adaptability.

Human resources (HR) were adequate and technically strong for CP implementation. Yet, as UNICEF transitions from service delivery toward technical assistance and strategic policy advice, its HR structure must evolve. Priority areas include gender expertise, adolescent and youth engagement, advocacy and influencing skills, and private sector partnerships.

Monitoring and evaluation systems, including risk management, align with global UNICEF standards and have supported programme oversight. Nonetheless, gaps remain between reported data and the ability to track progress against the Theory of Change or assess long-term impact. Persistent weaknesses in national outcome-level data further constrain UNICEF's ability to demonstrate contributions effectively.

Conclusion: Despite external demands and utilisation challenges, UNICEF Viet Nam has shown efficiency in resource mobilisation and emergency response. To sustain progress, the next CP should strengthen HR capacity in strategic areas, deepen and diversify private sector engagement, and enhance data systems to better capture transformative results.

3.5 Sustainability

Strategic advocacy has delivered policy gains that embed systemic change, including the 2024 Social Work Decree and frameworks for digital transformation and artificial intelligence in education. Capacity-building has equipped government and civil society with competencies for independent service delivery. Initiatives like competency-based training and certification for social workers and the institutionalisation of juvenile justice courses in legal education ensure a skilled workforce to maintain reforms. Local governments' contributions to initiatives (such as mental health programmes, digital libraries, and child councils), partnerships with donors such as the EU, and community-driven models (such as nutrition clubs, parenting groups, and school-based initiatives) are all indicative of sustainability potential.

However, structural, contextual and significantly, financial challenges threaten durability. Government budget cycles and allocation procedures preclude advance-based financing, while limited costed scale-up

strategies for pilot interventions do not sufficiently enable sustained services. Other barriers include modest frontline worker allowances, strict approval processes, and gaps in subnational capacities, infrastructure investments, and sectoral convergence.

Policy-level reforms (such as the Social Work Decree and juvenile justice curriculum) have been institutionalised within national systems and academic frameworks, and MOET-endorsed digital teaching and AI integration frameworks are positioned for continuity under ministerial oversight, contingent on adequate professional development funding. Community-level pilots require national guidelines, dedicated provincial budgets, and locally trained staff in order to persist once external funding ends.

Conclusion: Sustainability depends on embedding successful community models into government systems and securing diversified financing. Sectoral coordination, political commitment and resource allocation provide a solid foundation for continuity. While UNICEF's advocacy has effectively driven policy and normative change, the durability of community-level models depends on costed scale-up plans integrated into government budgets.

3.6 Lessons Learned

- UNICEF's advocacy during Viet Nam's recent institutional reforms offers lessons into how child-focused advocacy can shape long-term impact for other countries undergoing similar changes.
- The CPE highlights the importance of distinguishing between political and regulatory agenda-setting and the actual quality of services delivered. Effectiveness of legislative reforms depends on frontline actors having the capability, motivation, and opportunity to implement them.⁵
- UNICEF's role in legislative breakthroughs illustrates how evidence gathering, international benchmarking, and technical advocacy can position child-sensitive approaches within national frameworks, under a joint-UN effort.
- The CPE demonstrates that locally defined, problem-based strategies and multi-stakeholder collaboration ensure reforms are context-sensitive and achieve lasting impact.
- UNICEF's long-standing presence in Viet Nam, accompanying the country through successive stages of development has built credibility and institutional memory.

3.7 Recommendations

The CPE presents nine recommendations—five strategic and four programmatic—for the Viet Nam Country Office (VCO) to consider as it develops the next CP. The recommendations are categorized by (i) target audience and (ii) priority level:

- Short-term (ST) recommendations are to be implemented during the final phase of the current CP;
- Medium-term (MT) recommendations are intended for the planning and launch of the next CP;
- Long-term (LT) recommendations are to be carried out during the implementation of the next CP.

Level	Priority / Directed to	Recommendations
Strategic	MT / VCO management	1. Adapting to Viet Nam's transition to Upper-Middle-Income status and align with the final phase of the SDGs and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026 – 2029
	LT / VCO management	2. Consolidate UN System efficiency and strategic focus
	ST / VCO management & sections	3. Enhance management of pilot projects portfolio
	ST / VCO management & sections	4. Strengthen advocacy at UNICEF Viet Nam
	MT / VCO management	5. Progressively transition from the traditional funding approach to catalysing sustainable financing across public, private, and international sectors for children's services and rights
Programmatic	MT / VCO management & thematic working groups	6. Strengthen the programmatic integration of key cross-cutting issues by enhancing work on transformative gender, climate change, and disability
	MT / VCO management & thematic working groups	7. Redouble efforts to address harmful behaviours, norms and stereotypes that limit attainment of rights for all children
	MT / VCO management & thematic working groups	8. Reconsider and emphasise the role of parents in achieving the rights of all children in Viet Nam
	MT / VCO management	9. Strengthen UNICEF Viet Nam's subnational footprint to maximize equity, resilience and scalability

⁵ See Mayne, John. (2017). The COM-B Theory of Change Model (V3), for further details



Evaluation Report

1. Introduction

The UNICEF Viet Nam Country Programme of Cooperation (2022-2026) represents a collaborative partnership between UNICEF and the Government of Viet Nam, as outlined in the Country Programme Document (CPD). The UNICEF Viet Nam Country Office (VCO) engaged Landell Mills to conduct an evaluation of its Country Programme (CP). This evaluation aims to fulfil the dual purposes of accountability and learning, encompassing both summative and formative elements. The insights gained will inform future programming, including the development of the subsequent CPD for 2027-2031.

In accordance with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy, it is mandatory to conduct a Country Programme Evaluation (CPE) at least once every two programme cycles. This evaluation will thus identify opportunities for enhancing UNICEF's programming in the country, with a focus on:

1. The Programme of Cooperation's contribution to national development results.
2. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025 (UNSDCF) results.
3. UNICEF's strategic positioning in relation to its child rights mandate.

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 elaborates on the purpose, scope, and users of the evaluation. Section 3 presents the evaluation methodology, including data collection and analysis approaches, evaluation questions and matrix, data collection tools, sampling strategy, stakeholder analysis, ethical considerations, and evaluation limitations. Section 4 outlines key contextual factors in Viet Nam, followed by an overview of the CP. Section 5 presents the findings of the evaluation, by evaluation criteria and question. Section 6 and 7 provide conclusions and lessons learned, and Section 8 presents the recommendations of the evaluation.

2. Purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation

2.1 Purpose and users of the evaluation

This evaluation will serve the dual purpose of accountability and learning and will be both summative and formative in nature. It will inform future programming, including the design of the next CPD 2027-2031. The Terms of Reference (annex 1) identifies the specific objectives as the following:

- To assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the CP, with a focus on achievement of scale, equity, disability and gender equality and any specific programme areas which have not been subject to evaluation.
- To assess the ability of the CP to respond and adapt to changing contexts (including but not limited to COVID-19), new emerging and cross-cutting issues, and national priorities.
- To identify key challenges that constrain or catalysts that accelerate and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of CP implementation and performance.
- To identify lessons learned about what works and does not work and provide a set of forward-looking and actionable recommendations on how UNICEF can most effectively position itself and build on its comparative advantage to deliver with strength the expected results in the current CP and next programming cycle, taking into consideration national development priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This CPE builds upon evaluative exercises conducted by the VCO, including the Evaluability Assessment (EA) of the Viet Nam CPD.⁶ The EA aimed to assess the logical framework of the CP and the relevance of the expected results for children, to identify gaps or limitations in the design of the results framework, and to assess evaluability of the expected results. The CPE has considered the findings and recommendations of the EA and has drawn on other relevant thematic evaluations and reviews conducted by UNICEF at both national and global levels. The CPE is being undertaken around one and a half years prior to the end of the CPD period, and results are reflected as such.

In 2025, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) conducted an independent evaluation of the UNSDCF 2022-2026, forming an integral part of the UN's strategic planning process for the 2027-2031 programming cycle. This CPE aimed to contribute to the evidence pool for the UNSDCF evaluation.

The CPE has a range of target audiences, differentiated as primary stakeholders (for whom the CPE will make specific recommendations), and secondary audiences (with an interest in the findings). Annex 4

⁶ UNICEF (2023) EA for UNICEF Country Program. UNICEF Evaluation Office, New York.

provides a stakeholder mapping of how the evaluation's findings will be used by each stakeholder group to enhance utilisation.

a. Primary users

- **UNICEF VCO.** Management in VCO are the key audience for the strategic recommendations that emerge from the CPE, e.g. on the strategic positioning of UNICEF among the wider development community and UN framework in Viet Nam, and how the VCO can capitalise on its comparative advantages to achieve results for children. UNICEF programme staff are a crucial internal audience, responsible for operationalising the ongoing CP, and the future implementation of the next CP 2027-2031. The CPE engaged VCO management and programme staff at each stage of the evaluation, including through co-development of recommendations to encourage uptake of evaluation findings.
- **UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) and Headquarters (HQ).** For EAPRO and HQ, the CPE provides insight on the effectiveness of UNICEF's strategy and approaches in the context of Viet Nam, which could provide lessons applicable to other contexts, e.g. in other countries transitioning to lower-middle-income status, and those vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

b. Secondary users

- **Government of Viet Nam.** The CP was a partnership engagement between UNICEF and the government and thus stakeholders in government ministries and departments at national and sub-national level were crucial informants to the evaluation, as well as key audiences for the lessons and recommendations for future partnership with UNICEF and implementation of the next CP.
- **Other national partners including** civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, private sector, and academia.
- **UN Country Team (UNCT), other development partners, donors.**
- **Programme beneficiaries / Rights holders and duty bearers.** Youth, adolescents, parents and care givers, communities, civil society organisations, and the wider public all have an interest in the results of the evaluation.

An analysis of these groups, their interests and learning needs were examined during the inception phase. This also informed the CPE's strategy for engaging with these groups as part of data collection.

2.2 Scope of the evaluation

The scope of the CPE was primarily the UNICEF Viet Nam CP 2022-2026. As the CP is still being implemented, the **temporal scope** focused on the period from March 2022 to the end of June 2025, when the evaluation data collection concluded. However, the CPE has also reflected on programme implementation strategies and learning brought forward from the previous CP (2017-2021) to incorporate those programmes which have only achieved scale in the present period. Within this scope, the CPE looked at the **relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability** of the CP. While **impact** was excluded due to lack of evidence on longer-term impact of the CP, the evaluation has assessed progress towards intermediate results (outcomes) which are important interim steps towards longer-term impact, and which the CP expects to achieve by 2026 (see Table 3 in Section 4.2.4). In its assessment, the evaluation takes account of delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on interim results for some programmes to provide formative learning and recommendations. The **thematic scope** of the CPE encompassed all five programme components of UNICEF's activities in Viet Nam, and four key change strategies used by UNICEF to achieve results (see Section 4.2.4). Alongside covering the thematic focus of programmes, the data collection, analysis and reporting of the CPE were structured around these key change strategies. The CPE examined each strategy individually, as well as the combination and coherence of these strategies, to achieve the objectives of the CP.

3. Evaluation approach and methodology

3.1 Evaluation design and approach

This section presents the approach and multi-stage methodology employed for the CPE, including the overall design, evaluation questions, data collection methods, sampling, analytical framework, limitations, and mitigation strategies.

A theory-based contribution analysis approach was applied in the CPE. This was guided by the Theory of Change (ToC) of the CPD (see section 4.2.6 and annex 2) which was reconstructed by the Evaluation Team (ET) to reflect the variability in the CPD strategy and context. The ToC articulated the expected impact of the CPD through four key strategies: (i) innovation and digital transformation; (ii) communication for behaviour and social-norm change; (iii) advocacy with policy makers; and (iv) using data and evidence to drive change. The ToC provided an analytical framework to inform the CPE methodology and

assessment of evidence, focussing on the following key elements: (i) contribution of outputs to outcomes; (ii) the role of the four key strategies; and (iii) the associated assumptions and risks. Other considerations that framed the methodological approach are highlighted below:

a. Utilisation-focused evaluation: To support decision-making for the new programme cycle, the evaluation focused on the main objectives defined by VCO and EAPRO. Its conclusions and recommendations are aligned with the learning needs of the evaluation's key audiences.

b. Participatory processes: Stakeholder engagement methods were applied to enhance the utility of the assessment and to ensure equitable representation of diverse perspectives. Recognising the strategic nature of this evaluation and the availability of existing documentation, including studies conducted during CP implementation, primary data collection with children (under 18 years) was not undertaken. However, youth (over 18 years), and vulnerable populations were involved. Stakeholders from ethnic minority communities participated in focus group discussions, ensuring their voices were reflected in the findings. The perspectives of children and persons with disabilities were explicitly incorporated through consultation with a representative of the Association of People with Disabilities. Furthermore, this dimension was systematically addressed in interviews conducted at both national and local levels. For further information on stakeholder engagement and inclusion of marginalised populations, refer to section 3.3.2 and Annex 5.

c. Mixed methods and triangulation: A mix of quantitative and qualitative information, from secondary and primary sources was used for the analysis. Triangulation ensured that findings and conclusions were substantiated and accurate.

d. Quality and ethical standards: The evaluation adhered to internationally recognised quality and ethical standards, including OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and quality standards, the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards, and UNICEF's evaluation policies and ethical guidelines.⁷ The CPE design and implementation considered ethical safeguards, including the protection of the confidentiality, dignity, rights and well-being of human beings, especially children, and respect for local community values. Core obligations to ensure ethical security included independence, impartiality, credibility, conflicts of interest, and accountability. All ET members signed a Pledge of Ethical Conduct, committing to the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and associated ethical behaviours.⁸ The ET was trained and experienced in ethical research, and diverse in terms of gender and national and international expertise. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout. Informed consent (see annex 6) ensured transparency on the purpose, perceived risks and benefits, confidentiality measures and non-attribution of data, and withdrawal rights. Ethical clearance was obtained from an independent Ethical Review Board prior to data collection.

e. Human rights, gender and equity sensitive approach: The evaluation adopted a human rights-based, gender-responsive, and equity-sensitive approach, grounded in relevant international frameworks and UN strategies. These included:

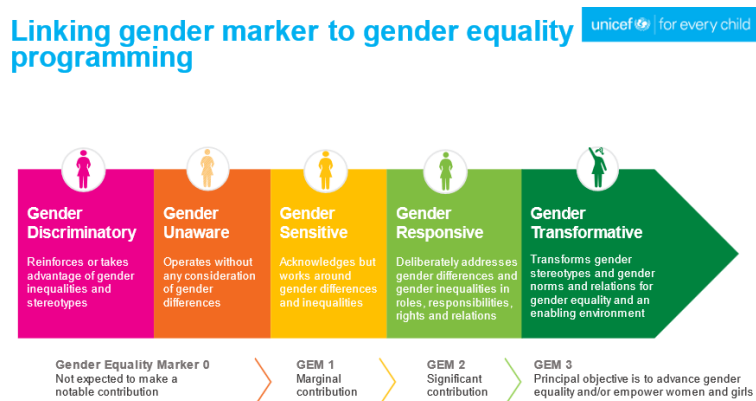
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- UNICEF Guidelines for Disability-Inclusive Evaluations (2022)
- UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy 2022–2030
- The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (2020)
- UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2022-2025
- UNEG Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation (2014)

Gender equality and human rights considerations were mainstreamed throughout the evaluation process. The evaluation assessed the extent to which the CP integrated and addressed the rights of its target populations. This included examining the presence of human rights analysis in programme design, the quality of stakeholder participation, and the degree to which rights-based principles were reflected in implementation and decision-making processes. The UNICEF Gender Equality Continuum, shown in Figure 1, was used as a key reference to assess the gender results of the CP. For each evaluation criteria, a gender specific and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) indicator was added to help conduct the analysis in combination with the dimensions of human rights and disabilities. This continuum was also used to assess the extent to which disability and ethnic minority groups are considered in indicators and results.

⁷ These included: UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis (2021), UNICEF's Revised Evaluation Policy (2023) UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator (2018), UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2017), Ethical Research Involving Children compendium (2013)

⁸ integrity, accountability, respect and beneficence

Figure 1 UNICEF Gender Equality Continuum



Source: UNICEF Gender Equality Marker and Gender Tag Guidance Note (2022)

f. Linkages with other evaluations

The evaluation considered related evaluations, such as the Viet Nam UNSDCF evaluation (started in April 2025) and was clear in explaining the objectives of the CPE to informants that may be involved in both. The ET also took into account findings and conclusions from all key evaluations conducted by UNICEF under the CPD. These included (but were not limited to), the ongoing global evaluation of the VCO Juvenile Justice Programme, with Viet Nam serving as a case study, and the After-Action Review of UNICEF Viet Nam's response to Typhoon Yagi. See Annex 11 for the bibliography.

3.2 Evaluation questions

The evaluation criteria and approaches were made explicit through ten evaluation questions (EQs) which were agreed during the inception phase. Indicators were formulated for the purpose of assessing each of the key programme strategies and were mainstreamed within the EQs. The CPE also assessed the extent to which the CPD incorporated the approach of human rights, gender equality, equity and interculturality for children and adolescents. The evaluation matrix (annex 3) details the indicators, data sources and methods used for each EQ.

Table 1 Evaluation questions

Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	1. How relevant is the CP, both in its design and implementation, to the rights of children, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised? 2. How well is UNICEF strategically positioned to respond to the changing circumstances and context of Viet Nam? 3. To what extent are the objectives of the CPD consistent with country development priorities and policies, and were aligned throughout the programme period with the SDGs and UNICEF global policies and strategies?
Coherence	4. To what extent have partnerships or coordination mechanisms been established with key actors, such as government at national and local levels, civil society, NGOs, academia, and other UN agencies, to avoid duplication of efforts, foster communication, ensure clearer accountabilities, and accelerate results for the most vulnerable children on a large scale? 5. How well are programme planning, implementation and key strategies incorporating key international commitments including gender equality and women's empowerment, equity for children, and the human rights-based approach?
Effectiveness	6. To what extent were programme outputs (short-term/intermediate results) delivered, and did they sufficiently contribute to desired programme outcomes and humanitarian response? 7. What internal or external factors contributed to achievements (or not) and to what extent were these factors within UNICEF's control? 8. How well has UNICEF used the following strategies to achieve results: a) innovation and digital transformation, b) communication for behaviour and social-norm change, c) advocacy with policy makers, and d) using data and evidence to drive change.
Efficiency	9. To what extent were the key strategies clearly articulated, adapted, and communicated, sufficient staff expertise and skills leveraged, and efficient monitoring and reporting systems established, including risk management?
Sustainability	10. Are the UNICEF interventions and their results likely to continue without UNICEF support? What are the contributing or constraining factors to make a durable change?

Given the broad scale of UNICEF's activities in Viet Nam, the CPE focused on the following key strategies:

- **Policy advocacy.** The evaluation mapped the VCO's advocacy efforts across programmatic sections, and selected case studies from significant advocacy areas for further analysis in the field. The methodological approach to assessing policy advocacy emphasises participatory methods with key stakeholders and is based on the UNICEF Global Communication and Advocacy Strategy. Contribution analysis was applied to this component.
- **Innovation and digital transformation.** The evaluation explored VCO's overall approach to innovation, including how UNICEF defines metrics around innovation, the strategy and processes of innovation. It also looked at the organisational context, resources and capabilities of the VCO in innovation, and how effective implementation of the CP has been to foster innovation with partners and beneficiaries.
- **Evidence generation efforts.** These were analysed, identifying stakeholder engagement and dissemination strategies. This provided evidence to inform the evaluation questions, as well as recommendations and key lesson learning on this programme component and fed into the assessment of the other change strategies, as evidence generation interlinks with these.
- **Communications for behaviour and social norm change.** The evaluation investigated VCO's key communications strategies used to influence behaviours and norms, target audiences and key campaigns, and select examples for deep-dive analysis. The assessment analysed how communications efforts have contributed to broader programme outcomes, including policy advocacy, innovation, and evidence generation, providing insights for recommendations and lessons learned.

3.3 Data collection and analysis methods

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, answering descriptive and normative questions to analyse the contribution of the VCO interventions to the achievement of the results planned in the CPD. The evaluation entailed the systematic collection of information on the CPD interventions and incorporated the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques, but not experimental ones. Methodological triangulation was used through several data collection methods and consultation with diverse groups of stakeholders. In synthesis, the evaluation used documentary review and quantitative data analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups discussions, as explained below.

3.3.1 Secondary data collection

Document review: During the inception phase, the ET reviewed and mapped documents and data shared by VCO. In the data collection phase, the ET obtained additional relevant documents from UNICEF and partners. A comprehensive desk review was conducted, encompassing all pertinent contextual analyses, progress reports, evaluation findings, and Results Assessment Module (RAM) reports covering the period (see Annex 11 for the bibliography). To systematically extract key information and identify emerging themes aligned with the evaluation's lines of enquiry, the ET applied qualitative coding methods.

Quantitative data analysis: Secondary quantitative data sources included UNICEF output and outcome indicator data, programmatic and associated quantitative information, financial records, and human resource data. These data sets were analysed in alignment with the evaluation's key lines of enquiry, and data visualisations were developed to support interpretation and enhance understanding. The analysis of quantitative data primarily informed the evaluation of the efficiency, relevance, and effectiveness criteria, providing evidence-based insights into programme performance and resource utilisation.

3.3.2 Primary data collection

Primary data collection was conducted between April and June 2025. Field missions visited Hanoi at national level, and at sub-national level the provinces of Gia Lia, Dien Bien and city of Da Nang (see section 4.2.3. for the CP's geographical focus).⁹ Criteria for the selection of provincial locations included: 1) the level of maturity: the CPE would be able to assess the drivers and lessons learned during the time; 2) provinces where the VCO had implemented more than two projects, to be able to assess the coherence of the work at the local level, providing understanding of issues related to policy influencing, lessons-learned and UNICEF's contributions, etc.; and 3) obtaining a context of institutional and local partners staff cooperation. Sampling of stakeholders to be consulted was based on analysis of the stakeholder mapping (annex 4), refined through document analysis, and discussions with VCO. In total, 115 informants were consulted, through 75 key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Table 2 summarises the number of informants by stakeholder category. Of the informants, 67 per cent were female and 33 per cent were male. Data collection was conducted 69 per cent in-person and 31 per cent

⁹ Field mission 1 (April 2025) included Hanoi and Da Nang, and field mission 2 (May 2025) included Hanoi, Gia Lia and Dien Bien.

online. Further details on data collection including a list of stakeholders consulted is presented in annex 5, while data collection tools are in annex 6.

Table 2 Summary of informants by category

Category	Number of Informants	Percentage of Total Informants
Beneficiary / Community member	21	18%
Local Service Providers	18	16%
Provincial Government	18	16%
UNICEF VCO	15	13%
National Government	11	10%
NGO/ CSO	10	9%
UNICEF EAPRO	10	9%
UN Agency	7	6%
Multilateral Banks/ Financial Institutions/ Public international donors	3	3%
Academia/Partner	2	2%
National Committee	1	1%
Total	115	

Although surveys had been considered as a potential data collection method at inception phase, during the data collection phase it was assessed by the ET and agreed with UNICEF that surveys would not be advantageous, given the sufficient breadth and depth of data collected through other methods and potential limitations of survey data including response levels.

Key informant interviews: In collaboration with VCO, the ET identified and prioritised key institutions and stakeholders to be interviewed. KIIs were conducted both in person (primarily with national and provincial level stakeholders) and online (primarily with UNICEF staff and international actors). The ET engaged in KIIs with a broad range of stakeholders, including UNICEF staff at country and regional levels; Government representatives at national and provincial levels; local service providers; international and national non-governmental organisations; other UN agencies; multilateral development banks and international donors; research institutions and academia; and national committees. KIIs were structured around the five evaluation criteria, with questions tailored to each informant's role and knowledge of the CP. Semi-structured interview guides outlined the topics to be covered, while allowing flexibility for open-ended responses and emergence of new lines of enquiry. This approach ensured consistency across interviews while enabling deeper exploration of relevant themes.

Focus group discussions: FGDs were employed in contexts where group interaction was likely to enrich the exchange of information, offering a platform for participants to share experiences and perspectives collectively. This method enabled the evaluation to capture group-level insights rather than individual viewpoints. FGDs were conducted with parents/ caregivers of children in schools targeted by UNICEF support, teachers (at kindergarten, primary and secondary levels), and health care professionals who had received UNICEF support including capacity development initiatives. Reflecting the CP's emphasis on gender equality, disability inclusion, and ethnic minority engagement, FGDs were designed to be inclusive. Where feasible, groups included:

- Gender representation: 61% of participants were female and 39% were male. Caregivers/parents and teachers of both male and female children were included in all FGDs with these stakeholders.
- Ethnic minorities: 18% of participants identified as members of ethnic minorities. This included 22% of caregiver/parents, 40% of health service staff/network. All participating teachers had experience of teaching students from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Disability inclusion: at least 20% of teachers reported having children with disabilities in their classrooms. It was not possible to calculate the proportion of caregivers/parents of children with disabilities participating in FGDs due to incomplete data.

Each FGD comprised 6–8 participants and primarily contributed qualitative data related to the relevance, coherence, and effectiveness of UNICEF-supported activities.

3.4 Data analysis approach

The **evaluation matrix** (Annex 3) served as the primary analytical framework, guiding the synthesis of evidence from primary and secondary sources. Data was systematically organised and analysed in alignment with the EQs and indicators defined in the matrix. To support coding of qualitative data, the ET used *Atlas.TI* software. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using *Microsoft Excel*.

As part of the assessment of the CPD results framework, the evaluation compiled a comprehensive table capturing outcomes and outputs included in the CPD or subsequently integrated into the RAM. The objective was to assess the status of CPD output indicators at the time of the evaluation, with outcome indicators considered where available. The primary data source was the RAM (with data up to the end of 2024), supplemented by insights from key informants and corroborating evidence. While not the central focus of the effectiveness analysis, this exercise served as an accountability mechanism. The results are presented in Annex 7 and provide a basis for critical reflection on the quality and robustness of CPD indicators. Following this assessment, the **contribution analysis** narrative was developed, grounded in the ToC. The initial quantitative findings were integrated with qualitative insights, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the CPD's performance. This synthesis helped document key issues raised during the evaluation and contextualised them within the perspectives of stakeholders involved in programme implementation.

Triangulation was used to improve accuracy and reliability of the findings. It helped reduce errors in interpreting causal relationships by identifying both gaps in expected results and unexpected positive outcomes. It helped to minimise bias by cross-checking information from different sources. Triangulation was applied in three ways: a) source triangulation (comparing the same information gathered from different stakeholders), b) methodological triangulation (using multiple data collection methods), and c) evaluator triangulation (involving multiple ET members in the analysis to ensure diverse perspectives and reduce individual bias). This strengthened the credibility of the CPE's conclusions and recommendations.

3.5 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation faced several limitations that impacted the depth and breadth of analysis, which were mitigated to the extent possible:

- Changes in government representatives immediately prior or during the evaluation process, driven by ongoing institutional restructuring in Viet Nam, resulted in reduced institutional memory and limited availability of key informants in some cases. To mitigate this, the ET drew on alternative secondary data sources and sent written interview questions to key informants who were not able to attend interview but opted to respond in writing.
- There was limited documentation available for certain components of the CP, particularly regarding pilot activities and the approaches used, which constrained the ability to fully assess their relevance, effectiveness, and scalability. Primary data collection helped to partially mitigate this constraint.
- The evaluation faced a limitation in conducting primary data collection with stakeholders related to the area of child protection generally, and particularly related to the Juvenile Justice Programme. For example, the evaluation could not interview the Ministry of Justice, or community-based child protection committees. Visiting juvenile courts or child friendly interview rooms was not possible. A separate evaluation of Access to Justice for Children in Viet Nam was ongoing during the data collection phase of the CPE.¹⁰ Therefore the CPE was designed to avoid repeated data collection with the same stakeholders and for efficiency between the two exercises. Thus, the evaluations findings on juvenile justice are primarily based on available secondary evaluations (including the UNICEF Formative Evaluation of Family and Juvenile Courts in Viet Nam, 2024), interviews with UNICEF staff, and a limited number of external stakeholders.

4. Country context and UNICEF Country Programme

4.1 Country context

The following sub-sections provide an overview of key factors in the context of Viet Nam. In addition, Annex 10 presents a timeline of key contextual events during the CP period to date, including UN and UNICEF strategies and resources, national strategies, political, environmental and other significant events.

a. Demography and population: Viet Nam is a Southeast Asian country, sharing borders with China, Laos, and Cambodia. It consists of 63 provinces and cities, and the population is estimated at 101.5

¹⁰ Viet Nam case study on Access to Justice for Children, part of the UNICEF HQ/global evaluation carried out by Coram international. As the case study was being undertaken in 2025, the inception report was shared with the CPE team, although the final report became available after the data collection phase of the CPE. The ET therefore drew on other available documentation related to the work on juvenile justice, including the UNICEF Formative Evaluation of Family and Juvenile Courts in Viet Nam, 2024.

million.¹¹ Approximately 23.3 per cent of the population were under the age of 15 years in 2024.¹² Viet Nam is one of the most rapidly ageing countries in the world. It is expected to transition from an “ageing” to an “aged” society by 2036.¹³ This demographic change is driven by a reduction in mortality, an increase in life expectancy, and a decline in fertility. Approximately one third of the population live in its mega-cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC).¹⁴ Its population comprises of 54 ethnic groups, the largest being the Kinh. The Kinh group is primarily concentrated in lowland and urban areas, while many of the ethnic minority groups live in the mountainous northern and central regions.

b. Socio-economic context: Over the past 30 years, Viet Nam has achieved remarkable socioeconomic progress and poverty reduction, moving to lower-middle-income status in 2010. Strong progress across several SDGs has been observed. Viet Nam aspires to become an upper-middle-income country by 2030. This goal is part of the country’s long-term development strategy, outlined in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS) for 2021-2030. Viet Nam has set the ambitious target of becoming a high-income country by 2045, which would mark a significant transformation in its economic development. Viet Nam has coined this new era (2025 to 2045) as ‘the Era of the Nation’s Rise’,¹⁵ conceptualised as a strategic plan to accelerate economic growth, innovation, and global influence. Ensuring that all of society benefits from this economic ascent remains a challenge. Socio-economic disparities by region and ethnicity persist, and inequalities have deepened because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

c. Political and governance context: Viet Nam’s governance is characterised by the leadership of the Communist Party. Since 2016, Viet Nam has implemented regulatory measures to reduce corruption, including legal reforms, public awareness campaigns, and increased enforcement of anti-bribery laws. The country’s ranking under the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index has improved from 113th in the world in 2016, to 88th in 2024 (scored 40/100, lower than the global average of 43). The anti-corruption campaign has reinforced accountability, fostering a sense of caution within the public sector, resulting in comparatively slower decision-making and service delivery than in earlier periods.¹⁶ In order to remove ‘bottlenecks’ in legal institutions and to liberate resources to promote socio-economic development, on 24 June 2025, at the 9th Session of the 15th National Assembly, the National Assembly adopted Resolution No. 206/2025/QH15 on special mechanisms for addressing demands associated with legal provisions on criteria for identification, principles, options, processes, and responsibilities. Viet Nam integrates Official Development Assistance (ODA) into its national budget, with funds allocated based on government priorities. Viet Nam’s ODA decree, amended in 2020,¹⁷ ensures ODA is used for areas directly contributing to national development. Prior to ministry consolidation, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) oversaw ODA alignment with the government’s development priorities and sector-specific strategies. In 2025 the MPI’s functions were transferred to the Ministry of Finance. As the economy continues to transition, Viet Nam has sought to reduce reliance on ODA, focusing on attracting Foreign Direct Investment and private sector contributions. ODA has decreased, with net ODA and official aid dropping from 3.17 billion USD in 2015 to 50 million USD by 2022, followed by an increase to 831 million in 2023.¹⁸ In December 2024, the Government announced a comprehensive restructuring of its organisation, including reform of Communist Party bodies, the National Assembly (NA), state apparatus, government agencies, and mass organisations. The new structure is formed of 17 ministries and ministry-level agencies (down from 22) and five government-affiliated agencies (down from eight). In July 2025, administrative reform merged 63 provinces¹⁹ and cities down to 34 provincial-level administrative units²⁰ and eliminated the district level entirely. While the restructuring was still in progress during this evaluation, some uncertainty remained about potential delays in decision-making processes, and possible impacts on ODA priorities due to changes in direction.

d. National policies and the Sustainable Development Agenda: Viet Nam’s second Voluntary National Review of implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2023) revealed progress in select areas, including poverty, health, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy. However, in other areas, Viet Nam is lagging behind regional progress, particularly on quality education, gender equality and life below water.²¹ To implement the 2030 Agenda, Viet Nam committed to: (1) Prioritize investments in human capital, science and technology, innovation; upgrade infrastructures, develop a green and circular economy, and build resilience against natural disasters and climate change;

¹¹ Viet Nam NSO. Data as of 2024. (Accessed November 2025) <https://www.nso.gov.vn/en/px-web/?pxid=E0201&theme=Population%20and%20Employment>

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ UNFPA Viet Nam: ‘Ageing’ <https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/topics/ageing-6> (Accessed February 2025)

¹⁴ Climate Risk Country Profile: Viet Nam (2020): The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank

¹⁵ General Secretary to Lam, September 23, 2024, speech at Columbia University in the United States

¹⁶ United Nations Viet Nam (2024) Viet Nam Common Country Analysis 2024 Update. November 2024

¹⁷ In December 2021, with the aim of streamlining the management process and improving the efficiency applicable to ODA and concessional loans, the Government issued Decree 114/2021/ND-CP on the management and use of ODA and concessional loans from foreign donors (Decree 114)

¹⁸ World Bank data, Net ODA and official aid received (current US\$) - Viet Nam. (Accessed December 2025)

¹⁹ The province names used in this evaluation report are the former names used before this provincial merging.

²⁰ comprising six centrally managed cities and 28 provinces

²¹ Ministry of Planning and Investment (2023), Voluntary National Review 2023 on the Implementation of the SDGs

(2) Enhance socialism-oriented market institutions, foster public administration reform and promote the participation of vulnerable groups in decision-making; (3) Further reform the social protection systems; (4) Stabilize macroeconomic fundamentals, continue COVID-19 recovery support, enhance efficient use of financial resources for sustainable development; (5) Improve data availability to enhance the monitoring of SDG progress; (6) Engage all stakeholders and partners to achieve the SDGs by 2030.²² Viet Nam has shown a commitment to advancing children's rights, ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. The Government has incorporated the CRC's principles into national laws and policies, including the Law on Children (2016). Viet Nam has made significant progress in reducing child poverty,

Box 1: Key national laws and policies related to the rights of children in Viet Nam:

- Constitution of Vietnam (2013)
- Law on Children (2016)
- National Action Programme for Children (2021-2030)
- Child Protection Programme (2021-2025)
- Education Law (amended 2019)
- Juvenile Justice Law (2015)
- Law on Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence (2007, amended 2022)
- National Plan on Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor (2021-2025)
- National Strategy on Reproductive Health, Maternal, Child Health, and Nutrition (2011-2020)
- Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025 (2021)
- Education Strategy Development Plan 2021-2026 (2021)
- National Target Programme for socioeconomic development in ethnic minorities and mountainous areas 2021–2030 (2021)
- Law on Justice for Minors (2024)
- Government Resolutions issued in 2025: Resolution 71 (education), 72 (health), 57 (science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation), and 59 (international integration)

increasing education access, and improving healthcare services. However, despite these strides, children face economic, social and environmental risks. Significant challenges remain, including child labour, violence, trafficking, and inequalities faced by vulnerable groups, including ethnic minority children, children living in poverty, children with disabilities (CWDs) and children affected by migration.

e. Health and nutrition: Health outcomes have improved markedly over the past decade. However, there are significant disparities in child mortality, particularly among ethnic minorities. Under-five child mortality stood at 20 per 1,000 live births in 2020.²³ However, rural under-five mortality rates are twice as high as in urban areas.²⁴ Although there has been a decrease in maternal mortality rates nationally, the ratio remains high in mountainous and ethnic minority-populated regions (100–150 per 100,000 live births).²⁵ Nationally, the percentages of women receiving four antenatal care visits and healthcare facility-based delivery were 88.2 and 96.3 per cent respectively. In contrast, these percentages are 10.6 and 37 per cent for Hmong.²⁶ While Viet Nam has consistently maintained over 80 per cent coverage for routine immunization of children under one years, the impact of COVID-19, interrupted vaccine supplies, and government procurement procedures caused a drop in immunization coverage to 66.4 per cent in 2023.²⁷ The Ministry of Health (MOH) 2019 Nutrition Survey revealed progress in child nutrition, but challenges remain. Viet Nam faces a triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight/obesity. Stunting affected 18.6 per cent of children under 5 in 2023, according to the MOH. In data as of 2020, the stunting rate among ethnic minority children was 31.4 per cent, twice as high as that of the majority Kinh children (15 per cent).²⁸ Only 55.2 per cent of children aged 6-23 months receive minimum dietary diversity.²⁹ Conversely, overweight and obesity rates are rising, affecting 19 per cent of children and adolescents in 2020.³⁰ Mental health is a critical issue for many adolescents. In 2022, a survey³¹ revealed that nearly 22 per cent of adolescents reported having a mental health problem, but only 8 per cent used support services.

During the period of this CP, the Government has introduced several new orientations aimed at strengthening the health system and improving service delivery at all levels. Directive No. 25-CT/TW (25

²² *Ibid*

²³ UNICEF (2024) Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2023, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2024. The preliminary figure for 2024 stood at 16.9 per 1,000 live births.

²⁴ Common country analysis, 2021.

²⁵ United Nations Viet Nam (2024) Viet Name Common Country Analysis 2024 Update. November 2024

²⁶ United Nations Viet Nam (2024) Viet Name Common Country Analysis 2024 Update. November 2024

²⁷ UNICEF (2023) End of Year Results Summary Narrative 2023

²⁸ Government of Vietnam (2021) Vietnam National Nutrition Strategy 2021-2030 <https://www.n4d.group/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Vietnam-National-Nutrition-Strategy.pdf>.

²⁹ GSO and UNICEF (2021) Survey Measuring Viet Nam SDG indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021 (MICS 6).

³⁰ UNICEF and Hanoi University of Public Health (2021) Landscape Analysis on Childhood Overweight and Obesity Vietnam

³¹ Institute of Sociology, University of Queensland, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2022). Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey: Report on Main Findings. Hanoi, Viet Nam: Institute of Sociology

October 2023) sets out a renewed emphasis on enhancing the quality of grassroots health care, recognising primary-level services as a cornerstone for equitable access and community-based prevention. Complementing this, Decision No. 89/QĐ-TTg (23 January 2024) approves the National Strategy for the Protection and Care of People's Health to 2030, with a vision to 2045, outlining long-term priorities for health system modernisation, human-resource development, and improved resilience to emerging public-health challenges.

f. Child poverty and social protection: While multidimensional poverty has declined to 3.2 per cent in 2023,³² poverty reduction remains uneven across population groups and regions. High levels of chronic poverty persist among ethnic minorities, especially children, older persons, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and non-registered migrants. The multi-dimensional child poverty rate sits at nearly 11 per cent, with high rates among disadvantaged groups, including certain ethnic minorities (33.1 per cent) and rural populations (13 per cent).³³ The Northern Midlands and Mountains and Central Highlands regions have the highest proportion of multidimensional child poverty (29.3 and 25.4 per cent respectively in 2018).³⁴ The social protection system remains fragmented, with significant coverage gaps. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the absence of a modern social protection system capable of providing adequate social assistance and security. The effectiveness of social protection programmes for children is hindered by limited coverage and accessibility, especially for children in remote or minority areas and those with disabilities. There is a substantial SDG financing gap in social protection which, along with job creation, would require additional annual spending of 3.9 per cent of gross domestic product.³⁵

g. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH): Access to improved WASH has advanced, however challenges and disparities remain. Between 2018 and 2022, the proportion of the urban population supplied with drinking water through a centralised water supply system increased from 86.7 to 94.2 per cent.³⁶ The proportion of households with improved water sources in the country overall reached 98.3 per cent in 2022, however the proportion remains lower for rural areas than urban areas (97.4 and 99.7 per cent respectively in 2022).³⁷ The proportion of the population using safe managed water is quite low, at 58 per cent in 2020 (46 and 77 per cent in rural and urban areas respectively). The Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas region had the lowest percentage of households using improved water sources. The proportion of households using hygienic toilets improved remarkably from 90.3 per cent in 2018 to 96.7 per cent in 2023.³⁸ The gap in hygiene toilet use between urban and rural areas had narrowed to 4.9% by 2022.³⁹ Gaps remain in provision of piped water to rural areas, hygienic latrines, adequate WASH facilities in schools, handwashing with soap and safe menstrual hygiene management. Ethnic minorities and those in mountainous areas are particularly affected by inadequate WASH services and facilities. Open defecation practices persist in many rural areas, contributing to increased child morbidity and stunting.

h. Education: Viet Nam has made significant strides in implementing SDG4 (quality education). Viet Nam has an almost universal primary education completion rate (98 per cent). Completion rates decline somewhat for lower secondary education, and then quite steeply for upper secondary education, with 87 per cent having completed lower secondary and 59 per cent having completed upper secondary.⁴⁰ Challenges remain regarding quality, equity and retention. Disparities exist along geographic, gender and regional lines; the Highlands and Mekong Delta regions have lower enrolment rates.⁴¹ The percentage of teachers who meet training standards as required by the Education Law in 2019 remains low.⁴² The percentage of schools with basic conditions and services to serve the learning needs of all children, including CWDs, remains limited. Employers struggle to identify graduates with essential skills. The quality of technical and vocational training remains of concern.⁴³ In 2025, the Government announced a policy of free tuition for all public-school students, which aims to ensure equal learning opportunities and ease financial burden on families. In August 2025, the Government issued Politburo Resolution 71, which identifies education as a decisive factor in Viet Nam's drive to become a high-income country by 2030, and sets specific reforms and ambitious targets in education for the end of the decade and beyond.⁴⁴

i. Digital transformation: With over 78 million users (around 79 per cent of the population), Viet Nam has one of the highest internet user rates in the region.⁴⁵ Technology is promoted in education through policies

³² General Statistics Office (GSO) (December 2023) "Socio-economic situation in the fourth quarter and 2023"

³³ UNICEF and GSO (2021) Current situation and trends of Multi-Dimensional Child Poverty in Viet Nam. Ha Noi, 2021.

³⁴ UNICEF and GSO (2021) Current situation and trends of Multi-Dimensional Child Poverty in Viet Nam. Ha Noi, 2021.

³⁵ UNICEF (2023) Vietnam Country Office Annual Report 2023

³⁶ Ministry of Planning and Investment (2023), Voluntary National Review 2023 on the Implementation of the SDGs.

[https://fileportalcms.mpi.gov.vn/TinBai/VanBan/2023-08/VNR_Full_Final\(EN\).pdf](https://fileportalcms.mpi.gov.vn/TinBai/VanBan/2023-08/VNR_Full_Final(EN).pdf)

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ UNICEF (2022) MICS-EAGLE Viet Nam Education Fact Sheets: Analyses for learning and equity using Viet Nam SDGCW Survey data. https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Viet-Nam_Factsheet_21-DecFINAL.pdf

⁴¹ UNICEF Viet Nam Country Office Annual Report 2024

⁴² Ministry of Planning and Investment (2023), Voluntary National Review 2023 on the Implementation of the SDGs

⁴³ ADB (2020) Viet Nam Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector Assessment. ADB, Manila, Philippines

⁴⁴ <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/1726405/resolution-71-and-the-future-of-learning-in-viet-nam-what-you-need-to-know.html>

⁴⁵ Kemp, S. (2024) DataReportal. Digital 2024: Vietnam. 23 February 2024

and reforms that embed digital literacy. However, disparities in technology access persist, highlighted by distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic,⁴⁶ especially in rural and ethnic minority areas.⁴⁷ Among youth aged 3-24, internet access is 86 per cent for the Kinh and Hoa groups, but lower for other minorities (e.g., Mong 29 per cent).⁴⁸ While digital transformation aids learning and connectivity, it has increased risks such as online violence, exploitation, and raised concerns about impacts on physical and mental health. In 2021, the Government approved the National Programme on Child Online Protection 2021-2025, which aims to protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse on the internet.

j. Child protection: Many forms of violence against children (VAC) persist and are underreported. Violent discipline by caregivers is widely accepted, with an estimated 72.4 per cent of children aged 1-14 years experiencing this.⁴⁹ Approximately 4 per cent of women experienced child sexual violence.⁵⁰ Child labour⁵¹ involves approximately 6.9 per cent of children aged 5-17 years.⁵² Survey data indicates that 5.6 per cent of children may have experiences of child trafficking.⁵³ Child marriage remains a significant issue. Among women aged 20-24, 14.6 per cent were married before 18.⁵⁴ Early marriage is negatively correlated with education and household wealth, and higher in rural area and within ethnic minorities (e.g. 53.4 per cent for Mong women).⁵⁵ Viet Nam has a sex ratio at birth of 1.11 (111 boys born for every 100 girls),⁵⁶ and there is evidence that this imbalance is caused by gender-biased sex selection.^{57,58} Nationally birth registration is high, with 99.06 per cent of children under five registered in 2024, while the rate is 98.01 per cent in Central Highlands and 98.79 per cent in the Mekong River Delta.⁵⁹ The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concerns for children deprived of their family environment and limited community-based alternative care.⁶⁰ An estimated 156,000 children are without parental care and 33,000 live in institutional care facilities.⁶¹ A rapid assessment⁶² of the impact of COVID-19 on women and children showed that preventive measures coupled with increased social and economic stress led to a rise in domestic violence. Other issues stemming from the pandemic included increase in children without adequate parental care, and mental health and psychosocial issues among children.

k. Child justice: The Child Law (2016) introduced principles to ensure minimum standards for the treatment of children in contact with the law. The United Nations provides technical support in this area, while Viet Nam continues to judiciously absorb international best practices in order to improve its legal system in a manner consistent with the national context. The Law on Legal Aid (2017) expanded legal aid coverage to all children under 16, minors aged 16 to 18 in conflict with the law, and crime victims aged 16 to 18 who face financial difficulties. Following the Law on People's Court Organization (2014), Family and Juvenile Courts were established. The number of children in conflict with the law has increased by 61 per cent between 2018 and 2022.⁶³ Despite national policies discouraging the imprisonment of children under 18, 63.4 per cent of convicted minors were sentenced to imprisonment in 2022.⁶⁴ In 2024, the 15th NA adopted a Law on Justice for Minors. The law aims to ensure juvenile offenders are handled according to their age, cognitive ability, personal circumstances, and societal danger of their actions. It prioritises education and rehabilitation, outlining measures for diversion, penalties, and legal procedures. The law

⁴⁶ Nguyen, Phan, & Chau (2022). Tackling unequal access to digital education in Vietnam during COVID-19 pandemic. ADB.

⁴⁷ UNESCO and UNICEF. (2021). Viet Nam: Case Study - Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia.

⁴⁸ UNICEF, Global Partnership for Education & VNIES (2022). Vietnam education Fact sheets, Analyses for learning and equity using Viet Nam SDGCW Survey data.

⁴⁹ Data refers to 2020-2021 period. Data source UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). 2020-21

⁵⁰ UNFPA (2020) Factsheet, Women's Experience of Violence: Results of the National Study on VAW in Viet Nam 2019

⁵¹ Children involved in child labour are defined as children involved in economic activities above the age-specific thresholds, children involved in household chores above the age-specific thresholds, and children involved in hazardous work.

⁵² NSO and UNICEF (2021). MICS Survey measuring Viet Nam SDG indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021, Survey Findings Report. Ha Noi, Viet Nam: National Statistics Office. <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/media/9576/file/Full%20report%20-%20MICS%206.pdf>

⁵³ CORAM International, ILSSA, UNICEF (2019) Casting light: in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Viet Nam

⁵⁴ NSO and UNICEF (2021). Survey measuring Viet Nam SDG indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021, Survey Findings Report. Ha Noi, Viet Nam: National Statistics Office.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ World Bank Data Open Data, accessed December 2025. Data refers to 2023. National Statistics Office data indicates 111.40 males births per 100 female births.

⁵⁷ UNFPA (2020) Viet Nam Country Profile, Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls: Improving the sex ratio at birth in select countries in Asia and the Caucasus

⁵⁸ World Bank Group (2022) Gender Biased Sex Selection in Vietnam – Demographic Projections and Policy Reform Recommendations. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank Group.

⁵⁹ National Statistics Office Vietnam. Available at: <https://www.nso.gov.vn/en/px-web/?pxid=E0233&theme=Population%20and%20Employment> (accessed December 2025). Data refers to preliminary data for 2024.

⁶⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2012.

⁶¹ UNICEF Viet Nam 'Alternative Care for Children': <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/alternative-care-children> (Accessed August 2025)

⁶² UNICEF-MOLISA (2021) Rapid assessment on violence against women and children as an impact of COVID-19

⁶³ Supreme People's Procuracy and UNICEF Viet Nam (2024) Situation of Individuals under 18 Who are Accused, Defendants or Victims in Criminal Cases in Viet Nam in 2022. Ha Noi, 2024.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

also addresses procedures for victims and witnesses, sentence execution, community reintegration, and victim support.

l. Gender: Viet Nam ranked 72nd out of 146 countries on the Gender Gap Index 2024, with a gender parity score of 71.5 per cent,⁶⁵ higher than global and regional averages. Since 2007, Viet Nam has bridged its gender gap by +2.6 points. However, drivers of gender inequality remain, starting with an imbalanced sex ratio at birth (see section j). Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage rates remain high, especially among ethnic minorities. The impact of COVID-19 has been acutely experienced by women and girls, from livelihood losses to an increase in gender-based violence (GBV), to school dropout.^{66,67,68} Girls remaining in school are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM)⁶⁹. Annex 10 presents additional key gender data in Viet Nam.

m. Disability: Over 7 per cent of the population has a disability,⁷⁰ and many PWDs face discrimination and barriers in realising their rights and accessing services. Approximately 2.5 per cent of CWDs access rehabilitation services.⁷¹ CWDs are more likely to be institutionalised, and at higher risks of sexual abuse and violence. The number of trained teachers with technical skills in inclusive education remains limited, hindering CWDs from attending mainstream education. A low percentage of schools have facilities and materials suitable for CWDs (37.1 per cent at primary level, 28.9 per cent at lower secondary level, and 19.9 per cent at high school level).⁷²

n. Children from ethnic minorities: Ethnic status is a key factor in socioeconomic inequality in Viet Nam. Ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in remote rural areas, with limited access to public services and basic infrastructure, and they typically have lower living standards than the ethnic majority Kinh group. Significant challenges remain in addressing issues and inequalities faced by children from ethnic minorities. As referenced in previous sections, these children experience higher levels of multidimensional child poverty, child mortality rates, malnutrition, early marriage, and unequal access to health, education, WASH, child protection and social protection services.

o. Children affected by migration: include internal and international migrants, children in forced displacement (asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced), children who are stateless, and children who remain behind (when one or both parents migrate). Approximately 13.6 per cent of the population are internal migrants,⁷³ and 5.2 per cent of children live without their biological parents.⁷⁴ There are an estimated 11,400 international child migrants.⁷⁵ Rural to urban internal migration routes are the largest flow. Children affected by migration face a range of protection risks, including violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking, child labour and economic exploitation. A 2019 study found that an estimated 5.6 per cent of children had experienced coercion, violence or exploitation in the context of independent migration.⁷⁶ These children are vulnerable to school drop-out, poverty, and limited access to services.

p. Climate change and environmental vulnerability: Viet Nam faces critical climate challenges, including biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, water scarcity and severe air pollution in major urban areas. Viet Nam ranked sixth in the Global Climate Risk Index in 2020.⁷⁷ Viet Nam is threatened by climate-related disasters like typhoons, floods, and droughts. The Mekong Delta faces drought and salinity intrusion, impacting agriculture and livelihoods. Children are disproportionately vulnerable to overlapping types of climate and environmental shocks, with impacts on nutrition, health, learning and protection that exceed regional averages.^{78, 79} Environmental sustainability has become a focus of Viet Nam's development planning. The Government has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, however progress has been limited.⁸⁰ In September 2024, Typhoon Yagi, the strongest storm in 70 years, hit northern Viet Nam, causing extensive damage and exposing children to multiple risks. As of December 2024, over 570,000 people lacked access to safe drinking water and sanitation, increasing disease risk and disrupting immunization.⁸¹ Around 220,000 children under five and 70,000 pregnant and lactating

⁶⁵ World Economic Forum (2024). Global Gender Gap 2024.

⁶⁶ UN Viet Nam (2020) UN Analysis on Social Impacts of COVID-19 and Strategic Policy Recommendations for Viet Nam

⁶⁷ UNICEF (2022) Follow up study on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on children and families in Viet Nam

⁶⁸ UNICEF Viet Nam, MOLISA (2021) Rapid assessment on violence against women and children as an impact of COVID-19

⁶⁹ Ho, Toan & La, Viet-Phuong & Nguyen, Minh-Hoang & Pham, Thanh-Hang & Vuong, Thu-Trang & Vuong, Ha-My & Pham, Hiep-Hung & Hoang, Anh-Duc & Vuong, Quan-Hoang. (2020). An analytical view on STEM education and outcomes: Examples of the social gap and gender disparity in Vietnam. Children and Youth Services Review. 119. 105650. 10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105650.

⁷⁰ GSO and UNICEF (2016). The National Survey on People with Disabilities 2016

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² Ministry of Planning and Investment (2023), Voluntary National Review 2023 on the Implementation of the SDGs

⁷³ GSO and UNFPA (2016) The 2015 National Internal Migration Study: Major findings, Ha Noi, 2016, p. 3.

⁷⁴ GSO and UNICEF (2014) Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2014, p. 240.

⁷⁵ UNICEF, East Asia and Pacific (2023) Situation of children affected by migration in ASEAN Member States. UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok, 2023.

⁷⁶ Aplan and Yarrow, Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Viet Nam

⁷⁷ Our World in Data (2023). Vietnam: CO2 Country Profile

⁷⁸ UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (2023) 'Over the Tipping Point'

⁷⁹ National Statistics Office of Viet Nam (2025). Statistical Yearbook of Viet Nam 2024. Hanoi: NSO

⁸⁰ UNICEF Viet Nam (2023) End of Year Results Summary Narrative 2023

⁸¹ UNICEF Viet Nam (December 2024) Typhoon Yagi Northern Viet Nam, Situation Report No.6. 8 November – 18 December 2024

women were at risk of malnutrition.⁸² Education disruptions worsened disparities, especially among ethnic minorities. Loss of livelihoods and displacement left an estimated 365,000 families in need of cash support, further exacerbating vulnerabilities of families in northern mountainous areas.⁸³ Over 100,000 children faced heightened child protection risks.⁸⁴

q. COVID-19 pandemic: COVID-19 resulted in an estimated 40,000 deaths in Viet Nam. A key Government strategy was to mobilise resources to vaccinate the entire population.⁸⁵ COVID-19 impacted multiple dimensions of children's lives; increased multi-dimensional poverty, health and nutrition challenges (including mental health), issues with WASH, disruptions in education, and threats to child protection.⁸⁶ The pandemic revealed weaknesses of the health sector and exacerbated inequalities, with vulnerable populations, such as rural and ethnic minority families, experiencing higher rates of poverty and reduced access to essential services.⁸⁷ Despite economic recovery, the pandemic has had a lasting impact, particularly on children, women, and vulnerable populations.

4.2 UNICEF Viet Nam Country Programme

4.2.1 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

The CP is guided by the Government's 5-year Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) 2021-2025 and supports the targets and priorities of the Government's Socioeconomic Development Strategy (2021–2030) and the National Action Plan for Children 2021–2030. It builds on national sectoral frameworks and aligns with and supports the SDGs. The CP also addresses cross-cutting areas (gender, adolescents, climate change, disability, migration etc.) and emerging issues (mental health, digital inclusion and transformation etc.). The CP aims to accelerate child rights fulfilment, so no child is left behind, promoting the integration of poor and underprivileged communities, especially ethnic minorities. Subnational programming focuses on disadvantaged regions with substantial ethnic-minority populations.

A key learning from the previous CP was that, while successfully supporting the Government to adopt inclusive laws and policies, UNICEF's programmes had not sufficiently narrowed equity gaps for the most vulnerable children, and persistence of widespread discrimination, language barriers and rigid regulations prevent many children and families from fully benefiting from social services. The current CP was expected to introduce breakthrough solutions to achieve impact at scale in addressing these equity challenges.

UNICEF contributes to the UNSDCF 2022-2026 through its financial and technical support to the Government and partners and to UN joint work, notably as co-chair of Outcome 1 on inclusive social development and contributing to the other three UNSDCF outcomes on climate change and environment, inclusive prosperity and good governance and access to justice.

4.2.2 Development process of the Country Programme

The 2023 EA⁸⁸ found that the CPD was developed through a comprehensive, evidence-based process led by the VCO, incorporating stakeholder input and lessons from past evaluations. The CPD builds on proven strategies (community engagement, localization, cross-cutting themes, partnerships, and adaptive approaches) to advance child rights and address inequalities. It was developed in collaboration with Government and aligns with national priorities, the broader UN system, and UNICEF's Global Strategic Plans (2018–2021 and 2022–2025). However, the EA noted that the CPD's structure, reflecting UNICEF's traditional sections, may hinder fully cross-sectoral programming for the 'whole child'.⁸⁹ Strategic shifts identified for the new CP included:

- Renewed focus on reaching the marginalised, especially ethnic minority groups with social services, communication for behaviour and social norm change and engagement opportunities, and a focus on transformational partnerships to address the drivers of gender inequity.
- Promoting children's environmental rights - prioritization of child-sensitive climate change and environmental policies, budgets and services and support for climate action by adolescents.
- Focus on digital solutions/digital transformation and innovation to achieve breakthrough results for ethnic minority children, children with disability and other vulnerable children.
- Expanding and stewarding partnerships for children's rights, with the public and private sector and with children and adolescents to enable their participation and civic engagement.

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ Viet Hoang et al (2022) "The COVID-19 pandemic in Vietnam – success, crisis, and endemic: Key thresholds and lessons," Journal of Global Health, November 2022

⁸⁶ UNICEF (2022) Follow up study on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on children and families in Viet Nam

⁸⁷ UNICEF (2022) Country Office Annual Report 2022 Viet Nam 2022

⁸⁸ UNICEF Viet Nam (2023) Evaluability Assessment or UNICEF CP Viet Nam (2022-2027)

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

Additional priorities for the new CP (based on lessons learned, context and emerging concerns) were **adolescent mental health** and **Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD)**. On IECD the priority is to fine-tune operations and enhance governance and financing, whilst scaling up holistic parenting via on-line learning especially in ethnic minority communities. Support to adolescent mental health was informed by UNICEF's 2022 study⁹⁰ on school-related risks to mental health. UNICEF's aims to focus on prevention (through positive parenting, socio-emotional development in schools, extra-curricular activities supporting mental health, and increasing trained counsellors) and on promoting policies and support to service providers to ensure mental health services are appropriate and accessible for all young people.

4.2.3 Geographical focus

UNICEF's programmes are implemented across Viet Nam, however between 2022 and the government administrative restructuring in 2025, three provinces were designated as programme focus areas: Dien Bien, Gia Lai and Soc Trang. As part of the 2025 restructuring, Gia Lai merged with Binh Dinh (while retaining the name *Gia Lai*), and Soc Trang merged with Can Tho City and Hau Giang Province to form a new province named *Can Tho*. **Given the temporal scope of this evaluation, all findings refer to the pre-restructuring provincial boundaries and classifications.** These provinces represent socio-economically disadvantaged regions along with localities facing emerging problems or emergencies. UNICEF has directly cooperated with the same focus areas during the previous CP (2017-2021), continuing into the current CP. The intention in the focus provinces is to exemplify stronger cross-sectoral cooperation and integration in how UNICEF delivers its programmes. Furthermore, VCO aimed to ensure that emerging issues, such as climate change and digitalization, are addressed coherently, and that there is a holistic approach in the focus provinces.

Da Nang City is the third largest city, and serves as the economic, culture and social hub of the central region. It is the focus of a 'child-friendly cities' pilot project in the current CP, building on a pilot introduced in 2020-2021. The approach is designed to realise child rights through attention to budget allocations, inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms, child participation and empowerment, and enhancing human resources and services for child protection and social work.

In addition to the geographic focus of the Country Programme, UNICEF has provided humanitarian response to a number of emergencies across Viet Nam during the 2022-2025 period. See section 4.2.7 and Annex 14 for additional information.

4.2.4 Outcomes and outputs

CP activities fall under **four thematic programme components (and a fifth component focused on programme effectiveness)**. Table 3 presents the outcomes and outputs of the CPD. These outcomes and outputs form the results framework of the CP. The main data source for outcome level indicators is Government statistics. Programme strategy notes provide additional detail of indicators at the output level, along with the means of verification.

Table 3 CPD Outcomes and Outputs

Outcome Statement	Indicative CPD Outputs
Outcome 1: Pregnant women, children and adolescents have equitable, quality health care and immunization, access to safe water and sanitation, adequate nutrition and mental health support services, live in safe and green environments and have the skills to practice healthy behaviours.	1.1 The healthcare and health promotion systems are strengthened to improve equitable maternal and child health services, including vaccination, mental health support services, climate resilience and preparedness and response to COVID -19 and other health emergencies. 1.2. The Government and nutrition stakeholders have enhanced capacity to formulate policies and budgets, ensure coordination and provide services to address under-5 child malnutrition in its all forms, with priority given to the most disadvantaged areas, obesity among adolescents, and the promotion of healthy eating habits. 1.3. The Government and partners have increased capacity to deliver evidence - based, quality, inclusive, gender - responsive and climate resilient water, sanitation services and to promote personal hygiene practices in communities and institutions. 1.4. Elected bodies and other institutions responsible for ensuring a safe and green environment for children have increased capacity to generate evidence, develop and implement child -sensitive and gender - responsive policies, strategies and plans at the national and subnational levels to mitigate the impact of climate change on children.
Outcome 2: Children and adolescents, especially vulnerable girls and boys,	2.1. The education system has enhanced capacity to deliver inclusive and gender - responsive learning and skills, including digital and transferable skills, for children from early childhood to adolescence.

⁹⁰ A Comprehensive Study on School-related Factors Impacting Mental Health and Well-Being of Adolescent Boys and Girls in Viet Nam (UNICEF 2022).

have equitable access to inclusive, quality learning and digital and transferable skills development, opportunities for participation in a clean, green and safe environment	2.2. The education system creates conducive and safe learning environments for children and adolescents, with respect for diversity for children and adolescents, which promote mental health and enable their participation and civic engagement. 2.3. The education system has improved capacity to strengthen policies, planning, monitoring and financing for gender - transformative, innovative and inclusive learning opportunities for all. 2.4. The capacities of the Government and partners are strengthened to ensure a safe, clean, green and resilient education system, including through the adoption of innovative, sustainable and climate -smart solutions at scale and enabling children 's awareness and engagement on climate action.
Outcome 3: Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable girls and boys, are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and unnecessary family separation, through inclusive and effective child protection, child - care and justice systems, empowerment with knowledge and skills against harmful social norms practices and improved mental health and psychosocial support.	3.1. Legislators, authorities at national and sub-national levels, and key non-state actors have enhanced capacity to formulate, coordinate, allocate adequate budget and implement evidence-based child protection laws and policies that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and unnecessary family separation. 3.2. The trained child protection workforce across the social welfare, health, education, and mass organizations are capable to provides accessible, inclusive, quality child- and gender-responsive prevention and response services, including mental health and psycho-social support. 3.3. Justice institutions and law enforcement authorities have enhanced capacity to implement inclusive, child-friendly and gender-responsive procedures, and provide coordinated services for increased access to justice for children and adolescents in contact with the law. 3.4 Children, adolescents, families, communities, and the private sector are equipped and empowered to address negative social norms and harmful practices and promote nurturing family environments.
Outcome 4: Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from evidence based, equitable, climate - resilient, environmentally sensitive and participatory policy, planning and public expenditure and an expanded child - sensitive and shock -responsive social protection system.	4.1. Government, elected bodies and other stakeholders, including the business sector, have the institutional capacity to realize children 's rights through equitable policies, plans and budgets and enhanced opportunities for child and adolescent participation. 4.2. The national social protection system, informed by multidimension al child poverty and climate vulnerability analysis, is strengthened and expanded to ensure inclusive, equitable, child - sensitive and shock - responsive support. 4.3. Local governments in selected provinces and cities have enhanced capacity to formulate, budget and implement effective plans for children and establish innovative platforms to enable the participation of children and adolescents in decision - making.
Programme Effectiveness: UNICEF programmes are effectively planned, coordinated, monitored, and implemented and well - resourced, including in emergencies, through strong communications and social - norm change, operations and partnerships, including with the private sector.	5.1 Programme management, coordination and innovation. 5.2 Planning, monitoring and evaluation, data and knowledge management. 5.3 Communication and public advocacy. 5.4 Partnerships and communication for social norms and behavioural change. 5.5 Public-private sector partnerships for resource mobilization and results for children.

Source: UNICEF CPD for Viet Nam 2022-2026 (December 2021)

The **four key change strategies** to achieve results in these programme components include:

- **Strategic policy advocacy:** Support in strengthening Viet Nam's policy framework and advocating for the rights and well-being of children and families.
- **Innovation and digital transformation:** Driving innovation and leveraging digital solutions to advance the rights of children in Viet Nam.
- **Evidence generation:** Building a robust evidence base on the situation of children in Viet Nam, using data to inform policy and drive meaningful change.
- **Communication for behaviour and social-norm change:** Including interpersonal communication, community engagement, advocacy, and mass media—to promote positive individual behaviours and positive social norms.

Table 4 presents UNICEF's key partners, including Government ministries/agencies and other strategic partners, and the CP outcome area they relate to. While this table highlights key partners only, a complete list of stakeholders consulted during the evaluation is provided in annex 5.

At the time of data collection in 2025, administrative restructuring was ongoing. Given that the temporal scope of the evaluation focuses on the period from March 2022 to June 2025, the findings section refers to the relevant ministries as they existed during the evaluation period. Several of these ministries have since been restructured or superseded, as outlined below.

Table 4 Government agencies and other strategic partners by outcome area

Type of stakeholder	Name of stakeholder	Outcome			
		1	2	3	4
Government of Viet Nam	Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) - merged into the Ministry of Finance (MOF) in 2025	x	x	x	x
	Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) - merged into the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) in 2025	x	x	x	x
	Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)	x	x	x	x
	Ministry of Health (MOH)	x	x	x	x
	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) - merged into the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) in 2025	x			x
	Ministry of Justice (MOJ)			x	x
UN, multi-lateral agencies/ Donors	UNFPA		x	x	
	UNDP			x	x
	UN Women	x	x	x	
	EU			x	
	Government of Australia, Embassy of the United Kingdom, Embassy of the Republic of Ireland				
Other National Institutions/ Actors	National Assembly (NA)	x	x	x	x
	Women's Union	x	x	x	x
	NextGen Viet Nam	x	x	x	x
NGOs	HealthBridge	x			
	World Vision	x	x		
Academia/ Research Actors	National Institute for Educational Strategy and Curriculum		x		
	National Institute of Nutrition	x			
Private Entities	Vietnam Chambers of Commerce and Industry (VCCI)				x

Source: UNICEF CPD for Viet Nam 2022-2026 (December 2021), PSNs (2021)

4.2.5 Country Programme budget

The budget for the CP (2022-2026) indicated in the CPD was USD 70,105,000. Regular resources accounted for just under 25 per cent of the budget and around 75 per cent of funding was expected to come from other resources. The budget per programme component is presented in Table 5. Financial data is analysed in section 5.4 under the efficiency criteria of the evaluation and further detailed in Annex 8.

Table 5 CPD budget

Programme components	Budget (USD)	% of Budget
Every child and adolescent survives, thrives and lives in safe and green environments	18,140,000	26%
Every child and adolescent learns and acquires skills	16,971,000	24%
Every child and adolescent is protected from violence, exploitation, and abuse	14,465,000	21%
Every child and adolescent benefits from child-sensitive policies and budgets	8,553,000	12%
Programme effectiveness	11,976,000	17%
Total	70,105,000	

Source: CPD 2022-2026

4.2.6 Theory of change

The overarching ToC of the CP was originally summarised in the CPD as follows:

'If policies, budgets, and plans prioritize children's rights and are gender-responsive; if social service systems are inclusive and accountable to provide high-quality, climate-resilient, innovative social services for children, adolescents, and women; if communities, families, children, and adolescents are positively engaged in decision-making and promote positive social norms; and if the private sector continues to respect and support children's rights and integrates them into their activities, then children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, will be empowered, healthier, better educated and safer. It is a fundamental assumption of the CP that the government will continue to prioritize and fund children's needs. However, climate change, natural catastrophes, and the impact of COVID-19 may impede the government's budgetary and human resource capacity, limiting its ability to execute children's rights'.

The ToC emphasises stakeholder engagement, community involvement, and the promotion of positive social norms to achieve sustainable change for children's rights. The EA (2023) highlighted that the logic of the CP and ToC provides a comprehensive framework for promoting children's rights, but noted the need for clearer articulation on how inputs and activities will be achieved, and a need for gender-transformative activities, indicators and targets.⁹¹ Beyond the overarching ToC, four additional ToCs are outlined in the programme strategy notes, each detailing specific programme components. While the CPE terms of reference did not require the ToC's reformulation, the ET developed a visual diagram (Annex 2) during the inception phase to represent the original narrative and integrate emerging priorities. Key additions include:

- An expanded concept of "risk-informed programming,"⁹² emphasizing resilience to shocks and disasters at individual, family, and community levels, as well as adaptability and flexibility and resilience of planning systems.
- The ToC also introduces the humanitarian-development nexus as a cross-cutting theme, promoting integrated approaches that address root causes of vulnerability while meeting immediate needs. This nexus should be reflected in policy, planning, coordination, and programming—ensuring responsiveness to gender and disability, linking humanitarian cash with social protection, and supporting peacebuilding and social cohesion. Planning, reporting, monitoring, financial and human resources, and management structures should help support effective nexus programming.⁹³
- Another cross-cutting element added to the ToC is VCO's commitment to transformative change, aligned with the LNOB principle. This aims to shift power dynamics, reduce exclusion and discrimination, and amplify the voice and autonomy of marginalised groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or location.
- The ToC diagram incorporates priorities such as innovation and digital transformation, good governance, and access to justice—reinforcing VCO's strategic direction and commitment to equity and inclusion.

4.2.7 Humanitarian response

As noted in the context section, Viet Nam is increasingly threatened by severe climate-related disasters. VCO has a long-standing partnership with the Viet Nam Disaster Management Authority, MOH, MARD (now MAE)⁹⁴, MOLISA (now MOHA)⁹⁵, and MOET which are focal agencies critical for emergency response. During the 2022-2025 period, VCO has been involved in humanitarian response to COVID-19 (2022), flooding in Nghe An (2022) and Hue (2023), drought and saltwater intrusion in the Mekong River Delta (early 2024). Responding to Typhoon Yagi (2024), UNICEF supported humanitarian relief, response and recovery efforts in Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Bac Kan, Dien Bien and Hoa Binh. Further background on UNICEF's humanitarian response is provided in Annex 14.

⁹¹ UNICEF (2023) Evaluability Assessment for UNICEF Country Program. UNICEF Evaluation Office, New York.

⁹² UNICEF (2021) CPD Viet Nam 2022-2026. Paragraph 25.

⁹³ UNICEF. 2021. Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming. UNICEF Evaluation Office, New York.

⁹⁴ MARD was superseded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment in 2025

⁹⁵ MOLISA was merged into the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2025

5. Findings

5.1 Evaluation criteria 1: Relevance

5.1.1 EQ1: How relevant is the CP, both in its design and implementation, to the rights of children, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised?

Key Finding 1: The CP 2022 - 2026 in Vietnam reflects a strong commitment to advancing child rights, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised populations. Its relevance is clear in both strategic design and implementation, with regional recognition for its impact. The programme aligns well with national and international child rights priorities. To further embody the UN's "Leave No One Behind" agenda, greater focus is needed on identifying groups facing intersecting forms of exclusion and ensuring their meaningful participation, supported by indicators that track progress among the most disadvantaged. UNICEF-supported projects at local level are highly relevant to provincial priorities and realities. They address systemic service gaps, empower vulnerable groups, and support national policy goals in a culturally and contextually appropriate manner. The use of flexible, innovative, and locally tailored approaches further reinforces their relevance to provincial development strategies.

a. Evidence of rights and needs-based programming design

The CPD 2022–2026 was informed by a robust set of evidence, reflecting both national priorities and children's needs. Sources used for the development of the CPD include the Common Country Analysis (2021), national strategic frameworks, UNICEF's own evaluative and analytical work, national surveys and data sources, global indices and assessments and UNSDCF outcomes. The Evaluability Assessment (EA) of the CP in May 2023 also found that the CPD was formulated through a participatory and evidence-informed process, drawing on lessons learned from the previous programme cycle, mid-term reviews, and thematic studies.

Programmes were largely designed with cultural sensitivity and operational realities in mind. Examples include the recruitment of facilitators from ethnic minorities, such as Hmong, Bahnar and Thai, to enhance local engagement; and training of ethnic minority women through the village midwifery network (see Annex 10.3). Evidence from the WASH programme in Keo Lom also demonstrates adaptations of technical solutions in this high-altitude zone.

Programming at province-level responded well to national and provincial priorities. Examples from several provinces demonstrate effective targeting and prioritisation of support. In Gia Lai, UNICEF is working in three districts and nine communes with a focus on nutrition, behaviour change related to child protection, maternal and childcare, and access to water⁹⁶. Stakeholders and project documentation show clear evidence of alignment with provincial priorities.

In Dien Bien, one of Viet Nam's most disadvantaged provinces,⁹⁷ UNICEF's focus on IECD, inclusive education, and health system strengthening directly responds to the province's development priorities and the broader national commitment to leaving no one behind. Similarly, in Da Nang, the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) project was informed by a Situation Analysis.⁹⁸ KII with officials in Da Nang confirmed that the activities supported by UNICEF continued to be appropriate to the context and to address gaps identified in 2020, and to address emerging issues such as mental health. Interviews with adolescents and parents also indicated that the approach and the various activities were addressing important and relevant issues.

In the case of Soc Trang, a coastal province which is highly vulnerable to climate change, including increasingly frequent and severe flooding, the Provincial Child Friendly Programme document placed a particular emphasis on related risk to children (e.g. on health, education and protection). Through initiatives such as "Innovation for Children" in 2023, UNICEF has sought to draw attention and investment from policy makers on these issues⁹⁹ and demonstrates the programme's theoretical alignment with local needs and vulnerabilities.

⁹⁶ UNICEF and Gia Lai Provincial People's Committee (2022) Letter of Commitment: CPD 2022–2026. Internal agreement outlining joint priorities and implementation modalities under the UNICEF–Viet Nam CP.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁹⁸ UNICEF and Da Nang People's Committee (2020) Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Da Nang

⁹⁹ UNICEF and Soc Trang Provincial People's Committee (December 2023) 2024-2026 Work Plan Provincial Child-Friendly Project

Consultations with stakeholders in Gia Lai and Dien Bien provinces highlighted several programming aspects that have increased the relevance of UNICEF's support:

- **Government alignment:** Stakeholders across sectors, both internal and external, confirmed that UNICEF's programming is consistent with National Target Programmes, especially for ethnic minorities, health, education, and rural development.
- **Provincial policy support:** In child protection, education and maternal-child health, provincial departments recognised that UNICEF's pilots can guide broader provincial rollouts, providing models for replication within local budgets once external support ends.
- **Adaptability to local needs:** Projects are tailored to account for variations in terrain, cultural practices (e.g., among Hmong vs. Thai communities), and resource availability (e.g., fee collection feasibility in nutrition clubs).

The consistency and depth of rights-based and needs-informed design principles, however, varies across interventions. In Da Nang, for example, government stakeholders explicitly referenced the Situation Analysis on children as a foundational input for project design, underscoring a commendable use of contextual evidence. Other initiatives, particularly EdTech pilots, have been shaped more by funding availability than by rigorous needs assessments, raising concerns about their strategic relevance and sustainability.

b. Responsiveness of CPD design and implementation to gaps and barriers in child rights promotion

Among the priority areas in the CPD are inclusion of marginalised groups and, within those, ethnic minorities and children with disabilities. Barriers for these vulnerable groups are outlined in the CRC Committee's Concluding Observations and the National Target Programmes for Ethnic Minorities and in the 2023 study¹⁰⁰ which reinforced the need for stronger local systems and inclusive policy frameworks to meet the needs of CWDs. Other vulnerable groups highlighted in national priorities and strategic frameworks include children from migrant backgrounds, and those from very poor households. According to the MOLISA, as of early 2024, approximately 1.258 million households in Viet Nam remain poor or near-poor under the multi-dimensional poverty standards, representing a poverty rate of 5.71 per cent nationally. These figures reinforce the importance of targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to services and opportunities for children living in poverty.¹⁰¹

While considered in the CPD design, this prioritization has not always translated into practice. A notable example is the participation-focused programming, which has engaged children and adolescents who, for the most part, do not belong to the groups identified as most vulnerable. This raises concerns about the equity and inclusiveness of outreach strategies. Promising efforts, such as the joint pilot with MOET, UNFPA, and UNDP,¹⁰² signal a potential shift toward more inclusive programming. However, the absence of results data limits the ability to assess their efficacy and scalability.

While disability inclusion has not yet been systematically mainstreamed across all programme components, feedback from government stakeholders highlights notable progress in specific areas. For example, under the IECD initiative, UNICEF has supported early detection efforts through targeted training activities, including two courses in Gia Lai and a training-of-trainers programme covering 15 cities and provinces. These efforts have enabled trained staff to implement early detection of disabilities locally, with some stakeholders describing the reach of early detection as "nationwide".

The disability inclusion landscape remains broadly consistent with the findings presented in the 2022 situational analysis report.¹⁰³ UNICEF's programming aligns with Viet Nam's evolving disability policy framework, which is anchored in the 2010 Law on Persons with Disabilities and further reinforced by the country's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2014. More recently, Viet Nam has been recognised as a regional leader in promoting disability inclusion, notably through its active engagement with the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.¹⁰⁴ Despite these advancements, persistent challenges in stakeholder

¹⁰⁰ Includovate Pty Ltd, June 2023, Assessment of Community-Based Service Availability for Children with Disabilities in Hanoi and Quang Nam, Viet Nam.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (2025) <https://english.molisa.gov.vn/topic/242836>

¹⁰² United Nations Joint Programme: Working together for an inclusive future. Implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) through effective collaboration (Phase 1 2022-2024 - extended through 2025)

¹⁰³ United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). (2022). Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Viet Nam: Country Brief. UNPRPD Technical Secretariat

¹⁰⁴ ASEAN (2019) ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025 – Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, February 2019. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Publication-ASEAN-Enabling-Masterplan-2025-1.pdf>

coordination, gaps in policy implementation, and limited participation of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities continue to reflect the structural constraints where UNICEF operates.¹⁰⁵ In this context, according to key informants, the UN system has stepped in as a convening force, facilitating dialogue, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement.

Other gaps identified by stakeholders working in the field of disability inclusion in Viet Nam include mental health and abuse prevention, with particular concern for CWDs who may face heightened risks. Stakeholders expressed interest in developing clearer guidelines for abuse assessment, noting that such tools are currently underdeveloped in the national context. Early detection of disability and early intervention efforts require further scaling to ensure broader coverage and sustainability. There is also growing interest for national stakeholders in leveraging digital tools—such as mobile applications—to enable families to conduct preliminary screenings and facilitate referrals to health services. Finally, sexual abuse prevention and support for CWDs was highlighted as an area requiring urgent attention and tailored programming.

c. Strategic selection of territories and target groups to ensure that no one is left behind (LNOB)

The VCO has made notable efforts to apply the LNOB principle, particularly in the strategic selection of priority provinces. These territories align well with the CPD's focus on ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged populations, reflecting a commitment to geographic equity. External sources, including the World Bank's report on Drivers of Socio-Economic Development Among Ethnic Minority Groups¹⁰⁶ also reinforce the urgency of targeted interventions in the prioritized provinces.

However, the operationalization of LNOB at the national level remains constrained by persistent data limitations. Interventions planned within the Annual Work Plans show a mixed record in terms of prioritizing the most vulnerable, disadvantaged, marginalized, and excluded groups. While there is evidence of targeting ethnic minorities, the assessment against the Gender Continuum Model¹⁰⁷, raises questions on whether UNICEF's approach can be regarded as genuinely transformative in terms of scale and sustainability.

While UNICEF documentation consistently articulates who is being left behind and why—often citing language as a barrier for ethnic minority parents—pilot project results are not sufficiently broken down to assess how effectively these barriers are being addressed. The lack of breakthrough solutions to persistent challenges, such as linguistic exclusion, suggests a gap between diagnostic insight and programmatic innovation. Moreover, a comprehensive approach to intersectionality¹⁰⁸ remains weak.¹⁰⁹

5.1.2 EQ2: How well is UNICEF strategically positioned to respond to the changing circumstances and context of Viet Nam?

Key Finding 2: UNICEF is strategically well-positioned to respond to the changing circumstances and context of Viet Nam, as evidenced by its longstanding partnerships, technical expertise, financial agility, and leadership within the UN system. From the perspective of national and international stakeholders, UNICEF's comparative advantage lies in its deep-rooted engagement with the Government of Viet Nam, spanning over five decades. This enduring collaboration has fostered trust and credibility, with high-level officials consistently expressing appreciation for UNICEF's contributions to national development priorities. However, the government restructuring presents significant challenges for child related policies, including inadequate capacity especially at the commune level and fragmented responsibilities for child-related services and potential disruptions to grassroots service delivery.

UNICEF's position as a preferred partner of central and local government in Viet Nam is partly due to its sustained field-level engagement, responsiveness to local needs, and delivery of high-quality technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives, such as those in the health and education which have been praised by stakeholders. It is also recognised for its ability to address funding gaps in essential but under-resourced areas. In the education sector, UNICEF's supply of school materials, digital tools, and child-friendly libraries has complemented government efforts to reduce dropout rates and improve educational

¹⁰⁵ UNPRPD (2022)

¹⁰⁶ World Bank Group (2019) Research Report, Drivers of Socio-Economic Development Among Ethnic Minority Groups in Vietnam. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank Group, Washington USA.

¹⁰⁷ Adapted from UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale for programme results

¹⁰⁸ Intersectionality in this evaluation is understood as the recognition of how overlapping social identities or factors—such as ethnicity, disability, gender, and poverty—compound disadvantage and exclusion. This level of analysis demands not only disaggregated data, but also systems capable of cross-tabulation and multi-variable reporting.

¹⁰⁹ Lefor, D. (2025). *Final Report: Assessment of Knowledge Gaps in Adolescents and Youth Programming for UNICEF Viet Nam*. UNICEF Viet Nam, July 2025, p. 28.

quality. Interviewed key informants perceived the nutrition and maternal and child health programs to benefit from UNICEF's significant contributions to therapeutic food provision, emergency interventions, and medical and cold chain equipment procurement and supplies at national level and in provinces where the organization is operational and in other provinces.

According to national government and civil society stakeholders, UNICEF's integration of international best practices and normative frameworks into its programming has been instrumental in shaping policy and enabling the scaling-up of successful initiatives.

While the EA noted that the CPD did not fully anticipate contextual disruptions, its responsiveness during emergencies - such as Typhoon Yagi, outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases and the COVID-19 pandemic - demonstrated operational agility and commitment to child-focused humanitarian action.

Interviewees consistently described UNICEF staff as approachable, non-bureaucratic, and highly responsive attributes that, combined with their recognised technical expertise, reinforce the organization's reputation as a reliable and effective partner. At the same time, as highlighted by the AAR¹¹⁰ a Middle-Income Country like Viet Nam has *capacities that can be enhanced, and UNICEF can provide relevant support on the quality of the response, for example in making sure that cross cutting issues are attended, or on targeting making sure that the most vulnerable are not left behind.*

However, ensuring continuity, visibility, and accountability in service provision through the ongoing government reform and restructuring¹¹¹ constitutes a central governance challenge ahead. The recent establishment of the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs¹¹² signals potential progress in addressing service delivery gaps for marginalized populations. Yet, its effectiveness depends on whether it is endowed with sufficient authority, resources, and institutional capacity. The dissolution of MOLISA¹¹³ marks a significant institutional reconfiguration, with responsibilities for vulnerable groups—especially children—now fragmented across multiple entities, raising concerns about coherence and coordination. The subnational governance restructuring underway has far-reaching implications for service delivery. Key grassroots functions such as immunization and primary health care, historically anchored in district and commune-level structures, face potential disruption during the transition. Maintaining service access and quality through this period of institutional flux will be a critical test of governance resilience.

In this evolving landscape, UNICEF's strategic positioning—anchored in its technical credibility, financial flexibility, and trusted partnerships, places it in a unique role to support Viet Nam in navigating these reforms while safeguarding child rights and well-being. From the vantage point of UN agencies and development organizations, UNICEF stands out for its technical expertise and financial capacity, particularly its engagement with private-sector fundraising. While these mechanisms have bolstered income generation, their flexibility can be constrained by project-specific allocations and evolving relationships with government authorities.

UNICEF is well positioned to support Viet Nam's transition toward upper-middle-income status. Partners consistently recognise UNICEF as a trusted and influential actor, capable of leveraging its comparative advantage to support Viet Nam's transition. This recognition stems from its longstanding presence in the country, proven technical expertise, institutional credibility, and sustained commitment to advancing the rights and well-being of children.

At the same time, stakeholders point to areas where UNICEF could further refine its strategic approach to remain responsive and impactful amid shifting socioeconomic conditions. Key stakeholders consulted in the evaluation point to the following:

- In a context marked by rapid economic transformation, it is essential that national policies integrate equity, resilience, and sustainability approaches to ensure that the benefits of economic progress reach all segments of the population, particularly children in vulnerable situations. Stakeholders emphasised the need for UNICEF to strengthen its role in shaping public policies that promote

¹¹⁰ UNICEF Viet Nam. (2025). After Action Review: UNICEF Viet Nam Response to Typhoon Yagi – Final Report. 23 June 2025.

¹¹¹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam. (2025). Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW on the Reorganisation of Administrative Units. Issued April 2025, implemented from 1 July 2025. and Prime Minister of Viet Nam. (2025). Decision No. 759/QĐ-TTg Approving the Plan for Administrative Reorganisation. Signed April 2025.

These regulations underpin the major restructuring of Viet Nam's administrative system, including the reduction of provinces from 63 to 34 and the shift from a three-tier to a two-tier governance model.

¹¹² Government of Viet Nam. (2025). Decree No. 41/2025/NĐ-CP on the Functions, Duties, Authority, and Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. Issued 26 February 2025.

¹¹³ Government of Viet Nam. (2025). Notification on the Reorganization of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. Published 1 March 2025. As part of the national administrative restructuring under Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW, MOLISA was dissolved and its functions redistributed: vocational education to the MOET, social protection and child affairs to the Ministry of Health, and drug addiction treatment to the Ministry of Public Security.

inclusive and sustainable growth, particularly by ensuring such processes are child-sensitive and grounded in the protection and advancement of children's rights.

- International partners emphasize the importance of intensifying advocacy efforts around child rights, particularly as Viet Nam advances toward higher levels of development. UNICEF's role in championing children's wellbeing is seen as vital in ensuring that economic growth does not come at the price of deepening inequalities.
- Strengthening inter-agency collaboration within the UN system is identified as a strategic priority for stakeholders consulted to foster programmatic synergies and avoid duplication. This strategic cooperation will enable a more coherent and effective response to the multidimensional challenges Viet Nam faces in its transition, while preserving UNICEF's added value in specific areas such as child protection, basic education, and maternal and child health.

5.1.3 EQ3: To what extent are the objectives of the CPD consistent with country development priorities and policies, and were aligned throughout the programme period with the SDGs and UNICEF global policies and strategies?

Key Finding 3: The CPD objectives and strategies demonstrate strong alignment with Viet Nam's national development plans, sectoral policies, and the UNSDCF priorities. Throughout the programme period, UNICEF's interventions remained consistent with its global mandate and strategic plan 2022–2025, as well as with the SDGs. This coherence has reinforced UNICEF's strategic positioning and enabled effective contributions to inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

a. Alignment with national priorities

The UNICEF CP in Viet Nam aligns closely with the country's SEDS 2021–2030, the National Action Programme for Children 2021–2030, and the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030. These frameworks prioritize: (i) Health, nutrition, and education, (ii) Protection from violence and exploitation, (iii) Gender equity and inclusion, (iv) Climate resilience and digital transformation. UNICEF's CP supports these goals through integrated programming that addresses both systemic gaps and emerging challenges.

Table 6 UNICEF CP & Viet Nam's NAPC (2021–2030)

NAPC Priority Area	Examples of UNICEF CP interventions' relevance
Health & Nutrition	- Scale-up of Early Essential Newborn Care - Strengthening maternal and child health systems / nutrition policies - Strengthening immunization system which included procurement and supply of vaccines, cold chain equipment
Education & Early Childhood Development	- Expansion of inclusive preschool education - Promotion of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), STEM, and life skills - Support for out-of-school adolescents and CWDs
Child Protection	- Strengthening child protection systems and case management - Support for online child safety frameworks - Advocacy for legal reforms (e.g. Juvenile Justice Law)
Mental Health & Psychosocial Support	- Integration of mental health services in schools - Training for teachers and health workers on psychosocial support
Participation & Empowerment	- Support for child-friendly governance and participation models - Capacity building for children's rights awareness
Climate & Digital Resilience	- Promotion of climate-resilient WASH systems - Digital literacy and safe online access for children - Advocacy for lead-free environments
Monitoring & Policy Advocacy	- Technical support for national child indicators - Integration of child-focused SDG metrics into planning - Support for national policy frameworks and budgeting

Source: own elaboration

The relevance of the CP is strongly reflected in its alignment with the NAPC 2021–2030. UNICEF's work not only complements Viet Nam's national goals but also enhances the country's ability to meet its commitments under the CRC and the SDGs. The overarching ToC (Annex 2) aligns closely with the priority areas of the NAPC. Its emphasis on child rights, gender-responsive policies, inclusive and accountable social service systems, and positive engagement of families and communities reflects core pillars of the NAPC. Furthermore, the CPD's focus on empowering vulnerable children through high-quality education, health, and protection services directly supports the NAPC's strategic objectives.

Evidence of the CPD's relevance can be found across various areas and sectors. A few examples are highlighted below.

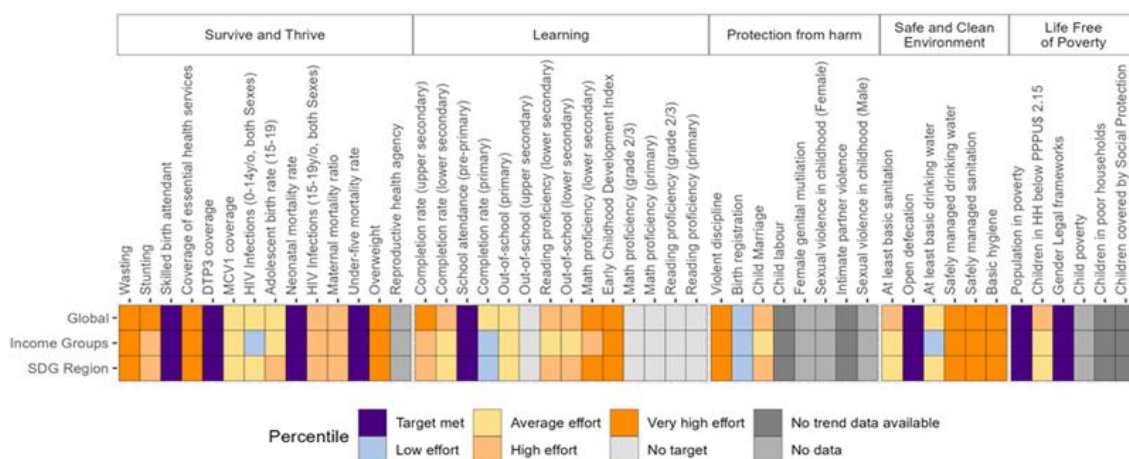
- UNICEF's support for **early childhood development (ECD)** is instrumental in advancing the NAPC's goals of expanding access to child-friendly communes and delivering comprehensive services for children under eight years of age. Through partnerships with local authorities and civil society organizations, UNICEF fosters the establishment and enhancement of ECD centres and promotes inclusive preschool education, particularly for ethnic minority communities and CWDs.
- In the domain of **maternal and child health (MCH)**, the CP prioritizes interventions aimed at reducing neonatal mortality and addressing nutrition-related complications. The expansion of Early Essential Newborn Care across thirteen provinces signifies UNICEF's commitment to improving clinical outcomes for caesarean births and preterm infants. Furthermore, the deployment of the digital Maternal and Child Health Information System (e-MCH) facilitates evidence-based planning and enhances real-time monitoring capacity within the national health infrastructure. The relevance of this initiative is particularly evident in maternal health monitoring, as it significantly improves data continuity between primary healthcare centres and hospitals. Historically, if a pregnant woman sought care at a community health centre and later required treatment at a district hospital, her records remained at the originating facility, necessitating manual data transfers. The introduction of the e-MCH system has transformed this process, allowing patient information to be retrieved using a unique digital ID, ensuring seamless data accessibility across different levels of care.
- **Education equity and inclusion** constitute another critical area of UNICEF's engagement. The CP targets the provinces facing the greatest disparities, focusing on gender-based barriers, learning challenges among CWDs, and the needs of out-of-school adolescents, particularly in ethnic minority regions. School safety initiatives, including efforts to combat violence and bullying, are complemented by mental health programmes that equip educators with psychosocial support skills and promote emotional well-being among students.
- Within the sphere of **child protection**, UNICEF's programming aligns with legislative advances such as the 2024 Juvenile Justice Law and revised child protection statutes. By strengthening case management systems and psychosocial services, supporting child online safety frameworks, and addressing accidental injuries—particularly drowning and road traffic incidents—the CP helps reduce preventable child mortality and injury. These interventions are embedded in Viet Nam's broader National Injury Prevention Strategy.
- **Climate and digital** issues have emerged as cross-cutting priorities within Viet Nam's development agenda. UNICEF responds by promoting climate-resilient WASH infrastructure and advocating for lead-free living environments. It also facilitates digital literacy initiatives and encourages the creation of safe online spaces for children to ensure equitable access to technological and environmental resources.
- UNICEF contributes to **policy advocacy and systemic reform** through its technical advisory support for national strategies. It plays a pivotal role in the development of shock-responsive social protection mechanisms and champions the integration of child-centred indicators within national statistical systems and SDGs monitoring frameworks. These efforts help mainstream child rights across planning and budgeting processes, reinforcing Viet Nam's commitment to evidence-based policy and inclusive development.

b. CPD alignment with the SDGs

UNICEF's work spans 10 out of the 16 SDGs, including SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 16. Its programmatic focus includes child protection, education, health and nutrition, WASH, social protection, and emergency response. The CPD's emphasis on health, education, protection, equity, and sustainability corresponds closely with the SDG targets tracked in the benchmarking report. The CPD's ToC—centred on inclusive policies, accountable systems, community engagement, and private sector responsibility—reflects core SDG principles such as leaving no one behind. The benchmarking exercise shows that UNICEF-supported areas like maternal and child health, education access, child protection, and poverty reduction are all part of the SDG monitoring framework, reinforcing the CPD's relevance. According to SDGs analysis conducted by UNICEF,¹¹⁴ Viet Nam currently has data on 43 of the 48 child related SDGs. The average latest available year for 25 modelled indicators is 2021, while the average latest available year for the 18 indicators directly observed is 2020. The last Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Viet Nam was completed in 2020. Data on some SDG indicators are reported, enabling the measurement of achievements and progress, as shown in the following image.

¹¹⁴ UNICEF Viet Nam: Benchmarking child-related SDGs, UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring—Data and Analytics Section, New York, September 2023.

Figure 2 SDGs Benchmarks Viet Nam (2023)¹¹⁵



Source: UNICEF, 2023

According to the analysis, several areas will require continued effort through 2030, including wasting, stunting, overweight, upper secondary completion rates, early childhood development (ECD), violent discipline, safely managed drinking water, sanitation, and basic hygiene (Figure 2). The CPD is well-positioned to support these efforts, especially through targeted interventions and policy advocacy, as emphasized by multiple national stakeholders.

c. Alignment with the UNSDCF

UNICEF has consistently played a vital role in promoting the rights and well-being of children and women. It has contributed to all four UNSDCF Outcomes, notably through its co-chair role in Results Group 1 on Inclusive Social Development. The objectives and strategies outlined in the CPD for Viet Nam 2022–2026 demonstrate a high level of consistency with the goals and priorities of the UNSDCF for Viet Nam 2022–2026. This alignment is both strategic and operational, reflecting a shared commitment to advancing the SDGs and national development priorities.

The UNSDCF sets out four overarching priorities: (i) inclusive social development, (ii) climate change response and environmental sustainability, (iii) shared prosperity through economic transformation, and (iv) governance and access to justice. UNICEF's CPD contributes directly to each of these pillars through its sectoral programming and cross-cutting strategies.

In the area of inclusive social development, UNICEF's CPD focuses on health, nutrition, education, child protection, and social protection. These efforts are designed to reduce multidimensional child poverty, improve access to quality services, and promote equity for marginalized groups—including ethnic minorities, CWDs, and migrant children. This is fully aligned with the UNSDCF's emphasis on leaving no one behind and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. UNICEF's work on climate resilience and environmental health, including support for climate-resilient WASH systems and lead-free environments, complements the UNSDCF's second priority on environmental sustainability. The CPD also supports digital transformation and innovation, which are key enablers identified in both frameworks. Under the third UNSDCF priority—shared prosperity through economic transformation—UNICEF contributes by investing in human capital development, particularly through early childhood education, life skills, and adolescent empowerment. These initiatives support Viet Nam's long-term vision for a skilled and resilient workforce.

Finally, in the domain of governance and access to justice, UNICEF's support for legal reforms such as the Juvenile Justice Law (2024), child protection regulations, and data systems for monitoring child rights aligns with the UNSDCF's goals of strengthening institutions and promoting rights-based governance.

Data from the UNCT in Viet Nam shows a total UN expenditure of \$233.9 million between 2022 and 2025.¹¹⁶ At the time of publishing of this data, UNICEF had expended US\$54 million—representing 23.1% of total UN expenditure during this period. More recent expenditure data from UNICEF (as of March 2025)

¹¹⁵ The Figure presents the heatmap to show the level of effort the country needs to perform to reach their child related SDG targets. Data on both the latest level of these indicators and historical performance are used as benchmarks. In this figure, blue means that the country has already met the target or is nearly achieving it; while light orange and dark orange indicate that the country is further away (off-track).

¹¹⁶ UN Sustainable Development Group, UNINFO data. Available at: <https://uninfo.org/v1/location/37/funding> (accessed October 2025)

shows an expenditure of US\$65 million.¹¹⁷ A number of significant UNSDCF results with UNICEF contribution included: COVID-19 response, response to natural disaster (e.g. Yagi typhoon), national action plan for children 2021-2030, National Child Protection Strategy (2022-2030), Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2030, Law on Social Protection, revised Law on Child Protection, and Law on Persons with Disabilities, among others. These examples were highlighted by UN stakeholders as involving significant UNICEF contribution and added value.

d. Relevance for UNICEF global policies

As Viet Nam advances from middle-income to upper-middle-income status, the CPD reflects a strategic shift in its approach, consistent with the country's evolving development context. The CPD outlines four core change strategies to be pursued across programme components: i) data and evidence generation; ii) strategic policy advocacy; iii) innovation and digital transformation; and iv) communication for behaviour and social-norm change. These are complemented by efforts to expand partnerships, including with the private sector, and to foster an enabling environment for child and adolescent participation.

This strategic orientation aligns with the programme modalities identified in UNICEF's Programme Guidance for High-Income Countries (2023), which defines four core strategies: i) evidence generation and knowledge management; ii) advocacy; iii) social and behaviour change; and iv) technical assistance. These strategies are designed to be complementary and are applied following a situational analysis of children's needs. The CPD's emphasis on upstream engagement—particularly through policy advocacy and systems strengthening—corresponds with the guidance for programming in more advanced contexts.

The CPD does not include direct service delivery as a central component, which is consistent with the expectations for a country approaching UMIC status. Instead, the programme focuses on influencing national policies, improving data systems, and promoting innovation, particularly in areas where disparities persist. The inclusion of child and adolescent participation across programme components further reflects the strategic shift toward inclusive and rights-based approaches.

The alignment between the CPD's change strategies and the HIC guidance indicates a recognition of Viet Nam's changing status and the need for a differentiated programming model. The adaptation is evident in the programme's focus on systemic interventions and its reduced emphasis on operational implementation. This suggests that UNICEF has recalibrated its role in Viet Nam to reflect the country's increased capacity and the nature of its remaining challenges. This strategic orientation was reinforced during the implementation period of the CPD. Evidence from programme activities and stakeholder engagement indicates that UNICEF increasingly prioritized upstream interventions, focusing on policy advocacy, data systems strengthening, and innovation. The shift away from direct service delivery toward systemic support is premised on the assumption that Viet Nam's institutional capacity has grown and that national counterparts have assumed greater ownership of child-related programming.

The CP is relevant to operationalize the priorities of the UNICEF Global Strategic Plan 2022–2025 as exemplified in the Table below.

Table 7 Alignment Table: UNICEF CP Viet Nam & Global Strategic Plan 2022–2025

Global Strategic Plan Goal Area	UNICEF Viet Nam CPD Alignment (2022–2026)
1. Every child survives and thrives	- Expansion of Early Essential Newborn Care - Nutrition interventions to reduce stunting and neonatal mortality - Support for maternal and child health systems and e-MCH platform - Immunization including COVID-19 vaccination
2. Every child learns and acquires skills for the future	- Inclusive preschool and secondary education for marginalized groups - Promotion of STEM, SEL, and life skills - Mental health support in schools and teacher training
3. Every child is protected from violence, exploitation, and harmful practices	- Strengthening child protection systems and case management - Support for Juvenile Justice Law (2024) and online child safety frameworks - Prevention of child accidents (RTIs, drowning)
4. Every child lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment	- Climate-resilient WASH infrastructure - Advocacy for lead-free environments - Integration of environmental health into child-focused programming

¹¹⁷ The UNCT and UNICEF sources differ on the expenditure of UNICEF during this period. The ET understand this is most likely due to the UNICEF expenditure data being more up to date than the data published by UNCT.

5. Every child has an equitable chance in life	- Support for shock-responsive social protection systems - Advocacy for child-sensitive budgeting and SDG indicator integration - Targeted interventions for ethnic minorities and CWDs
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Source: own elaboration

The objectives, programmes, and activities of the CP in Viet Nam exhibit broad alignment with UNICEF's overall mandate, strategic priorities, and global policy frameworks, particularly those outlined in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025. The CP's core emphasis on child survival, inclusive education, protection from violence and exploitation, and equitable opportunities reflects UNICEF's global focus on promoting child rights and achieving the SDGs. Moreover, the CPD prioritizes equity for vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, CWDs, and children affected by climate and digital risks—consistent with UNICEF's universal commitment to leaving no one behind. However, although not directly stated by key informants, an assessment of statements made by services providers and beneficiaries gives the impression that certain flagship UNICEF global programmes with cross cutting components—such as climate-smart child-centred programming, adolescent participation, and gender-transformative—are not consistently visible or optimally integrated across all CP interventions. While the CPD reflects UNICEF's strategic intent in these areas, the degree of integration at programme level varies, with some gaps noted in design and implementation. These include limited operationalization of adolescent participation, limited engagement of fathers in parenting programmes, and weak mechanisms for child and youth involvement in governance.

5.2 Evaluation criteria 2: Coherence

5.2.1 EQ4: To what extent have partnerships or coordination mechanisms been established with key actors, such as government at national and local levels, civil society, NGOs, academia, and other UN agencies, to avoid duplication of efforts, foster communication, ensure clearer accountabilities, and accelerate results for the most vulnerable children on a large scale?

Key Finding 4: The UNICEF CP in Viet Nam has established meaningful partnerships and coordination mechanisms with key actors—especially with government counterparts at both national and sub-national levels—which have been consistently recognised as a strength by stakeholders. UNICEF Viet Nam plays a pivotal role in the UN system, advancing child rights through both specialized programming and joint platforms. However, stronger institutional mechanisms for inter-agency learning, planning, and impact measurement will be essential for scaling up results and ensuring coherence, especially in a context where civic space is constrained and complexity is increasing across sectors.

The VCO has built extensive public partnerships both nationally and internationally, contributing effectively to programme design and implementation, resource mobilisation, policy advocacy and public communication. The following matrix presents an analysis of UNICEF's key stakeholders in Viet Nam using selected partnership dimensions drawn from UNICEF's global guidance on programme implementation partnerships. This draws on the stakeholder mapping elaborated during the design phase of the CPE, highlighting where each partner's strengths, gaps, and opportunities lie in relation to UNICEF's mandate and the evolving national context.

Table 8 UNICEF Viet Nam – Stakeholder Analysis

Actor Group	Partnership dimensions			
	Strategic Alignment	Complementarity / Added Value	Implementation Capacity	Contribution to CPD Results
Central Government Ministries	Strong alignment with CPD priorities and UNSDCF outcomes; shared focus on child rights, equity, and resilience.	Policy authority: ability to institutionalize and scale interventions nationally.	High policy-making capacity; variable subnational monitoring and resource constraints.	Essential for embedding policies into national systems and ensuring sustainability.
Provincial & Local Authorities	Align with national priorities while adapting to local contexts, especially in disadvantaged provinces.	Proximity to communities; capacity to pilot and adapt interventions.	Moderate; limited resources and uneven technical skills.	Key for operationalizing interventions and reaching vulnerable populations.

UN Agencies (WHO, UNFPA, UN Women, UNESCO, UNDP, etc.)	Aligned through UNSDCF and global mandates; complementary thematic focus.	Technical expertise; convening power; joint advocacy potential. Mixed blessing situations ¹¹⁸	Strong programme management and technical capacity.	Critical for evidence generation, innovation, and cross-sector integration.
Civil Society & Mass Organizations (Women's Union, Youth Union, NGOs, academia)	Thematic alignment on child rights, gender equality, health, education, and protection.	Community access; social legitimacy; grassroots mobilization.	Strong local presence; capacity gaps in results-based management and data systems.	Vital for reaching marginalized groups and feeding local evidence into policy.
Private Sector donors & Business Associations	Alignment on business and child rights, family-friendly policies, and innovation.	Financial resources; technology transfer; influence over workplace standards.	Variable; strong in innovation but less experienced in sustained social programming.	Can accelerate scalable solutions and mobilize resources for child-focused initiatives.
UNICEF RO	Fully aligned with CPD and global strategic plan.	Institutional knowledge; cross-sector coordination; quality assurance.	High technical and managerial capacity.	Driver of programme design, delivery, and partnership management.

Source: own elaboration

According to key informants from Government at national and provincial level, NGO partners and UN KIs, UNICEF's approach is characterized by its flexibility and responsiveness: it does not enter partnerships with rigid programmatic blueprints, but rather engages as a collaborative listener, adjusting its priorities and interventions in line with government needs and evolving local contexts. This adaptive posture has fostered strong working relationships and positioned UNICEF as a trusted partner. The long tenure and technical proficiency of many UNICEF staff were cited by national and provincial counterparts as factors contributing to their deep contextual understanding and ability to navigate complex inter-agency dynamics.

Coherence in partnerships within Viet Nam's development landscape reflects a complex operating environment for CSOs and international NGOs (INGOs). Viet Nam has a long tradition of vibrant community-based networks, and civil society continues to play a role in supporting development priorities.¹¹⁹ At the same time, stakeholders, including UN entities, have noted that evolving regulatory and political dynamics may influence the modalities and extent of engagement with non-state actors, which in turn can shape opportunities for collaboration.

UNICEF's CP demonstrates strong coherence in its partnerships with government institutions, reflecting the country's centralized governance model and institutional capacity. However, structural constraints persist in optimizing coordination with CSOs and INGOs, particularly in areas requiring participatory approaches and community-level accountability. These limitations may affect the CP's ability to fully leverage social accountability mechanisms and inclusive engagement models that are critical to reaching the most vulnerable children at scale. The UN Common Country Analysis for Viet Nam (2021) also underscores the need to strengthen civic participation and transparency to ensure inclusive development outcomes. Given this context, the CP's strategic emphasis on upstream policy advocacy and systems strengthening remains appropriate. Nonetheless, coherence across stakeholder groups could be enhanced by identifying safe and context-sensitive modalities for civic inclusion.

a. Synergies and linkages with partners and other UN agency interventions

UN Agencies collaborate in Viet Nam through an integrated approach guided by the UNSDCF 2022–2026, operationalized through joint programming, pooled funding mechanisms, and unified responses to national priorities. The UNCT, comprising 20 agencies, works collectively across thematic areas—ranging from social protection and climate resilience to digital transformation and gender equality.

According to KII and documental evidence, UNICEF has participated in all UN coordination mechanisms, including the UNICEF Representative co-chairing Results Group 1 on Inclusive Social Development and the UNICEF Deputy Representative co-chairing the Programme Management Team. UNICEF's substantive

¹¹⁸ "Mixed blessing situations" refers to circumstances that bring both advantages and challenges at the same time. In the context of inter-agency work, it means that collaboration generates positive outcomes—such as pooling expertise, resources, and legitimacy—while also working in common areas presents difficulties, for example overlapping mandates, coordination burdens, or differing institutional priorities.

¹¹⁹ Civil Society Brief: Viet Nam published by the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2025)

involvement in the MEL Group is also recognised by UN partners. UNICEF actively participated in some joint programmes financed by the Multi Partner Trust Fund and other Donors.

This comprehensive engagement has helped avoid duplication of effort, strengthen inter-agency communication, and clarify mutual accountabilities. Informants consistently noted that UNICEF's leadership in key coordination platforms has ensured that child-centred priorities are embedded in shared strategies and resource mobilization efforts.

At the same time, according to UNICEF staff, dedicating senior staff time and expertise to every coordination forum can draw capacity away from implementation, slow down decision-making, and risk diluting focus on core CP results. The key trade-off lies between (a) the value of maintaining systems-level coherence and a unified UN strategy, and (b) the need to concentrate limited human resources on rapid, on-the-ground delivery for the most vulnerable children.

One illustrative example of effective coordination was the UN's joint response to Typhoon Yagi, according to UN partners. UNICEF's child-focused interventions were integrated into a broader UN response. The response was guided by the UN Joint Response Plan¹²⁰ and informed by a multi-sector assessment conducted with national authorities.¹²¹ UNICEF's role complemented other agencies' mandates, demonstrating its capacity to contribute substantively to collective action while maintaining its technical leadership in child protection and education. The coordinated mission to Lao Cai Province in June 2025, involving multiple UN agencies, further illustrated the strength of this collaboration.¹²² UNICEF's collaborative approach also extends to longer-term resilience initiatives, such as its Net-Zero Climate Resilience for Children programme, which aligns with broader UN efforts across education, health, WASH, and social protection.¹²³ These examples underscore UNICEF's dual role as a technical lead in child-focused programming and a collaborative partner within the UN system, contributing to coherent, multi-sectoral support for vulnerable communities in Viet Nam. UNICEF supported the development of a "climate-smart school" model, integrating environmental awareness and disaster preparedness into school curricula. Teachers were trained not only in climate education but also in providing psychological support to students affected by crises—an area where UNICEF's expertise in child mental health complemented broader UN efforts in psychosocial recovery. UNICEF Viet Nam serves as co-chair of the Education Sector Group alongside the MOET and jointly leads the Education in Emergencies Working Group in partnership with Save the Children.

Beyond humanitarian contexts, UNICEF has fostered synergies through joint work with UN Women and UNFPA on violence against women and girls,¹²⁴ with UNDP on disability inclusion, and through the EU-funded Joint Rule of Law and Justice Programme (EU-JULE), where its partnership with UNDP received high praise from the EU delegation. The complementarity between the agencies was described as positive and effective, with UNICEF recognised for its strong technical input, collaborative spirit, and deep contextual knowledge, attributed to its cadre of national staff with long-standing service. Feedback highlighted UNICEF's ease in navigating formal and informal channels to address issues and enhance joint action, resulting in a programme considered a model of strong inter-agency partnership.

However, according to different UN stakeholders—including UNICEF staff engaged at a UN coordination level, as well as other UN agencies—there are still challenges to maximizing synergies across the UN system. There is room to improve joint resource mobilization, strategic information sharing, and coordinated engagement in complex sectors such as disaster prevention and recovery. National partners also call for enhanced coordination, typically framed in general terms rather than linked to specific operational mechanisms.

In health, UNICEF leads on newborn and child health and nutrition and immunization focusing on vaccine supply, cold chain equipment and children's health environment, while collaborating with UNFPA on maternal health and WHO on communicable illnesses and health system strengthening. In education, UNICEF brings strong expertise in early childhood and foundational learning, national curricula and education system, whereas UNESCO provides advisory support on national curricula and higher education frameworks. For adolescent development, strategic collaboration with UNDP supports economic

¹²⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2024). *Viet Nam: Joint Response Plan Typhoon Yagi and floods, September 2024 – June 2025 (Issued 27 September 2024)*.

¹²¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2024). *The Viet Nam Multi-Sector Assessment Report for Typhoon Yagi Recovery*. Published December 10, 2024.

¹²² [UN-led delegation visits resilient communities rebuilding after Typhoon Yagi in Viet Nam](#)

¹²³ Net-Zero Climate Resilience for Children initiative, <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/climate-resilience>

¹²⁴ UN Joint Programme (funded by DFAT) on Ending Violence against Women and Children (EVAWC) includes UNFPA, UN Women and UNICEF

empowerment and civic engagement initiatives, while UNICEF retains its distinct contribution to child protection, particularly in areas like preventing violence and exploitation. In WASH programming, several key informants perceived space for greater coordination with UNDP, leveraging infrastructure capabilities alongside UNICEF's behaviour-change interventions. As climate action increasingly involves multiple UN entities, UNICEF must align child-focused environmental health and resilience strategies with cross-agency climate initiatives to ensure integrated and sustainable solutions.

b. Coherence and coordination mechanisms at central level

Based on the available evidence and stakeholders consulted, coordination mechanisms with the central government in Viet Nam are both structured and adaptive, enabling UNICEF to operate across multiple levels of the different sectors. At the central level, UNICEF works directly with ministries and departments to co-develop policies, issue technical guidelines, and advocate for policy change. This collaboration is anchored in a coordination mechanism that aligns with government priorities and sectoral strategies. This central-level engagement is complemented by technical assistance and monitoring that cascade down through the system. UNICEF supports provincial authorities in adapting and implementing national technical guidance, organizing activities, and strengthening project management capacity. At the community level, it provides training for village workers and other frontline staff. Post-training, UNICEF and government counterparts usually conduct monitoring and supervision of facilities and personnel to ensure adherence to standards and assess sustainability of results.

A notable strength of this mechanism is its responsiveness to changing needs. Partners report that when adjustments are required — for example, during the recent vaccine shortage — UNICEF provided timely guidance and mobilized resources to ensure solutions are context-appropriate (For further details, see section 5.3.1.1.). However, resource constraints limit UNICEF's direct support to a subset of provinces, requiring ministries to mobilize additional funding for other areas, according to government officials. This, in turn, reflects an appropriate strategic approach, since UNICEF's comparative advantage lies in leveraging and advocating for the Government to provide the necessary services.

Stakeholders highlight no major challenges in working with UNICEF at the central level, citing the high commitment and technical competence of its programme officers, which enables in-depth, quality technical advice throughout implementation.

c. Coherence at provincial level

UNICEF's intersectoral coordination in Viet Nam at provincial level is widely recognised for its operational responsiveness and collaborative spirit, particularly at the field level. Stakeholders across sectors—including education, health, nutrition, WASH, and child protection—consistently noted that UNICEF's programme components are well-aligned geographically and thematically, often operating in the same communes and districts. This co-location has facilitated shared planning cycles, joint review meetings, and complementary interventions. These mechanisms have enabled consistent messaging on child rights, health, education and nutrition, and fostered a culture of practical collaboration among programme teams.

UNICEF's technical staff and the provincial-level Project Management Units (PMUs) were frequently praised by local stakeholders for their approachability, commitment, and ability to coordinate across sectors. Their willingness to resolve issues collectively and maintain partnerships despite logistical challenges and personnel turnover was highlighted as a key strength. Stakeholder feedback emphasized the quality of support provided by named UNICEF staff, noting their strong communication skills and capacity for rapid problem-solving.

Training materials, communication strategies, and behaviour change tools are often shared or adapted across sectors. For example, parenting communication and peer-to-peer learning are emphasized in both nutrition and child protection programmes, while education and WASH initiatives integrate messages on clean water, menstruation, and climate change through school-based activities. These shared approaches contribute to a coherent and child-centred programming model.

Partners at both national and local levels consistently expressed strong appreciation for UNICEF's ability to fill critical funding gaps. Government allocations often fall short in key areas such as therapeutic nutrition, emergency maternal support, and the procurement of essential equipment, making UNICEF's financial contributions relevant to sustaining these interventions. In the education sector, for instance, provision of school materials, digital tools, and "friendly libraries" has complemented state efforts to reduce dropout rates and improve learning outcomes. By shouldering these funding responsibilities, UNICEF has enabled local authorities to maintain service continuity and to pilot innovative approaches within constrained budgets.

However, this financial support also carries implications for the organization's strategic role at mid-term in a country transitioning toward upper-middle-income status. As Viet Nam advances economically, there is a growing need to further recalibrate UNICEF's engagement—from direct financial support toward strengthening domestic systems and promoting sustainable, nationally financed solutions. Thus, beyond direct service delivery, UNICEF has distinguished itself through its role as a policy-to-practice bridge. Its community-based nutrition club model—adapted from successful initiatives in Lao Cai and Gia Lai—has been widely hailed by local departments as a simple, affordable, and scalable pilot worthy of domestic replication. Equally significant is UNICEF's contribution to evidence-based advocacy: by presenting rigorous data on child nutrition and ECD at provincial and national forums, the organization has shaped child-focused policy debates in ways that few other NGOs have managed. Partners also highlight UNICEF's equity-driven targeting, which prioritizes the most remote and ethnically diverse districts rather than concentrating solely on accessible urban centres. Finally, UNICEF's advance-based financing arrangements and streamlined approval processes have minimized transaction costs and fostered a high degree of trust, enabling implementing units to exercise autonomy while remaining aligned with UNICEF's strategic objectives.

Many partners advocated for enhanced coordination and cross-learning, urging UNICEF to facilitate more inter-provincial exposure visits, inter-sectoral workshops, and in-person reviews to share best practices and foster a more integrated approach.

FGDs with parents, teachers, and community leaders reaffirmed the high regard for UNICEF's contributions in health messaging, menstrual hygiene education, clean water provision, and awareness-raising around online safety and climate action. Participants especially valued the practical nature of these interventions, which translated complex concepts into everyday practices. At the same time, community members expressed a keen interest in deeper engagement—for instance, father-focused modules in parenting programs—and in more substantial infrastructure improvements, such as additional wells and water tanks in schools.

As mentioned earlier, one of the distinctive features of the approach in Viet Nam is the consolidation of multiple intervention strategies within a single provincial project. This integrated setup is facilitated by a governance model in which the Provincial People's Committee plays a governance role, and a PMU is established with staff who implement and interact directly with a central coordinator based at the national level. These mechanisms—particularly the PMU structure and the active involvement of provincial authorities—enable cross-sectoral collaboration and information sharing. They help ensure that interventions in areas such as health, education, child protection, and social policy are not implemented in isolation but are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This integrated governance and implementation model is considered a key enabler for achieving more coherent and impactful results.

Inter-agency coordination with other UN entities presents both achievements and opportunities for improvement at provincial and local level. While UNICEF's work intersects with agencies such as UNDP and UNFPA—particularly in maternal health, nutrition, and social protection—local stakeholders often report limited visibility of structured collaboration in field-level implementation. This perception reflects a lack of joint interventions or shared planning in overlapping domains at the operational level.

5.2.2 EQ5: How well are programme planning, implementation and key strategies incorporating key international commitments including gender equality and women's empowerment, equity for children, and the human rights-based approach?

Key Finding 5: While the CP broadly incorporates key international commitments related to child rights and equity, there is scope to strengthen its integration of gender equality. The CP is largely gender-responsive, with emerging gender-transformative practices in areas such as WASH and social protection. Strong results are visible in menstrual health initiatives, gender integration in social protection, STEM opportunities for girls, and gender-sensitive justice reforms. Gaps include the limited availability and use of disaggregated data that links gender and disability with other intersecting factors such as poverty and ethnicity, and limited evidence of norm and behaviour change.

The coherence of the CP with key international commitments—including gender equality, equity for children, and the human rights-based approach—is broadly evident in its programme planning, implementation, and strategic priorities. Viet Nam is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The CPD reflects alignment with the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations, particularly those outlined in the 2022 Concluding Observations. These include addressing gaps in access to services for marginalized groups such as ethnic minority children, CWDs, and those in remote areas, as well as strengthening child protection systems and

inclusive education. UNICEF's programming demonstrates responsiveness to these concerns, reinforcing its commitment to child rights.

a. UNICEF's contribution to gender equality in Viet Nam

According to the evidence collected in previous and next sections, about gender issues under the CP, the following table summarizes the findings applying the Gender Equality Continuum.¹²⁵

Table 9 Gender issue findings applying the Gender Equality Continuum

Section	Findings	Continuum Position
Health and Nutrition	At upstream level, strong focus on maternal and child health, nutrition, and adolescent girls' micronutrient supplementation. Integration of sex-disaggregated data in some areas, but not systematic. At downstream level, village midwives in remote communes (e.g. Dien Bien, Gia Lai), community-based nutrition clubs, adolescent girls' micronutrient supplementation, or emergency nutrition support. The <i>Cô đỡ thôn bản</i> programme, while not explicitly framed as gender-transformative, contributes to safer childbirth practices and empowers women in remote areas. These interventions directly address maternal and child health gaps, particularly among ethnic minorities.	Gender-responsive. Programmes address women's and girls' specific health needs and reduce inequities in priority areas. (maternal care, adolescent nutrition), but limited evidence of addressing underlying gender norms (e.g., male involvement in care, women's decision-making power).
WASH	At upstream level, explicit menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) policies with the Women's Union; inclusion of boys and male teachers in awareness campaigns; climate-resilient WASH services designed with gender-sensitive approaches. At downstream level, climate-resilient toilets, rainwater harvesting, ceramic filters in upland schools, MHH programming with the Women's Union, and awareness campaigns involving boys and male teachers. Parents report adopting water conservation habits at home.	Between gender-responsive and gender-transformative. The programme not only addresses practical needs (MHH facilities, safe sanitation) but also begins to shift social norms by involving men and boys in menstrual health discussions.
Learning and Skills	At upstream level, support for inclusive education policies includes attention to gender disparities in access and retention, especially for girls in ethnic minority and rural communities. At downstream level UNICEF has supported child-friendly libraries, extracurricular activities targeting girls (STEM, climate, life skills), the Skills4Girls initiative, STEM/STEAM engagement for girls, inclusive education for CWDs, and LGBTQI+ inclusion pilots. However, KIIs and FDGs suggest persistence of gender stereotypes (girls steered away from STEM, parents influencing subject choices) that need to be addressed.	Mixed: gender-sensitive to gender-responsive. While interventions acknowledge and address barriers, more work is required to systematically/critically analyse results to assess how far efforts are effective to shift entrenched gender norms in education and career pathways.
Child Protection	At upstream level, gender-sensitive approaches to violence prevention and child justice, including training for law enforcement and judicial actors on gender-based violence and child-friendly procedures (Law on Justice for Minors), training of forensic experts on gender-sensitive techniques. However, limited systematic data disaggregation by sex and disability. At downstream level, parenting communication groups in ethnic languages, emergency child protection subsidies, Children's Councils institutionalized in local governance, gender-sensitive justice reforms, and GBV protocols.	Gender-responsive. Services are adapted to girls' and boys' needs, and GBV is addressed, but transformative change in social norms (e.g., harmful practices, gendered violence drivers) is still emerging, with limited evidence on changing harmful norms and root causes of violence.
Social Policy and Governance	At upstream level, gender-responsive social protection (cash-plus models addressing GBV risks), partnerships with the Women's Union, and integration of gender equity into policy frameworks, and joint advocacy/resource mobilization with UN agencies.	Gender-responsive, with transformative potential. By linking social protection to GBV prevention and women's empowerment, UNICEF is moving toward structural change, though scale and institutionalization remain limited

Source: own elaboration

While progress is evident, the evaluation notes that not all interventions apply a gender-transformative lens; many remain gender-sensitive. There is limited evidence of systematic gender analysis informing

¹²⁵ The **Gender Equality Continuum** (as defined in UNICEF's *Gender Equality Marker and Gender Tag Guidance Note*, 2022) categorizes interventions as: **Gender-blind** (ignores gender differences), **Gender-sensitive** (acknowledges but does not address inequalities), **Gender-responsive** (addresses specific needs of women, men, girls, boys), **Gender-transformative** (actively seeks to shift harmful gender norms and power relations).

programme design across sectors. Opportunities exist to deepen collaboration with other UN agencies and national partners to promote intersectional approaches and address structural gender inequalities.

UNICEF's performance against the gender continuum model in Viet Nam reflects a degree of gender sensitivity in its activities, with efforts to consider the participation of both males and females. However, the approach lacks consistency and strategic depth. Although evident efforts have been made to improve strategic coordination on gender since the 2023 Gender review,¹²⁶ both internal and external stakeholders observed that the absence of a dedicated cross-sectoral gender advisor has constrained VCO's capacity to transition from gender-responsive to fully gender-transformative programming (see section 0).

b. Gender responsiveness and institutionalisation of results

UNICEF has contributed to some priority areas of gender national frameworks such as the *National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030)*:

Table 10 UNICEF Viet Nam Contributions to the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030)

Priority Area of the National Strategy	UNICEF Contributions / Evidence
1. Political participation and leadership of women	Indirect contributions through child protection and social policy work that promote women's participation in community-level decision-making (e.g., village midwives, women leaders in parenting clubs, female facilitators in education and WASH).
2. Gender equality in education and training	Support for girls' participation in STEM and digital skills initiatives; integration of socio-emotional learning and gender-sensitive curricula; reduction of stigma around menstruation and puberty in schools; <i>Skills4Girls</i> initiative.
3. Gender equality in labour, employment, and economic empowerment	Indirect contributions through social protection systems that are gender- and shock-responsive; promotion of equitable caregiving roles in parenting programmes (potential to support women's labour participation).
4. Gender equality in health care and reproductive health	Strong contributions: adolescent nutrition (iron/folic acid supplementation), maternal health, menstrual hygiene management, inclusion of acute malnutrition treatment in the health services; integration of gender-sensitive reproductive health services.
5. Gender equality in family life and prevention of gender-based violence	Parenting programmes delivered to mixed groups; promotion of shared caregiving responsibilities; child protection outcomes aligned with international standards; Juvenile Justice Law (2024) includes gender-sensitive procedures.
6. Gender equality in information, communication, and awareness-raising	Integration of gender equality into curricula and extracurricular activities; awareness campaigns on menstrual hygiene and adolescent health; engagement of teachers and students in shifting social norms.

Source: own elaboration

Considering the evidence provided under the other EQs, the evaluation found that UNICEF's programming in Viet Nam demonstrates strong alignment with international commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment, including the CRC, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the SDGs. This alignment is reflected in the integration of gender-sensitive approaches across sectors of the CP. The programme also demonstrates progress in the inclusiveness of its monitoring framework. Indicators are increasingly disaggregated by sex, and in some cases by disability and ethnicity (see Annex 12), thereby enabling more nuanced analysis of equity gaps. In education, for example, indicators explicitly track girls' participation in STEM and digital skills initiatives, while in child protection, access to justice and gender-sensitive services are monitored, albeit with inconsistent disaggregation across provinces. Nonetheless, the absence of systematic data on girls and adolescents from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities continues to constrain the ability to fully assess programme reach and impact.

Evidence further suggests that UNICEF has applied a sustainability lens to gender-sensitive issues by embedding them within national policies and financing mechanisms. The integration of acute malnutrition treatment into selected pilot health services provides a pathway toward financial sustainability, while provincial budget allocations for WASH strategies and the institutionalisation of menstrual hygiene guidelines strengthen the likelihood of long-term impact. In education, the incorporation of socio-emotional learning and gender equality into the national early childhood curriculum represents another example of durable policy change. However, sustainability remains contingent on adequate domestic resources and political commitment, with risks posed by fiscal constraints and persistent gendered social norms.

Finally, the evaluation highlights cases of institutionalisation of gender-responsive approaches. The 2024 Juvenile Justice Law incorporates gender-sensitive procedures, while decrees on social work and school counselling embed professional standards that reflect gender considerations. Sectoral plans in education,

¹²⁶ UNICEF Viet Nam (2024) Light Gender Programmatic Review 2023

health, and child protection also integrate gender equality objectives, signalling a degree of institutional uptake. Yet, institutionalisation remains uneven across sectors and subnational levels, and mechanisms for accountability and stable financing are not yet fully consolidated, according to several stakeholders. Complementary reviews, namely the UNICEF VCO Light Gender Programmatic Review (2023), showed this: health, nutrition, climate/DRR, social policy and social protection interventions still lack systematic gender analysis, and in child protection and justice the application of a gender lens is inconsistent, particularly in areas such as sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour, or violent discipline. According to implementing partners and local actors, such as the Women's Union and provincial authorities, these gaps are more pronounced at provincial, district, and commune levels. Challenges are especially acute in remote and ethnic minority areas where institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming depends heavily on project-based support.

In addition to the evidence already highlighted, qualitative findings point to a gradual shift in community perceptions of gender roles in provinces visited by the ET, particularly through initiatives such as menstrual hygiene education, prenatal care, and shared caregiving responsibilities. Teachers reported reduced stigma around puberty and menstruation and greater classroom engagement of girls in programme-supported schools, while the active role of village midwives¹²⁷ underscores women's participation in service delivery. Nonetheless, the evaluation also notes limitations in the transformative potential of some interventions: for example, while parenting sessions in Da Nang were delivered to mixed groups, the extent to which the approach challenged traditional gender roles and norms was not clearly evidenced¹²⁸, and STEM initiatives require further scrutiny to assess whether they address underlying structural barriers.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the CP has made significant contributions to advancing gender equality, both through programmatic interventions and through policy and institutional reforms. At the same time, the evaluation underscores the need for more systematic data, stronger accountability frameworks, and sustained resource mobilisation to ensure that gender-sensitive achievements are fully institutionalised and sustainable over time.

c. Other cross-cutting issues and their integration into policies and programmes

Climate adaptation and resilience: UNICEF Viet Nam's programming demonstrates emerging attention to climate adaptation, particularly in the WASH and education sectors, where interventions have responded to environmental vulnerabilities affecting children and communities. Pilots such as climate-resilient toilets and clean water systems in drought- and flood-prone areas reflect efforts to strengthen service delivery in line with equity principles and the human rights-based approach. These initiatives are consistent with international commitments, including the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and the SDGs—especially SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). They also align with UNICEF's global Strategic Plan (2022–2025), which calls for climate-responsive programming to protect children's rights in the face of environmental risks.

In education, climate change topics have been integrated into curricula and extracurricular activities, fostering awareness and adaptive behaviours among students. However, these efforts remain small-scale, and there is limited availability of quantitative indicators to assess climate resilience or behavioural change. Stakeholders noted that awareness of UNICEF's climate-related work among provincial departments is uneven, and that intersectoral coordination is sometimes constrained by fragmented ministries mandates.

LNOB: The CP has systematically integrated the LNOB approach across its programmatic outcomes, particularly in education, child survival, child protection, and social policy. In these areas, equity considerations are embedded through gender-responsive systems, disability inclusion, poverty targeting, and attention to children in rural and climate-vulnerable contexts. For example, the education outcome explicitly advances inclusive curricula and safe learning environments, while social policy outputs strengthen gender- and shock-responsive social protection systems and child poverty measurement. Child survival and development outputs emphasize equitable access to health, nutrition, and WASH services, with a focus on adolescent girls and disadvantaged communities. Child protection outcomes reinforce legal, and policy frameworks aligned with international standards, though service delivery gaps remain in reaching the most vulnerable.

In the case of CWDs and PWDs, UNICEF is perceived as a knowledgeable and credible actor on disability, particularly in its institutional engagement and contributions to the UN Joint Programme 'Working together for an inclusive future'. Implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through effective collaboration'.¹²⁹ A significant opportunity for advancing inclusive policies lies in the Government of Viet Nam's recent announcement of the Integrated Early Response and Care (IERC) approach, which

¹²⁷ see Annex 10.3 for background information on the Village Midwifery Network

¹²⁸ Based on the Helping Adolescents Thrive mid-term review report and FGDs with parents.

¹²⁹ The programme involved collaboration between UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA), the Vietnamese government, and organisations of persons with disabilities. Phase 1 2022-2024 - extended through 2025

involves sub-national funding mechanisms. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to support the government in operationalizing this system-wide commitment, given its credibility and in-country expertise. Unlike other actors focused on project-level implementation, UNICEF can play a strategic role in shaping inclusive systems.

5.3 Evaluation criteria 3: Effectiveness

This section analyses the extent to which the planned outputs in the CP have been achieved and how these outputs have contributed to the desired outcomes. The findings are organised according to the CP results framework, categorised by each of the four programmatic outcomes. This section presents a summary narrative from a contribution analysis perspective, while **a more detailed activity / output-level analysis** was carried out by the CPE, and is presented in **Annex 16**. Available **data from the CP indicators** provided in Country Office Annual Reports (COARs) and RAM are included in **Annex 7**. **Financial analysis**, including annual budget and expenditure per outcome area, is included in **Annex 8**.

5.3.1 EQ6: To what extent were programme outputs (short-term/intermediate results) delivered, and did they sufficiently contribute to desired programme outcomes and humanitarian response?

5.3.1.1 Child survival and development

Outcome result statement: Pregnant women, children and adolescents have equitable, quality health care and immunization, access to safe water and sanitation, adequate nutrition and mental health support services, live in safe and green environments and have the skills to practice healthy behaviours.

Key Finding 6: While Viet Nam has seen impressive progress in child survival and health indicators over several decades—driven by economic growth, policy reforms, and international partnerships—the last five years have exposed persistent and emerging bottlenecks. As a result, the fundamental needs across these four areas have remained relatively consistent over the current CPD. The bottlenecks include the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on immunization systems, persistent regional disparities in maternal and child health, rising child overweight and obesity, and widening gaps in access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), especially among ethnic minorities and in rural or climate-vulnerable regions.

UNICEF Viet Nam's main contribution in health and immunization lies in restoring and strengthening preventive and primary maternal and child health services, with a focus on immunization systems and community-level continuity of care. It played a catalytic role by developing technical guidelines, training health workers, and addressing logistical bottlenecks such as cold-chain and vaccine supply management. However, the sharp decline in routine coverage in 2023 highlights persistent vulnerabilities in system sustainability.

In nutrition, UNICEF's integrated efforts target undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, promote better dietary practices, and improve early detection and treatment of severe wasting. Through policy advocacy, regulatory reform, capacity building, and strategic partnerships, it is helping build a resilient nutritional framework for children and adolescents. UNICEF's WASH interventions have bridged service gaps while driving policy change, financing strategies, and climate resilience. The programme's success reflects the power of combining infrastructure support with normative advocacy and capacity development. To sustain and scale these gains, continued government commitment, diversified funding, and cross-sector coordination will be crucial—especially to reach the most vulnerable children.

Over the period 2022-2026, Child Survival and Development had an allotted CP budget (OR and RR) of US\$ 18.1 million and an expenditure of US\$ 13.7 million (as of March 2025), resulting in an execution rate of 76 per cent. In addition, US\$ 19.2 million has been spent through ORE (Other Resources Emergency). The annual budget and expenditure are presented in Annex 8. For the CP output assessment refer to Annex 7.

UNICEF Viet Nam's contribution to the Child Survival and Development outcome is positioned within a comprehensive ToC that articulates pathways for achieving equitable, timely and quality health care, immunization, access to safe water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, and mental health support services by 2026. Across the period 2022–2026, UNICEF's Child Survival and Development programme has achieved significant progress despite considerable systemic demands posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and administrative restructuring within the health sector.

a. Equitable, quality health care and immunization

UNICEF has played a central role in recovering immunization coverage in 2024 through measures such as cold chain strengthening, vaccine logistics support, and community outreach initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust in immunization programs, according to MOH officers, following sharp declines in 2022 and 2023 which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and administrative restructuring within the health sector.

The reemergence of measles, diphtheria, and pertussis reportedly led to outbreaks in late 2023 and early 2024.¹³⁰ These outbreaks were most pronounced in remote and underserved communes, where immunization gaps persist. By October 2024, routine immunization systems supported by UNICEF and partners fully immunized over 1,081,000 children under two, with national DTP1 coverage rebounding sharply to 99% and DTP3 coverage reaching 97%—recovering from a pandemic-induced low of 80% and 65% respectively in 2023. Measles vaccine coverage climbed from 82% to 98% in just one year.¹³¹ Compared to both global and regional benchmarks for the same period, Viet Nam's recovery in DTP3, DTP1, and measles vaccine coverage in 2024 is exemplary. According to the IA2030 global progress report,¹³² global DTP3 coverage stagnated at 84–85% for several years, with zero-dose children globally remaining far above targets. Viet Nam's reduction of zero-dose children from 274,000 to 13,000 in just one year highlights the strength of its system response, government commitment, and the pivotal support of UNICEF and partners.

UNICEF's advocacy to re-centralize vaccine procurement and its technical support to the MOH were instrumental in addressing systemic bottlenecks (find more details in section 5.3.3.c). However, while administrative data suggest that coverage rates in 2024 had approached pre-pandemic levels in several provinces, stakeholders cautioned that the sustainability of this recovery will depend on the stability of governance and supply chain systems over the coming year. Despite system strengthening, the immunization rate for infants under one year in 2023 fell dramatically, which triggered a significant measles outbreak affecting nearly every province. Ensuring consistent routine coverage—rather than just periodic campaign spikes—remains a core challenge. Viet Nam's experience underscores how temporary recoveries in coverage can mask persistent system fragility and inequities if not sustained by reliable supply chains, strong data systems, and robust community engagement.

UNICEF's contribution to **maternal, newborn, and child health** in Viet Nam is widely recognised for its systematic, multi-level approach that integrates service delivery, capacity development, and community-based outreach. UNICEF-supported EENC and maternal health interventions showed measurable improvements (RAM reports): (i) over 81,000 mothers received skilled birth attendance in 2024, with over 74,500 newborns provided with essential early care by health workers trained in UNICEF-supported activities; (ii) the network of 1,200 village midwives supported over 18,600 pregnant women and directly assisted over 10,200 newborns in remote and underserved areas during the year. Placed in the national context, these achievements represent a significant contribution to Viet Nam's health priorities. With an estimated 1.4 to 1.5 million live births annually,¹³³ UNICEF-supported interventions accounted for roughly five to six per cent of all births nationwide. While this proportion may appear modest in absolute terms, its strategic importance lies in the focus on disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities and rural households, where maternal and neonatal mortality risks remain disproportionately high.

At the national level, UNICEF supported the MOH in developing technical guidelines (e.g. Kangaroo mother care method, comprehensive early childhood care (0–5 years), annual medical check-ups for children under 24 months, or newborn care in health facilities). One of the most significant legislative developments is the revised Health Insurance Law No. 51/2024/QH15¹³⁴ which introduces a pivotal provision recognizing village-based midwives as formal members of the health workforce, particularly in ethnic minority communities. By strengthening the role of village midwives and enhancing the skills of frontline health workers, UNICEF has contributed directly to Viet Nam's progress toward universal health coverage extending the reach of maternal and newborn health services to populations that are often

¹³⁰ According to WHO data, the incidence of measles in Viet Nam rose sharply from 0.2 per 100,000 population in 2022 to 0.4 in 2023 and then surged to 77.8 in 2024. Pertussis followed a similar trend, increasing from 0.2 in 2022 to 0.4 in 2023 and reaching 10.7 in 2024. In contrast, diphtheria peaked at 0.6 in 2023 but declined to 0.1 in 2024, after registering no reported cases in 2022 (Source: [WHO Immunization Data portal - Global](#)). These figures underscore the urgency of strengthening routine immunization systems and maintaining high coverage, particularly in the context of recent health system disruptions and shifting administrative responsibilities.

¹³¹ Viet Nam Achieves Remarkable Progress in Childhood Immunization, WHO and UNICEF Report

¹³² World Health Organization. (2023). Immunization Agenda 2030: Global progress report 2023. World Health Organization. (2024). Immunization Agenda 2030: Global progress report 2024.

¹³³ UN World Population Prospects 2024 data

¹³⁴ Ministry Of Finance Viet Nam Social Security News (14th March 2025) 'Universal Health Insurance – A Chance for Equal Access to Healthcare Services'. Available at: <https://vss.gov.vn/english/news/Pages/vietnam-social-security.aspx?CatelD=198&ItemID=12528> / with supporting regulations such as Decree No. 02/2025/ND-CP and Circular No. 01/2025/TT-BYT guiding operational rollout

excluded from mainstream provision. UNICEF also supported the development of the electronic maternal and child health (eHealth) system, which was successfully piloted in select provinces. However, coverage currently extends to only 30–40% of health facilities within those regions. Nationwide expansion remains dependent on securing additional funding and strengthening institutional capacity (see details of UNICEF's contribution in Section 5.3.3.a).

Nationally, Viet Nam's recent data suggest that 96% of births are attended by skilled health personnel, positioning the country on par with upper-middle-income countries and significantly above the global average of 83–84%. However, this aggregate figure obscures substantial disparities: coverage remains markedly lower in remote, rural, and ethnic minority areas, where neonatal and maternal mortality ratios are several times higher than those observed in urban centres.¹³⁵ UNICEF's focus on expanding midwife networks and digital health information systems aligns with the programme logic of targeting system bottlenecks and closing the last-mile gap, yet persistent disparities highlight the limits of these interventions in the absence of broader, cross-sectoral investments and community engagement.

At the provincial and district levels, UNICEF helped launch targeted interventions to address service gaps, while at the community level, it strengthened the capacity of specialized health staff through training. A major asset is UNICEF's communication expertise, which enhances outreach and behavioural change. In addition to training, UNICEF provides essential equipment (e.g., projectors) and informational materials (e.g., leaflets) to enable health workers to educate mothers and caregivers. UNICEF has played a pivotal role in strengthening Viet Nam's unique network of community-based health workers in remote areas. These workers receive six months of training to support antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care to encourage facility-based births and provide care when access is not possible. However, these gains are mainly confined to the geographic areas prioritized by the programme, highlighting the need for broader scale-up and sustained investment.

b. Access to mental health services

During this CP, VCO has advanced the integration of mental health into its programme portfolio. Interventions include advocacy for policy change, embedding socio-emotional learning in the education sector, training teachers and health workers, and pioneering child and adolescent mental health surveillance. The nationally representative V-NAMHS survey, supported by UNICEF, provided robust evidence that 21.7 per cent of adolescents experienced mental health issues in the past year, while only 5 per cent of parents recognised these needs, highlighting deep-rooted stigma and low mental health literacy.¹³⁶ This evidence has been critical in shaping policy dialogue and informing Viet Nam's first National Scheme on Mental Healthcare System Strengthening, which establishes a multi-sectoral framework for accessible and quality services, including specialized support for children and adolescents.

These efforts have directly advanced several key developments: (i) policies related to children's, adolescents', and women's mental health have been developed, moving beyond the traditional focus on severe adult mental illness; (ii) the availability of data and evidence has been significantly expanded through UNICEF's partnership with the Institute for Sociology, which has strengthened national capacity for evidence-based policy recommendations; and (iii) the capacity of health workers has been improved through the adaptation of the WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive package, with 720 teachers and caregivers trained and 36,000 children reached, including 22,000 adolescent girls. This has enhanced detection, protection, prevention, and treatment capacities within schools and communities, although gaps remain in extending training benefits to parents.

In addition, standard guidelines and training materials are being developed and adapted for national use, with MOET planning to implement the toolkit from 2025. Communication campaigns such as "Open Up & Connect" and youth-led initiatives have increased awareness and reduced stigma, thereby improving access to information for parents, caregivers, children, and adolescents. Positive mental health has also been promoted through Sports for Development¹³⁷ and other communication activities, designed to foster teamwork, social bonding, and collaborative problem-solving among adolescents. Social innovation clubs¹³⁸ provide a platform for children to use a design-thinking approach to tackle mental health or climate issues they identify as priorities. However, while interviews and early programme feedback suggest increased engagement with mental health services, stakeholders consistently noted that adolescents and caregivers often do not know where to seek information or support, and that services remain scarce or

¹³⁵ WHO 'Maternal health in Viet Nam'. Available at: <https://www.who.int/vietnam/health-topics/maternal-health>

¹³⁶ Institute of Sociology, University of Queensland, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 2022. Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey: Report on Main Findings. Hanoi, Viet Nam: Institute of Sociology

¹³⁷ UNICEF Viet Nam 'Girls are Unstoppable': <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/girls-are-unstoppable>

¹³⁸ The Social Innovation Clubs are part of UPSHIFT, a programme which builds the capacity of education practitioners at central and provincial levels.

inaccessible, particularly outside urban centres. This underscores the need for stronger implementation mechanisms, clearer referral pathways, and expanded service coverage.

The proliferation of initiatives targeting youth mental health in recent years, originating from diverse actors, including government bodies, civil society, and international partners, contribute to fragmentation in systematic evidence synthesis and Mental Health governance structures. Existing national policies predominantly address severe adult mental illnesses and lack a child- or adolescent-centred framework.¹³⁹ In this context, the UN in Viet Nam could play a strategic convening role to map, align, and harmonize interventions.

c. Access to nutrition services

UNICEF has played an instrumental role in shaping Viet Nam's nutritional landscape through both advocacy and technical support. The agency has supported the government in developing and rolling out the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS, 2021–2030), scaling up SAM treatment, strengthening nutrition surveillance, and piloting parenting and school-based interventions to improve early feeding and dietary diversity. One of the most significant policy results in this field has been the inclusion of a sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) tax in Viet Nam's Excise Law (scheduled to take effect in 2027). UNICEF commissioned and disseminated a national study on SSB consumption patterns, health risks, and policy options, the findings of which were presented in 2024 at high level workshops jointly organized with the NA's Committee for Culture and Education, the MOH, and the National Institute of Nutrition, exemplifying VCO's capacity in advocacy and policy engagement. The study estimated that a 10% SSB tax could reduce consumption to prevent hundreds of thousands of overweight/obesity cases in children by 2030, with downstream reductions in NCD incidence. KII and media coverage confirm that the study's evidence was cited in debates on the draft Excise Tax Law and the draft amendment now contains provisions for an ad valorem excise tax on SSBs, a measure publicly endorsed by multiple parliamentarians as a child health protection strategy.¹⁴⁰ External observers have credited UNICEF and allied organizations with providing the technical evidence and advocacy that shaped this outcome.

Other policy-related contributions from UNICEF include the development of national guidelines on iron folic acid supplementation for schoolgirls and the development of a circular guiding funding allocation for nutrition benefit packages, which has been pivotal in combating stunting and severe acute malnutrition (SAM). UNICEF's contribution to the circular included evidence synthesis, costing models, and coordination with MOH and MOF stakeholders to ensure alignment with stunting and SAM reduction priorities. This circular has since served as a key instrument for channelling resources to local-level nutrition interventions, particularly in high-burden provinces. These interventions are vital for Viet Nam's long-term development, as they directly impact child survival, cognitive development, and future economic productivity.¹⁴¹

UNICEF catalysed the scaling of high-impact nutrition interventions in targeted regions, notably Dien Bien and Gia Lai, reaching nearly 9,800 pregnant women with micronutrient supplements, 5,600 children with micronutrient powder, and over 500 children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) received treatment in 2024.¹⁴² Over 100,000 children affected by Typhoon Yagi were screened for malnutrition; 5,300 were referred for treatment. The interventions are most significant not for their absolute coverage, which is modest in national terms,¹⁴³ but for their equity focus and demonstration effect, showing how targeted, high-impact approaches can be scaled to reduce stunting and malnutrition across Viet Nam. The national

¹³⁹ Institute of Sociology, University of Queensland, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2022). Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey: Report on Main Findings. Hanoi, Viet Nam: Institute of Sociology

¹⁴⁰ Tuoi tre news (November 2024) 'Childhood obesity: Vietnam proposes 10% excise tax on sugary drinks' <https://news.tuoi-tre.vn/childhood-obesity-vietnam-proposes-10-excise-tax-on-sugary-drinks-10383097.htm> / Global health Advocacy Incubator (July 2025) 'Vietnam Introduces Country's First Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax'

<https://www.advocacyincubator.org/news/2025-07-09-vietnam-introduces-countrys-first-sugar-sweetened-beverage-tax>

¹⁴¹ Extensive global and national evidence links improved child nutrition to long-term development outcomes. Studies by UNICEF, WHO, and The Lancet's Maternal and Child Nutrition Series show that stunting and wasting increase the risk of mortality from common childhood illnesses, while chronic undernutrition in the first 1,000 days impairs brain development, reducing school readiness and learning capacity (see UN Joint Programme on Nutrition in Viet Nam evaluation, 2017).

¹⁴² RAM and project reports

¹⁴³ Children receiving micronutrient powder (5,600): Relative to the 8.5 million under-five children nationally, this is a small proportion (<0.1%). However, in high-burden provinces, this coverage is significant, directly addressing dietary diversity gaps and micronutrient deficiencies among vulnerable groups. SAM treatment (500 children): Against an estimated 200,000 SAM cases nationally, this is only 0.25% coverage. Yet, in the targeted districts, it represents a critical lifeline for children who otherwise would not have access to treatment. It also demonstrates proof of concept for scaling Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) nationally.

stunting prevalence among under-five children declined to 18.2% by 2023, surpassing the 2025 target of 27%.¹⁴⁴

UNICEF's contributions to nutrition have been vital in **mitigating the effects of crises** such as COVID-19 and Typhoon Yagi. These events led to a spike in SAM among vulnerable populations, particularly in remote and ethnic minority communities. UNICEF responded by (i) providing therapeutic food and emergency nutrition support, (ii) supporting nutrition surveillance and data systems, (iii) advocating for multisectoral coordination and budget allocation.

By providing therapeutic food and emergency nutrition support, UNICEF has contributed to stabilising malnutrition rates in remote and ethnic minority communities, as evidenced by COAR reports. Beyond immediate response, UNICEF has been advocating for a sustainable financing mechanism to incorporate treatment for SAM into Viet Nam's updated Health Insurance Law—a forward-looking approach that links humanitarian response with long-term development (the humanitarian–development nexus). In 2024, as an interim measure, UNICEF accelerated the implementation of nutrition components under the National Targeted Programmes through a series of regional workshops attended by more than 300 officials from provincial Centres for Disease Control, thereby strengthening local capacity for programme roll-out. Furthermore, building on provincial plans in Dien Bien and Gia Lai to scale up high-impact nutrition interventions, the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition was expanded to additional districts within these provinces and piloted in select areas of Kon Tum and Lao Cai according to local informants and UNICEF 2024 Annual Report. This expansion demonstrates the potential for community-based solutions to be scaled nationally, particularly in regions with high stunting and SAM prevalence.

In the realm of dietary diversity and obesity prevention, UNICEF has worked closely with the MOET to create healthier food environments in schools. This collaboration included technical support for drafting school nutrition guidelines, advocacy for policy change, and evidence-based consultations that contributed to the formal ban on unhealthy food products—including sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)—within school premises. UNICEF also supported capacity-building for school staff and awareness campaigns targeting students and parents to reinforce healthy eating behaviours. UNICEF's pilot rollout of a school nutrition environment assessment tool has provided actionable insights for improving food choices and educating students, according to local stakeholders consulted.

Finally, a key highlight is UNICEF's partnership with the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI), an international programme headquartered in the United States.¹⁴⁵ Under the GHAI partnership, UNICEF Viet Nam implemented the *Fix My Food* campaign—part of a global initiative tailored to the national context. Led by university students and youth advocates, the campaign promotes healthy eating habits and raises awareness about the risks of ultra-processed foods. According to UNICEF reports, the campaign reached over 1.2 million people in Viet Nam through digital platforms, with youth-led content, peer-to-peer outreach, and school-based events amplifying its visibility. While formal outcome evaluations are ongoing, anecdotal evidence suggests increased awareness among adolescents and growing demand for healthier food options in school settings. Through its collaboration with GHAI, UNICEF not only channels global funding but also leverages specialized knowledge to strengthen national nutrition policies and systems—reinforcing its role as a trusted convener and catalyst for evidence-based reform.

A recurring and severe bottleneck in nutrition interventions is the persistent inequity across regions, ethnicities, and income groups.¹⁴⁶ Despite new strategies and improved targeting, persistent funding and implementation gaps continue to limit treatment coverage for children with severe acute malnutrition. In 2024, UNICEF estimated that over 90% of approximately 200,000 SAM cases remained untreated. Budgetary constraints and the exclusion of SAM treatment from the national health insurance scheme mean that children in poor or remote areas often lack access to lifesaving care. While some progress has been made, the formal integration of SAM treatment into Viet Nam's national health insurance system has yet to be achieved. According to key stakeholders, this gap significantly restricts financial access to essential nutrition services for the most vulnerable populations. Interventions promoting improved dietary diversity—and the availability of protein and micronutrient-rich foods—have reportedly faced challenges

¹⁴⁴ Scaling Up Nutrition (2025) '*Viet Nam reduces child stunting to 18.2% with increased nutrition investment*'. Available at: <https://scalingupnutrition.org/news/viet-nam-reduces-child-stunting-182-increased-nutrition-investment>

¹⁴⁵ The collaboration with the VCO forms part of a global grant from GHAI HQ to UNICEF HQ, under which Viet Nam is one of three implementation countries—alongside Jamaica and Tanzania—benefiting from targeted support to advance nutrition policy and programming

¹⁴⁶ Mondon, C., Tan, P.Y., Chan, C.L. *et al.* (2024) Prevalence, determinants, intervention strategies and current gaps in addressing childhood malnutrition in Vietnam: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health* 24, 960 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18419-8>

due to limited household purchasing power, persistent food insecurity, and underdeveloped local markets—resulting in slow progress in actual consumption gains.

d. Access to safe water and sanitation

The CP has delivered demonstrable results across the WASH sector by pursuing an integrated strategy that combines service delivery, policy advocacy, financing reforms, and climate resilience. Between 2023 and 2024, UNICEF's direct interventions expanded **equitable access to basic sanitation, safe water, and essential hygiene** services for more than 140,651 people—of whom 89,236 were children—as well as for 36 schools and 12 health facilities.¹⁴⁷ This represents a relatively small proportion of the national population in need—less than one per cent of those lacking hygienic sanitation and an even smaller share of those without clean water.¹⁴⁸ However, the population-level significance of UNICEF's contribution lies less in the scale of direct service delivery and more in its strategic focus on equity and vulnerability. Most beneficiaries were children, and interventions were concentrated in rural and marginalized communities in the Northern Mountains, Central Highlands. In these settings, UNICEF's support often represents the only pathway to safe water and sanitation, particularly for ethnic minority communities and schools and health facilities that have historically received limited public investment.

At the provincial level, recognising that Dien Bien, Gia Lai, and Thai Nguyen have some of the lowest sanitation coverage rates in Viet Nam, UNICEF delivered policy drafting expertise, evidence synthesis, and inter-ministerial facilitation to the MARD for the formulation of two key circulars in 2023 on private sector engagement and socialisation in rural water supply, operation, and maintenance. According to COAR reports and key informant interviews with UNICEF staff and local partners, both circulars were explicitly designed to be child-focused, aiming to expand safe water access for rural and vulnerable children, particularly those in underserved ethnic minority areas, accompanied by advocacy actions to the respective People's Committees to secure political endorsement and budgetary commitments. UNICEF further strengthened local capacity by training provincial planners to integrate equity-focused approaches, ensuring that hard-to-reach populations—such as remote ethnic minority communities, poor households, and schools lacking adequate facilities—were prioritised. As a result of these efforts, all three provincial People's Committees approved costed sanitation action plans in 2023, which according to project implementation reports and UNICEF's internal monitoring data, led to the expansion of sanitation access in several high-vulnerability communes, including the installation of new **water supply systems** and improved latrine coverage in targeted schools and health facilities.

UNICEF's contribution to sustainable financing mechanisms is notable. UNICEF's convening of high-level dialogues, such as the National Conference on Rural Water Supply attended by over 300 stakeholders, promoted public-private partnerships and prioritization of ethnic minority areas. One example is the solar-powered water supply pilot in Dien Bien, where UNICEF facilitated collaboration between provincial authorities and private engineering firms to deliver climate-resilient water infrastructure in underserved ethnic minority communes. The partnership includes private sector contributions to system design, installation, and maintenance, while the government covers operational subsidies and community mobilization. The development and initial implementation of a costed, inclusive WASH financing strategy emerged from these dialogues. In four vulnerable provinces, advocacy efforts secured more than USD 250,000 in government budget allocations for WASH initiatives.

UNICEF's engagement with climate resilience is also evident. The assessment of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions for rural water systems,¹⁴⁹ conducted with the MARD, laid the groundwork for pilots in Dien Bien and other provinces. The development and endorsement of three climate-resilient sanitation models for hard-to-reach communities in the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands represents important innovation for building system resilience against climate shocks. Capacity-building has reached over 3,351 WASH officers and efforts have culminated in formally approved water safety plans and local resilience strategies that institutionalize climate-sensitive practices within the WASH sector.

¹⁴⁷ COAR reports

¹⁴⁸ More than 16 million rural residents—nearly one quarter of the rural population—still lack hygienic latrines, including 4.9 million children under 15. A further 26.1 million rural people, or 41 per cent of rural households, remain without access to clean water (PSN, Outcome 2 - ToC)

¹⁴⁹ UNICEF Viet Nam and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2023). Research brief: Assessment of renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions for rural water supply in Viet Nam. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/media/13746/file/Research%20brief:%20assessment%20of%20renewable%20energy%20and%20energy%20efficiency%20solutions%20for%20rural%20water%20supply%20in%20Viet%20Nam.pdf>

Building on the *National Strategy on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation by 2030, Vision 2045*, approved in late 2021 with UNICEF's support,¹⁵⁰ UNICEF has continued to advocate for sustainable financing mechanisms—particularly public-private partnerships (PPPs)—in Viet Nam's WASH sector.¹⁵¹ The *Assessment of WASH Funding and Financing in Viet Nam* (2022),¹⁵² conducted jointly with MARD and other national partners, provided a comprehensive analysis of financing gaps and opportunities in the sector. The study recommended innovative financing approaches, including PPPs, to ensure equitable and sustainable service delivery. UNICEF facilitated conferences and dialogues on financing for WASH access among remote and vulnerable groups in collaboration with MARD, MOH, MONRE, and the Viet Nam Women's Union.¹⁵³ The National Conference on Rural Water Supply attracted over 300 participants, and UNICEF's advocacy messages on PPPs, priorities for ethnic minorities, and financing were subsequently incorporated into MARD's directives to all provinces.¹⁵⁴ These initiatives directly support the resilience of vulnerable communities and contribute to improved access to safe water and sanitation services, aligning with the CPD's equity and health outcomes.

The reliance on external funding for WASH, combined with weak local engagement, has led to unsustainable systems: evidence from Dien Bien shows that revenues from user tariffs often fail to cover basic infrastructure operation costs, leading to system breakdowns, unsafe water, or intermittent service delivery. Incomplete maintenance processes and lack of long-term investment planning at the provincial level further risk infrastructure failures and lost gains.¹⁵⁵

Despite behaviour change campaigns, there is evidence of gender imbalances and social exclusion: girls, particularly during menstruation, are often left out of educational and sanitation access, with nearly 40% lacking knowledge and access to menstrual hygiene services and products. Stigma and facility gaps result in shame, absenteeism, and negative health and educational consequences for adolescent girls. Inadequate coordination with education and health sectors sometimes results in poorly installed or under-utilised facilities, limiting broader child-health benefits.

e. Safe and green environments

Key Finding 7: UNICEF Viet Nam has progressively mainstreamed climate resilience and disaster preparedness across its programmes, responding to the rising frequency and intensity of environmental shocks that disproportionately affect children. The devastation wrought by Typhoon Yagi catalysed a strategic pivot from geographically limited risk analyses toward a more holistic approach that integrates social vulnerability, child sensitivity, and low-carbon development. Core areas of UNICEF's engagement have included supporting child-sensitive climate risk assessments, promoting disaster preparedness in schools and health facilities, and engaging in high-level policy dialogue on adaptation and resilience.

Given Viet Nam's heightened vulnerability to climate change, UNICEF has strategically prioritized **environmental health and disaster preparedness** as part of its contribution to this Outcome. UNICEF Viet Nam has played a central role in mainstreaming child-sensitive disaster prevention and control and climate change adaptation (DRR) across the education and health sectors. These efforts have been instrumental in mobilizing financing and embedding child-centred resilience within national systems. In collaboration with the MOH, UNICEF supported the development of the national environmental health assessment (2024), which has since informed provincial planning and capacity-building efforts. Over 1,000 healthcare workers were trained in climate-resilient health practices, according to MOH officials and UNICEF programme monitoring data. To address air pollution concerns, the MOH, with UNICEF's support, finalized guidelines in 2023 and trained 50 health care managers on measures to protect women and children from harmful pollutants, according to UNICEF COAR and press sources.¹⁵⁶ Although available data on their implementation remains limited, the guidelines represent an important step toward integrating environmental health into maternal and childcare, and a decisive contribution in the development of policy in this area. Additional contributions to address air pollution were made at the preschool level, particularly in integrating resilience and disaster preparedness into early learning environments. For further details, see Section 5.3.1.2.

At the systems level, UNICEF partnered with VDDMA to co-develop monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools for the national DRM plan, alongside child-centred guidelines for disaster drills and Sendai Framework

¹⁵⁰ UNICEF (2021) *National Strategy on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation by 2030, with a vision to 2045*, 22 December 2021

¹⁵¹ According to UNICEF RAM and COAR reports and informant testimony from government, notably MARD.

¹⁵² UNICEF Viet Nam and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2022) *Assessment of WASH Funding and Financing in Viet Nam*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/reports/report-assessment-wash-funding-and-financing-viet-nam>

¹⁵³ According to UNICEF RAM and COAR reports.

¹⁵⁴ Based on ministry key informants' testimony.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

¹⁵⁶ UNICEF (2024) 'UNICEF And Partners Protect Children From Air Pollution In Vietnam'

assessments. These instruments were rolled out across all 63 provinces, ensuring that preparedness and response activities systematically account for children's unique vulnerabilities. In parallel, VCO provided technical and policy support to the MARD and the MOET in the lead-up to the establishment of the cooperation framework in early 2024.¹⁵⁷ The most tangible, documented outcome to date is the institutionalisation of DRR within the national education system – as discussed in Section 5.3.1.2.

UNICEF's pilot initiatives have demonstrated the integration of sustainable infrastructure with child-sensitive programming, e.g. in the Mekong Delta and Central Highlands where innovations both enhance the immediate resilience of children and caregivers and contribute to broader environmental protection and SDGs.

Collectively, these integrated interventions reflect UNICEF's comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy to protect children from the adverse impacts of climate change and disasters. By developing child-sensitive programmes, engaging young people in active advocacy, updating national and local preparedness frameworks, and institutionalizing youth participation, UNICEF is fostering resilient, sustainable communities and improving policy responsiveness at every level. Strategic partnerships and targeted capacity-building efforts underpin these achievements, ensuring that the voices and vulnerabilities of children remain central to Viet Nam's climate and disaster risk management agenda.

5.3.1.2 Learning and skills

Outcome result statement: Children and adolescents, especially vulnerable girls and boys, have equitable access to inclusive, quality learning and digital and transferable skills development, opportunities for participation in a clean, green and safe environment.

Key Finding 8: UNICEF Viet Nam's principal contribution to the Learning and Skills field is its catalytic role in promoting and supporting systemic, inclusive, and sustainable reforms in the education sector. This is achieved through a combination of technical leadership, policy advocacy, evidence generation, and partnership brokering, all aimed at dismantling structural barriers to equitable learning and skills development. UNICEF's interventions are designed to ensure that the most marginalised children are not left behind in Viet Nam's rapid socio-economic transformation.

A key aspect of UNICEF's contribution is its leadership in co-chairing the Education Sector Group with the MOET, and the Education in Emergencies group with Save the Children. This positioning enables UNICEF to influence national policy, mobilize resources, and coordinate multi-stakeholder responses to both chronic and acute challenges in the education sector. UNICEF's technical expertise is recognised in the successful advocacy for the integration of social-emotional learning into the new ECE curriculum, the development of digital and AI competency frameworks, and the scaling of inclusive education resource centres.

Moreover, UNICEF's approach is characterized by a strong emphasis on systems strengthening, moving beyond pilot projects to embed innovations and best practices into national policies, curricula, and institutional frameworks. Challenges include accessing reliable data and ensuring that approaches to inclusion across all aspects of learning and skills (especially for CWDs and those from ethnic minorities) encourage meaningful participation and agency. Work on innovations in education technology (and potential for scale and replicability) need to be more critically assessed. The vital role of parents as a resource is underutilised. Across several initiatives there was insufficient evidence available to demonstrate results (e.g. for 'We Share', Social Innovation clubs, GEDI awareness training and LGBTQI+ efforts).

Over the period 2022-2026, Learning and Skills had an allotted CP budget (OR and RR) of US\$ 16.97 million and an expenditure of US\$ 11 million (as of March 2025), resulting in an execution rate of 65 per cent. In addition, US\$ 519 thousand has been spent through ORE (Other Resources Emergency). The annual budget and expenditure are presented in Annex 8. Four outputs seek to contribute to Learning and Skills outcomes (refer to Table 3 in section 4.2.4). For the CP output assessment refer to Annex 7.

UNICEF Viet Nam's contribution to the Learning and Skills outcome is broadly aligned with the ToC vision that, by 2026, children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, should have equitable access to inclusive, quality learning, digital and transferable skills, and opportunities to participate in a clean, green and safe environment. Overall, the contribution is most visible at the level of systems strengthening, policy and normative change, and piloting of innovative models, while evidence of sustained, largescale change in access and learning outcomes for the most marginalized groups remains more limited.

¹⁵⁷ <https://phongchongthientai.mard.gov.vn/en/Pages/consultation-workshop-on-the-draft-guidelines-for-integrating-cca-and-drr-education.aspx>

In relation to the first precondition of the ToC – that an increasing proportion of girls and boys enhance their **school readiness through quality early childhood education opportunities**, including in their own language – UNICEF’s principal contribution has been to shape national frameworks and mobilise resources that underpin early learning. A key achievement has been the MOET endorsement in 2025 of a new early childhood education (ECE) curriculum with socio-emotional learning at its core, strongly influenced by UNICEF’s sustained technical support and advocacy, and in the process of rollout in 20 provinces (MOET/UNICEF reports). In parallel, UNICEF’s leadership in the Education Sector Group contributed to securing approximately USD 4.7 million from the Global Partnership for Education to strengthen ECE, particularly for ethnic minority children (sector meeting records and partner confirmations). Building on previous work on mother tongue based bilingual education (MTBBE), UNICEF co-organised advocacy workshops and supported teacher training, which informed MOET’s action plan on strengthening Vietnamese language preparation for preschool and primary school students in ethnic minority areas.¹⁵⁸ The circular #20 on resource centres and the MOET action plan on Vietnamese language preparation for ethnic minority children reflect policy outcomes influenced by UNICEF’s advocacy according to key informants.¹⁵⁹ On disability inclusion, a joint effort (with UNDP and UNFPA) in Da Nang pilots a model of integrated education that can be scaled up. In Phase 1 of the partnership (2022–2023), the three UN partners focused on advocacy for supportive legislation, which resulted in the government issuing key circulars on planning for inclusive education—most notably the resource centre circular #20 in 2023 and a guiding decree addressing copyright limitations and exceptions (e.g., for braille editions). Phase 2 highlights implementation of the legislation. UNDP serves as the technical coordinator of the partnership with a focus on book accessibility for students, while UNICEF is focused on promoting the operation of inclusive education resource centres (based on guidelines from Phase 1). The joint UN pilot’s Phase 1 outputs (legislation and guidance) and Phase 2 focus on operationalising the legislation, demonstrate a pathway from policy to implementation confirmed in project reports and KIIs.

With respect to the **access to on- and offline quality learning** opportunities from early childhood to adolescence, including children with disabilities and those affected by disasters (second precondition of the ToC), UNICEF has played a prominent role in advancing digital and inclusive transformation within the education sector. UNICEF supported MOET to develop a Digital Skills and Competency Framework focused on strengthening teachers’ digital pedagogy and helping school leaders manage IT infrastructure, student digital literacy and online safety. It also collaborated with MOET on the development of a national artificial intelligence competency framework and provided ongoing technical assistance to the Ministry’s ICT Department to enhance education management information systems¹⁶⁰. In the domain of inclusive education, UNICEF’s contribution was recognised in the government’s 2025 announcement that by 2030 all localities will have at least one inclusive education development support centre for children with disabilities, as well as in circulars on inclusive resource centres and copyright exceptions that facilitate the production of accessible learning materials.¹⁶¹ UNICEF also sustained Viet Nam’s engagement with the Global Digital Library,¹⁶² including content in eight ethnic minority languages and sign language, and ensured that children with disabilities and ethnic minority children are visibly represented in generic materials. Together, these interventions speak directly to ToC pathways that require national policies, plans and standards to foster equitable access to digital learning solutions and inclusive education, and to ensure that learning can continue in contexts of climate change and disaster risk. Nevertheless, existing assessments do not yet demonstrate clear outcome level improvements resulting from digital innovation pilots, and that scale and sustainability have not been sufficiently evidenced. It is therefore not yet possible to conclude that the most disadvantaged children (including children with disabilities, those in remote or disaster-prone areas, and those facing linguistic or socioeconomic barriers) have systematically benefited from enhanced access to quality learning (online and offline).

UNICEF’s contribution to improve **learning through effective, relevant teaching and learning processes in safe, respectful and inclusive environments** (third precondition of the ToC) has been multifaceted, addressing gender, inclusion, climate and disaster risk reduction, and child and adolescent

¹⁵⁸ ET did not get more detailed info about this; however – UNICEF and Save the Children drafted a proposal to the Global Fund for Education (for 2024–2026) which summarises progress and summarises remaining gaps in MTBBE in Viet Nam. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2023-vietnam-program-document-gpe-grant.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ UNICEF’s role in influencing the Government’s 2025 announcement that, by 2030 all localities will have at least one inclusive education development centre was recognised in KIIs with involved stakeholders (including Government ministries, policy institutions, and other UN agencies)

¹⁶⁰ UNICEF (30 May 2025) ‘Viet Nam National Forum on Artificial Intelligence in Education’

¹⁶¹ UNICEF’s role in influencing the Government’s 2025 announcement that, by 2030 all localities will have at least one inclusive education development centre was recognised in KIIs with involved stakeholders (including Government ministries, policy institutions, and other UN agencies)

¹⁶² The ET was not able to establish results of the Global Digital Library (GDL) at the child level as data was not available. Description of this activity is included in annex 16, section 2.1.

participation. The Viet Nam Country Office has promoted an explicit gender-responsive - and in some interventions gender-transformative - approach in curriculum development, teaching and learning materials, and teacher training. It has initiated programmes seeking to increase girls' engagement in STEAM subjects, such as the "Skills4Girls" initiative and related hackathons, STEM summer schools and digital events under the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Da Nang, implemented in partnership with the VN-UK Institute¹⁶³ and a range of private sector actors. In 2022, an LGBTQI+ school assessment tool was piloted with nearly 3,000 students, and more than 200 teachers participated in training on gender equality and gender-responsive pedagogy aimed at improving the inclusiveness of school environments for sexual and gender minorities. At the same time, UNICEF supported MOET in formulating a Comprehensive School Safety Framework for Child Rights and Resilience, integrating disaster-risk reduction and climate change adaptation into sector policy and curricula, and delivered training for preschool and secondary school teachers and managers on environmental protection, disaster preparedness and climate resilience. Through the Healthy Cities for Adolescents project and the broader Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Da Nang, UNICEF also contributed to the establishment and expansion of Children's Councils and youth advisory platforms intended to give adolescents a voice in decision-making on education, environment and urban development.

These contributions align closely with ToC pathways that call for gender sensitive and inclusive strategies to address school related gender based violence and promote mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, and with the expectation that children and adolescents – both in and out of school – should participate in efforts to reform and improve the education system. They also reinforce the environmental dimension by embedding disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in education policies and classroom practice, and by creating opportunities for young people to engage in climate and environmental debates.

Despite notable achievements, several unintended or suboptimal outcomes have emerged from UNICEF's interventions in Viet Nam. Key informant interviews suggest that STEAM initiatives may inadvertently reinforce existing gender norms, with girls often valued for leadership and communication roles while boys dominate the technical space. This dynamic risks perpetuating traditional expectations rather than transforming them. Similarly, digital and online approaches—such as teacher training, parenting programmes, and learning platforms—carry the risk of widening exclusion gaps for families and communities with limited technological readiness, particularly in economically and geographically challenged areas. Participation mechanisms, including Children's Councils and youth platforms, have been praised for legitimising children's voices, yet they lack representativeness, rely on formalized adultlike formats, and provide weak feedback loops, limiting their transformative potential.

In relation to the ToC, several areas of contribution remain below expectations. While pilots such as inclusive education centres and school safety frameworks demonstrate promise, many UNICEF supported innovations have not yet moved beyond experimental scale, and evidence of government financed, systemwide replication is limited. The ToC's emphasis on behavioural and social norm change—families and communities valuing education and sustaining school attendance, especially for girls and children with disabilities—has not been matched by systematic data on shifts in attitudes or practices. Finally, although numerous activities target digital, STEAM, social emotional, and life skills, there is minimal quantitative evidence that these efforts have translated into improved learning outcomes or transferable skills at scale.

In summary, UNICEF's role can be characterised primarily as that of convener, policy advocate and provider of technical assistance. Co-chairing the Education Sector Group and the Education in Emergencies group has given UNICEF significant leverage to influence sectoral policies, quality standards and external financing. Its technical expertise has been instrumental in the development of curricula, competency frameworks, inclusive education policies, and school safety and climate-related guidance, as well as in piloting innovative models in digital learning, inclusive education and child participation. At the same time, several implementation and measurement bottlenecks constrain the strength of the contribution story.

¹⁶³ VN-UK is one of UNICEF's implementing partners in Da Nang for the HCA and CFCI work - and is responsible for the STEM and digital activities of the project.

5.3.1.3 Child protection

Outcome result statement: Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable girls and boys, are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and unnecessary family separation, through inclusive and effective child protection, child - care and justice systems, empowerment with knowledge and skills against harmful social norms practices and improved mental health and psychosocial support.

Key Finding 9: UNICEF Viet Nam's child protection contribution reflects a systems-strengthening approach characterized by investments in law and policy reform, workforce professionalization, justice system innovation and capacity building. The achievements documented—the Decree on Social Work, the Law on Justice for Minors, the Family and Juvenile Courts, Child-Friendly Investigation Rooms, and inter-agency coordination mechanisms—represent important institutional progress toward the conditions specified in the ToC. While institutional reform and innovations represent important systems-level change, it is necessary to follow these through to determine how far they are delivering improved protection outcomes for children. UNICEF could also provide stronger analysis of how far activities under CP have transformed harmful gender dynamics and norms. Efforts on family strengthening and alternative family based care were minimal.

Over the period 2022-2026, Child Protection had an allotted CP budget of US\$ 14.46 million and an expenditure of US\$ 7.98 million (as of March 2025), resulting in an execution rate of 55 per cent. In addition, US\$ 784 thousand has been spent through ORE (Other Resources Emergency). The annual budget and expenditure are presented in Annex 8. Four outputs seek to contribute to Child Protection outcomes (refer to Table 3 in section 4.2.4)

UNICEF Viet Nam's contribution to the Child Protection outcome is positioned within an ambitious Theory of Change that envisions children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, living in safer environments and protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and unnecessary family separation. The ToC articulates a coherent logic by which systemic improvements in legal and policy frameworks, workforce professionalization, inter-agency coordination and service delivery—combined with changes in community attitudes, caregiving practices and help-seeking behaviours—should result in measurable protection from violence and exploitation.

UNICEF's contribution to this outcome spans four interconnected domains: the establishment of comprehensive legal and policy frameworks; the professionalization of the child protection and social work workforce; the strengthening of child-friendly justice systems and mechanisms for accessing justice; and the promotion of positive caregiving practices and community norms that protect children from harm. These contributions are positioned within a systems-strengthening approach that emphasizes the interconnected roles of social welfare, health, education, law enforcement and justice sectors, and recognises the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral responses to child protection challenges.

The principal achievements that constitute UNICEF's child protection contribution can be organized around several critical junctures: (i) the 2024 Decree on Social Work represents a landmark achievement after years of consistent advocacy and technical support, establishing professional standards, defining the scope of social work practice, and creating a regulatory framework for accreditation and licensing. This foundational instrument is designed to strengthen the institutional capacity and professional identity of the social work workforce, enabling more effective and sustainable protection and support services for vulnerable children. (ii) The approval by the National Assembly of the Law on Justice for Minors in 2024, taking effect from January 1, 2026, provides a comprehensive legal foundation for child-centred access to justice and reflects UNICEF's sustained engagement in law reform. (iii) The rollout and institutionalization of Family and Juvenile Courts across 56 People's Courts at superior, provincial and district levels represents a systems-level shift toward specialized, child-friendly justice processes, with 9,897 child alleged offenders and victims accessing these courts in the period under review. (iv) The institutionalization and replication of Child-Friendly Investigation Rooms across all 63 provinces, with over 1,500 children interviewed using child- and gender-sensitive techniques, demonstrates an important procedural innovation in how the justice system interacts with child victims and witnesses. (v) Through a joint programme with UN Women and UNFPA addressing the intersections of violence against women and children, and through parenting support initiatives reaching over 12,000 parents, UNICEF has contributed to efforts to strengthen positive caregiving practices and reduce acceptance of violent discipline. (vi) The expansion of Children's Councils and youth participation platforms in Da Nang to 39 councils across city, district and commune levels reflects UNICEF's investment in mechanisms for child voice and agency in governance.

These contributions are distributed across the two principal pathways identified in the ToC: improving access to protection mechanisms and multi-sectoral services (first pathway), and promoting positive attitudes and behaviours that protect children (second pathway).

UNICEF's role in the child protection domain has evolved as a policy influencer, law and justice reform champion, capacity builder and, to a more limited extent, direct implementer of community-based interventions. The organization's comparative advantage has been most visible at the systems and policy levels, where UNICEF has leveraged technical expertise, international evidence, and sustained government partnerships to shape legal and institutional frameworks.

In the law and justice domain, UNICEF has contributed substantially to the development of the Law on Justice for Minors and the establishment of Family and Juvenile Courts through years of evidence gathering, international comparison, policy dialogue and technical support. The attention UNICEF has devoted to ensuring that judges and justice personnel are trained in child-friendly, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches represents a recognition that systems-level change requires not only policy reform but also shifts in the attitudes, knowledge and practices of those implementing these systems. Similarly, UNICEF's role in establishing the Decree on Social Work involved consistent advocacy, international benchmarking and technical support to position social work as a distinct, professionalized discipline with defined competencies and regulatory oversight, rather than a residual or ad hoc function within government agencies.

As a systems integrator and advocate for inter-agency coordination, UNICEF has supported the development and functioning of coordination mechanisms spanning social welfare, health, education, law enforcement and justice sectors. The effort to ensure that social work principles and practices are integrated into healthcare settings through a Ministry of Health circular, and the development of a Child Protection Committee model at the National Children's Hospital, exemplify UNICEF's commitment to multidisciplinary, whole-of-system approaches to protection. The three-year partnership with the International Organization for Migration and the US Department of State to strengthen government systems for protecting children from violence, trafficking and smuggling, involving training for police, border guards, judges and court personnel, demonstrates UNICEF's work across traditionally fragmented domains.

As a capacity builder, UNICEF has invested in training at multiple levels of the system: development of trainer-of-trainers programmes, integration of content into pre-service curricula at universities, direct training of frontline personnel, and support for the establishment of professional networks and communities of practice. The rollout of training on safeguarding children in digital spaces to 24,000 child protection actors across all 63 provinces represents a substantial reach, though the evidence on the effects of this training is limited. The support for specialised training on gender biases and trauma-informed approaches for forensic experts, obstetricians and paediatricians reflects attention to the particular roles these professionals play in responding to child violence and abuse.

As an implementer of community-based interventions, UNICEF's role has been more limited. The parenting support programmes—including the Holistic Parenting programme reaching over 12,000 parents and the "Nobody's Perfect" initiative planned to reach 17 provinces and 40 factories—represent direct engagement with caregivers. The joint VAW-VAC programme emphasizes digital case management and knowledge-sharing platforms, positioning UNICEF as an enabler of systems change rather than a direct service provider.

However, this strategic positioning creates an important tension that warrants attention: systems-level change, while necessary, is often slow and its effects on child-level outcomes may only be visible years after initial investment. The emphasis on policy, law and capacity-building requires a specific focus on how institutional reforms are translating into improved protection outcomes for the most vulnerable children, and whether the knowledge and skills being transferred to workforce members are actually being applied in frontline service delivery.

5.3.1.4 Social policy and governance

Outcome result statement: Children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from evidence based, equitable, climate - resilient, environmentally sensitive and participatory policy, planning and public expenditure and an expanded child - sensitive and shock -responsive social protection system.

Key Finding 10: UNICEF has made a strategic contribution to social policy and governance in Viet Nam by translating political commitments into actionable investment priorities through its leadership in public finance for children. Its advocacy has elevated equity and inclusion within public investment debates, ensuring that the needs of ethnic minority children, children with disabilities, and those in remote areas are reflected in fiscal decision-making. Moreover, UNICEF's engagement with the National Assembly and sub-national authorities has strengthened the institutionalization of child-focused indicators in planning and monitoring frameworks, enhancing the visibility of children's issues and enabling the scale-up of effective models.

UNICEF's work has strengthened child friendly local governance by embedding a child lens in provincial planning and budgeting, particularly through its support to the development and implementation of provincial action plans in selected provinces such as Dien Bien and Gia Lai. The combination of rigorous budget analytics costed sectoral plans, child-focused indicators, and participatory architectures has yielded People's Committee endorsements, measurable planning gains, and visible youth-led contributions to urban services. Addressing uneven fiscal capacity, lack of disaggregated financial data on government spending for children, participation quality, and shock-responsive financing will be pivotal to consolidating these gains and ensuring that child-centred governance delivers equitable, durable results across provinces and cities.

Over the period 2022-2026, Social Policy and Governance (SPG) had an allotted CP budget (OR and RR) of US\$ 8.55 million and an expenditure of US\$ 5.13 million (as of March 2025), resulting in an execution rate of 60 per cent. In addition, US\$ 220 thousand has been spent through ORE (Other Resources Emergency). The annual budget and expenditure is presented in Annex 8.

UNICEF Viet Nam's contribution to the Social Policy and Governance outcome is positioned within a comprehensive Theory of Change that envisions children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, benefiting from evidence-based, equitable, climate-resilient, environmentally-sensitive and participatory policy, planning and public expenditure, and from an expanded child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection system.

a. Evidence based, equitable, climate - resilient, environmentally sensitive and participatory policy, planning and public expenditure

UNICEF is a central actor in shaping child-focused social policy and inclusive governance across the country's evolving development landscape. Its longstanding partnership with national and provincial institutions has allowed it to influence strategic planning and resource allocation, with demonstrable impact on both upstream policy frameworks and service delivery at the grassroots level.

Policies, plans and financing for children: At the policy level, UNICEF's advocacy contributed to the inclusion of child-focused priorities in the Politburo Directive on Child Care and Protection (Directive No. 28-CT/TW), which now serves as a foundational political document guiding national commitments to child welfare. UNICEF Viet Nam contributed to Directive 28 by providing technical support, promoting equity-focused public finance, and partnering with national institutions to integrate child protection into policy and planning frameworks.¹⁶⁴ In parallel, UNICEF worked with other UN agencies to strengthen the child-sensitive dimensions of social protection policies, including Resolution No. 42-NQ/TW of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, and supported adjustments to the national child benefit scheme, which increased the transfer value from VND 360,000 to VND 500,000 according to official sources.

One of UNICEF's most notable achievements was its contribution to the approval and design of the **National Financing Strategy**, which now prioritizes investment in human capital development—particularly for children, the poor, and ethnic minorities. UNICEF's advocacy and technical support during strategic events like the Viet Nam Public Finance Forums, which were led by the MOF and the NA, seek that social sector investments become more equitable and inclusive. Alongside other UN agencies, UNICEF supported **costing exercises for social sector plans**, which provided vital evidence for resource planning toward the 2030 SDG targets. For example, a preliminary costing of the National Plan of Action

¹⁶⁴ Party agency, UNICEF promote cooperation in childcare, protection

on Nutrition revealed a US\$2.3 billion funding requirement against a budget that covered only around 5% of the need, helping UNICEF frame an urgent advocacy case for better investment¹⁶⁵.

UNICEF provided high-quality research and technical advice to support the government's review of Directive #20 on childcare, education, and protection. This led to the identification of systemic challenges, including insufficient financial resources, weak policy implementation, and fragmented service delivery systems. The evidence generated was formally integrated into the draft review report and became foundational for shaping child-related directives and resolutions for the 2023–2030 period.¹⁶⁶

At the request of the MPI's Institute for Development Strategies, UNICEF prepared a comprehensive input paper positioning child development as the bedrock of human capital and socio-economic progress, designed to inform the Government-led Viet Nam 2045 report. Given the report's anticipated influence on the Party's Political Document and the 2026–2030 SEDP with a vision to 2045, this input creates a pathway for embedding child-focused investments into long-horizon national strategies.

UNICEF and MPI also conducted a joint study on financial solutions to address multidimensional child poverty (MDCP) across rural and urban contexts. The analysis recommended institutionalizing MDCP monitoring systems and mainstreaming poverty-reduction strategies within national and subnational plans. It further proposed shifting from input-based to output-based budgeting, particularly in health and education, to sharpen efficiency and outcome orientation in resource allocation. These recommendations are being applied through joint reviews of subnational SEDPs and sectoral plans to enhance child-friendliness and climate resilience, with special attention to the climate-exposed Mekong region—an area where climate shocks intersect with service deficits to deepen child vulnerability.

UNICEF leveraged contemporaneous evidence on child outcomes and public investment to inform **policy dialogues** with different national stakeholders. Advocacy focused on integrating child-priority areas—especially WASH and nutrition—into core policy instruments. A tangible outcome is the inclusion of targeted WASH priorities in the draft National Targeted Programme on Socio-Economic Development for Mountainous and Ethnic Minority Regions (2026–2030), aligning infrastructure and hygiene promotion with equity targets. In fiscal policy, UNICEF and partners advanced the case for excise taxation on SSBs in the draft law, aiming to curb consumption of unhealthy products and improve child health outcomes, while potentially generating earmarkable revenues for preventive services.

UNICEF also advanced **disability inclusion** through its work with MOLISA's Department of Child Affairs, UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNDP, and UNFPA. It supported the “Assessment on Access to Community-Based Services for Children with Disabilities,” whose findings directly informed the revision of MOLISA's service guidelines. UNICEF's efforts further enabled the full participation of CWDs in the 2023 National Children's Forum, where 188 children—including 14 with disabilities—engaged in policy dialogue and benefited from newly trained facilitators skilled in inclusive practices.¹⁶⁷ UNICEF also adapted a global training package and delivered a Training of Trainers with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, UNDP, and UNFPA. The approach combined technical content with experiential perspectives, strengthening cadres capable of cascading inclusive service standards across sectors. A complementary communication effort—an International Day of PWDs video featuring youth with disabilities alongside UN representatives—spotlighted inclusive leadership and sustainability, amplifying the normative case for disability-responsive systems.

In the realm of **responsible business practices**, UNICEF leveraged its convening power to build strategic partnerships with the private sector. This approach became increasingly effective in the context of growing interest in corporate sustainability and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) standards. UNICEF engaged over 100 business stakeholders through forums and organized deep-dive consultations to embed child rights in corporate sustainability frameworks.¹⁶⁸ Its co-creation approach—recognizing business sector participation in policy design—not only opened dialogue but established enduring collaborations. For example, UNICEF's partnership with Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour led to the scale-up of the parenting programme in workplaces, including training for 800 worker-parents and 90 trade union facilitators who will lead future rollouts.

UNICEF scaled engagement under the “Work: No Child's Business” initiative, onboarding an additional 215 companies to integrate the Children's Rights and Business Principles into operations. Practical changes included strengthening policies for young workers, bolstering due diligence and remediation for child labour risks in supply chains, and promoting family-friendly workplace practices. These engagements create a channel for translating child rights into corporate governance and human resource systems, with spillover effects on vendor compliance and sectoral standards. UNICEF's collaboration with the VCCI also included targeted interventions on **child labour prevention and young worker protection**. These led to outreach

¹⁶⁵ UNICEF Viet Nam Country Office Annual Report 2022, which references the preliminary costing of the National Plan of Action on Nutrition and highlights the funding gap used to support UNICEF's advocacy efforts.

¹⁶⁶ Directive #20 Review Report, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs [MOLISA], 2023

¹⁶⁷ UNICEF Annual Reports

¹⁶⁸ UNICEF Viet Nam Business Engagement Summary, 2022–2023

to 175 youth—many employed in tourism and hospitality sectors—through policy dialogues and counselling.¹⁶⁹ Further policy inputs from UNICEF were reflected in the MOJ's National Action Plan on responsible business practices, in partnership with UNDP.

Child friendly local governance: Following approval of the CPD, VCO initiated a multi-province partnership with Dien Bien, Gia Lai, Soc Trang, and the city of Da Nang to enhance subnational capacity for child-centred planning, budgeting, and implementation. At the sub-national level, UNICEF supported the three focus provinces and city to integrate child-related indicators into their Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs). These included targets on stunting reduction, preparedness planning in the education sector, and child-friendly disaster risk reduction. A South–South exchange in Jinan, China—with delegates from Da Nang, Can Tho, and MOLISA—reinforced national–local learning and policy transfer from peer child-friendly cities. Such efforts demonstrate UNICEF's comparative advantage in leveraging Viet Nam's decentralized governance system to pilot and demonstrate good practices, which can subsequently inform national policy replication.

According to key informants, collaboration with the Hanoi University of Public Health (HUPH) enabled a **systematic assessment of provincial allocations and expenditures** for social sectors and child-specific priorities, with budget briefs designed as advocacy tools to recalibrate spending towards children. UNICEF's governance support is underpinned by a robust evidence system spanning fiscal, sectoral, and participatory domains. Systematic budget analyses and budget briefs with HUPH quantified provincial allocations and identified structural underinvestment in WASH, social assistance, and child protection, providing a baseline for advocacy and reform. Provincial planning memos and costed scale-up plans in Dien Bien and Gia Lai translated evidence on high-impact interventions into endorsed implementation roadmaps. SEDP reviews and indicator packages in Soc Trang embedded child-centred metrics into routine planning and statistical systems. In Da Nang, CFCI documentation—including M&E frameworks, facilitation guidelines, and participation records—provided traceable evidence of youth voice influencing urban services and public space design, while youth engagement reports demonstrated reach, inclusion, and skill-building outcomes across participation platforms.¹⁷⁰

All this indicates that UNICEF's differential value lies in its ability to integrate plan–budget analytics with participatory governance, and to convert findings into endorsed policies and scale-up decisions. The organization's convening role bridged provincial authorities, academia, youth organizations, and national ministries, aligning stakeholders around a coherent child-centred governance agenda. UNICEF brought a comparative lens to fiscal and sectoral prioritization, introduced child-focused indicators into SEDPs, and institutionalized participation through Children's Councils¹⁷¹ and co-designed M&E systems, thereby anchoring children's voices and outcomes in the architecture of local decision-making.

Despite these achievements, several challenges constrain the extent to which outputs have translated into sustained outcomes. A persistent barrier is the lack of disaggregated financial data on government spending for children, highlighted in several reports and by key informants. While aggregate data are available for broad sectors such as education, more granular information—such as expenditure on early childhood education or child-sensitive social assistance—remains either unavailable or inaccessible. This gap significantly limits the ability of UNICEF and its partners to conduct comprehensive financial analyses and to advocate effectively for targeted investments in children.

To mitigate these challenges, according to CO staff, UNICEF has established its own internal monitoring system to track progress against annual and five-year targets. Annual targets are used as process indicators, providing a measure of incremental progress, while longer-term targets serve as benchmarks for outcome-level change. However, the challenge remains how to link UNICEF's monitoring with government systems in order to ensure sustainability, comparability, and national ownership of results. Strengthening government capacity in data M&E is therefore an emerging priority.

In this regard, UNICEF has identified the National Statistics Office (NSO) as a key partner for building stronger national systems. Collaboration with NSO is seen as essential to improving the availability and quality of disaggregated data, particularly by gender, ethnicity, and other equity dimensions. Stakeholders

¹⁶⁹ UNICEF Viet Nam (2023) Youth Engagement Tracker,

¹⁷⁰ A preliminary budget analysis highlighted robust allocations to education and health—exemplified by Gia Lai's 30.8 per cent of the provincial budget to education and 10.9 per cent to health—while underscoring underinvestment in WASH, social assistance, and child protection, and recommending tighter plan–budget linkages through equitable, output-based norms and explicit child-responsive budgeting guidance. Comprehensive reviews and costings in Dien Bien and Gia Lai culminated in People's Committee endorsements to scale proven interventions across priority sectors, targeting underserved districts and communes for sustained implementation, confirmed by local stakeholders. In Soc Trang, UNICEF-supported inclusion of additional indicators for early childhood education, nutrition, and WASH advanced through technical consultations, strengthening the evidence base for shock-responsive planning.

¹⁷¹ By the end of 2024, Da Nang had 39 Children's Councils, comprising one at city level, seven at district level, and 31 at commune level, reflecting a maturing infrastructure for meaningful participation (UNICEF annual reports).

emphasized the potential of incorporating qualitative indicators into monitoring frameworks, which could provide a richer understanding of progress toward social outcomes and help capture dimensions such as social norm change or equity impacts that are not easily reflected in quantitative data.

Finally, while costing studies have been valuable in revealing funding gaps, their influence is moderated by the political economy of decision-making. Government uptake of recommendations varies, and the sustainability of reforms depends on continued advocacy and alignment with broader fiscal priorities. Finally, the tension between efficiency and equity remains a structural challenge. While administrative reforms and IFIs emphasize cost-effectiveness, UNICEF's mandate requires prioritizing the rights of the most vulnerable, which often entails higher per capita costs.

b. An expanded child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection system

UNICEF's contributions to child-sensitive social protection reflect a comprehensive strategy that has evolved from normative advocacy to evidence-based policy influence and operational design. Central to this effort has been a consistent emphasis on child grants, and shock-responsive mechanisms, underpinned by rigorous analytical work and multi-stakeholder engagement.

UNICEF played a pivotal role in shaping the revision of Party Resolution No.15 for 2022–2026, advocating for the **inclusion of child grants for children** under ages three and six. This advocacy was codified in a UNICEF-led social protection policy brief and further reinforced through contributions to government-led consultations and presentations. These policy positions were echoed in the Joint UN Synthesis Report on Social Policies and acknowledged during high-level events convened by the UN and MOLISA, where UNICEF's focus on human capital and inclusive services received formal recognition.

Empirical research served as a foundation for **policy dialogue**, most notably through Viet Nam's participation in Stream 3 of the global Gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection (GRASSP) programme, led by UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. The resulting case study provided a diagnostic of gender responsiveness in the development of the Multi-Pillar Social Assistance Reform and Development strategy and Decree 20. The GRASSP final report and policy brief illuminated institutional bottlenecks, such as limited financial and knowledge resources for gender mainstreaming, and proposed specific capacity-building and design recommendations. Dissemination of findings at the 2nd East Asia and Pacific Regional Social Policy Conference further enabled regional peer learning and policy alignment.

UNICEF's work in coalition-building significantly strengthened the gender-responsive dimension of social protection. The organization catalysed partnerships with MOLISA's Gender Equality Department, the Viet Nam Women's Union, and local civil society organizations, such as the Institute for Social Development Studies and the Light Institute. These partnerships have supported the **contextualization of international evidence** and the amplification of gender equity narratives within national policy frameworks.

The shift from advocacy to implementation is exemplified by the design of a child-sensitive, gender-responsive **cash-plus model** in partnership with Da Nang Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs. This model incorporates cash transfers linked to complementary services including case management and parenting support to mitigate child protection risks and GBV. Operational tools, such as an implementation manual detailing referral pathways, service standards, and social worker protocols, are grounded in a prior rapid assessment that identified poverty, domestic violence, and harmful parenting practices as risk factors.

UNICEF addressed the delivery dimension of social protection both by developing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for **humanitarian cash transfers** and social protection in emergencies and by operationalizing harmonized cash transfer modalities during acute response. The SOP—shaped by feasibility assessments and consultations with government ministries, international partners, financial service providers and local authorities—establishes the protocols needed for timely, scalable transfers aligned with government systems and the Core Commitments for Children. Complementing this guidance, the Country Office successfully deployed harmonized cash transfers (HCTs) in response to Typhoon Yagi, coordinating closely with government counterparts and humanitarian actors to reach affected households rapidly.¹⁷²

Concurrently, UNICEF contributed substantive technical support to MOLISA's review of Decree No. 20. Through joint work with UNDP, UNFPA, and the ILO, the organization helped formulate recommendations aimed at enhancing inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and shock responsiveness. Evidence synthesis, costing scenarios, and comparative analyses informed proposed amendments, culminating in the promulgation of Decree 76/2024. This new legal framework increases benefit levels, promotes expanded coverage, and authorizes provincial discretion to adjust benefit values based on local cost-of-living and child-specific

¹⁷² UNICEF Viet Nam. (2025). After Action Review: UNICEF Viet Nam Response to Typhoon Yagi – Final Report. 23 June 2025

needs, thereby creating opportunities for more equitable outcomes in high-poverty provinces. However, disparities in fiscal capacity and administrative readiness among provinces pose challenges to consistent implementation.

Institutional preparedness was a complementary focus area. UNICEF established an internal humanitarian cash transfer task force with defined objectives and modalities to bolster emergency response capability. Engagement with financial service providers, exploration of long-term partner arrangements, and alignment across internal programmatic sectors supported a coherent cash-plus approach. Furthermore, Viet Nam's participation in regional platforms facilitated the exchange of operational insights, especially in disaster risk financing and anticipatory action. This included sharing experiences at regional conferences in Bangkok and undertaking a financing options study with the Ministry of Finance (MOF), MOLISA, and MARD under the EU–UNICEF Public Finance Facility (Phase 2).

5.3.2 EQ7: What internal or external factors contributed to achievements (or not) and to what extent were these factors within UNICEF's control?

Key Finding 11: While UNICEF has demonstrated strategic agility and programmatic responsiveness, the extent of its achievements is mediated by external conditions—particularly economic recovery and administrative restructuring—that lie beyond its direct control. The coming year will be critical for recalibrating implementation strategies and supporting government efforts to stabilize service delivery systems in newly configured administrative units.

The performance of UNICEF in Viet Nam has been shaped by a complex interplay of external constraints—beyond the organization's direct control—and internal dynamics, which UNICEF can influence to varying degrees. Understanding these factors is critical for interpreting both the successes achieved and the gaps that remain.

a. External factors

Two major unforeseen crises significantly influenced both achievements and implementation challenges during the CPD period—though distinct in nature, both had substantial operational implications.

COVID-19: The pandemic already underway for approximately 21 months prior to the start of the CPD, continued to exert unforeseen pressures during the recovery phase. As noted by stakeholders across multiple levels, 2022 and 2023 saw a downturn in routine immunization coverage, largely driven by service disruptions linked to COVID-19 and delays in vaccine procurement. These impacts, while partially anticipated, extended beyond UNICEF's direct control and required adaptive programming and coordination with national systems. These pandemic-related disruptions did not occur in isolation. Rather, they compounded longstanding structural challenges in logistics and procurement that have historically constrained service delivery already discussed in the report (See section 5.3.2.1.a). Chronic issues such as vaccine shortages and procurement delays persist, particularly in provinces with vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations. While recognizing the supply side challenges, key informants also emphasized the need for sustained vigilance, targeted catch-up campaigns, and strengthened disease surveillance to prevent further transmission and mitigate the risk of outbreaks.

Typhoon Yagi: The typhoon's aftermath posed acute logistical and infrastructural challenges. Coordinating multisectoral interventions—across health, education, WASH, and community engagement—was further complicated by the storm's impact. While exact percentages vary by province, reports confirm that a substantial portion of damaged water systems (estimated at 80–85 per cent) remained unrepaired in the months following the typhoon, especially in hard-hit areas like Quảng Ninh, Lao Cai, and Son La,¹⁷³ placing additional strain on implementation capacity and service delivery.

While UNICEF maintained strategic leadership and technical support throughout, the extent to which these external factors could be mitigated was limited. Nonetheless, the organization's ability to adapt and recalibrate interventions in response to evolving conditions reflects a degree of institutional resilience and responsiveness. However, there is room for greater consideration of these types of external shocks in the design of the ToC and associated risk frameworks, to ensure more robust scenario planning and contingency measures in future programming cycles.

Financial and structural constraints. At sub-national level,¹⁷⁴ a reliance on reimbursement-based funding has delayed activity roll-out and constrained flexibility, especially at the community level. As local units must pre-finance costs, UNICEF's advocacy for more flexible, advance-based disbursements has only partially mitigated systemic cash-flow issues. These challenges originate in national budgeting procedures and provincial fiscal capacity—factors largely external to UNICEF's control. The increasing

¹⁷³ ACAPS (2024) *Viet Nam: Humanitarian impact of Typhoon Yagi – Briefing Note (19 September 2024)*. ACAPS.

¹⁷⁴ In the three prioritised provinces of Gia Lai, Dien Bien and Soc Trang, and the city of Da Nang

requirement for direct implementation by UNICEF has impacted the operation of the CP, discussed further in section 5.4.1.2

Modest allowances for frontline workers (100,000–300,000 VND/month according to KIs) have driven high turnover as staff seek better-paid private sector roles. Commune restructuring has compounded the problem by relocating or reassigning personnel without adequate retraining. Although UNICEF supports training and supervision, compensation levels and administrative reforms lie outside its direct authority.

Furthermore, while central-level partners generally possess strong analytical and managerial skills, sub-national institutions—particularly in remote or under-resourced provinces—may lack the technical expertise or human resources to translate policy into practice. UNICEF can mitigate this through targeted capacity-building initiatives and by seconding national staff to provincial teams, but systemic inequalities in civil service recruitment and retention are deeply rooted and extend beyond UNICEF's direct influence.

Insufficient investment in physical infrastructure—water systems, sanitation facilities, and school amenities—has further limited the longevity of behaviour-change interventions. While UNICEF can lobby for infrastructure funding, ultimate budget allocations reside with government partners.

The process by which pilot successes are scaled up in Viet Nam also often entails policy integration rather than direct replication. UNICEF can demonstrate what works, but formal adoption depends on government planning cycles, budgetary ceilings, and competing priorities.

Policy and administrative bottlenecks. Commune and district mergers have disrupted reporting lines and delayed fund approvals, creating uncertainty among implementing partners. While UNICEF has adjusted its project management cycles to remain responsive, these adaptations are made within the broader context of government-led restructuring processes, which fall outside UNICEF's control. Implications for the government restructuring and merger process are discussed in Section 5.1.2.

Limited cross-sectoral integration of implementing partners—where health, education, WASH, and protection operate in silos—also dampens holistic impact. This represents a partial internal shortcoming, addressable through stronger inter-unit planning and stakeholder convenings.

Anti-corruption legislation. As mentioned in the context section (4.1c) and according to various key stakeholders from the international development community, while positive in intent, anti-corruption legislation has introduced strict approval processes for partnerships and resource mobilization. These procedures can inadvertently slow the pace at which UNICEF is able to deploy funds or engage with new stakeholders.

Access to high quality data. Viet Nam produces data for 43 of 48 child-focused SDG indicators and has conducted six MICS surveys (the latest in 2020). The **disaggregation of these datasets** is by gender, ethnicity, sub-national administrative level and disability, with each data point being concurrently disaggregated by one or two strata. While recognizing that concurrent disaggregation by higher numbers of strata requires significantly greater investments and may not be feasible for some sampling frames, that level of disaggregation would further extend the intersectoral lens on overlapping identities and structural disadvantages through which UNICEF's tailors its interventions to the most marginalized groups. For further details, see section 5.3.3.d and Annex 12. Refuge from these constraints lies partly in high-level advocacy—UNICEF can lobby for richer data collection and greater transparency—but it cannot unilaterally change national statistical mandates.

In addition, **UNICEF's access to government financial data** remains inconsistent. Although aggregate figures on child-related spending are available, detailed line items—such as allocations for early childhood education or child-sensitive social assistance—are often absent. This opacity hinders UNICEF's capacity to conduct precise budget analysis or advocate for reallocation of resources toward underfunded child services.

Within project level M&E systems,¹⁷⁵ current approaches emphasize outputs over long-term outcomes or behavioural indicators (see section 5.4.1.4). The **lack of systematic impact tracking** constrains adaptive learning and advocacy for scale-up. While UNICEF retains full control over its evaluation frameworks, expanding outcome-oriented metrics requires additional resources and partner buy-in.

Geographic and socio-cultural barriers. Remote, mountainous terrain imposes steep logistical costs on outreach. Poor road infrastructure and long distances require substantial time and resources for service delivery.

Deep-rooted cultural norms—preference for home births, scepticism toward vaccination, and gendered caregiving roles—demand prolonged, tailored communication efforts that outlast typical project timelines. UNICEF's communication strategies have begun to shift attitudes, but the pace of behavioural change remains constrained by factors beyond programmatic design.

¹⁷⁵ Established between UNICEF and Government implementing partners in programme documents

b. Internal factors

According to UNICEF staff, organizational silos and uneven inter-unit coordination have at times diluted the coherence of cross-cutting initiatives. Although task forces—such as the Gender Working Group—exist, their variable effectiveness hinges on leadership engagement and clear mandates. UNICEF has recognised these shortcomings and is actively pursuing “convergence packages” in areas like early childhood development, mental health, and climate resilience.

At the same time, certain parts of UNICEF—most notably Child Protection and Social Policy—have leveraged their inherently cross-sectoral mandates to foster collaboration with Health, Education, and WASH programmes. These pockets of success indicate that, where intentional systemic approach exist, UNICEF can transcend its internal divisions. Ongoing efforts to document and scale up the models of policy-level structuring and documentation of integrated approaches, aim to formalize and replicate cross-sectoral collaboration through joint concept notes, shared monitoring frameworks, and unified reporting templates, rather than simply describing internal coordination mechanisms.

Stakeholder perceptions corroborate and nuance these internal dynamics. Provincial officials, district managers and community representatives consistently praised UNICEF’s professionalism, technical competence and flexibility—attributes frequently cited as drivers of effective collaboration and uptake at local level (see also sections on EQ2 and programme effectiveness). Technical support and capacity building emerged repeatedly as perceived strengths: respondents highlighted the cultural adaptability and practical emphasis of training (for example midwife upskilling and life-skills or STEM teacher support) and noted that UNICEF’s responsiveness and non-bureaucratic approach facilitated sustained engagement in remote and emergency contexts. These perceptions align with the examples of cross-unit collaboration described above and help explain why certain interventions were more readily adopted at provincial and district levels. Even in the most remote communes or during emergency contexts, staff were described as approachable and non-bureaucratic. One child protection officer praised UNICEF’s “never-angry, never-reject” attitude, noting the organization’s willingness to convene parenting sessions late at night or during harvest season. Other key stakeholders at provincial level similarly emphasized UNICEF’s hands-on site visits, which persisted despite logistical hurdles.

The uniformly positive assessments of UNICEF’s work in priority provinces reflect the organization’s effectiveness as a strategic enabler, capacity-builder, and equity-focused innovator. Partners value UNICEF’s technical rigor, respectful collaboration, and adaptive engagement. As the provinces continue their development trajectories, sustaining momentum will require not only the preservation of these internal strengths but also a concerted effort to address infrastructure deficits, broaden geographic reach, and deepen cross-sectoral integration. By responding to these partner-generated recommendations, UNICEF can further consolidate its role as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development.

Table 11: Synthesis of key factors and extent of UNICEF’s Control

Extent of control	Key factors
Fully within UNICEF’s control	- Partner engagement model, training quality, and staff responsiveness
	- Programme design features (e.g., equity targeting, pilot replication models)
	- Internal coordination for cross-sectoral integration and M&E framework enhancements
Partially within UNICEF’s influence	- Financing modalities (advocating for advance-based vs. reimbursement models)
	- Policy dialogue and evidence advocacy at provincial/national levels
	- Infrastructure investment through partnership convening and co-funding proposals
	- Deep-seated cultural practices
Largely beyond UNICEF’s direct control	- National and provincial budget cycles and fiscal constraints
	- Administrative restructuring of communes and districts
	- Geographic remoteness
	- Frontline worker remuneration policies set by government authorities

Source: ET elaboration

5.3.3 EQ8: How well has UNICEF used the following strategies to achieve results: a) innovation and digital transformation, b) communication for behaviour and social-norm change, c) advocacy with policy makers, and d) using data and evidence to drive change?

Key Finding 12: UNICEF has demonstrated considerable success in driving change through context-sensitive innovations that empower communities, foster sustainability and promote inclusivity; deepening digital transformation across its portfolio would further accelerate learning, adaptation and impact at scale. UNICEF's strategic convening power and normative expertise are essential to embed child-rights safeguards, data-protection standards and accountability across Vietnam's digital reform lifecycle—ensuring that ethical considerations, transparency and inclusive governance prevent marginalisation and empower all children.

Community-driven interventions—such as locally adapted nutrition clubs, village midwife networks, and school rainwater-harvesting WASH systems—have successfully shifted behaviours in maternal and child health and student hygiene, but without robust indicators to track normative change and sustained practice adoption, these gains risk remaining transient.

UNICEF's high-level advocacy and policy influence have yielded results during this CPD cycle, particularly in advancing child-focused reforms and promoting inclusive service delivery. Despite these achievements, internal role clarity remains a challenge, especially in coordinating advocacy efforts and aligning programmatic and communication functions.

Pilot initiatives have generated valuable local insights, yet there is a need to strengthen mechanisms for measuring transformative outcomes, defining clear exit strategies, and ensuring scalability. The translation of local evidence into sustained national policy reforms has room to be improved to foster the integration of pilot findings into broader policy frameworks.

The CPD identifies four change strategies that underpin all programme components: data and evidence generation; strategic policy advocacy; innovation and digital transformation; and communication for behaviour and social-norm change. Throughout these strategies, UNICEF's ability to mobilize partnerships and resources has been a cornerstone of its success. Collaborations with government entities, non-governmental organisations engaged in advocacy, and international donors have enabled the implementation of region-specific interventions and the scaling of impactful programs. This section offers a systematic analysis of the most significant results alongside the principal limitations and challenges encountered. While many of these outcomes and constraints have already been noted in earlier sections, here they are synthesized and organized to provide a coherent overview of the programme's overall achievements and areas for improvement.

a. Innovation and digital transformation

UNICEF's provincial-level programming in Dien Bien and Gia Lai exemplifies a robust application of innovation to drive sustainable change, with interventions tailored to local contexts and underpinned by community ownership. The Community-Based Nutrition Clubs represent a locally adapted innovation that transforms nutrition education into practical, community-led action. Originally piloted in Lao Cai and scaled in Dien Bien, stakeholders consistently described the model as cost-effective, citing its ability to function without ongoing external funding and its replication in multiple communes. Provincial health staff and UNICEF programme coordinators also emphasized the model's adaptability and relevance across communes. Its replication potential is further evidenced by MOH-led learning visits and local government uptake, positioning it as a scalable approach to improving child nutrition in resource-constrained settings.

Similarly, the establishment of “friendly libraries” and thematic clubs have contributed to the transformation of school environments into emotionally supportive and inclusive spaces. These initiatives have fostered creative thinking, peer-to-peer learning, and gender-responsive engagement, enabling students to express greater confidence when addressing sensitive issues such as menstrual hygiene and violence prevention, as highlighted by beneficiaries. In the WASH sector, climate-adapted rainwater harvesting systems and ceramic filtration units have reportedly helped address chronic water scarcity in upland schools like Keo Lom, improving health outcomes during the dry season while reinforcing climate resilience and environmental stewardship among students.¹⁷⁶ Complementing these infrastructural innovations, UNICEF's Parenting Communication Groups delivered by ethnic-language facilitators have cultivated peer-to-peer

¹⁷⁶ Based on stakeholder feedback gathered during a key informant interview with the Dien Bien Centre for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (NCERWASS), triangulated with additional inputs from UNICEF informants

exchange on early childhood care, reaching thousands of caregivers—even scheduling sessions at night to accommodate farming schedules—and thereby strengthening parental confidence and child well-being.

Although digital tools are less prominent across these low-tech, high-impact interventions, UNICEF has begun integrating digital transformation within its multi-sectoral life skills and awareness campaigns. During the Typhoon Yagi response, the VCO pioneered the use of AI technology for real-time data collection in the after-action review—marking the first application of this innovation within the UN system.^{177 178} This approach enabled rapid, evidence-based decision-making and has since been scaled to other Country Offices as a model of digital transformation, according to UNICEF sources. While significant opportunities remain for further expansion of real-time data systems, this breakthrough demonstrates UNICEF's leadership in leveraging innovation to strengthen coordination, accountability, and adaptive programming.

Table 12 Case Study Highlights

Intervention	Core Innovation	Transformative Impact	Evidence of Scale
Community-Based Nutrition Clubs	Locally sourced meals and shared processing equipment	Sustainable feeding models and behaviour change	Scaled from pilot in Lao Cai to Dien Bien; cost-effective for national roll-out
Friendly & Inclusive School Libraries & Clubs	Child-centred “friendly libraries” and thematic learning clubs	Emotional support, soft-skill development, gender inclusion	Clubs replicated in non-project schools
Rainwater Harvesting & Ceramic Filter Systems (WASH)	Climate-adapted rainwater catchment and ceramic filtration	Safe drinking water, improved hygiene, climate resilience	International study visits; replication initiated in other provinces
Parenting Communication Groups with Ethnic-Language Facilitators	“Nobody’s Perfect” peer groups delivered in local dialects	Parental confidence, better early childhood outcomes	20+ groups reaching thousands of caregivers in Q1/2025
Multi-Sectoral Integration of Life Skills & Awareness	Online safety, reproductive health, child rights across sectors	Holistic child development; students as community change agents	Awareness materials disseminated via students to households
Emergency Adaptation & Equity-Driven Targeting	Rapid programme pivot for Typhoon Yagi response	Programme agility; equity in reaching ethnic minority children	Cohesive integration of emergency kits and subsidies

Source: own elaboration

When it comes to interventions built around a digital strategy, several remarkable results can be highlighted. In support of Child Survival and Development, several sources¹⁷⁹ confirmed that UNICEF has played a key role in supporting digitisation of Viet Nam’s health system through the EMNCH system, bringing in international financing from the Government of Japan, providing technical expertise, supporting pilots in disadvantaged provinces, and generating evidence that convinced the government to adopt and scale the EMNCH system nationwide using domestic resources. Achieving full national integration will require substantial investment and unwavering institutional commitment.

In **education**, the CP underscores digital transformation as a cornerstone of its Learning and Skills outcome. Central to this ambition has been the development, with MOET leadership, of a national digital competency framework for teachers and educators alongside a parallel framework for students—and, most recently, a dedicated AI competency framework for learners. These reference tools establish common definitions of digital literacy, aptitude and ethical awareness, forging a shared understanding of the opportunities, priorities and obstacles inherent in a rapidly evolving edtech landscape. By articulating the competencies required of both instructors and pupils, UNICEF has laid critical groundwork for systemic

¹⁷⁷ UNICEF Viet Nam. (2025). After Action Review: UNICEF Viet Nam Response to Typhoon Yagi – Final Report. 23 June 2025

¹⁷⁸ UNICEF Viet Nam, Typhoon Yagi Situation Report No. 4, 2024

¹⁷⁹ [The Government of Japan and UNICEF support Viet Nam to strengthen the Digital Health System / Nhật Bản và UNICEF hỗ trợ tăng cường hệ thống y tế số tại Việt Nam](#) / [Japan, UNICEF help Vietnam strengthen digital health system](#)

change and has established a coherent platform from which policymakers, school administrators and training providers are able to align curricula, professional development and assessment systems.

A commendable feature of UNICEF's approach has been the insistence on inclusion from the outset. CWDs, ethnic minority groups and non-Vietnamese speakers have been incorporated into framework consultations and pilot sites, reflecting UNICEF's commitment to equity. UNICEF has been active in

Box 2: Examples of Innovation in the Education space

- **'Tinkering with Tech'** uses "microbits" to foster computational thinking in classrooms enhanced with hands-on projects. Introduced to 170 secondary teachers and education managers in three provinces, it aims to help teachers address the root causes of girls' reluctance to enter STEAM-related study.
- **A pilot of the 'School of Fish' app** on computational thinking skills for preschool children completed in 2021. Interest was high from MOET, children and parents but the pilot faced technical glitches (slow connection, insufficient tablets and poor contextualization for Vietnam and ethnic minority children).
- **Universal Design for Learning**, an educational framework based on cognitive neuroscience, guides flexible learning environments to accommodate individual learning differences, especially for children with disability. MOET has incorporated this framework in both pre- and in-service teacher training.

supporting innovation in the digital space; however, it needs to more systematically collect evidence to demonstrate outcome level changes at scale. UNICEF has proactively promoted digital innovation—piloting online teacher training modules, upgrading school networks, and convening hackathons to generate localized solutions. To date, no evidence has been found regarding the extent to which blended learning modalities have contributed to improved pedagogical quality, student achievement, or school retention rates. The absence of evidence regarding the impact of blended learning modalities on pedagogical quality, student achievement, or retention rates should not be interpreted as a judgment on their effectiveness. The planned evaluation of digital transformation pilots (2019–2025) is expected to generate relevant insights.

b. Communication for behaviour and social-norm change

UNICEF's communication efforts have generated tangible shifts in awareness, attitudes and some behaviours across target groups in priority provinces. Feedback from local stakeholders and beneficiaries during the FGDs indicates that parent recipients of UNICEF interventions report higher vaccination uptake and more active involvement in prenatal and postnatal care, suggesting that messages around maternal and child health have penetrated family decision-making. In schools, according to teachers' feedback, pupils now demonstrate greater confidence in discussing sensitive issues—such as puberty or menstrual hygiene—and teachers increasingly employ child-centred, inclusive pedagogies. This change has been supported by a combination of strategies, including the use of tailored communication materials. The "friendly libraries" created safe, informal spaces where children could access age-appropriate resources and initiate conversations on sensitive topics, while the "thematic clubs" provided structured peer to peer dialogue and facilitated teacher moderated discussions. Teachers noted that the libraries were particularly effective in normalizing access to information and reducing stigma, whereas the clubs played a stronger role in building pupils' confidence to articulate questions and share experiences in group settings. Provincial authorities credit these changes with contributing to core objectives in health and education, including reduced dropout rates and improved maternal and child survival.

These changes are reinforced by practice-based interventions that marry communication strategies with community-driven service delivery. In nutrition clubs, mothers learn to prepare nutritionally balanced meals from locally sourced staples, transforming abstract health messages into hands-on routines that reduce malnutrition in a cost-effective, replicable model. Village midwives, too, serve as frontline communicators in remote mountainous communes, bridging critical service gaps where formal health facilities are inaccessible.¹⁸⁰ Their home visits and community sessions not only deliver life-saving clinical care but also contribute to increased rates of antenatal check-ups and higher proportions of women preparing birth plans, signalling a shift in social norms around maternal survival. In the WASH-in-schools programme, UNICEF's promotion of rainwater harvesting and ceramic filtration systems underscores the link between infrastructure and behaviour: local beneficiaries indicated improved handwashing practices, and teachers reported fewer menstruation-related absences among girls. By ensuring reliable access to clean water—especially during girls' menstrual cycles—the initiative embeds hygiene messaging within a tangible, context-sensitive solution that supports continued school attendance.

Evidence from document review and KIs indicates that communication campaigns such as the National English-Speaking Contest on Disaster Prevention and Climate Change Adaptation, the "One Day as a Child Reporter" video challenge, and a nationally broadcast comic and animation series have yielded four principal outcomes: large-scale public engagement across all provinces; the empowerment of children and adolescents as visible climate actors; the strengthening of advocacy platforms capable of influencing policy; and early indications of positive shifts in environmental awareness and practices. Collectively, these

¹⁸⁰ see Annex 10.3 for background information on the Village Midwifery Network

outcomes contribute indirectly to the CPD result of enabling institutions and elected bodies to advance evidence-based, child- and gender-responsive policies aimed at creating safe, green environments and mitigating the impacts of climate change on children. UNICEF reports that the visibility generated by these initiatives has been used in advocacy with ministries, provincial authorities, and parliamentary committees, reinforcing the case for integrating child- and gender-responsive measures into environmental and climate policies. Although long-term behavioural impact data is still not available, feedback from participating schools indicates increased knowledge of climate risks and greater willingness to adopt environmentally friendly practices (such as waste reduction, tree planting, and water conservation) at the community level.

Despite these promising examples, however, the current monitoring framework falls short of capturing deeper shifts in social norms or values. The CPD articulates social-norm change as a priority, but its indicators focus largely on outputs—e.g. numbers trained or registered on platforms like U-Report—rather than on genuine transformations in beliefs, attitudes or power relations. There is no systematic deployment of Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) studies, and post-training assessments record knowledge gains without consistent follow-up on whether new practices have been adopted. By shifting from output-focused indicators (numbers trained, facilities built, strategies adopted) to SMART indicators that measure attitudes, practices, and perceptions, VCO can more effectively monitor whether its interventions are driving the intended social and normative transformations outlined in the CPD. In the Annex 13, a set of indicators is suggested by the ET.

c. Advocacy with policy makers

UNICEF's advocacy strategy has yielded notable policy and legislative advances across multiple sectors, reflecting the office's capacity to influence high-level decision-making. By leveraging rigorous data and cultivating partnerships with government ministries, research institutions, and international agencies, UNICEF has positioned itself as a credible interlocutor in national policy forums. This multi-sectoral approach underscores the organization's comparative advantage in fostering environments conducive to child rights and equity.

In the **nutrition** sector, UNICEF's engagement in Tax Law reform discussions exemplifies its ability to secure fiscal commitments for child health. Through presenting comprehensive analyses on the health risks of SSBs, the office contributed to the adoption of Viet Nam's first excise tax on SSBs (see EQ6, section 5.3.1.1c). This policy milestone reflects the effectiveness of evidence-based advocacy and multi-stakeholder coordination, with UNICEF playing a key role alongside the MOH and civil society partners. The tax is expected to generate sustainable revenue for health promotion and nutrition programmes, demonstrating the replicability of fiscal strategies that align public finance with child health outcomes.

Within **education**, UNICEF's contributions to curriculum development and competency frameworks have reshaped early childhood and digital learning paradigms. The national Early Childhood Education curriculum—co-designed with MOET—incorporates gender-transformative pedagogy and social-emotional learning, with potential reach exceeding four million pre-primary children. Concurrently, UNICEF supported the establishment of national digital competency standards for teachers and students, as well as an AI competency framework for learners. This support included co-hosting multi-stakeholder consultations such as the National Forum on AI in Education (2025), contributing to the design of teacher training, and piloting AI-powered learning tools. UNICEF's engagement aligned with MOET's National Plan for Digital and AI Competency Development and helped position Viet Nam's education system within emerging global norms, standards and competencies in digital and AI education.¹⁸¹

In the **health** sector, UNICEF's advocacy to reverse decentralization of vaccine procurement and its technical support for national immunization plans highlight its strategic role in addressing systemic barriers. According to key informants and documental sources, UNICEF's advocacy to reverse the decentralization of vaccine procurement in Viet Nam contributed to the Government's decision in 2023 to re-centralize financing and procurement of vaccines under the MOH. The decentralization policy, introduced earlier that year, had led to severe vaccine stockouts and the sharpest decline in childhood immunization coverage in over two decades. Following UNICEF's technical advice and joint advocacy with WHO and other partners, the Government issued a resolution in mid-2023 to restore central procurement. This policy shift stabilized vaccine supply and enabled a rapid rebound in coverage.¹⁸²¹⁸³

In the realm of **child protection**, according to several sources both from UNICEF and national stakeholders, sustained lobbying culminated in the NA's enactment of the Law on Justice for Minors in 2024, providing a robust legal foundation for children's access to justice¹⁸⁴. Collaborative advocacy between UNICEF and UN Women on the VAWG programme played a pivotal role in introducing a child-

¹⁸¹ Viet Nam National Forum on Artificial Intelligence in Education / Vietnam, UNICEF Discuss AI Competency Framework for Students – VUFO NGO Resource Centre

¹⁸² From decentralization to re-centralization: lessons learned from Vietnam's rapid reversal in the financing of the Expanded Program on Immunization Nguyen, Khanh Phuong et al. The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific, Volume 61, 101648

¹⁸³ Viet Nam Achieves Remarkable Progress in Childhood Immunization, WHO and UNICEF Report

¹⁸⁴ See also the Evaluation Report on the EU-Jule programme: Terminal Evaluation of the EU Justice and Legal Empowerment in Viet Nam (EU JULE) Programme, PAGO DA Component by UNDP in the period 2017- 2024 (2024)

centred lens into interagency protocols that address both VAW and VAC. According to both agencies, this joint positioning helped demonstrate to Government inextricable links between VAW and VAC, reinforcing the need for integrated prevention and response mechanisms. This collaboration built on earlier joint efforts and evidence, including a 2020 multi-country study¹⁸⁵ which laid groundwork for interagency convergence and highlighted the strategic value of linking VAC and VAW responses.

UNICEF's influence on the Decree on **Social Work** reflects a sustained engagement to professionalize social services. UNICEF supported the development of national programmes on social work, contributed technical inputs to circulars regulating social work services, and advocated for the recognition of social work as a profession. This engagement contributed to the approval of Circular 03/2023/TT-BYT by the MOH in 2023¹⁸⁶, formally defining social work positions and staffing ratios in health facilities. According to COARs and KIIs, UNICEF's support included policy dialogue with MOH and MOET, capacity building for provincial authorities, and evidence generation on the role of social workers in child protection and mental health. The decree marks a milestone in institutionalizing professional social services and integrating them into health and education systems. Additionally, UNICEF contributed to the adoption of Circular 20/2023/TT-BGDDT¹⁸⁷, mandating the establishment of school counsellor positions. According to KIIs and external sources,¹⁸⁸ UNICEF supported MOET through technical inputs, policy dialogue, and evidence generation on the importance of psychosocial support and child protection in schools. UNICEF also provided international best practices to inform the design of the school counsellor role, ensuring it includes responsibilities for mental health care, psychosocial support, and child protection case management.

In **climate and DRR**, UNICEF has moved beyond episodic engagement to institutionalize youth participation in policymaking. This includes training programmes for provincial disaster prevention officials to collaborate with young advocates, the establishment of permanent youth advisory panels within VDDMA and MOET, and strategic dialogues with MARD, MONRE, and MOH that feature youth representatives. These structures aim to ensure that children's and adolescents' perspectives inform decision-making on climate adaptation, early action, and sustainable development at both local and national levels (see more detail in Box 3).

Additional evidence of institutionalization efforts can be seen in the establishment of Children's Councils, initially piloted by UNICEF in Ho Chi Minh City, which now serve as legitimate forums for young people to express views on policies and actions affecting their lives. In Da Nang, the Youth Union confirmed that this is a project they have taken ownership of and intend to continue. However, the Mid-Term Review of the Healthy Cities for Adolescents programme¹⁸⁹ noted limited success in engaging policymakers and decision-makers through these councils—a finding echoed by other stakeholders in Da Nang. This mixed evidence suggests that while structural mechanisms for youth participation are being developed, their influence on policy processes remains uneven and context dependent.

¹⁸⁵ UNICEF and UN Women (2020). Ending Violence Against Women and Children in Viet Nam: Opportunities and Challenges for Collaborative and Integrative Approaches. Hanoi: UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

¹⁸⁶ 03/2023/TT-BYT in Vietnam, Circular 03/2023/TT-BYT job positions public employees by job titles in public health service providers in Vietnam

¹⁸⁷ <https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=208996>

¹⁸⁸ UNICEF hoan nghênh Việt Nam thúc đẩy vị trí việc làm về công tác xã hội và tư vấn trong các cơ sở y tế và giáo dục

¹⁸⁹ UNICEF Viet Nam (2025) Mid-Term Review Report, Health Cities for Adolescents (HCA) Project, Phase 2 in Da Nang, Viet Nam. Prepared by Hung Phnam

Box 3: UNICEF's Contributions to Policies and Regulations

Viet Nam has witnessed political and legal advancements that mark substantial achievements of UNICEF contribution in advocacy and policy reform. Some of the most notable milestones have emerged in the domains of health, nutrition, WASH, and climate resilience. They reflect both the responsiveness of the Vietnamese government to evolving social needs and the strategic influence of sustained advocacy from UNICEF.

- **Recognition of village-based midwives**

Passed in November 2024, the revised Health Insurance Law No. 51/2024/QH15¹⁹⁰ introduces a pivotal provision recognizing village-based midwives as formal members of the health workforce, particularly in ethnic minority communities (see Annex 10.3). According to VCO reports, UNICEF's advocacy for this recognition began in the past CPD.¹⁹¹ Several sources indicated that UNICEF provided technical evidence on the cost-effectiveness and cultural relevance of village-based midwives, including field data, policy briefs, and high-level consultations with legislators and provincial health departments.¹⁹² The revised law not only reinstates their role but also guarantees remuneration, thereby institutionalizing their contribution and promoting maternal health equity. This legislative shift represents a significant step toward reducing disparities in maternal and newborn care across geographic and ethnic lines. UNICEF supported the implementation of village midwife training and support systems as part of the provincial-level project in Gia Lai and Dien Bien, helping to demonstrate the midwives' role as essential intermediaries between communities and formal health systems. As observed by the Evaluation Team, this approach has proven effective in improving maternal health outcomes in remote areas. However, scaling and sustainability require increased budget allocations and stronger incentives to retain midwives in their roles.

- **Nutrition policy: Progress toward a SSB tax** - As previously covered in EQ6 (see section c).

- **WASH sector reform: Expanding public investment in rural areas**

According to KIs with provincial health departments and development partners, while private-sector initiatives have successfully expanded access in urban areas, they have been less effective in rural regions, particularly in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands. In response to this disparity, the newly integrated Ministry of Agriculture and Environment issued a decree mandating enhanced public funding for WASH services at national and sub-national levels. This is expected to improve access and affordability of clean water for rural populations, addressing inequities in service provision. UNICEF played a pivotal role in catalysing these reforms through sustained advocacy and technical advisory support. Its contributions are documented in the 2022 Assessment of WASH Funding and Financing in Viet Nam¹⁹³, developed with MPI and MARD. This analysed rural WASH financing gaps, underscored the disproportionate impact on children and marginalized communities, and offered recommendations for public investment strategies. UNICEF engaged in policy dialogue through the Joint SDG Fund platform and co-hosted technical consultations with national and provincial stakeholders. Interviewed officials at provincial level confirmed that UNICEF's evidence and convening role helped elevate WASH as a development priority. Furthermore, collaboration with UN agencies, private entities (SCG Thailand, Gravity Water), and national ministries has facilitated the mobilization of technical resources and advocacy leverage which have been instrumental in pressing for targeted crisis-repair mechanisms and in securing commitments for longer-term investments in rural and under-resourced areas.

- **Disaster risk reduction: Child-centred emergency preparedness**

Prior to Typhoon Yagi, national preparedness strategies in Viet Nam did not consistently integrate child-specific vulnerability data. According to stakeholders consulted, contingency frameworks tended to emphasize infrastructure and general population needs, with limited systematic attention to differentiated risks faced by children—such as continuity of education, psychosocial support, and child protection services during emergencies (UN OCHA & UNCT, Joint Response Plan for Typhoon Yagi and Floods, 2024).¹⁹⁴ Lessons from the Yagi response highlighted these gaps, prompting the Government to enact a new national decree requiring the systematic collection and integration of child vulnerability data into disaster preparedness and response frameworks.¹⁹⁵ This measure ensures that emergency planning and interventions are more responsive to the unique needs of children, particularly in climate-induced crises. UNICEF co-led technical consultations and policy dialogues under the Child-Centred DRR Working Group, which included UNDP, Save the Children, and the Viet Nam Association for the Protection of Child Rights.¹⁹⁶ These efforts were supported by field-level data from post-disaster assessments in Quang Binh and Yen Bai, which highlighted gaps in child protection and psychosocial support during emergencies. Interviewed officials confirmed that UNICEF's evidence and convening role directly informed the decree's provisions, particularly the requirement for disaggregated vulnerability mapping and child-focused contingency planning.

- **Climate policy: Integrating child rights into national commitments**

Collaboration between UNICEF and MARD¹⁹⁷ has focused on strengthening the integration of child-centred considerations into climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. This collaboration has included joint technical workshops, policy roundtables, and the development of child-focused guidance materials for Viet Nam's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) implementation. An example of this work was the publication of *'What If We Contribute? – A Comprehensive Guide to Viet Nam's NDCs'*¹⁹⁸ a child-friendly resource designed to raise awareness and promote youth engagement in climate policy. Endorsed by MARD, this was used in outreach activities targeting schools and youth networks. UNICEF also contributed to the Climate Resilience for Children initiative, which promotes inclusive, gender- and child-responsive climate policies and budgets.

d. Using data and evidence to drive change

UNICEF has strategically leveraged data and evidence generation to catalyse policy reforms and programmatic innovations, positioning empirical analysis at the heart of its advocacy. The data-driven

¹⁹⁰ Viet Nam Social Security News / with supporting regulations such as Decree No. 02/2025/ND-CP and Circular No. 01/2025/TT-BYT guiding operational rollout

advocacy successfully secured political commitment and enabled the integration of evidence into legislative and planning processes, enhancing the credibility and sustainability of child-focused interventions. The evidence base demonstrates how UNICEF's advocacy translated into concrete political and legislative outcomes across multiple sectors. The formal recognition of village-based midwives in the revised Health Insurance Law, progress toward the sugar-sweetened beverage tax (EQ6, section 5.3.1.1c), and the decree mandating enhanced public funding for rural WASH services (2022 Assessment of WASH Funding and Financing) illustrate the integration of technical inputs into national policy frameworks. Similarly, the incorporation of child vulnerability data into disaster preparedness following Typhoon Yagi, and the endorsement of child-focused climate resources such as *What If We Contribute?* by MARD, highlight how evidence-driven advocacy secured political commitment and embedded child rights into planning processes.

Central to this success has been UNICEF's collaboration with research institutions and universities, which serve as vital intermediaries in generating evidence. Through joint commissioning of policy papers, think-tank roundtables and peer-reviewed publications, UNICEF has fostered a culture of evidence-informed decision-making within line ministries. A notable example is the Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey (V-NAMHS), jointly conducted with the Institute for Sociology (IOS) and international academic partners, which generated nationally relevant data. The survey findings informed the MOH's draft National Adolescent Mental Health Strategy.¹⁹⁹ Collaborations with Hanoi Medical University and the Hanoi University of Public Health produced technical guidance and policy briefs that fed into the National Nutrition Strategy 2021–2030 and Circular 29/2023 on mandatory nutritional labelling, particularly around equity-focused service delivery and childhood obesity prevention. In the justice and education sectors, UNICEF partnered with Ha Noi Law University, the Judicial Academy, and teacher training colleges to jointly develop curricula and training materials that integrated child rights into legal and pedagogical frameworks. These contributions supported the Law on Justice for Minors (2022) and the rollout of the new Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework (2025), embedding child-sensitive approaches in both justice and education systems.²⁰⁰ Additionally, UNICEF's engagement with the Human Rights Institute under the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy and youth-led organizations such as UPSHIFT and the Youth-led Action Initiative enabled the co-design of advocacy tools and community-based solutions, reinforcing intergenerational equity and participatory policy discourse. These initiatives exemplify UNICEF's strategic use of knowledge partnerships to translate technical findings into actionable policy recommendations.

Moreover, VCO's partnerships extend to international exchanges—study tours and seminars that import global best practices and export Viet Nam's own successes—enriching the domestic policy discourse with comparative insights and reinforcing Viet Nam's reputation as a regional innovator in child welfare. For example, in 2024 UNICEF facilitated a study tour to the Philippines on the CFCI, where Vietnamese officials and youth representatives exchanged experiences with counterparts from Manila and Cebu on integrating children's voices into urban planning. Upon return, participants reported that the exchange directly inspired the adaptation of participatory planning tools in Da Nang and Hai Phong. As one official from the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs noted: *"Seeing how other countries institutionalize children's councils gave us the confidence to accelerate our own pilots—what seemed aspirational before now feels achievable"*.²⁰¹ This testimony illustrates how international exposure acted as a catalyst for change, translating comparative learning into concrete policy innovation at the subnational level.

VCO communication has underpinned these efforts, as UNICEF harnesses national media platforms to disseminate research findings and showcase model programmes. This approach was recognised by a wide range of consulted stakeholders, who cited increased visibility and resonance of key messages as

¹⁹¹ Ministry of Health & UNICEF (2020). *Evaluation on the performance, relevance, sustainability, and scalability of village midwifery in Viet Nam*. Ha Noi.

¹⁹² UNICEF Viet Nam (2020). *Evaluation of the Initiative of Ethnic Minority Village Midwives in Viet Nam* (Available at: <https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?documentID=18744&fileID=47895>) / Ministry of Health, Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs and UNICEF Co-organise Conference to Advance Policies Supporting Village-based Midwives

¹⁹³ UNICEF Viet Nam, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. *Assessment of WASH Funding and Financing in Viet Nam*. Hanoi: UNICEF, November 2022.

¹⁹⁴ UN OCHA / UN Country Team Viet Nam. *Joint Response Plan for Typhoon Yagi and Floods, September 2024 – June 2025*

¹⁹⁵ Decree No. 165/2025/ND-CP, issued by the Vietnamese Government on 30 June 2025, and effective from 1 July 2025. It details provisions for implementing the Data Law No. 60/2024/QH15, including mandates for the systematic collection and integration of child vulnerability data into national disaster response frameworks

¹⁹⁶ United Nations Country Team in Viet Nam. *2024 Annual Results Report*. Hanoi: United Nations, March 2025.

¹⁹⁷ now part of the newly integrated Ministry of Agriculture and Environment

¹⁹⁸ UNICEF Viet Nam (2024). *What If We Contribute? – A Comprehensive Guide to Viet Nam's Nationally Determined Contributions*. Hanoi: UNICEF Viet Nam, 2024. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/media/17841/file>

¹⁹⁹ Institute of Sociology, University of Queensland, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2022). *Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey: Report on Main Findings*. Hanoi, Viet Nam. Available at: <https://qcmhr.org/outputs/reports/15-vnamhs-report-eng-15-feb-2023/file>

²⁰⁰ UNICEF (2019) *Progress in Viet Nam in Mainstreaming Justice for Children in National Legal and Judicial Reforms*

²⁰¹ HCA Đà Nẵng / UNICEF Viet Nam. *Sharing Initiatives for Child-Friendly Cities in Da Nang* (January 2025)

contributing to policy dialogue and public engagement. While the number of media products alone does not constitute evidence of effectiveness, the strategic use of these assets—such as videos illustrating the cost-effectiveness of nutrition clubs or written features on early childhood education reforms—has demonstrably supported advocacy goals. For instance, televised reports and media articles were cited by national partners as instrumental in generating interest and uptake of programme models. In 2023, media engagement resulted in over 600 published media articles and 21 televised reports, reaching over 101 million people and generating 10 million video views, according to reports from the Communications and Advocacy Section. By crafting compelling narratives around data—whether illustrating the cost-effectiveness of nutrition clubs or the impact of early childhood education reforms—UNICEF ensures that evidence resonates with policymakers, practitioners and the public alike.

UNICEF's deployment of pilot or demonstrative projects has generated valuable insights into local service delivery and highlighted pathways for scaling effective interventions. As analysed, pilot efforts have spanned both urban and rural contexts, adapting activities to specific community needs and extending outreach to remote provinces such as Gia Lai through initiatives like the Children's Friendship Project, Dien Bien and Soc Trang, or a city like Da Nang. By prioritizing vulnerable populations—including ethnolinguistic minorities, CWDs, and families in geographically isolated areas—these pilots have operationalized LNOB principles and created tangible models for addressing entrenched disparities.

However, the use of pilot projects as catalysts for policy change has revealed important limitations. The lack of a shared operational definition within UNICEF for terms such as “pilot,” “demonstrative project,” and “scaling up” has led to inconsistent usage across programmes, undermining evidence quality, creating divergent expectations about intent and required proof of concept, and weakening the effectiveness of scale-up advocacy and planning. This lack of clarity affects how initiatives are framed, monitored, and leveraged for policy influence, making it difficult to determine whether an activity is intended to test feasibility, demonstrate replicability, or generate evidence for institutionalization. In an upper-middle-income country context, where UNICEF's role is no longer direct service delivery but rather generating rigorous, context-sensitive knowledge to inform policy and systems reform, such ambiguity is particularly consequential. The ET found that interpretation of these terms varies widely among provincial PMU teams, local partners, and VCO programme staff, leading to differing objectives, inconsistent criteria, and missed opportunities for strategic advocacy.

The CPE found robust analysis and data consolidation at the level of thematic sections and their respective interventions—such as health, education, or child protection. However, at the provincial level, including the integrated projects in Dien Bien and Gia Lai, data landscapes were more fragmented. These initiatives, by design, operate across multiple sectors and involve diverse implementing partners, creating both complexity and opportunity for more integrated and systematic analysis. While localised data collection is expected in such settings, the challenge lies in ensuring that this data can be meaningfully aggregated to inform broader learning and scalability. The CPE identified a wealth of local knowledge—often gathered through interviews, field visits, and informal documentation—that may be currently underutilised. This knowledge could be highly valuable for decision-making if better consolidated and aligned with the formal M&E frameworks of the CP.

Disaggregated data and Intersectionality

While the CPD includes output and outcome indicators with disaggregation requirements - most commonly by sex, age, geographic location (rural/urban), poverty status, and disability - their ability to measure intersectionality depends on whether data collection and reporting mechanisms support integrated, multi-dimensional analysis.²⁰² Strengthening this capacity, where feasible, may support operationalization of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle and further inform targeted, context-sensitive interventions.

Box 4 Examples from the CPD

- Number of adolescent girls and boys receiving IFA supplementation → valid for gender and age, but not for gender × poverty unless poverty is also tracked.
- Proportion of rural population using safely managed water → valid for location, but not for gender × location unless sex is also disaggregated.
- Multidimensional child poverty analysis including gender and disability → this is closer to an intersectional indicator, because it explicitly combines poverty with gender/disability.

Source: Own elaboration. See annex 12 for further analysis.

²⁰² See 'Access to high quality data' in section 5.3.2.

5.4 Evaluation criteria 4: Efficiency

5.4.1 EQ9: To what extent were the key strategies clearly articulated, adapted and communicated, sufficient staff expertise and skills leveraged, and efficient monitoring and reporting systems established, including risk management?

Key Finding 13: VCO has demonstrated strong public finance mobilisation and evolving private sector fundraising, with potential for further growth in the next CP. However, external constraints (including planning and approval processes with government and NA, and an increased requirement for direct implementation) have constrained funding utilisation.

Overall, VCO human resources (HR) were sufficient and technically strong to support CP implementation. However, as UNICEF shifts toward technical assistance and strategic policy advice, moving away from service delivery, the HR structure must evolve. Areas for strengthening to meet the demands of UNICEF's strategic ambitions include gender, adolescent and youth participation and development, advocacy and influencing skills, and private sector expertise.

M&E systems, including risk management, align with global UNICEF practices and have supported CP management. However, a gap exists between the nature of data typically reported on by UNICEF, and the ability to monitor progress against the ToC and assess long-term impact. Weaknesses in national data on outcome indicators continues to challenge VCO in effectively capturing and demonstrating its contributions.

Timeliness of interventions has been affected by external constraints. While VCO has demonstrated adaptability in response, these delays have impacted delivery.

5.4.1.1 Financial resources

a. Fundraising ambition

The CPD 2022-2026 set a total budget of US\$70.1 million, comprising of US\$17 million from Regular Resources (RR) and US\$52.7 million from Other Resources (OR).²⁰³ This reflected a continued decline in RR since the previous CP (2017–2021), with increasing reliance on OR. Anticipating reduced ODA due to Viet Nam's middle-income status, VCO shifted its strategy toward diversified, sustainable funding. The resource mobilisation plan focused on securing predictable, long-term support across local, regional, and global levels, emphasizing private sector engagement, innovative financing, and stronger donor relations. New channels included private sector fundraising (PSFR), growing contributions from the Global Giving Platform, and Business 4 Results, alongside efforts to mobilise domestic government resources. VCO also aimed to transition emergency-focused bilateral partnerships toward longer-term CP funding (ORR), exploring trade and investment-linked collaborations through donors and their commercial arms.

b. Actual expenditure

Between March 2022 and March 2025 (about 62% into the CP period) actual CP expenditure, comprised of RR and OR, reached almost \$44 million (63% of the total planned budget). RR expenditure was at 81% of its target, while OR reached 56%. Additionally, ORE expenditure exceeded \$21.95 million, marking a 179% increase compared to the 2017–2021 CPD (see Figure 3). This reflects the scale of the emergency response during the CP period, largely due to Typhoon Yagi.

Table 13 CPD Budget and Expenditure (2022-2025) by Fund Source

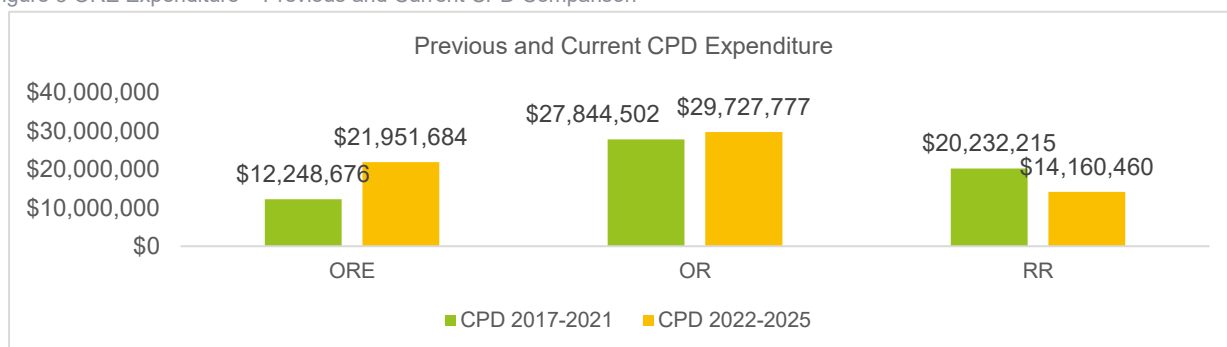
Fund Source	CPD 2022-2026 Planned Budget	Actual Expenditure (to March 2025)	Expenditure as % of Planned Budget
Regular Resources (RR) Total	\$17,405,000	\$14,160,460	81%
Other Resources (OR) Total	\$52,700,000	\$29,727,777	56%
Total CP Expenditure (OR+RR)	\$70,105,000	\$43,888,237	63%
ORE (Other Resources Emergency)	N/A	\$21,951,684	N/A

²⁰³ UNICEF defines RR and OR funding as: Regular Resources / Core Resources for Results (RR) – contributions without restrictions, to be used flexibly for children wherever and whenever the need is greatest. Other Resources Regular (ORR) – contributions for targeted interventions in development programming. These include flexible, thematic funding for a country and/or sector. These can also be further earmarked for specific programmes or projects. Other Resources Emergency (ORE) – contributions specifically for humanitarian programming. These include the flexible Global Humanitarian Thematic Fund and specific regional and country humanitarian appeals, as well as opportunities for targeted responses through more earmarked funding. Source: UNICEF Core Resources for Results, 2022 Report

Total CP Expenditure + Emergency (OR+RR+ORE)	N/A	\$65,839,917	N/A
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Sources: CPD Budget data: UNICEF CPD Viet Nam (December 2021). Expenditure data: VCO (14 March 2025)

Figure 3 ORE Expenditure – Previous and Current CPD Comparison



Sources: VCO data. CPD 2022-2025 expenditure data as of March 2025

Financial execution across programme components reveals varied spending realities. **Child Survival, Development and Environment (CSDE)** have the highest OR and RR budget utilisation, reaching 75% by March 2025. It also recorded the largest ORE expenditure (over \$19 million) and accounted for 50% of total expenditure. A contributing factor to high rates of expenditure in CSDE cited by VCO was donor-approved cost and time extensions, driven by COVID-19 impacts on WASH needs and services.

The CSDE budget utilisation rate was followed by Education (65% utilisation), SPG (60%), Child Protection (55%) and Programme Effectiveness (50%). Expenditure data is of March 2025, approximately 62% into the CP period. Accordingly, the utilisation rates of Education and SPG are consistent with the current stage of implementation, while Child Protection and Programme Effectiveness show lower-than-expected utilisation. A contributing factor to this relative under-expenditure, as cited by VCO, was implementation delays, for example the increased demand for direct implementation (see section 5.4.1.2). Programme Effectiveness relied most on **RR** (63% of its expenditure), followed by SPG (51%). While RR covered only 24% of Child Protection, 15% of Education, and 9% of CSDE expenditures. **OR** funding was highest in Education (81%), followed by Child Protection (68%), SPG (45%), CSDE (32%), and Programme Effectiveness (20%). **Emergency expenditure (ORE)** was most significant in CSDE (58% of its total), followed by Programme Effectiveness (16%), Child Protection (9%), Education (5%), and SPG (3%), indicating lower reliance on emergency funding in these areas.

Key informants identified constraints in VCO's ability to manage budget allocations across sectors due to rigid planning and approval processes with the government and NA. Annual budgets are locked in at the start of the five-year cycle, limiting flexibility to adapt to new donor opportunities or evolving needs—particularly affecting cross-sectoral collaboration. Government-inflexible ODA caps hinder rapid funding adjustment regardless of sectoral demand, requiring UNICEF to directly implement activities exceeding the cap, which is not always feasible. Additional delays stem from complex procedures for annual budget approvals by MOF and NA, and disbursement challenges at the National Treasury.

Table 14 CPD Budget and Expenditure (2022- March 2025) by Programme Component

Programme Component	CPD Budget	CPD Expenditure	% CPD Budget Utilised	ORE Expenditure	Total CPD + ORE Expenditure	% of Total Expenditure
CSDE	\$18,140,000	\$13,717,051	76%	\$19,242,940	\$32,959,991	50%
Education	\$16,971,000	\$11,011,335	65%	\$519,229	\$11,530,563	18%
Child Protection	\$14,465,000	\$7,981,169	55%	\$784,854	\$8,766,022	13%
SPG	\$8,553,000	\$5,134,200	60%	\$220,109	\$5,354,309	8%
Programme Effectiveness	\$11,976,000	\$6,044,480	50%	\$1,184,551	\$7,229,031	11%
Total	\$70,105,000	\$43,888,237	63%	\$21,951,684	\$65,839,917	

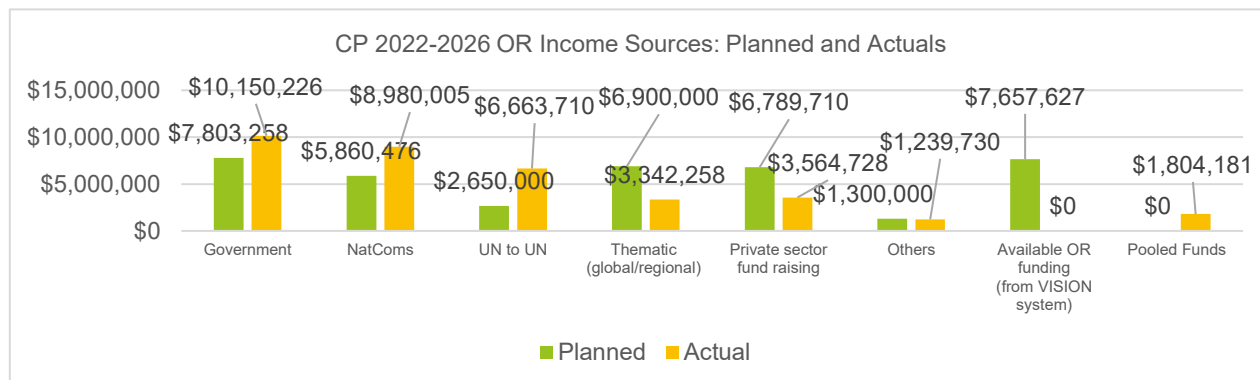
Sources: Budget data: UNICEF CPD Viet Nam (2021). Expenditure data: VCO (14 March 2025). **NOTE:** CPD Budget includes RR and OR only. ORE is an additional expenditure to CPD planned budget.

Annex 8 provides additional financial expenditure data analysis.

c. Funding mobilisation – OR funding sources

During the 2017-2021 CP cycle, OR funding came primarily from National Committees (US\$14.1M, 46%) and Thematic Funds (US\$8.3M, 27%), followed by UN joint programmes (US\$3.2M, 10%), bilateral governments (US\$3.3M, 11%), and Global Partnerships/others (US\$1.8M, 6%).²⁰⁴ For 2022–2026, VCO identified a US\$20.5M gap in OR funding and aimed to scale up PSFR and public sector contributions, with PSFR expected to cover US\$6.7M.²⁰⁵ Analysis of OR Funding data as of June 2025 shows that the key OR funding sources has been Government (\$10.1 million, 28%), National Committees (\$8.9 million, 25%), UN to UN (\$6.6 million, 19%), Thematic Funds (\$3.3 million, 9%) and PSFR (\$3.5 million, 10%). Figure 4 compares planned vs. actual OR income sources as of June 2025.

Figure 4 CP 2022-2026 OR Income Sources: Estimations and Actuals



Source: Estimations– VCO Resource Mobilisation Plan 2022-2026 and PSFR Business Plan 2022. Actuals– VCO data, covering 2022 – June 2025. Includes ORE outside of CP activities.

d. Partnership with private sector for child focused programming

By June 2025, VCO had raised \$3.5 million from PSFR (53% of the estimated \$6.7 million target). PSFR targets were exceeded in 2022 and 2024 but were not fully met in 2023.²⁰⁶ This data reflects progress about 80% into the CP period (June 2025). To drive fundraising VCO established a dedicated Partnership and Resource Mobilization (PARMO) team focused on three streams: (1) corporate partnerships ; (2) high-net-worth individuals (HNWI); and (3) mass individual giving. Beyond funding, private sector partnerships have yielded broader impact. Notably, in 2023, collaboration between UNICEF, private sector partners, and MARD, led to the installation of Viet Nam’s first solar-powered, net-zero toilet at a primary school in Soc Trang, marking a step toward establishing an expanded public-private partnership for scaling the green sanitation solution nationwide.

VCO has made significant progress in developing corporate and HNWI partnership. For example, in 2024 the Emergency Fundraising Campaign for the Yagi Storm raised a flexible US\$400,000 from corporate donors.²⁰⁷

Viet Nam’s PSFR was established later than in some other countries in the region. EAPRO has provided substantial support—such as legal and technological guidance, and sharing best practices—however, some solutions that have proven effective elsewhere in the region (e.g. payment service providers) have required adaptation to the Vietnamese context. While the government is increasingly recognising the valuable role of the private sector in national development, its commitment to ensuring adherence to legal and procedural requirements applicable to all development partners in line with the national governance model. This well-defined and nuanced regulatory environment calls for tailored engagement by UNICEF in fostering private sector partnerships initiatives.

Key informants noted different phasing of UNICEF’s multi-year planning cycles and the private sector’s annual funding cycles (typically finalised July-October), a common structural challenge in development–private sector engagement, requiring adaptive planning mechanisms to secure timely commitments.

e. Public sector fundraising

Analysis of funding data and insights from KIIs indicated that VCO has demonstrated a strong capacity to mobilize resources from the public sector, underpinned by the maintenance of long-standing relationships with key donors. As of June 2025, VCO has raised 130% of its planned amount from Government sources. However, consultation with key stakeholders highlighted that during the CP period, the internal coordination and delineation of responsibilities related to public sector partnerships has lacked clarity. This

²⁰⁴ VCO, Resource Mobilization Plan of UNICEF Viet Nam Country Cycle 2022-2026

²⁰⁵ VCO, PSFR Plan UNICEF Viet Nam Country Cycle 2022-2026 (2022)

²⁰⁶ Estimations source – VCO Resource Mobilisation Plan 2022-2026 and PSFR Business Plan 2022. Actual source – VCO data, as of June 2025

²⁰⁷ VCO 2024 RAM End of Year Summary Report

ambiguity was considered to have fragmented engagement efforts and limited the office's ability to strategically influence and collaborate with public sector partners to advance results for children.

5.4.1.2 Direct implementation

VCO has occasionally undertaken direct management of specific operational tasks (e.g., hiring consultants, organising events) to maintain programme momentum, in response to context changes, such as tighter ODA policies and time required to complete project approval. This reflects a procedural adaptation rather than a reversal of the shift away from direct service delivery. In 2024, nearly US\$1.3 million (about 40.5% of the Supply Unit's procured services) was spent this way. This represents a significant operational burden, as the office structure and CP were not designed to support such a high volume of procured services. It has placed significant strain on procurement, finance, and programme teams, slowing implementation and reducing efficiency.

Direct implementation may limit the potential for achieving results at scale. Government-led activities often generate greater engagement and ownership, which can be harder to replicate through direct implementation. Despite these challenges, VCO has responded with flexibility and adaptability, including by pursuing smaller, non-project-based collaborations that require less approval time. For example, although no formal partnership existed with MOLISA during this CP cycle, VCO directly implemented targeted social policy activities. However, the growing reliance on direct implementation remains a major bottleneck, likely to persist due to ongoing government restructuring, reinforcing the need for operational flexibility and advocacy for more enabling implementation modalities.

5.4.1.3 Human resources and organisational structure

The evaluation found that overall, VCO's human resources were maintained at a sufficient level, with high quality technical capacity aligned to the CP's intended results and effective implementation. External stakeholders—including government partners, donors, and UN agencies—consistently identified staff expertise in child rights and protection as a key strength and value-add of UNICEF. Internal regional informants also recognised the high quality of technical skills within the VCO team. The long tenure of many local staff contributed to strong institutional knowledge and contextual understanding. External partners highlighted the value of direct technical input of staff across multiple projects. The high-quality technical skills of staff were also recognised by internal informants at regional level. Staff technical capacity was instrumental in advancing CP outcomes (discussed in 5.3.1) and maintaining strategic partnerships (discussed in 5.2.1).

VCO has demonstrated a sustained commitment to capacity-building and professional development to support effective programme implementation. For example in 2024, staff participated in 14 group training and knowledge-sharing sessions, targeted training strengthened PARMO's expertise in donor engagement, and 46 staff were trained in PSEA by RCO.²⁰⁸ In 2023, the office achieved 95 per cent completion of its Strategic Learning Plan and delivered 23 training sessions.²⁰⁹ Additionally, as part of the 2023 light Gender Programmatic Review,²¹⁰ gender training was delivered to all staff. Staff well-being and engagement have also been prioritised. Staff satisfaction surveys consistently reflect positive outcomes. The 2024 Global Staff Survey yielded an Employee Engagement Index score of 3.96, surpassing both the global average (3.0) and the regional average (3.88).²¹¹ A follow-up action plan, developed collaboratively by HR, senior management, the Staff Association, and Young UNICEF, is regularly reviewed through Joint Consultative Committees and Country Management Team meetings.

On staffing composition, VCO has engaged a relatively high number of UN Volunteers (UNVs), recognised as a cost-effective way to enhance capacity. On average, 71% of personnel were local staff, 10% international professionals, 13% UNVs, 5% consultants and 2% international volunteers/KMCO. Between 2022 and 2025, staff demographics averaged 72% female, 28% male, and 3% of staff had a disability. Ethnic minority inclusion does not appear to be reflected in the staffing structure. Human resources data, including section-level staff distribution is provided in annex 9. The recruitment process was found to function efficiently, filling posts with an average recruitment time of 41 days in 2024 and 51 days in 2023, consistently below the corporate key performance indicator of 60 days.²¹² In 2024, the emergency response to Typhoon Yagi triggered the rapid deployment of additional human resources, including 12 surge personnel, two staff on temporary appointments, and five consultants to provide critical support.

As Viet Nam transitions to upper-middle-income status, UNICEF is repositioning itself as a provider of technical assistance and strategic policy advice, moving away from direct service delivery. To support this shift, the design and composition of the office's human resource structure must evolve accordingly.

²⁰⁸ VCO RAM End Year Summary Narrative Report 2024

²⁰⁹ VCO RAM End Year Summary Narrative Report 2023

²¹⁰ UNICEF Viet Nam (2024) Light Gender Programmatic Review 2023

²¹¹ VCO RAM End Year Summary Narrative Report 2024

²¹² VCO RAM End Year Summary Narrative Report 2023 and 2024

However, the evaluation identified several areas within the current organisational structure that require strengthening to meet the specific demands of the CP's strategic ambitions. These include the areas of 1) gender, 2) adolescent and youth participation and development, 3) advocacy and influencing skills and 4) private sector engagement and the dual-office model.

a. Gender

As discussed in Section 5.2.2 (EQ5), the absence of a dedicated gender focal point has constrained coherence and progress toward the CP's gender-transformative goals. The 2023 Light Gender Programme Review recommended structural adjustments, including enhanced staff capacity, improved monitoring and reporting, and investments in gender-sensitive frameworks and data disaggregation ('based on sex, age, or both'). In response, VCO has undertaken measures to enhance gender capacity, such as conducting gender training for all staff and appointing the SPG Section Chief as the Gender Focal Point, who co-convenes the Gender Task Force with the Deputy Representative for Programmes. However, internal and external stakeholders noted ongoing gaps in strategic coordination and the absence of a cross-sectoral focal point for gender, which may hinder full realisation of gender-transformative objectives.

b. Adolescent and youth participation and development

VCO's commitment to adolescent and youth participation and development is reflected in its diverse youth engagement initiatives (for example, VCO's support for the 2024 Local Conference of Vietnamese Youth and communication activities promoting youth-led climate advocacy). These efforts were positively acknowledged by partners, young people, and UN stakeholders. VCO has taken steps to strengthen its human resource capacity for adolescent and youth engagement, recognising it as a cross-sectoral priority. In 2023, a Programme Officer was appointed within the SPG Section as the Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) Focal Point, convening a quarterly ADAP Working Group across programme sections. A National UN Volunteer Specialist was also deployed in Da Nang to support youth participation under CFCI. However, VCO informants identified that youth engagement remains fragmented across programme sections, with varied approaches and inconsistent integration of core ADAP principles. While the ADAP working group was established to support a strategic approach, informants reported structural limitations that constrain its effectiveness. Challenges included a need for strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms, as well as inconsistent engagement from working group members responsible for promoting ADAP integration within their respective sections. The *Assessment of Knowledge Gaps in Adolescents and Youth Programming for UNICEF Viet Nam (2025)* corroborated with these findings and identified specific recommendations for VCO to enhance internal coordination and accountability for a unified ADAP approach across the office. UN informants acknowledged UNICEF's strong progress in youth engagement, whilst highlighting a continuing gap in targeted focus on adolescents within UN youth programming.

c. Advocacy and influencing skills

As noted in section 5.3.3c, the evaluation found that VCO's advocacy strategy lacks clear articulation and integration across the organisation. As VCO transitions toward a strategic advisory role, this necessitates a more coordinated structure involving thematic specialists, advocacy experts, evidence functions, and external research and analytics. Currently, public advocacy is concentrated within the Communication and Advocacy section, with one advocacy-focused role under the CSDE Section (Nutrition Specialist with advocacy focus).²¹³ Broader policy advocacy is primarily led by the SPG Section. The country representative and deputy country representative (programmes) lead advocacy for child's rights at a strategic level.

The evaluation found that advocacy roles, skills, and responsibilities remain under-defined, with limited shared understanding and strategic coordination. Efforts were considered²¹⁴ to be fragmented, lacking strategic planning, monitoring mechanisms, and clear role delineation between programmatic sections and the Communication and Advocacy section. Without a clearly articulated operational framework, planning processes fragment, diminishing the coherence of advocacy initiatives and undermining UNICEF's ability to lead in policy advocacy. Internal coordination suffers, hindering the timely sharing of evidence and the alignment of strategic objectives. The UNICEF Global Communication and Advocacy Strategy 2024–2030²¹⁵ highlights the need for integrated governance, defined roles, shared accountability, and standardized workflows to ensure strategic consistency and amplify policy influence.

The absence of specialized training in strategic advocacy contributes to misalignment. Staff lack updated training on methodologies to translate empirical findings into compelling policy narratives. According to the 2024–2030 Strategy, advocacy is a core organizational Change Strategy—not merely a support function—and must be embedded across all teams and contexts. It emphasises that advocacy training for Country Offices is essential to scale results and convert field-level impact into systemic change for children. During interviews,²¹⁶ it was noted that there has not been systematic training in this area.

²¹³ VCO Organogram January 2025

²¹⁴ KIs with internal VCO informants

²¹⁵ UNICEF (2024) Communication and Advocacy Towards 2030

²¹⁶ KIs with internal VCO informants

This capacity is closely tied to the evaluation's reflections on the pilot–assess–demonstrate–communicate cycle, which supports policy development, service quality improvement, and driving behaviour change. Internal documentation and interviews indicated VCO recognises these gaps in and is actively exploring strategies, challenges, and mitigation measures to strengthen advocacy capacity.

d. Private sector engagement and the dual-office model

The evaluation identified opportunities to further strengthen structural arrangements and coordination mechanisms supporting VCO's private sector engagement. The PARMO team is primarily based in HCMC, geographically separate from the Hanoi headquarters. This dual-city presence offers strategic advantages including proximity to private sector partners and market actors, while also requiring deliberate coordination mechanisms to ensure effective collaboration across functions and locations.

In this context, the evaluation observed areas where closer alignment could enhance integration. For example, a communications function within PARMO—focused on child rights and business engagement—operates alongside, but separately from, the central Communications and Advocacy function. Strengthening linkages between these roles could support greater coherence across advocacy, partnership engagement, and external communications.

Insights from internal VCO sources indicate that, as private sector engagement has expanded into thematic areas, including digital transformation, climate change, and DRR, there is scope to further clarify roles and responsibilities across sections, including between PARMO and other sections (such as Communications and SPG). This reflects the evolving nature of private sector engagement within the Country Office and points to opportunities for continued refinement of coordination arrangements as the portfolio matures.

The dual-office model would benefit from a more deliberate articulation of how HCMC can be strategically leveraged for high-level representation, partnership development, and convening. With clearer intent and coordination, the dual-city presence could further strengthen VCO's engagement with private sector and other stakeholders.

Importantly, the evaluation found strong alignment between these observations and reflections emerging from VCO's internal mid-term strategic reflection process (December 2024). During the CPE data collection phase, VCO reported that by July 2025, concrete actions had already been initiated to respond to some of these issues – particularly related to advocacy and private sector engagement.

5.4.1.4 Monitoring and reporting, including risk management

a. Internal monitoring and reporting systems

In a dynamic programming context, strong planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) are essential for evidence-based decision-making and timely course correction. As is standard practice in UNICEF, VCO's monitoring and reporting system operates across multiple levels of indicator frameworks:

- **Core CP Monitoring:** The PME team leads annual reporting on the CPD indicators, including UNSDCF, Core Standard Indicators (CSI) derived from the UNICEF Strategic Plan results framework, and RAM standard and additional indicators agreed with national partners.
- **Grant and Project Monitoring:** Each donor grant and government project document includes its own set of indicators. These may align with CPD indicators or introduce unique metrics. UNICEF Programming sections design and oversee monitoring at grant/project level. The PME unit's role at this level is complementary, to provide advisory support and conduct quality assurance on the project's ToC and M&E framework, ensuring alignment with the CPD and UNCF.
- **Annual Management Plan (AMP):** The Operations Section monitors AMP indicators, which include CPD-linked and office-specific priorities such as staff wellbeing.

At the project level, M&E plans are agreed in Programme Documents between UNICEF and implementing partners. Key Performance Indicators are reported quarterly, biannually, and annually. Day-to-day monitoring is primarily conducted by PMUs, under the oversight of the implementing partner's Project Director. UNICEF focal points (including provincial coordinators and sectoral staff) maintain regular communication with PMUs to ensure quality, address issues, and make adjustments. Monitoring tools vary by project but commonly include surveys, studies, situation analyses, assessments, evaluations, and field visits by UNICEF, PMUs, and implementing partners. UNICEF also participates in activities (e.g. workshops) and conducts on-site financial spot checks. Field visit frequency is determined annually based on available resources. All projects undergo periodic reviews, including quarterly evaluation meetings with VCO, PMUs, and partners. High-priority or high-risk interventions may involve ad-hoc or third-party monitoring. Donor requirements often include end-of-year surveys by independent consultants. Through data collection at provincial level, the evaluation found M&E activities to be functioning as outlined. However, the evaluation noted some inconsistencies in how government implementing partners have collected evidence to assess results of activities. For instance, an absence of standardised pre- and post-testing in teacher training and limited use of KAP studies in SBC initiatives. These gaps may hinder the

ability to assess the contribution of activities to intended outcomes. Internally, M&E capacity varies across sections, and the limited size of the PME team may constrain the scope and depth of monitoring activities.

The EA (2023) noted that while outcome indicators capture planned changes, the qualitative evidence of achieving those changes are not easily observed, limiting the measurability of the CP and UNICEF's contribution to outcomes. Donors are increasingly requiring this level of analysis within grant results frameworks (e.g. during mid-term and end-of-grant reviews). However, significant constraints persist, including inconsistent national data on outcome indicators. Most of the data reported by VCO focuses on activities and immediate outputs (such as the number of individuals trained), with fewer indicators on outcome and impact level results. This structure is common in results frameworks and is not indicative of a weakness. However, the CPE identified opportunities to enhance the use of indicators that capture quality improvements and outcome-level changes.²¹⁷ Such data are essential for VCO to credibly monitor progress against the ToC and to assess long-term impact. High-level indicators (e.g., legislation enactment or population-level changes) derived from government data, provides limited insight into UNICEF's direct contribution. Some gaps remain between these high-level results and the output-level data reported on. For example, while monitoring data shows numbers of adolescents participating in a programme, it may lack accompanying evidence of changes in knowledge, behaviour, or service quality. Incorporating intermediary indicators (e.g. measures of improved knowledge or practices, enhanced access to services, service quality, or client satisfaction) could strengthen progress tracking and provide a clearer picture of UNICEF's contributions. See annex 13 for further analysis in this area. The use of a refined Theory of Change as the foundation for the evaluation framework is appropriate for the identification of key indicators across the entire causal chain, including underlying assumptions.

As discussed under EQ8 and Annex 12, while many indicators in RAM reporting include disaggregation features, their validity for measuring intersectionality depends on whether data collection and reporting mechanisms support integrated, multi-dimensional analysis. While data disaggregation is to some extent hampered by external constraints in national data (see section b), efforts to strengthen this capacity (internally and externally) is essential to ensuring the CP is effectively addressing equity and inclusion. Pilot activities, along with the research, evaluations, and studies conducted by VCO, present valuable opportunities for UNICEF to showcase best practices in data disaggregation by key variables—and to highlight the insights such data can generate.

Internal informants reported that the Typhoon Yagi response strengthened VCO's humanitarian programme monitoring. Third-party monitors conducted PDM of UNICEF's cash transfer program. While this evaluation did not focus in-depth on the Yagi response and monitoring, the PDM was raised as an example of a monitoring channel that had provided quality feedback and learning, and enhanced AAP. Learning from the humanitarian PDM and exploring the use of Third-Party Monitoring in the core programmatic areas may offer a means to strengthen data quality and completeness, while reducing staff travel demands.

b. External national data and monitoring systems

UNICEF aligns its indicators with national plans and relies heavily on government data. However, weaknesses in government monitoring systems—especially at the local level—pose constraints. Government and implementing partner monitoring, including pre- and post-activity assessments, is often insufficient for measuring outcomes. As referred to in section a, at the provincial level, the evaluation identified some weaknesses and inconsistencies in evidence collection by implementing partners. Access to disaggregated government data remains limited. For example, a challenge for efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusion for all children relates to collecting data on progress of children in satellite

- e-MCH system launch with MOH in 2024 to enable data-informed planning and timely responses in maternal and child healthcare.
- Global *Data Must Speak* initiative, identifying factors linked to school performance and learning outcomes to improve equity-driven planning and decision-making.
- Advocacy in collaboration with the GSE for the inclusion of data on children up to age 18 in the annual statistical yearbook—an expansion from the previous upper limit of 16 years.
- National Nutrition Survey, the Disability Survey, and the Survey on SDG indicators on Children and Women in Viet Nam (the national version of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6).
- National census and identification systems data analysis in partnership with UNFPA, to generate insights to inform policy and programming.
- National evaluation capacity building on management of investment capital in programmes/projects relating to children in 2024, with the MPI and Vietnam National University.

²¹⁷ This finding was based on a triangulated analysis of the following data sources: 1. Triangulation with related findings in other VCO assessments/evaluations during the CP. Including the Evaluability Assessment (2023), light-touch gender review (2023), and assessment of knowledge gaps in adolescent and youth programming (2025), 2. Review of VCO monitoring and evaluation reports and data, at multiple levels of indicator reporting (e.g. CP annual reporting, provincial programme level monitoring reports, project evaluations), 3. Interviews with UNICEF staff, 4. Limitations experienced by the CPE in applying contribution analysis approach to assessment of effectiveness of the CP in various outcome areas, based on available data and evidence.

schools. MOET aggregates data from ‘core’ schools with several satellite campuses – which often masks significant inequity – for example in terms of connectivity, teacher to pupil ratios, and learning outcomes. For UNICEF, addressing this issue with MOET is critical for the aspiration of LNOB in Learning and Skills. UNICEF’s access to financial data on child-related government spending is limited (see section 5.3.2.). Disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity, and disability remains limited across national datasets, and marginalised groups remain underrepresented. Key informants, including VCO staff and government staff, emphasised the need for continued support to improve government data architecture. VCO has made targeted investments during this CP to enhance national M&E capacity and data systems. For example:

VCO’s RAM reporting includes the output indicator ‘*Availability of national data disaggregated by sex, age and geography on child rights realization, including data on children with disabilities*’, rated as ‘fully achieved’ in 2024.²¹⁸ This indicator is designed to measure UNICEF’s support to government, rather than capturing outcome level results. In 2023, UNICEF’s CSI system introduced the output indicator ‘*Level of UNICEF support to Government to improve the availability and quality of child-related SDG indicators is being implemented*’. This was assessed as ‘5’ and rated as ‘fully achieved’ in 2024.²¹⁹ Going forward, this indicator holds potential to meaningfully capture UNICEF’s contribution to child-related national data.

c. Evaluation and strategic learning exercises

The Costed Evaluation Plan (CEP) outlines strategically important evaluations for the CP cycle, though not all planned evaluations are included. The CEP 2022-2026 outlined three evaluations. According to reporting in COAR 2024, four evaluations had been conducted.²²⁰ VCO also maintains an Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Plan (IMEP), a living tool to plan, monitor, and report on all evidence-generating activities (research, surveys, evaluations, and studies).²²¹ The SOPs for the IMEP were updated in 2022, with the aim to ensure high-quality and strategically relevant studies, research, and evaluations. As of April 2025, 12 activities were included (out of a total of 24, a selection based on the established IMEP criteria). Annex 15 presents IMEP activities by section, type, and estimated budget. CSDE accounts for the highest share of evidence generation activities, a reflection of the comparatively larger scope of the section which includes four sectoral units. During the CP, evaluations have been initiated based on several key factors. These include key moments of the programme lifecycle (for example, this CPE and the forthcoming digital literacy and transferable skills evaluation), opportunities for strategic learning, and the need to generate evidence to support the scaling up of successful interventions. For instance, an after-action review of the Yagi response, including the cash transfer pilot, are ongoing, designed to inform future preparedness and response to emergencies. Similarly, the *Formative Evaluation of Family and Juvenile Courts in Viet Nam (2024)*²²² aimed to provide evidence on the potential for scale-up of the EU-JULE programme. Evaluations have also been conducted in response to donor requirements, or when the VCO is selected as a case study by the Evaluation Office. These triggers ensure that evaluations are aligned with strategic priorities, contributing to evidence-based decision-making.

d. Risk management

VCO operates in a complex environment, facing internal and external factors that may ultimately affect programme implementation. Despite these challenges, VCO has maintained a strong approach to risk monitoring and the identification of mitigation measures. The primary mechanism for strategic risk management is the VCO’s rolling AMP. A comprehensive risk library is developed annually with inputs from all programme sections and is reviewed by the Country Management Team to inform updates to the AMP. The Operations Section leads this process, ensuring that risk management remains integrated into strategic planning. Importantly, the VCO has adopted an approach to decision-making that considers both the risks of action and inaction. In 2025, the office advocated with EAPRO for greater flexibility in the AMP process, emphasising the need for it to be a living document rather than one constrained by fixed deadlines. This request was accepted for the current year, allowing VCO to update the AMP and associated risk assessments in an adaptive manner.

5.4.1.5 Other operational efficiency measures

Operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness are crucial considerations for UNICEF. VCO has implemented several measures to enhance operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness, including:

- **Long-term agreements (LTAs):** LTAs streamlined procurement, reduced transaction costs, and enabled economies of scale. By 2024, 51% of service contracts and 69% of goods contracts used LTAs. These were particularly effective during emergencies, such as the Typhoon Yagi response,

²¹⁸ VCO RAM End Year Summary Narrative Report 2024

²¹⁹ *Ibid*

²²⁰ Including the IECD endline programme evaluation completed in 2022, which was included in the CEP of the CP 2027-2021.

²²¹ *IMEP 2022-2026 Criteria for inclusion of data / evidence generation activities in the IMEP:* To fulfil at least three out of the four criteria: 1. It is strategically important to provide evidence for: a. informing programme development, b. informing policy advice and advocacy, c. holding policymakers / other duty bearers accountable in major programs for child rights. 2. The study/research is vital to deliver a priority of the Annual Management Plan; 3. UNICEF funds at least 20% of the activity; 4. Budget exceeds 40,000 USD

²²² UNICEF (2024) Report Formative Evaluation of Family and Juvenile Courts in Viet Nam. Ha Noi, 2024. This Evaluation was conducted by NHQuang&Associates Law Firm under the EU Justice and Legal Empowerment Programme in Viet Nam (EU JULE).

where an existing LTA with FAO and Viet Nam Post facilitated rapid cash transfers. However, efficiency gains must be weighed against the time and cost of establishing LTAs.

- **Corporate credit cards:** Widely used for small-scale payments, corporate credit cards have reduced administrative burden and overheads. Transactions are monitored by UNICEF's Global Shared Services Centre, which also advises on cost optimisation.
- **Common Back Office (CBO) Initiative:** As part of the global One UN initiative, UNICEF collaborated with other UN agencies to consolidate operational functions. This aims to reduce duplication, lower administrative and transaction costs, and enhance service quality and effectiveness. While the evaluation had limited data to assess the full impact of the CBO on VCO's operational efficiency, informants identified some challenges in realising efficiency gains in supply chain and procurement due to the programmatic nature of VCO's procurement activities, which often fall outside CBO's scope.

5.5 Evaluation criteria 5: Sustainability

5.5.1 EQ10: Are the UNICEF interventions and their results likely to continue without UNICEF support? What are the contributing or constraining factors to make a durable change?

Key Finding 14: While UNICEF's advocacy has been highly effective in securing agenda placement and driving normative change, the long-term sustainability of these community-level models will ultimately depend on the ability to leverage diversified financing and to maintain high-quality service delivery within a national context that increasingly prioritizes efficiency and target attainment. Localized pilot interventions (e.g., menstrual-hygiene management or community parenting groups) remain vulnerable to discontinuation unless they are accompanied from inception by clear exit strategies, costed scale-up plans embedded in government budgets, and strengthened M&E mechanisms to track outcomes and ensure fidelity.

a. Contributing factors to sustainability

Several factors strengthen the likelihood of continued impact. First, UNICEF's strategic advocacy has yielded high-level policy gains that are self-perpetuating. The August 2024 enactment of the Decree on Social Work exemplifies how sustained technical assistance and evidence-based dialogue can embed professional standards in national legislation, creating a regulatory framework that outlasts any single project cycle. Similarly, collaboration with the MOET to develop foundational frameworks for digital transformation and AI integration in teacher curricula has produced institutional products—i.e., normative documents and accredited training modules (see Box 3 for further details).

Second, capacity-building efforts have focused on equipping government counterparts and civil-society organizations with the competencies necessary to deliver and oversee services independently. Since 2022, UNICEF's work to define roles, competencies, and professional standards for the social service workforce across health, education, and protection sectors has laid a foundation for tailored training programmes and licensing schemes. A notable example is the collaboration with the MOLISA to develop a competency-based training and certification framework for social workers. This framework includes standardized curricula, assessment protocols, and a licensing mechanism that enables provincial authorities to accredit practitioners based on nationally endorsed criteria (Circular 03/2023/TT-BYT and Circular 20/2023 TT-BGDDT). Such systemic investments in human capital reduce reliance on external technical inputs over time. In the justice sector, the EU-JULE project—with UNICEF co-leadership—successfully institutionalized a juvenile justice course within university legal education. By embedding child-friendly justice principles in academic curricula, the initiative ensures a pipeline of qualified professionals to sustain reform momentum.

Third, political commitment at provincial and district levels provide a critical enabling environment. In Da Nang and Hue, for example, local governments have expressed strong ownership of school-based mental health programmes, digital libraries, and child-council structures under the Child Friendly City initiative. Their willingness to allocate line-item funding—even if modest—to these activities signals an intention to continue, albeit on a constrained scale. Moreover, strategic partnerships with donors such as the EU for justice reform (Phase 2 budget negotiations with the MOF) point to an emerging ecosystem of stakeholders ready to finance and steward UNICEF-initiated reforms. Similarly, in Dien Bien and Gia Lai, local authorities have demonstrated active support for UNICEF-supported interventions, including participation in planning processes, facilitation of intersectoral coordination, and contributions of resources. These efforts reflect emerging local ownership and scalability potential. However, sustainability is not yet guaranteed, and no formal exit strategy is currently in place.

UNICEF's interventions in Viet Nam are widely perceived by local stakeholders as practical, context-sensitive, and co-developed rather than externally imposed. This perception contributes significantly to

their sustainability beyond the duration of UNICEF's direct support. In provinces such as Dien Bien and Gia Lai, community members, local officials, and frontline service providers consistently emphasized that UNICEF's approach respects local realities and builds on existing capacities. Some examples are (i) community-based nutrition clubs that utilise locally available food and equipment, reinforcing household-level ownership and reducing dependency on external inputs; (ii) parenting groups that are facilitated by individuals who speak local languages and understand cultural norms, fostering trust and sustained participation, and (iii) school clubs empower students to address real-life challenges—such as climate change, online safety, and hygiene—through peer-led activities that are both relevant and replicable.

Policy makers at both national and local levels view these models as low-cost, high-impact, and adaptable across diverse settings—key attributes for long-term sustainability. Stakeholders emphasized that the use of local facilitators, locally sourced materials, and participatory methods has fostered strong community ownership, enhancing the likelihood of sustained implementation. While these factors position the initiatives for scale-up, their durability will ultimately depend on continued political commitment, integration into government systems, and alignment with domestic budgetary priorities.

Additional facilitating factors for durable change outlined earlier in the report, include UNICEF's role in bridging policy and practice and its streamlined financing mechanisms that have fostered trust and enabled greater autonomy among implementing partners.

b. Constraining factors to durable change

Nonetheless, a number of structural and contextual issues threaten sustainability. The most pervasive constraint is financial. Government budget cycles and allocation procedures often preclude the kind of advance-based financing that accelerates project implementation. Where costed scale-up strategies are limited—particularly for interventions originally funded on a pilot basis—local authorities face economic limitations to maintain service levels. But other key, high-level informants at the local level report that, although they are willing to provide funding, UNICEF's lack of continuity or exit strategies limits the articulation of a joint work proposal. This demonstrates the existence of grey areas in the implementation of the policy cycle and underscores the need to develop better continuity or exit strategies. In many provinces, only a small proportion of communes have benefited from UNICEF pilots, and the lack of clarity around what constitutes “scaling up”—whether replication, modular roll-out, or policy-driven institutionalization—further complicates resource mobilization.

Equally problematic is the fragmentation of activities across sectors. Some interventions exist in isolation—in some places, school-based menstrual hygiene sessions apart from community-level water-sanitation initiatives, or parenting groups under child protection unlinked to ECD curricula.

Finally, across several sectors, non-government stakeholders highlighted a recurring gap between the existence of policies or standards and the actual quality of services experienced by communities. While regulatory frameworks have advanced, implementation remains uneven. Mental health emerged as a particularly illustrative example: despite recent policy advances, stakeholder consultations and evidence—such as the Viet Nam Adolescent Mental Health Survey—indicate limited awareness of these regulations among local authorities and communities, alongside inconsistent service delivery. This reflects the early stage of the mental health agenda in Viet Nam rather than a shortcoming in current programme efforts. In this context, it remains important for UNICEF to continue supporting demonstrative interventions closely connected to service providers, both to strengthen delivery mechanisms and to generate evidence on access and service quality that can inform effective nationwide implementation.

Additional constraining factors were outlined earlier in the document, including financial and structural limitations such as modest allowances for frontline workers, and commune restructuring—all of which have affected implementation continuity and staff retention. Capacity gaps at sub-national level, limited investment in physical infrastructure, and policy integration challenges further constrain the sustainability of results. Administrative bottlenecks have also slowed implementation and resource mobilization. Additional data disaggregation, where feasible, could contribute to improved targeting of marginalized groups in some situations, and improved access to government financial information may help better inform advocacy for budgetary shifts. Finally, geographic and socio-cultural barriers—ranging from remote terrain to entrenched norms—continue to challenge outreach and behaviour change.

c. Assessing the likelihood of sustained impact

When evaluating the prospects for continued impact, it is instructive to differentiate between policy-level reforms and community-level practices. Legislative achievements—such as the Social Work Decree or the juvenile justice curriculum—are highly likely to endure, as they have been codified within national systems and embraced by academic institutions. Frameworks developed with MOET for digital teaching and AI

integration similarly carry forward under ministerial oversight, provided that professional development budgets are allocated. In contrast, discrete community pilots—such as the menstrual hygiene interventions or parenting groups under the “Nobody Is Perfect” curriculum—face steeper sustainability challenges. Without explicit national guidelines, dedicated line-items in provincial budgets, and local staff trained in programme management, these models may lapse once external funding ceases.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Relevance

Conclusion 1: The CP is highly relevant to the rights of children, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. Its strategic design reflects a strong commitment to equity and inclusion, aligning with national priorities and the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and deliberately targets systemic service gaps in disadvantaged provinces and among ethnic minority communities. Its context-sensitive, locally adapted interventions have produced measurable improvements in child wellbeing across core sectors—health, nutrition, WASH, education, and child protection—through models that balance national-level policy engagement with community-level delivery in three prioritized provinces and one city.²²³

1. UNICEF Viet Nam’s CP has demonstrated relevance through flexible, responsive interventions that have improved child wellbeing in underserved communities, particularly in health, nutrition, WASH, education, and child protection. Local initiatives such as village midwife networks, nutrition clubs, inclusive education, and WASH infrastructure highlight its effectiveness and relevance.
2. To fully realize its potential, strategic enhancements are needed in cross-cutting areas including early childhood development, parenting, and youth engagement. Participatory mechanisms for marginalized children and adolescents also need strengthening to ensure meaningful engagement.

Conclusion 2: The CP is strategically positioned to respond to the country’s evolving development landscape, demonstrating enduring relevance through its technical expertise, financial agility, and trusted partnerships with both central and local government counterparts, and credibility with international and national NGOs. Field-level engagement has further reinforced its reputation as a preferred partner, particularly in underserved regions, where UNICEF’s support for midwife training, life skills education, and emergency nutrition has filled critical service gaps and improved outcomes for vulnerable populations.²²⁴

1. UNICEF’s longstanding engagement with the Government of Viet Nam—spanning over five decades and grounded in continuous operational presence—has cultivated deep institutional credibility, enabling it to influence national priorities and support strategic reforms through high-impact interventions. This sustained engagement has enabled the organization to develop a nuanced understanding of local power dynamics and institutional capacities—an asset that can be further leveraged to promote inclusive, context-sensitive programming.
2. UNICEF’s integration of international best practices and normative frameworks has shaped policy reform and enabled the scaling of successful models. Its responsiveness during crises such as Typhoon Yagi and the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored its operational agility and humanitarian commitment. While UNICEF’s contributions are widely recognised, stakeholders also identified strategic opportunities for refinement to ensure continued relevance and impact amid Viet Nam’s evolving socioeconomic landscape. These include strengthening UNICEF’s role in shaping inclusive, child-sensitive public policies; intensifying advocacy around child rights to prevent widening inequalities; enhancing inter-agency collaboration within the UN system to foster programmatic synergies; and ensuring that economic growth translates into equitable outcomes for children, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

6.2 Coherence

Conclusion 3: UNICEF’s CP has effectively built meaningful partnerships and coordination mechanisms with key actors, particularly government counterparts at both national and sub-national levels. These collaborative efforts have been consistently recognised by stakeholders as a core strength, enabling UNICEF to play a pivotal role within the UN system in advancing child rights through both targeted interventions and joint platforms.²²⁵

²²³ Related to the EQ1 and 3 and linked to findings: 1 and 3.

²²⁴ Related to the EQ2 and linked to finding: 2.

²²⁵ Related to the EQ4 and linked to finding: 4.

1. UNICEF's intersectoral coordination in Viet Nam is perceived as effective and adaptive at the field level, supported by committed staff and integrated programming. Nonetheless, there is room to strengthen inter-agency collaboration to maximize impact and avoid duplication. Strengthening institutional mechanisms for integration and enhancing inter-agency collaboration would enable UNICEF and UN agencies to more fully leverage its comparative advantage and contribute to system-wide coherence and impact.

Conclusion 4: UNICEF Viet Nam reflects a strong alignment with key international commitments on gender equality, equity for children, and the human rights-based approach. The CP is largely gender-responsive, with emerging gender-transformative practices in select sectors such as WASH, education, and social protection. However, to fully realize its transformative potential, the programme must deepen its integration of gender equality principles.²²⁶

1. However, the evaluation highlights persistent gaps that constrain the full realization of these commitments. While monitoring frameworks are becoming more inclusive, further efforts are needed to ensure consistent application and to deepen intersectional approaches. Advancing gender integration will require a more deliberate focus on shifting social norms, strengthening data systems, and embracing transformative approaches. Revisiting the previous light-touch gender review and implementing its recommendations would mark a critical step toward aligning UNICEF's work with higher levels of the gender continuum model.
2. Disability inclusion remains insufficiently mainstreamed across programme components, with persistent structural and operational barriers that go beyond limited disaggregated data. While government stakeholders noted progress in specific areas—such as early detection of disability efforts under the IECD initiative, including training activities in priority provinces and a training-of-trainers programme across 15 provinces—these advances are not yet embedded in a system-wide approach.

6.3 Effectiveness

Conclusion 5: UNICEF has adopted several key strategies to enhance the effectiveness of its programming in Viet Nam, enabling it to address critical issues in social development, health, education, and child protection. The CP met most output targets with positive results, adapting well to COVID-19 and Typhoon Yagi challenges by effectively adjusting budget and strategies.²²⁷

1. In the field of child survival and development, UNICEF has played a pivotal role in advancing child health in Viet Nam, with notable achievements in maternal and child health, nutrition, WASH, and climate resilience. Its multisectoral interventions, evidence-based advocacy, and strategic partnerships have addressed systemic challenges and promoted sustainable development. Through its strategic interventions, UNICEF has also mitigated the immediate effects of crises such as COVID-19 and Typhoon Yagi while also laying the groundwork for sustainable improvements in nutrition and health systems. However, geographic and resource limitations persist, highlighting the need for a more targeted approach to maximize impact.
2. In learning and skills, UNICEF's collaboration with MOET has significantly advanced the Learning and Skills agenda, marked by technical expertise and contextual insight. Progress includes embedding digital and socio-emotional skills into national frameworks and developing a rights-based early childhood education curriculum. However, challenges remain in accessing reliable data and ensuring inclusive, participatory approaches—particularly for CWDs and ethnic minorities. Greater focus is needed on critically assessing education technology innovations, leveraging parental engagement, and addressing harmful social norms and stereotypes. A more comprehensive strategy to dismantle barriers—especially those related to gender, disability, and ethnicity—will be essential for sustained, equitable change.
3. UNICEF's child protection work has achieved notable success, particularly in juvenile justice reform and strengthening social service systems. The approval of the Law on Justice for Minors marks a major milestone, providing a robust legal framework for children's access to justice. UNICEF's technical leadership in joint UN initiatives has contributed to integrated responses to violence against

²²⁶ Related to the EQ5 and linked to finding: 5.

²²⁷ Related to the EQ6 and linked to findings: 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

children and women. Greater emphasis is needed on parenting, tackling harmful social norms, and adopting gender-transformative approaches—especially engaging men and boys. Strengthening early detection and support systems for CWDs, expanding partnerships with civil society, and building adult capacity to facilitate child participation will be critical for advancing inclusive and rights-based protection for all children in Viet Nam.

4. UNICEF Viet Nam has contributed to shape national social policy and governance by leveraging evidence-based advocacy and technical expertise to embed child rights into long-term reforms. Its role as a trusted government advisor has strengthened positioning UNICEF as a leading force in advancing accountability to the CRC and promoting child-focused policy innovation. During this CP, UNICEF sought that child-related priorities were integrated into major national frameworks, including the 2021–2030 National Financing Strategy, the Communist Party Politburo Directive on childcare, education, and protection, and Resolution No. 42 on social policy reform. UNICEF further influenced the long-term vision for Viet Nam 2045 and the 2026–2030 Development Plans, while delivering its first humanitarian cash transfer in response to Typhoon Yagi.
5. To sustain and scale these gains, UNICEF must address challenges such as uneven provincial fiscal capacity, implementation gaps, and limited shock-responsive financing. Continued progress will depend on institutionalizing reforms through budget alignment, regulatory improvements, robust indicator systems, and long-term investment in youth engagement and ecosystems.

Conclusion 6: UNICEF’s investment in technical assistance, policy dialogue, and institutional capacity-building has positioned it as a trusted advisor in advancing inclusive social policies. UNICEF Viet Nam’s approach under both the current and preceding CPs has deliberately focused on piloting and modelling scalable interventions rather than direct service delivery. Pilots have demonstrated relevance, innovation, and scalability but they face challenges such as inadequate documentation, unclear project definitions, and misaligned success criteria.²²⁸

1. UNICEF’s field-focused approach distinguishes it from other agencies. UNICEF Viet Nam has demonstrated its capacity to catalyse systemic change through context-sensitive innovations, high-level advocacy, and community-driven programming. These efforts have advanced inclusive service delivery and child-focused reforms, positioning UNICEF as a key actor in shaping Viet Nam’s development landscape. However, to sustain and scale these achievements, strategic enhancements are needed.
2. As Viet Nam transitions to upper-middle-income status and VCO aligns with UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026–2029, the programme must evolve to meet increasingly complex governance and development demands. This requires deepening expertise in public finance, legal frameworks, and policy analysis to enhance UNICEF’s capacity to influence decision-making at the highest levels. Strengthening specialized capabilities in advocacy, fiscal policy, and institutional reform—supported by unified strategic frameworks, robust monitoring systems, and cross-sectoral coordination—will be essential to translating technical strengths into sustained, transformative impact.

6.4 Efficiency

Conclusion 7: Despite external constraints affecting funding utilisation and timely delivery, the VCO has shown strong capacity in mobilising public and private sector resources, with notable achievements in fundraising and emergency response. Human resources and monitoring systems have supported implementation effectively, though strategic shifts in UNICEF’s role require further reflection in the articulation of human resources and data systems.²²⁹

3. VCO has demonstrated a strong ability to mobilise funds from both the public sector sources and the private sector, with steady growth in PSFR over the CP period. However, funding utilization has also been influenced by external factors, including government planning processes and an increased reliance on direct implementation in response to contextual requirements.
4. As PSFR has expanded, clearer articulation of roles across programme and partnership functions has emerged as an area of further strengthening. While the dual-city presence—with PARMO in HCMC and VCO in Hanoi—offers strategic advantages, it places demands on coordination.

²²⁸ Related to the EQ8 and linked to finding: 12.

²²⁹ Related to the EQ9 and linked to finding: 13

5. Overall, staffing levels and technical capacity were adequate for CP delivery. However, as UNICEF shifts toward technical assistance and policy advice, HR structures must evolve—especially in gender, youth engagement, advocacy, and private sector work.
6. The M&E system, including risk monitoring, supports management of the CP and aligns with UNICEF global practices. However, gaps exist between the nature of data typically reported on, and the ability to monitor progress against the ToC and assess long-term impact. Weaknesses in national outcome level data continues to pose a challenge for VCO in effectively capturing its contributions.
7. External constraints have significantly delayed the timeliness of CP interventions, despite VCO's adaptability and responsiveness.

6.5 Sustainability

Conclusion 8: The long-term sustainability of UNICEF Viet Nam's achievements hinges on a) embedding successful community-level models into government systems with secured, diversified financing and robust national monitoring frameworks, and b) addressing entrenched behaviours, norms and stereotypes. The CP support has integrated child-related issues into national policies, backed by strong evidence, political commitment, and resource allocation, ensuring the sustainability of results. Despite challenges in service delivery, data availability and sectoral coordination, national partners' commitment and political provide a solid foundation for sustained impact.²³⁰

1. UNICEF's interventions are sustainable due to their alignment with national goals, ensuring the permanence of local infrastructures and services, particularly in health, education, and nutrition sectors. However, sustainability varies across different programmes, with policy-level interventions showing greater promise than service delivery programmes. Policy-level interventions once tested and piloted, have the potential to become national frameworks, ensuring their sustainability. In contrast, service delivery programmes may struggle with sustainability due to their reliance on continued support. Over the next programme cycle, efforts will need to focus on significantly improving the quality of services and exit strategies.

7. Lessons Learned

The CPE provides valuable learning on the key functions essential for shaping effective development policies:

1. During Viet Nam's recent administrative restructuring, which involved the merging of several institutions and provinces, the evaluation found that beyond the tangible results linked to the established CP causal chain, UNICEF's accompaniment and advocacy played a critical role. By actively placing children's interests at the centre of decision-making, UNICEF was able to influence outcomes in ways that safeguarded child rights during a period of institutional transition. This experience highlights the importance of maintaining a strong advocacy presence in times of systemic adjustment, ensuring that reforms do not overlook the needs of the most vulnerable.
2. The CPE highlights the importance of distinguishing between political and regulatory agenda-setting and the actual quality of services delivered to children and families. Legislative and policy reforms are necessary foundations, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on whether frontline actors have the capability (knowledge and skills), the motivation (both conscious and habitual drivers of behaviour), and the opportunity (institutional and contextual conditions) to apply these reforms in practice.²³¹ Experience shows that systems change is sustainable only when reforms are complemented by investments that strengthen workforce capacity, foster motivation, and ensure enabling opportunities. This underscores that achieving child-level outcomes requires not only policy breakthroughs but also attention to the behavioural dynamics of service delivery.
3. Systems-level reforms in child protection and justice require more than legislative breakthroughs; they depend equally on sustained investment in the attitudes, knowledge, and practices of frontline actors. UNICEF's contribution to the Law on Justice for Minors, the establishment of Family and Juvenile Courts, and the Decree on Social Work illustrates how evidence gathering, international benchmarking, and technical advocacy can position child-sensitive approaches within national frameworks. Importantly, these achievements were realised as part of a broader joint-UN effort, with UNICEF recognised for bringing specialized expertise on children to the partnership. This underscores the value

²³⁰ Related to the EQ7 and EQ10 and linked to findings:11 and 14

²³¹ See Mayne, John. (2017). The COM-B Theory of Change Model (V3), for further details

of combining institutional reform with multi-agency collaboration to achieve durable improvements for children.

4. The CPE shows that integrated regional approaches—linking health, education, protection and other services across municipal, provincial and national levels—can generate systemic improvements for children and adolescents. A key insight is that progress is most effective when strategies are grounded in problem-based approaches, with priorities defined at the local level. By articulating interventions around locally identified challenges and fostering collaboration among diverse actors—government departments, private sector, academia and civil society—UNICEF has helped build solutions that are context-sensitive, adaptive and sustainable. This experience underscores the importance of combining regional integration with locally driven problem definition to ensure that reforms respond to real needs and achieve lasting impact.
5. Finally, in the course of the CPE several key informants in senior positions recalled having been able to study as children thanks to UNICEF's support. This testimony illustrates UNICEF's long-standing presence in Viet Nam, accompanying the country through successive stages of development. Over time, UNICEF's role has evolved from direct service provision to a more strategic function focused on policy advice and advocacy. The lesson is that sustained engagement across generations not only builds institutional memory and credibility, but also enables UNICEF to adapt its role in line with national development trajectories—shifting from service delivery to influencing systemic reforms and policy agendas.

8. Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are derived from the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. They were developed independently by the evaluation team and are expected to be discussed during a validation meeting with the reference group and the UNICEF Viet Nam team to refine them and support their ownership. To facilitate their use, the recommendations are organized by target unit and linked to the conclusions on which they are based.

Below are nine recommendations—five strategic and four programmatic—for the Viet Nam Country Office to consider as it develops the next CP, each accompanied by illustrative examples for action. The recommendations are categorized by priority level: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. Short-term recommendations are proposed for implementation during the final phase of the current CP; medium-term recommendations are intended for the planning and launch of the next programme cycle; and long-term recommendations are to be carried out during the implementation of the next CP.

Recommendation 1: Adapting to Viet Nam's transition to Upper-Middle-Income status and align with the final phase of the SDGs and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026 – 2029

Level: Strategic	Based on conclusions: 1, 2, 5
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to: VCO management

1. **Address emerging challenges:** As Viet Nam transitions toward upper-middle-income status, UNICEF must proactively position itself as a key advocate for ensuring that economic progress translates into equitable outcomes for all children—particularly the most marginalized. The next Country Programme should reflect this ambition by addressing both unfinished priorities and emerging cross-cutting challenges, including mental health, digital transformation, and climate change. Given that the 2027–2031 programme cycle aligns with the final phase of the SDGs, and in light of Viet Nam's strong commitment to SDG monitoring through regular Voluntary National Reviews, the SDGs should serve as a strategic framework for identifying and addressing areas of greatest need. This requires moving beyond national averages to explicitly target provincial and social disparities that risk being obscured in aggregate data. This should go beyond aggregate national indicators to explicitly account for provincial and social disparities. This approach is particularly critical in the context of anticipated reductions in ODA resources, which demand a sharpened focus on value for money. Field-level interventions must be strategically designed to act as catalysts for systemic improvements and drivers of institutional change, rather than isolated service delivery efforts. Tackling these issues will require maintaining a strong upstream focus to influence the policy and fiscal frameworks that determine system-wide outcomes for children. Core priorities should include delivering high-quality, disaggregated data analysis to inform government decision-making; enhancing thought leadership through rigorously evidence-based recommendations; and deepening engagement in child-focused budgeting and public finance analysis to drive equity in resource allocation.
2. **Strategic alignment with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026-2029 and acceleration:** UNICEF Viet Nam should strategically align its country programme with the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan by prioritising population-level results

across the five Impact Areas—particularly those most urgent and intractable in the national context.²³² Leverage the three key accelerators to drive cross-sectoral impact: (i) adolescent girls: prioritise gender-responsive programming in education, protection, and health, especially in underserved regions; (ii) community and front-line systems: invest in local service delivery platforms and para-professional workforce to extend reach and accountability, and (iii) innovation and digital transformation: modernise data systems (e.g., CRVS, case management) with child-data safeguards and enable digital inclusion for children and families.

3. **Focus interventions in most deprived areas:** VCO should continue to support well-targeted downstream interventions to ensure that no child is left behind in Viet Nam's economic, social, and technological development—particularly CWDs - aligned with the National Target Programme for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas for the 2021–2030 period and the Strategy on Ethnic Affairs until 2025, with a vision to 2030. This will require intensified engagement at the local level in underprivileged and deprived areas to build capacity, secure sustainable financing, and ensure interventions are effective, scalable, and resilient (See recommendation 9). By aligning practical, on-the-ground innovations with policy influence, legal reform, and robust data governance, UNICEF can help ensure that successful models are not isolated pilots but are integrated into systems, budgets, and laws that sustain inclusive progress for the most marginalised children (See recommendation 3).
4. **Support the improvement of the quality of public services:** To enhance the delivery of quality services, it is crucial to make institutional investment to foster long-term capacity building through evidence-based research and global knowledge networks. Efforts should be directed towards capacity development of frontline professionals (supply side) and social behaviour change (demand side), including the design and implementation of evaluations that measure the change achieved. Advocate to national stakeholders to balance efficiency and target achievement with a commitment to improving service quality.

Recommendation 2: Consolidate UN System efficiency and strategic focus

Level: Strategic	Based on conclusions: 3
Priority: Long-term	Directed to VCO management

The **UN system** is undergoing **structural consolidation**, reducing its **footprint in individual countries**. As agencies take on **greater responsibilities**, UNICEF must (i) consolidate and actively project its comparative advantage in education and child protection and health by positioning itself as a **leading technical authority** and convener within the UN system and beyond; and (ii) **strengthen inter-agency collaboration**, ensuring **efficient resource allocation**.

UNICEF possesses significant institutional strengths, and a unique mandate centred on the rights and wellbeing of children, positioning it as a key actor within the UNCT. Its technical expertise, long-standing partnerships, and programmatic reach offer considerable potential to contribute more strategically to collective UN efforts. The following areas present concrete opportunities for UNICEF to enhance its comparative advantage and deepen its impact, according to the consolidation of different stakeholder's view:

1. **Strengthening strategic leadership in social policy and systems:** UNICEF is well-placed to assume a more prominent role in shaping the UN's collective approach to social protection in Viet Nam. Building on its technical leadership and partnerships in social assistance, UNICEF can help consolidate UN support in this domain through closer coordination with other agencies. In addition, as Viet Nam undergoes institutional reforms—including the merger of administrative units and decentralization of governance—UNICEF's existing sub-national presence and relationships with provincial authorities position it to support development planning, investment prioritization, and public financial management reforms. These contributions would reinforce the UN's relevance in supporting inclusive and equitable governance.
2. **Expanding roles in protection, accountability, and inclusion:** Globally, UNICEF is recognised as a leading agency on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In Viet Nam, as the UN system works to establish a comprehensive PSEAH (Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment) framework, UNICEF has begun contributing through the development of standard operating procedures for case referral. However, there is scope for UNICEF to take a more proactive role, including the creation of communications materials and broader guidance to support survivor-centred approaches. Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated Accountability to Affected Persons (AAP) mechanism in Viet Nam presents an opportunity for UNICEF to lead this workstream, in close coordination with the PSEAH Coordinator. UNICEF has also made notable progress in youth engagement, yet adolescents remain underrepresented in UN youth initiatives. Targeted programming that focuses specifically on teenagers could ensure their meaningful inclusion and empowerment, addressing a critical gap in current youth strategies.
3. **Leveraging and expanding thematic leadership:** UNICEF's mandate and experience in digital inclusion and child online safety position it to lead efforts in digital transformation for children. Opportunities exist to scale initiatives that not only expand digital access in schools but also promote broader societal safety and inclusivity in

²³² The SP orients the whole organisation around five Impact Results to 2029—survival and development; learning and skills; freedom from poverty; protection from violence; and resilience to climate and environmental risks—delivered through a defined set of strategies: advocacy and partnerships; policy and financing; evidence; engaging families and communities and shifting social norms; strengthening basic social services; and coordinating across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

the digital space. Moreover, UNICEF's strong technical capabilities and advocacy power can be further harnessed to amplify the UN's collective impact, particularly in areas aligned with children's rights and wellbeing.

4. **Strengthening UN partnerships and information sharing:** To enhance system-wide coherence, UNICEF can increase its engagement in inter-agency knowledge exchange and strategic partnerships. Strengthening collaboration with other UN entities would help reduce duplication, foster synergies, and support more effective implementation of shared goals. This includes contributing to joint learning platforms, cross-sectoral data systems, and integrated monitoring frameworks that reflect the multidimensional nature of child development.

Recommendation 3: Enhance management of pilot projects portfolio

Level: Strategic	Based on conclusions: 6, 7
Priority: Short-term	Directed to VCO management and sections

To convert effective pilots into lasting interventions, a three-pronged strategy is recommended. First, UNICEF and partners must co-develop clear exit and scaling roadmaps from project inception, specifying criteria for transition—such as adoption of costed implementation plans by provincial People's Committees, mainstreaming of training modules into civil-servant induction courses, or embedding service standards in health and education inspectorate frameworks. Second, financial planning should secure sustainable funding models tailored to the local socio-economic context. While co-financing arrangements and cost-recovery mechanisms may be pursued in localities with the capacity to pay, scale-up strategies in extremely disadvantaged areas must strictly align with the State's preferential support policies. In these targeted areas, financial sustainability should rely on securing sustained state budgetary allocations and integration into National Target Programs, rather than user fees. All funding models should be supported by economic analyses that demonstrate value-for-money, equity, and social impact to government decision-makers. Third, strengthening M&E systems by embedding outcome and fidelity indicators into official reporting templates will facilitate adaptive management and provide the data needed to secure sustained budgetary allocations. To enhance the management and knowledge sharing of projects within the VCO, it is recommended to:

1. **Enhance management of pilot projects portfolio:** it is recommended to develop and implement a comprehensive framework with clear guidelines and standardised processes for pilot management, ensuring consistency and coherence across all pilot initiatives. Additionally, enhancing staff and Government partners understanding of pilot concepts through targeted training and capacity-building programs is crucial.
2. **Develop a comprehensive pilot monitoring tool:** Create a tool to improve the monitoring and evaluation of pilot projects. The tool proposed by the ET for data collection during this CPE can serve as a reference (see annex 6, section 1.12).
3. **Comprehensive measurement system for capacity development initiatives:** Create a system to systematically assess changes in knowledge, behaviours, and motivation resulting from UNICEF-supported capacity-building processes. This will help in tracking the effectiveness of these initiatives and making necessary adjustments.
4. **Document successful scale-up initiatives:** Ensure that successful pilot projects are evaluated and documented, highlighting the strategies and processes that led to their success. Develop detailed sustainability and/or exit plans for each project, including post-funding strategies.
5. **Incorporate feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders:** Regularly gather and incorporate feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders to ensure that the interventions are relevant and context specific. This will ensure continuous improvement and alignment with the needs of the target population.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen advocacy at UNICEF Viet Nam

Level: Strategic	Based on conclusions: 2,6,7
Priority: Short-term	Directed to VCO management and sections

UNICEF Viet Nam's advocacy function must be positioned as a central strategic driver for policy influence and systemic change for children, by formulating a unified governance structure that defines clear roles and responsibilities, establish capacity-building programmes focused on strategic advocacy, and implement a comprehensive management system for pilot initiatives. The following actions are recommended:

1. **Capacity building:** a priority recommendation is to build institutional capacity through targeted, advanced training for the communications team and relevant programme staff, focusing on political economy analysis, policy influencing techniques, coalition-building, and evidence-driven messaging. This would allow advocacy efforts to move beyond tactical content dissemination and towards sustained engagement with decision-makers and opinion leaders. In parallel, advocacy planning should be embedded into annual workplans across sections, ensuring that every major initiative is underpinned by clear policy objectives, theory of change, and measurable influence targets.
2. **Resource alignment:** To strengthen its human resource capacity for advocacy and policy influence, a series of strategic and structural improvements could be considered, in line with UNICEF's Global Advocacy Strategy. For

example, investing further in specialised advocacy and influencing roles (dedicated advocacy roles or dual-function positions that combine technical and influencing expertise), strengthening internal cross-sectoral coordination on advocacy, and developing a unified, office-wide advocacy strategy with clear priorities and shared monitoring tools. Building staff capacity through targeted training and mentoring is also essential, as is leveraging global and regional expertise (e.g. through technical support and short-term consultancies).

3. **Institute a results-based monitoring framework** for advocacy, tracking both output metrics (e.g., high-level engagements, policy submissions) and outcome indicators (e.g., adoption of child-friendly policies, budget allocations influenced).
4. **Formulate a governance structure** that defines clear roles and responsibilities, establish capacity-building programmes focused on strategic advocacy, and implement a comprehensive management system for pilot initiatives.²³³ By reinforcing the evidence-to-policy pipeline—ensuring that local data are systematically aggregated, rigorously analysed, and strategically communicated—UNICEF can strengthen its influence on national agendas and foster a more resilient, evidence-informed policy environment.

Recommendation 5: Transition from the traditional funding approach to catalysing sustainable financing across public, private, and international sectors for children’s services and rights

Level: Strategic	Based on conclusions: 2, 3, 7, 8
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to VCO management

To effectively close the persistent gaps in child services and rights in Viet Nam, UNICEF must progressively transition its funding model—focused primarily on donor contributions and the inertia of conventional direct service delivery — toward a strategic financing model that leverages, influences, and mobilizes resources across public, private, and international sectors. In practice, this means that UNICEF complements donor funding with diversified financing approaches and to support governments in costing child services and integrating them into national and provincial budgets. Its co-designs blended finance models that combine public funds, concessional loans, and private capital, while transitioning from direct service delivery to systems strengthening through scalable pilots and government-led adoption. UNICEF also expands its role from fundraising to broader resource mobilization by engaging businesses, foundations, and financial institutions to co-invest in child outcomes. Finally, it promotes long-term fiscal sustainability by using investment cases, fiscal diagnostics, and policy advocacy to secure durable, systemic financing. Some specific recommendations are:

1. **Institutional transformation:** Build UNICEF Viet Nam’s internal capacity in public finance, policy advocacy, and strategic resource mobilization. Align internal systems, planning tools, and performance indicators with the CP’s financing strategy.
2. **Public budget allocation and spending:** UNICEF Viet Nam has demonstrated influence in shaping national policies (e.g., nutrition financing, inclusive education), but there is significant opportunity to support government partners in costing child-focused programs and integrating them into national and subnational budgets. Apply budget analysis and tracking tools to monitor public spending on priority areas for children and adolescents. Develop investment cases and fiscal space assessments to advocate for increased and equitable public investment.
3. **Financial accessibility of essential services:** Persistent financial barriers to accessing healthcare, nutrition, and education—especially in remote and ethnic minority areas—underscore the need for UNICEF to support policy reforms that enhance financial equity and protection.
4. **Development assistance mobilization:** UNICEF Viet Nam has successfully mobilized external resources but could further strengthen its role in coordinating development assistance to align with national priorities for children. Strengthen coordination platforms to ensure aid effectiveness and harmonization with government-led planning and budgeting processes.
5. **Private sector engagement:** While UNICEF has engaged private actors in areas like digital learning, opportunities remain to further explore blended finance or influence.. Engage Vietnamese businesses and NGOs in supporting service delivery models that support inclusive development. One option could be pilot blended

²³³ Note from the ET on governance modalities: the core issue is the need to reinforce the office’s capacity—whether through intersectoral coordination mechanisms (e.g., focal points) or through programme integration (e.g., a dedicated role). In shaping programmatic strategies, by our experience, big UN agencies often face a choice between adopting a more coordinated approach—where sectoral efforts are aligned but remain distinct—or pursuing deeper integration, where interventions are designed and delivered through unified, cross-sectoral frameworks. A coordinated model can preserve sectoral expertise and allow for flexible partnerships, but it may risk fragmentation or missed synergies if not actively managed. In contrast, an integrated approach can enhance coherence, efficiency, and impact—particularly in addressing complex, multidimensional challenges such as climate change or mental health—but it requires stronger institutional capacity, shared planning mechanisms, and often, a cultural shift toward joint ownership. Ultimately, the choice is not binary. Many successful models blend both approaches, using coordination to build bridges across sectors while selectively integrating where joint delivery adds value. The decision should be informed by context-specific factors VCO such as available resources, staffing profiles, and the maturity of intersectoral collaboration.

finance models: developing one or two pilots (e.g., resilience infrastructure, school WASH, digital learning) that combine public funds, concessional finance and private contributions with measurable child outcomes. Segment and prioritise private sector partners by mapping corporate, financial, and philanthropic prospects (including HNWLs, foundations, fintech, e-commerce, and banks), and design tailored engagement offers such as shared-value partnerships, cause marketing, and employee giving, where appropriate and subject to risk, due diligence, and alignment with child-rights safeguards.

6. UNICEF is well-positioned to collaborate with **international financial institutions** (IFIs) and climate finance mechanisms to embed child-sensitive components into large-scale infrastructure and social protection financing. Key opportunities include accessing climate finance channels such as the Green Climate Fund and climate-smart IFI windows, advocating for the integration of child impact criteria in sectoral loans, and offering technical expertise in beneficiary monitoring and social safeguards. Strategically, UNICEF's growing portfolio in disaster prevention and control and climate change adaptation provides a strong foundation for engaging development banks and elevating child-sensitive adaptation as a central priority within national climate strategies.
7. **Data, M&E and evidence for resource mobilisation:** Link evidence to fundraising efforts by converting programme impact data and SDG-costed scenarios into concise, compelling investment cases tailored for donors and private sector partners. Financing metrics should be disaggregated by source, geographic reach, and equity impact to demonstrate value and inform portfolio decisions. Additionally, documenting and publishing rigorous pilot initiatives—including cost per beneficiary and clear scalability pathways—can help de-risk investments and build confidence among partners seeking sustainable, high-impact solutions for children.
8. In light of the **constraints faced by the VCO in managing budget allocations across sectors** (stemming from planning and approval processes with the government and National Assembly), a review of internal planning processes to identify areas where greater flexibility can be introduced is recommended. Furthermore, drawing on lessons learned from other country offices operating under similar institutional constraints, may yield practical insights and adaptive strategies. Continued strategic engagement with government counterparts to explore more adaptive planning mechanisms is required.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the programmatic integration of key cross-cutting issues by enhancing work on transformative gender, climate change, and disability

Level: Programmatic	Based on conclusions: 1, 4, 5, 7
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to VCO management and thematic working Groups

To effectively strengthen the programmatic integration of key cross-cutting issues, it is recommended to:

1. **Enhance strategic alignment by incorporating more robust vulnerability mapping from an intersectional perspective, complemented by participatory needs assessments that reflect the lived realities of marginalized groups.** This would help ensure that resources are directed toward populations facing the greatest barriers to rights realization and social inclusion, in line with both national commitments and UNICEF's equity-focused mandate.
2. **Build capacity and collaboration on gender equality:** Build capacity for a comprehensive gender approach across sectors, including through pilot projects. Strategic planning is essential to define UNICEF's role in collaboration with other UN agencies on human rights and gender approaches in Viet Nam. A significant opportunity lies in the Government of Viet Nam's recent announcement of the Integrated Early Response and Care approach, which involves sub-national funding mechanisms. UNICEF is uniquely positioned to support the government in operationalizing this system-wide commitment, given its credibility and in-country expertise. Unlike other actors focused on project-level implementation, UNICEF can play a strategic role in shaping inclusive systems.
3. **Further develop the multidimensional poverty index.** Measure deprivations in children's health, education, and living standards. This will help in identifying and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children and materialize the LNOB principle.
4. **Bring greater focus to intersectionality.** The next CPD should explicitly prioritize equity-driven strategies that target those furthest behind. To ensure meaningful progress, VCO must embed intersectionality into programme design, strengthen inclusive data systems (refer to Annex 12), and adopt a results framework that emphasizes gap reduction as a core metric of success.
5. **Prioritise climate mainstreaming by developing formal intersectoral climate risk assessment policies to enhance scalability, sustainability, and climate sensitivity across all programme areas.** Strengthen the visibility and operational integration of flagship UNICEF global programmes—such as climate-smart child-centred programming, adolescent participation, and gender-transformative parenting—within the CP framework. Ensure alignment with UNICEF's internal best-practice guidance through systematic documentation of programme design and implementation modalities, leveraging lessons learned from peer countries.

6. **Refine the monitoring system to include cross-cutting issues.** Adjust the results framework to include more SMART indicators that are sensitive to gender, interculturality, disability, and other vulnerability criteria. This refinement will ensure that RAM reports provide robust information on the extent to which these cross-cutting approaches are effectively integrated. (Refer to Annex 12).

Recommendation 7: Redouble efforts to address harmful behaviours, norms and stereotypes that limit attainment of rights for all children

Level: Programmatic	Based on conclusions: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to VCO management and thematic working Groups

Critically examine disaggregated results and redouble efforts to address harmful norms and stereotypes, particularly those related to gender, disability and ethnic minorities through coordinated consultation mechanisms with relevant ministries and agencies, especially the Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. To achieve sustained change on positive outcomes for all children requires a more nuanced, robust and comprehensive approach to tackling entrenched attitudes and social norms (for example those linked to disability, girls' engagement in STEM subjects/careers, empowering ethnic minority groups and on addressing all forms of violence). A comprehensive and holistic approach identifying the principal blockages and gatekeepers – including attitudes of service providers and decision makers – needs to be developed across all thematic areas. Results frameworks, workplans, monitoring systems and assessments or evaluations should include clear measurable expected results – and changes should be tracked critically and systematically using tried and tested tools. Develop explicit, measurable indicators for normative change, embed regular KAP surveys into programme cycles and institutionalize follow-up mechanisms to track behaviour adoption over time (See Annex 13 for additional suggestions).

Recommendation 8: Reconsider and emphasise the role of parents in achieving the rights of all children in Viet Nam

Level: Programmatic	Based on conclusions: 1, 5
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to VCO management and thematic working Groups

VCO does currently work with parents (especially in health) and incorporates some parenting education projects, but across the whole programme - the role of parents – including the huge resource they represent – and the key role they play in ensuring child rights – could be more directly addressed. The approach should support parents to employ positive, non-violent discipline techniques that rely on communicating expectations and setting parameters around child and adolescent behaviour. As well as addressing violent discipline at home, a key component should be supporting child and adolescent wellbeing – including mental health and actions that can help to ensure safety online. In Learning and Skills for example, the interface between home and school on critical areas such as digital learning, supporting well-being and mental health of all children, early detection of disability, right age transitions etc. may be a missed opportunity to deepen results and enhance sustainability of those results. Engaging parents – both mothers and fathers -with key interventions – particularly those intended to tackle harmful norms (e.g. on STEM subjects) or to challenge stereotypes (for example on CWDs or related to children from ethnic minority groups) may not achieve sustainable change without more deliberate and intensive parental involvement. At the same time, not involving parents centrally in all activities brings the risk of widening the generation gap rather than promoting intergenerational collaboration.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen UNICEF Viet Nam's subnational footprint to maximize equity, resilience and scalability

Level: Programmatic	Based on conclusions: 1-4
Priority: Medium-term	Directed to VCO management

The next UNICEF Viet Nam Country Programme cycle will be set against a profoundly shifting context. Viet Nam has achieved remarkable human development and poverty reduction outcomes, transforming itself from one of the world's poorest nations to a lower-middle-income country with dynamic economic growth and clear aspirations to attain high-income status by 2045. Yet this success story is marked by persistent and in some cases widening subnational disparities, emerging climate and urbanization challenges, demographic transitions, decentralization reforms, and mounting constraints on official development assistance. As it enters the final lap towards the child-related SDGs in 2030, UNICEF must recalibrate its subnational focus and operational modalities to ensure impact at scale for all children—especially the most vulnerable.

Aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026–2029—foreseeing a paradigm shift to policy influence, systems strengthening, and catalytic partnership—the following recommendations are proposed to guide UNICEF Viet Nam's geographical priorities and ways of working over the coming programme cycle:

1. Prioritize targeted systems strengthening in high-deprivation zones: focus upstream support, technical assistance, and capacity building on provinces/districts with persistent multidimensional child poverty, stunting, and exclusion—especially remote Northern Midlands, Central Highlands, and select Mekong Delta localities—by supporting local authorities to deliver scalable, equity-focused solutions.

2. Embed climate resilience and adaptation into subnational social services: mainstream climate risk analysis and child-focused adaptation into provincial and district health, education, social protection, and WASH systems in climate-vulnerable regions (e.g., Mekong Delta, Central Coast, urban flood-prone zones), building the capacity for climate-smart service planning, budgeting, and disaster response.
3. Leverage urbanization for inclusive and innovative child-centred services: pilot and catalyse models for inclusive service delivery in rapidly expanding urban and peri-urban areas (e.g., Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Da Nang, secondary cities), with special attention to migrants and marginalized urban children, while supporting city governments to adopt data-driven planning and universal, shock-responsive social protection.
4. Strengthen subnational leadership amid decentralization reforms: support newly empowered provincial and commune-level authorities to lead multi-sectoral child development strategies, by investing in local evidence generation, participatory planning, budget advocacy, and social service workforce development in the context of administrative restructuring.
5. Finally, to strategically target resources and maximise impact, a tiered geographic framework could be considered for the next Country Programme: (i) Tier 1: Scale + Resilience Pilots - Focus on climate-vulnerable provinces (e.g., Mekong Delta, central coast) to strengthen shock-responsive systems, resilient WASH, education, and social protection. (ii) Tier 2: Equity and Inclusion Focus - Target northern mountains and central highlands with high ethnic minority populations and child poverty, prioritising inclusive ECD, outreach health, and culturally adapted services; (iii) Tier 3: Urban and Migration Hotspots - Selected districts in HCMC, Hanoi, and Da Nang to address migrant child needs, urban WASH, mental health, digital safety, and youth participation—leveraging donor and private sector interest; (iv) Tier 4: Policy Innovation Zones - 1–2 provinces with strong leadership and fiscal space to pilot scalable models and generate policy-relevant evidence.

