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# Vietnam

## Country Reference Framework

*(Updated version of March 2026)*

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## Background

In FYP1 the VLIRUOS country strategies presented the strategic niche for future VLIRUOS cooperation in a specific country, leading to strategy-based calls for proposals. These country strategies created a framework for project formulation, but could limit project identification to geographical and/or thematic foci and/or to a limited number of partner institutions. Country strategies also aimed at enabling synergy and complementarity between VLIRUOS projects and projects from other (Belgian) stakeholders working in that country.

In FYP2, however, we shift towards an approach whereby a country reference framework provides information rather than strategic guidance. The country reference frameworks will be used mainly to support teams of academics when identifying and formulating project proposals, by providing a context analysis focused on Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the higher education sector in a given country, and by providing an overview of Belgian actors, their ongoing projects and partners in that country in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity.

The country reference frameworks consist of three components:

(i) overview of VLIRUOS projects in the country;
(ii) context analysis focused on the Agenda 2030 framework and the higher education sector;
(iii) overview of Belgian actors (ANGCs involved in thematic or geographic JSFs & Enabel), their local partners and their regional/thematic focus.

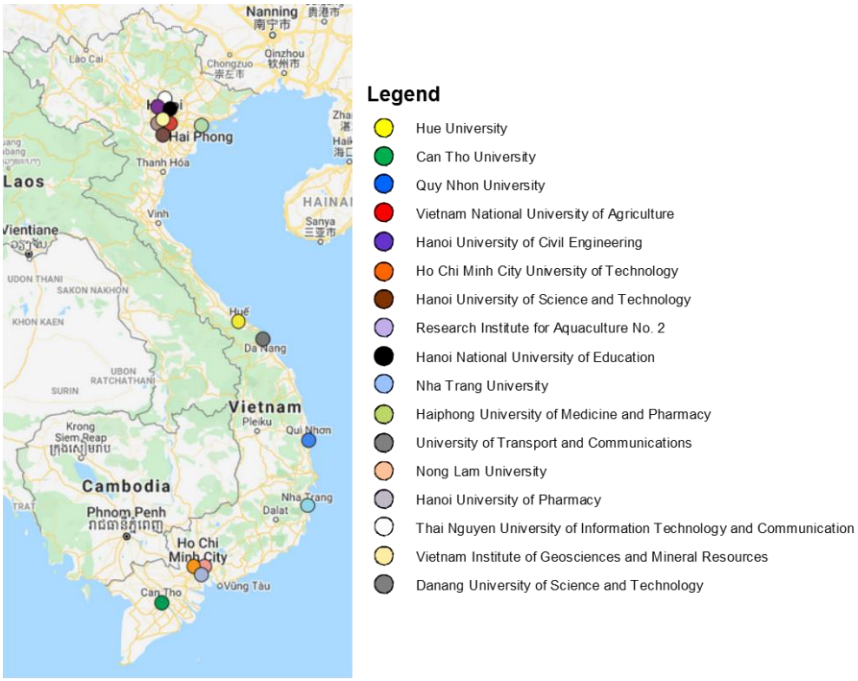
The frameworks have been elaborated based on information available at the time of drafting this actor programme and through consultations with both Flemish and local project promotors, and with geographic JSFs, when applicable, to ensure relevant information for coherent project formulation is included.

Prior to the launch of competitive calls, the ANGCs active in the country/region will be invited to list a number of research themes/questions that can be addressed by HE&SIs in the framework of VLIRUOS funded projects or scholarships. Synergy and complementarity will be integrated as an element in the selection of project proposals, more in particular when discussing the (developmental) relevance and coherence of the proposals and the extent to which the multi-stakeholder partnership principle has been reflected in the project's implementation set-up. By this mode of operation, the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development links up with the other geographic JSFs.

Evidently, the frameworks will be updated regularly in consultation with the HEI&SI stakeholders and with the respective geographical JSFs and, where appropriate, also with ARES, and especially prior to the launch of competitive calls by VLIRUOS, to be compatible and responsive to evolving/emerging needs and priorities of academic and international actors active in the country/region/sector.

# 1. VLIRUOS in Vietnam

## 1.1. Overview projects & scholarships (1998 – 2025)




| Projects 1998-2025 | | | | Scholarship Type | Finished | Ongoing | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Type** | **Budget (€)** | **Number** | | **ICP** | 257 | 24 | 281 |
| ***Total*** | ***27.562.406*** | ***105*** | | **ICPPHD** | 17 | | 17 |
| IUC | 11.647.450 | 4 | | **ITP/KOI** | 158 | | 158 |
| NETWORK | 2.602.823 | 1 | | **SRS** | 46 | | 46 |
| TEAM | 8.217.406 | 28 | | **Total** | 478 | 24 | 502 |
| SI | 3.172.536 | 48 | | | | | |
| JOINT | 221.955 | 2 | | | | | |
| Crosscutting | 1.392.299 | 18 | | | | | |
| ITP | 307.936 | 4 | | | | | |

**Vietnam is a long-standing partner of Flemish higher education institutions**. From 1999 to 2025 VLIRUOS spent over € 27 million in project cooperation with Vietnam, including 4 long-term institutional partnerships : the Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) projects with **Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST), Can Tho University (CTU)** and **Hue University (HU) and the** national interinstitutional

NETWORK in Biosciences for food, coordinated by CTU (in collaboration with Vietnam National University of Agriculture, Hue University, Nha Trang University and Research Institute for Aquaculture N°2). Another long-term partnership has started with **Quy Nhon University (QNU)** in September 2022. More detailed information can be found on our VLIRUOS website vliruostats (statistics)

## 1.2. Ongoing projects and future calls (2022-...)

| Ongoing VLIRUOS projects in FYP 2022-2027 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Type** | **Runtime** | **Title** | **Flemish promoter** | **Local promoter** | **Local institution** | **Total budget (FYP 2) (€)** |
| IUC | 2019-2024 | Institutional University Cooperation with Hue University (HU) (phase 2 & phase-out) | P. Bossier (Ghent University) | Nguyen Quang Linh | Hue University | 365.000 |
| *Subproject 1* | | *Institutional strengthening* | *M. Valcke (Ghent University)* | *Huynh Van Chuong* | | |
| *Subproject 2* | | *Livestock and Aquaculture* | *V. Fievez (Ghent University)* | *Dinh Phung Le* | | |
| *Subproject 3* | | *Coastal ecosystem and natural resources management* | *L. Triest (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)* | *Duong Van Hieu* | | |
| *Subproject 4* | | *Rural health care* | *A. Derese (Ghent University)* | *Minh Tam Nguyen* | | |
| Networks | 2019-2024 | Network Bioscience for Food (phase 2 & phase-out) | K. Dewettinck (Ghent University) | Thanh Ha Toan | Can Tho University | 270.000 |
| *Subproject 1* | | *Joint graduate training and research based education in Aquaculture* | *F. Volckaert (KU Leuven)* | *Ngoc Ut Vu* | | |
| *Subproject 2* | | *Interuniversity research based education in Vietnam to guarantee the safety and quality of the food supply chain in the South* | *M. Hendrickx (KU Leuven)* | *Ly Binh Nguyen* | | |
| IUC | 2022-2027 | Institutional University Cooperation with Quy Nhon University (QNU) (phase-in & phase 1) | K. Temst (KU Leuven) | Vu Thi Ngan | Quy Nhon University | 3.000.000 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Subproject 1* | | *Developing an early flood warning system to improve the adaptive capability of the local authorities and communities in the context of climate change (P1)* | *P. Willems (KU Leuven)* | *Anh Tu Ngo* | | |
| *Subproject 2* | | *Enhancing the performance of the solar-assisted drying system and biogas production by using novel nanomaterials and technical solutions (P2)* | *E. Janssens (KU Leuven)* | *Thanh Hai Phan* | | |
| *Subproject 3* | | *Improving the safety and quality of avocado and durian crops by managing pre-harvest factors (P3)* | *W. Vanhove (Ghent University)* | *Thi Thanh Tra Huynh* | | |
| *Subproject 4* | | *Research on post-harvest preservation using natural bioactive compounds to improve the value of local fruit (P4)* | *B. Nicolai (KU Leuven)* | *Duc An Hoang* | | |
| *Subproject 5* | | *Establishing risk assessment and risk management models for the dragon fruit and jujube supply chains (P5)* | *S. Speelman (Ghent University)* | *Thi Thanh Phuong Truong* | | |
| *Subproject 6* | | *Improving institutional capacity for the internal service delivery of e-services to students, e-learning and library (P6)* | *P. Lernout (Hasselt University)* | *Thanh Binh Nguyen* | | |
| *Subproject 7* | | *Establishing a sustainable institutional waste management system at Quy Nhon University (P7)* | *E. Van Mechelen (University College Ghent)* | *Van Chi Vo* | | |
| TEAM | 2019-2022 | Impact of saltwater intrusion on water resources and irrigation in the Southern Central region of Vietnam under climate change | T. Hermans (Ghent University) | Ho Huu Hieu | Vietnam Institute of Geosciences and Mineral Resources | 46.278 |
| TEAM | 2022-2027 | Development of plant-based milk beverages with improved functionality for enhancing economic value of Vietnamese crops and healthy lives | K. Dewettinck (Ghent University) | Dinh Thi Tran | Vietnam National University of Agriculture | 279.980,80 |
| TEAM | 2022-2027 | Levodopa-rich biomass of slime molds and puffballs and their melanins for treatment of Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease | A. Van Eeckhaut (VUB) | Hanh TM Tran | International University - Vietnam National University HCM City | 279.999,50 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TEAM | 2022-2027 | GEOdata infrastructures and citizen SCIences to support REsilient development of rural com-munities in Quang Nam province (GEOSCIRE) | M. Kervyn (VUB) | Nguyen Quoc Dinh | Vietnam Institute of Geosciences and Mineral Resources | 299.981,00 |
| TEAM | 2024-2029 | From Farm to River: Climate-Resilient Shrimp Farming in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta (FANTASHRIMP) | P. Goethals (Ghent University) | Vu Ut | Can Tho University | 299.912,80 |
| TEAM | 2024-2029 | Advancing Climate Action through the Promotion of 'Ugly' Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Vietnam: Participatory Approach to Combat Food Loss and Waste for Food Security and Poverty Reduction | C. Yung Hung (Ghent University) | Au Nu Hai Ton | Hue University | 299.984,30 |
| TEAM | 2024-2029 | Anisakis: Unravelling the health risks of fish borne nematodes in Southern Vietnam embedded in capacity building and stakeholder engagement. | S. Gabriël (Ghent University) | Hien Le Than (NLU) | Nong Lam University (HCMC) (lead promoter in Vietnam), University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Can Tho University, Institute of Public Health, NIMPE, RIA 2 | 299.972,20 |
| SI | 2022-2024 | The women's empowerment-sustainable tourism nexus in rural Vietnam | C. Parra (KULeuven) | Huong Hoang | Vietnam National University | 69.960,00 |
| SI | 2022-2024 | Improving the indoor air quality to reduce health risks for susceptible groups in Vietnam. | C. Walgraeve (Ghent University) | Nguyen Luong Duc | Hanoi University of Civil Engineering | 69.996,03 |
| SI | 2022-2024 | Capacity building for a sustainable management of mineral resources in the Vietnam | S. Dewaele (Ghent University) | Nguyen Quoc Dinh | Vietnam Institute of Geosciences and Mineral Resources | 70.000,00 |
| SI | 2023-2025 | DORA: open Drone data platfOrm for biodiveRsity mApping to support the sustainable management of forests | H. Luong (Ghent University) | Thi-Lan Le | Hanoi University of Science and Technology | 69.861 |
| SI | 2023-2025 | Promoting inclusive digital transformation for rural households through multimedia solutions | T. Schellens (Ghent University) | Huu Hanh Hoang | Posts and Telecommunications | 69.999 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Institute of Technology | |
| SI | 2025-2027 | A Vietnamese-Belgian partnership for developing climate-resilient solutions using a wave-energy-harvesting bio-inspired breakwater structures | M. Abdel Wahab (Ghent University) | Hung Hung Nguyen-Xuan | Ho Chi Minh City of Technology (HUTECH) | 69999,94 |
| SI | 2025-2027 | From Research to Practice: A Pilot for Methane Mitigation in Vietnam's Livestock Sector | V. Fievez (Ghent University ) | Thanh Lam Phuoc | Can Tho University | 69997,4 |
| SI | 2025-2027 | Environmental Impact Assessment and Capacity Building for Sustainable Management of Xuan Thuy National Park, Nam Dinh Province, Vietnam | Yue Gao (VUB) | Huong Ngo Thi Thuy | Phenikaa University | 69990,6 |
| SI | 2025-2027 | Facilitating the Uptake of Life Cycle Thinking and SDG-Aligned Practices in Vietnam through Stakeholder-Driven Research on Agriculture<br>Advancing Social Housing through Promoting Inclusive Design Research and Education in Vietnam (ASPIRE)<br>Designing Biosensors with Innovative Eco-Friendly Biomaterials for Detecting Pathogenic Bacteria in Aquaculture | J. Dewulf (Ghent University) | Thao (Thi Thanh) Nguyen | Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City (IUH) | 68866,6 |
| SI | 2025-2027 | Facilitating the Uptake of Life Cycle Thinking and SDG-Aligned Practices in Vietnam through Stakeholder-Driven Research on Agriculture<br>Advancing Social Housing through Promoting Inclusive Design Research and Education in Vietnam (ASPIRE)<br>Designing Biosensors with Innovative Eco-Friendly Biomaterials for Detecting Pathogenic Bacteria in Aquaculture | A. Heylighen (KULeuven) | Lan-Huong Le | Hanoi University of Civil Engineering | 69927 |
| SI | 2025-2027 | Facilitating the Uptake of Life Cycle Thinking and SDG-Aligned Practices in Vietnam through Stakeholder-Driven Research on Agriculture<br>Advancing Social Housing through Promoting Inclusive Design Research and Education in Vietnam (ASPIRE) | M. Kraft (KULeuven) | Mai Tran | VinUniversity | 69993 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Designing Biosensors with Innovative Eco-Friendly Biomaterials for Detecting Pathogenic Bacteria in Aquaculture | | | | |
| ITP | 2022-2025 | A research training programme on Machine Learning for climate change mitigation in buildings | M. Abdel Wahab (Ghent University) | n/a | n/a | 150.000 |
| ITP | 2022-2025 | Professional training: Sustainable consumption and production: how to measure and move forward? | J. Dewulf (Ghent University) | n/a | n/a | 138.532 |

Abbreviations (type): IUC=Institutional University Cooperation; SI=Short Initiatives; ITP=International Training Programme. Abbreviations (Flemish institutions): KULeuven= Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; UG=Ghent University; VUB=Vrije Universiteit Brussel, HU=Hasselt University.

Competitive calls for new projects will be launched and announced on our website. Nationals of Vietnam are eligible[1] to apply for scholarships for the International Master Programmes (ICP).

[1] Admission requirements, application procedures and selection procedures differ across the programmes and host institutions.

# 2. Vietnam and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

## 2.1. Vietnam and the Sustainable Development Goals

Since the first VNR in 2018, Vietnam has experienced a difficult context in progressing towards the SDGs due to the COVID-19 prolonged impacts, increased food and fuel prices, external financial instability, and worsening impacts of natural disasters and climate changes. Despite the challenging context, Vietnam continued to make strong commitments to the 2030 Agenda that was institutionalized in the National Action Plan. All 17 SDGs have been mainstreamed in socio-economic development strategies, plans, and sectoral policies at national and local levels. According to VNR 2023 (and VNR Summary 2023), the whole political system and society have strived to further accomplish the SDGs.

Continuing to be on track for SDG 1, the multidimensional poverty rate declined from 9.2% to 4.3% between 2016 - 2022. Important achievements were evident for SDG 6 with 98.3% of households using improved water sources in 2022 (from 93.4% in 2016). Expanded investments in infrastructures, export oriented industrialization and enabling environment for innovation of enterprises contributed to progress in SDG 9. Continued progress was made for SDG 10 through job creation, expansion of social protection coverage, and enhanced support for vulnerable groups, especially in coping with the COVID-19 negative impacts. Improvements were made for SDG 16, with the rate of population and organizations showing their satisfaction with public services increased from 80.9% to 87.2% between 2017 - 2021. After approximately three decades of global and regional integration, being a pro-active and responsible member of the international community, Vietnam has secured solid improvements under SDG 17.

SDG 3 continues to be improved with reduction of child mortality and 92.04% of the population having health insurance in 2022. For SDG 4, the rate of transition from primary to lower secondary schools was 99.9% and the percentage of students graduating from lower secondary schools was 98.1% in 2022. Regarding SDG 7, the percentage of households with access to electricity was 99.5% in 2022. Vietnam's growth rate was 8.02% in 2022 while maintaining a low unemployment rate (SDG 8). The country progressed towards SDG 11 with the percentage of population living in temporary houses declining from 2.6% to 0.9% between 2016 - 2022. Vietnam continues to advance SDG 13 through the Net Zero commitment that has been integrated into relevant policies.

However, Vietnam still faces multiple challenges and therefore needs to accelerate the SDG implementation further. In particular, Vietnam will prioritize addressing malnutrition among ethnic minority children (SDG 2). Extra efforts will be put into improving health and well-being, the expansion of essential healthcare services for all people, especially for vulnerable populations such as the older people and ethnic minorities (SDG 3). Vietnam will also advance SDG 4 toward equitable access to quality education, especially for vulnerable groups. Increasing renewable energy and boosting energy efficiency will be the focus for SDG 7. Vietnam will continue to prioritize inclusive growth, decent jobs, and enhance labour productivity to further progress SDG 8. In addition, Vietnam will make extra e-orts in addressing environmental issues in both urban and rural areas (SDG 11); promoting sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12); mobilizing resources for disaster risk management and climate change mitigation and adaptation (SDG 13); preserving life below water (SDG 14); protecting biodiversity and improving ecosystem services (SDG 15).

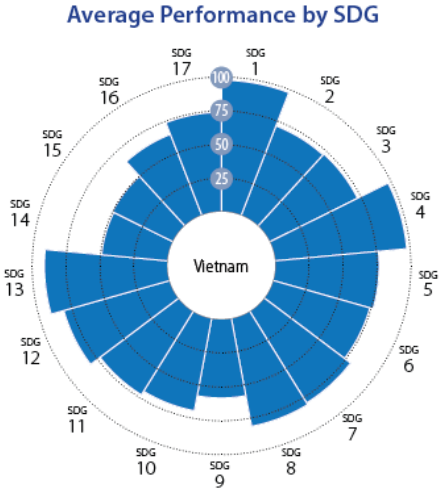
To successfully implement the 2030 Agenda in the remaining halfway, Vietnam will: (1) Prioritize investments in human capital, science and technology, innovation; upgrade infrastructures to improve

productivity, develop a green and circular economy, and build up resilience against natural disasters and climate change; (2) Enhance socialism-oriented market institutions, foster public administration reform and promote the participation of vulnerable groups in decision-making process; (3) Further reform the social protection system to strengthen resilience of communities and support for vulnerable groups; (4) Stabilize macroeconomic fundamentals, continue the COVID-19 recovery support, mobilize and 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 collaborate with all partners to achieve the SDGs for all by 2030.

Different action plans covering the period 2021 and 2030 have been elaborated, among which the National Green Growth strategy, the National strategy on R&D and application of Artificial Intelligence, the National strategy for 4th Industrial revolution (sectoral-development-strategies) and the Vietnam National Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and production (SCP 2021-2030). Moreover, sustainable development principles have been thoroughly mainstreamed into the 2011-2020 and 2021-2025 Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025 SEDP).

Taking into account the global aspect of the SDGs, the sustainable development report assesses where each country stands regarding achieving the SDGs. Vietnam ranks 61st out of 167 countries included in the report. The Vietnam Country Profile shows that the majority of goals is facing significant challenges, except for quality of education.



As an umbrella organisation that works with calls for proposals, VLIRUOS supports interventions for and through higher education institutes, supporting them in the areas of education, research and uptake and thereby strengthening them in their role as development actor. Doing so, the impact of the interventions supported by VLIRUOS can be found in a large variety of sectors. In line with its major intervention area, VLIRUOS positions itself within the education sector, especially focused on higher education, research and innovation (SDG 4 and 9). However, through its interventions, VLIRUOS intervenes in different sectors as well. VLIRUOS recognises that given the complexity, scale and interconnectedness of current societal challenges, meaningful social, economic and ecological transformations can only be realised by starting from a holistic and integrated approach to the SDGs. When translated into SDGs, the projects that were financed by VLIRUOS in Vietnam covered mainly, apart from SDG 4 and 9, SDGs 2, 3, 12 and 13. Top sectors for VLIRUOS in this country for the past decade are education, agriculture, aquaculture, environment, food security, health and technology transfer.

More background information and context analysis on Vietnam can be found in the **geographic Joint Strategic Framework** for Vietnam, which will be shared with (potential) project promotors when new calls are launched.

**Additional sources on progress related to higher education & science (SDG 4)**

- UNESCO-UIS: overview data resources indicators related to SDG4
- Our World in data:
  - Indicators related to educational mobility and inequality
  - Indicators related to tertiary education
  - Indicators related to projections of future education (demand)
  - Indicators related to science and research

## 2.2. Higher education landscape in Vietnam

Since late 2004, a series of policy initiatives have been taken with respect to higher education, taken by the Ministry of Edcuation and Training (MOET). These decisions were about the adoption of Higher Education Quality Accreditation Regulation; the renewal of Vietnam's Tertiary Education in the 2006-2020 period; the importance of networking of higher education institutions with expansion of higher education and the advancement of scientific and technological research; the credit system to be used in higher education with an increasing importance of QA and different types of institutions and various levels of higher education; the requirements for Master level education in terms of human resources and teaching infrastructure; the renewed legal framework for reform of the university governance setup to be more flexible and to increase managerial autonomy to the university; the renewed program on Quality Improvement for Higher Education for 2019–2025. This program pronounces the overall strategic directions and the main principles applicable for all universities and consist of the 1/ Increasement of the diversification of income sources and a more efficient use of resources, 2/ Enhancement of internationalization and strengthening employer engagement and 3/ Equity and competition among universities and strengthening quality assurance.

Vietnam's higher education system has steadily developed[2]. The number of universities has increased rapidly. In 2020, Vietnam has 420 universities, of which there were 175 public ones and 60 private universities and 5 with 100% of foreign investment in the country. Now many of them have developed to be multi-field, multi-disciplinary/comprehensive universities offering Associate/college, Bachelor/university, master's and PhD programs. Regarding the enrolment, according to the World Bank, of the 6.9 million pupils

[2] Text updated based on final evaluation IUC with Hue University, performed by Dr. Patrick Vanderweyden from te evaluation consortium C_Lever.

of post-secondary school age, about 2 million (28.6%) are enrolled in universities and colleges. This rate is quite low compared to the countries in the region.

In terms of management structure, universities in Vietnam can be categorized into three primary types: National universities, regional universities, and normal universities/colleges. Two national universities located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are directly overseen by the Prime Minister. These national universities oversee various universities, colleges, service delivery institutions, and research institutes.

Meanwhile, three regional universities situated in Thai Nguyen, Hue, and Da Nang cities fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). These regional universities, similar to their national counterparts, encompass a range of universities, colleges, and research institutes.

Normal universities and colleges, on the other hand, may be established by MOET, other ministries, Vietnam's Academies of Science and Technology, or Social Science, or under the authority of provincial People Committees.

According to the Performance of Higher Education document (2020) in Vietnam (Improving-the-Performance-of-Higher-Education-in-Vietnam), Vietnam aspires to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035, its productivity needs to increase continuously, which requires greater production and effective use of high-skilled manpower and science, technology, and innovation. The link between higher education and socioeconomic development is well recognized but there is a disconnect between Vietnam's achievement on equitable economic growth and human development, on the one hand, and the performance of the higher education system, on the other. Vietnam's higher education system is not ready to capitalize on the huge potential of young people coming out of general education. Vietnam's access to higher education is below 30 percent, one of the lowest among the East Asian countries. Vietnam needs to invest more and soon in its higher education system if it wants to become internationally competitive by capitalizing on its younger generations, and by focusing on quality, relevance and equity.

Overall, Vietnam's higher education has made progress in a number of areas. MOET has played a proactive role in initiating positive changes toward modern governance through amendment to the Higher Education Law in 2018 and implementation of the university autonomy agenda since 2014. Access to higher education has more than doubled since 2000, and about 54 percent of the current 2.3 million students are females. Impressive progress is also seen in the qualification levels of academic staff: the share of university lecturers with master and/or PhD degrees increased from 47 percent in 2007 to 72 percent in 2015. The number of joint programs and internationally accredited academic programs has also grown substantially. In terms of research output, the number of citable documents in per capita terms has almost tripled in the past 10 years. Vietnamese universities now appear in the global university rankings.

According to the VNR 2023, equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university education should be ensured by 2030. There is still a gender gap and sex disaggregation by discipline in education and training should receive more attention. The percentage of women studying science, engineering and technology is still quite low. While these are critical areas in the context of the Industry, the lack of sex disaggregated data by discipline at the national level limits policy making to promote gender equality in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

Looking at international rankings like Webometrics, 10 Vietnamese universities are ranked worldwide within the top 2000.

## 2.3. Leaving no one behind

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community pledged to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. The principle of leaving no one behind can be defined as a three-part imperative: to end absolute poverty in all its forms, to stop group-

based discrimination that results in unequal outcomes for disadvantaged populations, and to take action to help the furthest behind.

Vietnam shows major differences between multidimensional and income poverty across regions. While having an income poverty headcount higher than that of the South East, the Red River Delta's multidimensional poverty incidence is considerably lower. The multidimensional incidence in the Central Highlands is higher than in the Northern midland and mountain areas, while its income poverty rate is much lower. Clear differences in regional income and multidimensional poverty rates reveal deprivations beyond income, often rooted in factors like geography, supply constraints and institutional barriers. Multi-dimensionally poor population in the Northern midland and mountain areas were more likely to be deprived in aspects of education, health insurance, housing, sanitation, and assets to information access that may be caused by the limited social service provision and access. The Central Highlands region had high levels of deprivation in most of dimensions and income, perhaps due to geographical, economic, linguistic and cultural barriers. (UNDP, HDR 2019).

However, according to Vietnam's approach to LNOB, the country was, in 2016, among the first countries globally to adopt a multidimensional poverty standard, defining poverty not only by income but also by access to health care, education, clean water, information, and social insurance. The move marked a great stride in the modern social policy approach. Average incomes of poor households increased by more than 1.6 times compared to 2015. Previously impoverished provinces, including Ha Giang, Dien Bien, Quang Binh, and Kon Tum, made significant progress in infrastructure and living standards.

According to the VNR 2023, Vietnam has continued to improve its policy system to ensure a healthy life and enhance welfare for people at all ages, from infants to children, women and men, and the elderly. Some outstanding results include the drop of maternal mortality per 100,000 live births from 54 cases in 2015 to 46 in 2019 and the fall of mortality rate of children under 5 years old and under 1 year old. However, Vietnam still faces difficulties and challenges in achieving SDG 3 regarding the targets of maternal and child health care in ethnic minority and mountainous areas and high unmet need for contraceptives, especially among young female migrants.

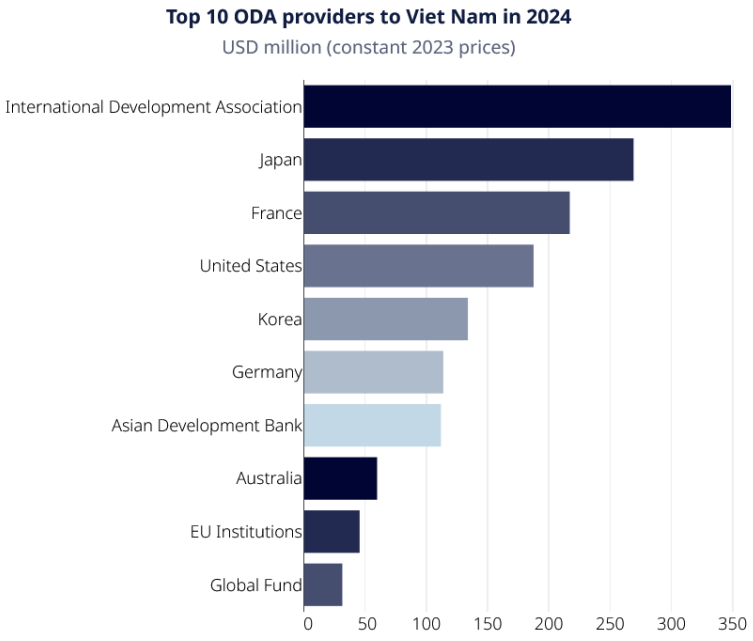
Combating harmful social norms on gender and gender biased sex selection will be the key to accelerate SDG 5. Vietnam has made certain efforts to ensure the equal participation of women in the political and economic fields. In addition, the sexual and reproductive health care for women has experienced positive changes although there are still certain limitations. Women are the key doers of unpaid family care work, while the infrastructure to care for children, the sick, people with disabilities and the elderly is limited.

The nation's substantial progress in equitable access to basic education has not been matched by corresponding greater opportunities at the tertiary education level. Youth from the top quintile are 67 percentage points more likely to have tertiary education opportunities than those from the poorest welfare quintile. The access gaps are also noteworthy across ethnicity groups - youth from ethnic minority communities are 34 percentages points less likely to access tertiary education than those from majority groups. The existing financial aid instruments (scholarship, tuition exemption/reduction, student loans) and nonmonetary incentives (admission quotas for students from remote areas) have not been very successful since inequality in tertiary enrolment has worsened over time across both income and ethnicity groups. The disparities are also due to insufficient academic readiness to enter tertiary education and the lack of outreach programs (such as information campaigns and counseling services) for those from disadvantaged communities and households. Vietnam can significantly enhance tertiary education access and equity by increasing institutional differentiation, strengthening student financial aid, and having a larger and better prepared pipeline of secondary school graduates for further education.

## 2.4. Multistakeholderpartnership - Stakeholder analysis

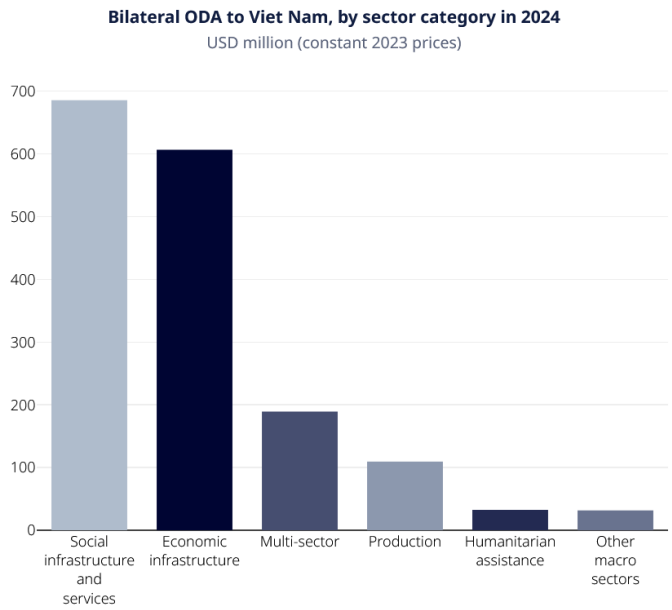
The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges that the SDG framework is seeking to address, requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. As such, the principle of multistakeholderpartnership – which promotes cooperation and partnerships at different stages and spanning the boundaries of civil society, private sector, government, and academia – is ubiquitous across the 2030 Agenda. An analysis of these stakeholders is essential for each partnership.

Looking at the international partners of Vietnam, the International Development Association is the main donor of gross official development aid (ODA) in Vietnam. With the withdrawal of USAID funds since the Trump administration took over in 2025, this situation is expected to change in the following years.

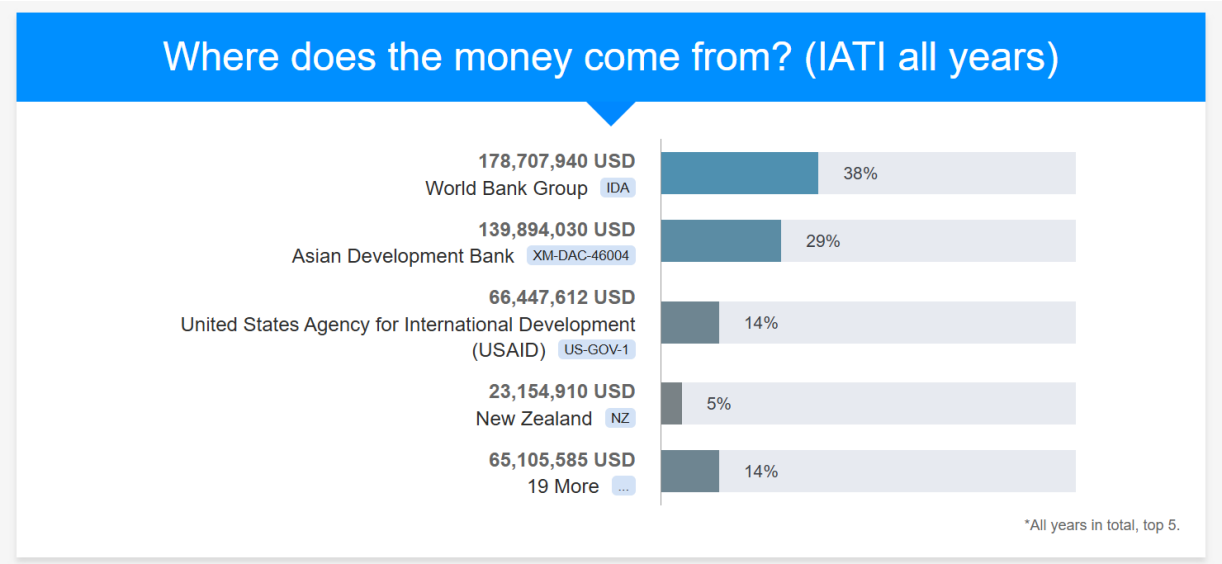



Sources: OECD (2025) , Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]

Most of the support goes to social infrastructure and services.



Based on data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), the World Bank is the main donor in the higher education sector. The VLIRUOS funding is not categorized exclusively as Higher education but spread over the sectors of project activity.




VLIRUOS contributes to the 2030 agenda by realizing a societal impact, implying an impact on local communities, civil society, governments, private sector or other higher education institutions. In what follows we list the role and the desired change among the main actors involved in the change process that VLIRUOS envisages to support through *its interventions*.

| Actor | Role and interest/influence |
|---|---|
| **Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam** | HEIs in Vietnam are important boundary partners in the realization of VLIRUOS outcomes in terms of its contribution to Agenda 2030, and the potential contribution to local sustainable development. As project owners they are expected to contribute to HEIs' enhanced institutional performance in the core tasks relating to education, research and societal service delivery strengthening the HEI's visibility and recognition as a centre of excellence. In the long-term, partner HEIs are also expected to have a multiplier effect on the higher education system and development sector in the country or region through their engagement in (global) knowledge-driven partnerships with academic and non-academic stakeholders. |
| **DGD ( incl Belgian embassy in partner countries)** | DGD has an advisory role in the VLIRUOS selection commissions and follows-up on the VLIRUOS portfolio and the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development. The Belgian Embassy can play a role in facilitating the uptake of knowledge, the identification, mobilisation and relation building with other stakeholders (e.g. links with European Union, national government, other donors), the contextual updates etc. |
| **Belgian bilateral cooperation (BIO & Enabel)** | VLIRUOS will regularly exchange with Enabel and BIO to identify and communicate opportunities for synergy and complementarity with academic projects of the partner HEIs (e.g. through country reference |

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| | frameworks, JSF platform). In the case of Vietnam however, bilateral cooperation and Enabel activities are already outphased but quite some important bilateral contacts remain and potential links with BIO can be further investigated. |
| **Students, professionals, and alumni** | **Students** can be direct (e.g. as a recipient of a PhD scholarship within a project) or indirect beneficiaries (e.g. enjoying improved/innovative didactical approaches) of the projects. As direct beneficiary, their changed role will be about the generation and use of newly acquired knowledge, competences (e.g. global citizenship) and networks in view of sustainable development. Alumni from VLIRUOS-projects in Vietnam will be important stakeholders in connecting VLIRUOS projects with each other, with other actors, etc. |
| **Academics/researchers** | As direct beneficiaries of the projects, academics and researchers affiliated within Flemish and partner HE&SIs play an important role in co-creating, disseminating and creating conditions for uptake of knowledge relevant to the achievement of the SDGs in line with the needs, policies and priorities of the partner HE&SIs, local/national or regional stakeholders. |
| **Members of the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development** | VLIRUOS, ITM and ARES have initiated the JSF on HESD4SD to further unlock the developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other local, Belgian and international partners as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a platform for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. In Vietnam all 3 actors are present. |
| **Belgian Actors of the Non-governmental Cooperation** | VLIRUOS continuously tries to identify and encourage synergy and complementarity between Belgian ANGCs and academic stakeholders. Through the uptake of research results, mobilisation of local stakeholders, participation in trainings or courses, identification and communication of relevant research questions/opportunities, hosting of international internships, facilitating student mobility... these actors play a critical role. |
| **International organizations and other donors (e.g. WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, European Commission...)** | Interventions undertaken by international organisations like UN agencies such as FAO or international donors active in higher education cooperation can be complementary in the achievement of the objectives of projects. They can, for instance, play a role in the use and upscaling of new knowledge or practices or serve as seed money for bigger interventions financed by these international organisations. |
| **Academic/science (inter)national and regional networks** | Regional or (inter)national academic/science networks (e.g. ASEAN) are among the potential indirect beneficiary as targeted HE&SIs strengthened in their research/educational capacities can improve the functioning of the networks they are part of through the co-creation, exchange and uptake of knowledge among academic stakeholders. Similar effects can be realized in the case of alumni and scholarship networks/associations when former scholarship students act as agents of change within these networks. |

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| **Public sector: Local or central government and political community** | Engage in evidence-based governance that puts knowledge to the test by being a stakeholder in the co-creation of inclusive (innovative) solutions and effective user of research results to foster good governance for sustainable and coherent policies. |
| **State owned/Private sector** | To ensure that the resource-led sustainable industrialization process is both sustainable and beneficial, the government will work closely with the **private sector**. This includes developing both the private sector and human capital to build an educated, skillful, and productive labor force to drive industrialization. |
| **Civil society, social movements and local communities** | Civil society actors, social movements and local communities are expected to co-create, access and use the knowledge and research products generated within the framework of *projects* thereby making a potential contribution to the entire range of SDGs. |

# 3. Synergy and Complementarity with other (Belgian) actors in Vietnam

## 3.1. VLIRUOS approaches to synergy and complementarity

Drawing upon their longstanding common history, VLIRUOS, ARES and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) jointly developed the thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development (JSF HES4SD). Through cooperation with civil society, private and public sector, the JSF initiators[3] aim to further unlock the huge developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other Belgian, local and international partners, in different ways: as partner in a multi-actor partnership, as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a knowledge broker for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. This reference framework for Vietnam will feed into the **platform** that the initiators of the JSF HES4SD plan to create to proactively communicate opportunities and facilitate such cooperation. More precisely, the platform can be used to:

(i) communicate about the launch and results of competitive calls for projects;
(ii) communicate other opportunities for projects or scholarships;
(iii) gather/exchange on collaboration opportunities (e.g. requests for scientific advice);
(iv) share information about ongoing projects, events and seminars in the country/region.

## 3.2. Bilateral cooperation (Enabel) in Vietnam

Since June 2019, bilateral cooperation with Vietnam was discontinued.

[3] The three JSF initiators represent 60 Belgian higher education institutions (HEIs), being 11 universities, 32 university colleges, 16 school of arts, and ITM.

## 3.3. Belgian actors of the non-governmental cooperation in Vietnam

### 3.3.1. Thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science

Together with ARES and ITM, VLIRUOS forms a thematic joint strategic framework on higher education and science for sustainable development (JSF HES4SD): hes4sd.be

More info specifically about ARES in Vietnam can be found on Moove ARES

Collaboration with the geographic JSF of Vietnam will be facilitated by systematically sharing information on projects and grants, by allowing Belgian ANGC to submit their needs in applied research or training, and by encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships through competitive calls for proposals (VLIRUOS/ARES) or partnerships with ITM counterparts.

### 3.3.2. Vietnam Joint Strategic Framework

| | Description of the strategic goal | ANGCs |
|---|---|---|
| **SG1** | Strengthen inclusive, gender-responsive child protection and youth leadership to prevent child marriage and advance girls' rights while building resilient communities.<br>➢ preventing child marriage through empowerment and culturally grounded norm change; promoting youth leadership in safe, structured spaces; and strengthening gender-responsive protection systems with adolescent-friendly services and reliable referral pathways; linking youth leadership and protection to local disaster risk reduction and climate-resilience planning | Plan International<br>VVOB<br>Rikolto |
| **SG2** | Promote sustainable, climate-resilient livelihoods and food systems that empower smallholder farmers, cooperatives, MSMEs and marginalised groups, especially women, ethnic minority communities, and adolescent girls and boys, while improving access to healthy, affordable food for all.<br>➢ fostering climate-resilient agriculture inclusive of women, youth, ethnic minorities, and smallholders; strengthening inclusive value chains and market access; improving nutrition-sensitive, safe food environments and equitable access to healthy diets; and boosting income diversification, financial resilience, and women- and youth-led initiatives through life skills, savings, and shock-responsive finance. | Plan International<br>VVOB<br>Rikolto |

### 3.3.3 Other Thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks

Apart from the collaboration with the JSF HES4SD, there will also be collaboration with the Decent Work thematic JSF that contributes to expertise on labour rights, occupational safety, informal workers, gender-sensitive value chain governance and social protection. This is particularly important for SG2, where youth, women and smallholder farmers often face barriers to decent work and safe employment. Complementarity will be pursued through shared evidence, coordinated advocacy, and alignment on themes such as income, responsible business conduct and inclusive market systems. The JSF Decent Work is led by 9 Belgian actors - including labour unions, public health insurance funds and NGOs. Its approach is underpinned by the four pillars of ILO's Decent Work Agenda: 1. decent job creation; 2. rights at work; 3. social protection and 4. social dialogue. Oxfam is the main actor of the JSF Decent Work in Vietnam. Oxfam's national programme in Vietnam is embedded in a broader regional Decent Work programme, influencing components targeting ASEAN. The programme focusses on women and youth workers in informal and formal agri-food value chains, promoting labour rights, better Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and increased access to social protection.