

COUNTRY YOUTH

# CALL TO ACTION 2025

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Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence based solutions for the 2030 agenda and its SDGs for leaving no young person behind in Asia and the Pacific



VIETNAM

## Situational Analysis

Vietnam has demonstrated a strong commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with notable progress in several areas. In health (SDG 3), the country has seen a reduction in child mortality rates and achieved a health insurance coverage of 92.04% of the population as of 2022 (UN, 2023). Regarding gender equality (SDG 5), while significant strides have been made, challenges persist, particularly in data availability, with substantial gaps in gender-related indicators (UNICEF, 2023). Economically (SDG 8), Vietnam's growth trajectory is accelerating, with projections indicating growth rates more than twice the global forecast for 2023-2025 (UNDP, 2023).

However, issues such as informal employment and youth unemployment require ongoing attention. In terms of marine sustainability (SDG 14), the country faces challenges, including significant data gaps in indicators related to life below water, necessitating further investment in data generation and environmental protection efforts (UNICEF, 2023). According to the Government of Vietnam (2023), partnerships (SDG 17) have been pivotal in Vietnam's SDG implementation, with the nation making remarkable progress through strong commitments and the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda in national policies.

To accelerate progress, Vietnam recognizes the need for enhanced data collection, increased investment in sustainable practices, and strengthened multi-stakeholder collaborations.

In rural and remote areas in Vietnam, neonatal and maternal mortality rates are still higher in these

regions due to limited access to healthcare facilities, cultural barriers, and a shortage of trained healthcare professionals. Child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) remain a significant issue with 14.6% of women aged 20-24 in Vietnam married before 18. Gender inequality, poverty, and limited education contribute to these practices, often made worse by culturally insensitive interventions. Another major issue is the rising mental health crisis, particularly among young people. Suicide rates, especially among individuals aged 15-29, have been increasing, with social pressures and limited mental health services exacerbating the situation. In 2019, suicide was one of the leading causes of death for this age group, signaling the urgent need for mental health support and awareness programs. Vietnam's healthcare system has made significant strides, but there are still gaps in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities, children, LGBTQIA+ and the elderly. Additionally, emerging concerns such as vaping and the rise of pod systems have prompted new considerations for public health laws.

Vietnam has made strides in gender equality, but deep-rooted norms, economic shifts, and climate change continue to reinforce disparities. Women remain underrepresented in leadership (9.6% in the National Assembly, <11% in executive roles) despite high workforce participation (over 70%), largely due to limited STEM access and unpaid domestic burdens—which Vietnamese women perform 2x more than men. Meanwhile, climate change is forcing male fishers and farmers into unsafe, low-wage migrant labor, increasing their economic vulnerability. Human trafficking remains a major threat, particularly in border provinces like Lao Cai and Quang

Co-convoked by:



In collaboration:



In partnership:



Ninh, where women and girls are trafficked to China and Cambodia. Ethnic minority girls face early marriage due to poverty and cultural norms.

Vietnam's workforce is shifting rapidly, with 56% of workers in the informal sector, particularly in construction, fishing, and domestic work, where low wages, lack of contracts, and unsafe conditions are widespread. Many workers earn less than VND 5 million (\$200) per month, making them vulnerable to exploitation and job insecurity. Migrant labor is increasing, both within the country and abroad, as climate change forces fishers and farmers to seek work in cities or neighboring countries like Thailand and Malaysia. However, many lack formal skills and certifications, limiting their job prospects and exposing them to unsafe and exploitative conditions. Meanwhile, youth unemployment and underemployment remain concerns, with 40% of young workers lacking vocational training, preventing them from accessing stable, high-paying jobs. Women also face barriers in the workforce, particularly regarding maternity leave, childcare access, and career advancement. Without flexible work policies and financial support, many women are forced to leave the labor market after childbirth. While Vietnam's economy continues to grow, ensuring fair wages, safe jobs, and equal opportunities for all workers—especially in informal sectors and among youth and women—remains a key challenge.

Vietnam, a coastal nation, heavily relies on its marine resources for economic growth, with sectors like fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and marine transportation playing key roles in national development. The country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is three times the size of its land territory, highlighting the critical importance of marine ecosystems. These waters host around 20 distinct ecosystems, including mangrove forests, coral reefs, lagoons, and seagrass beds, supporting rich biodiversity and livelihoods for millions.

However, this reliance has become increasingly unsustainable due to climate change, socio-economic pressures, and environmental degradation. Industrial activities, overfishing, and unsustainable aquaculture practices have led to the loss of 12% of coral reefs since the early 2000s, with 48% of remaining reefs at risk. Around 100 marine species are currently under threat due to overexploitation. Additionally, climate-related events like storm surges have historically caused severe damage to coastal ecosystems and communities. These challenges underscore the urgent need for sustainable marine resource management, climate adaptation, and stronger environmental protections to ensure the long-term health of Vietnam's marine ecosystems and economic stability.

Vietnam's commitment to SDG 17 is evident in its multifaceted approach to international partnerships. The country actively engages in bilateral and multilateral collaborations, extending beyond traditional areas like economics and health to prioritize education and youth development. Partnerships with countries like Singapore facilitate specialized exchange programs in fields like entrepreneurship, while ASEAN initiatives such as ASEAN Youth Summit provide regional training in digital entrepreneurship. Multi-stakeholder engagement is key, with collaborations between domestic and international actors supporting learning hubs and fostering cross-border opportunities. These initiatives, often supported by organizations like the World Bank, empower Vietnamese youth with crucial skills for the future workforce, including emerging technologies through partnerships with companies. This strategic focus on collaborative action strengthens Vietnam's capacity to address global challenges and achieve sustainable development.

Despite Vietnam's growing engagement with international partnerships to advance SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, significant gaps remain in empowering young people to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. On the one hand, Youth-focused collaborations with organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ASEAN, and the World Bank have created platforms for young leaders to contribute to global goals. Initiatives like Youth4Climate and the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Program empower young Vietnamese to participate. However, making up over 23% of the population, youth are facing barriers to active participation in decision-making processes, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Access to resources, skills training, and leadership opportunities is still uneven, limiting the potential of youth to drive innovation and contribute to key areas such as climate action, digital transformation, and social entrepreneurship.

Youth from ethnic minority groups and remote regions also often lack access to international exchange programs, technical training, and platforms for regional collaboration. Existing partnerships and initiatives, such as Youth4Climate and ASEAN youth programs, have made progress (UNDP, 2021), but they often fail to reach the broader youth population due to limited funding, insufficient outreach, and lack of localized support (UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, young people's involvement in policy-making, economic development strategies, and climate adaptation planning remains minimal, leaving their voices underrepresented in national and regional development agendas.



## Recommendations

Our recommendations for Vietnam on selected SDGs to achieve optimum target are as follows-

### SDG3: Good Health and Well-being

- Implement mental health policies across various environments, such as workplaces and schools, to foster a supportive atmosphere. These policies should ensure access to mental health resources, provide accommodations for employees or students with mental health challenges, and encourage open dialogues about mental well-being, ultimately reducing stigma and promoting mental health care in all settings.
- Create inclusive healthcare systems that cater to the unique needs of vulnerable groups, including children, women, and the LGBTQIA+ community. This includes culturally competent services, gender-affirming care, and non-discriminatory practices. Ensure accessible healthcare services in rural areas, developing healthcare infrastructure and providing essential services like vaccinations, routine treatments, and preventive care for infants, children, adolescents, and LGBTQIA+.
- Implement and enforce transport safety measures to reduce road accidents and injuries, with a particular focus on pedestrian safety, traffic regulations, and safer transport options for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. This includes ensuring that infrastructure, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible transport options, is available for people with disabilities and the elderly.
- Invest in capacity building for school teachers by creating dedicated training programs in School Psychology Counsellor. These programmes should focus on mental health practices, providing students and educators with the Social Emotional Learning tools to address mental health concerns early on, particularly in school settings. This will promote a supportive learning environment and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.
- Develop inclusive playgrounds that are accessible to children, elderly, and people with disabilities and promote International Play Day. Alongside this, distribute a toolkit that includes board games or interactive activities designed to promote children's well-being and create a stress-free environment. These educational games should focus on social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, and mental health awareness.

### SDG5: Gender Equality

- Recognize men's vulnerability in climate migration by launching vocational training funds to help them transition to safer, stable jobs in sectors less dependent on environmental changes. These initiatives should focus on equipping men with new skills, providing long-term economic stability, and recognizing men's roles in addressing climate-induced challenges. Gender equality should address both men's and women's challenges, ensuring opportunities for all.
- Reduce Vietnamese women's unpaid care burden by increasing public recognition of their double workload and running nationwide campaigns that promote shared household responsibilities. These efforts should encourage equal participation in domestic work, fostering a more equitable division of labour at home and enabling women to pursue career opportunities and improve their overall well-being.
- Ensure 50% of governmental scholarships and vocational training opportunities in STEM and business are allocated to women, empowering them to bridge the gender gap in these fields. This would support women's entry into leadership roles, enhance decision-making diversity, and contribute to long-term economic growth by fully utilising the talents and potential of both genders.
- Governments and organizations should adopt gender-responsive policies that focus on preventing human trafficking and sexual abuse of women and girls. These policies should include stricter law enforcement, support services for survivors, education campaigns to raise awareness, and systematic legal frameworks that ensure justice for victims and perpetrators are held accountable.
- Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in all sectors, particularly in the workplace and educational environments. DEI initiatives should include equal opportunities for women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and underrepresented groups. Policies should focus on inclusive recruitment, fair representation, and equitable treatment in all areas of society to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Develop and implement youth-led strategies to address Child, Early, and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) in under-represented areas. This includes removing policy barriers and shifting away from punitive approaches. The strategies should emphasize cultural sensitivity, engage local communities, and empower young people to take leadership roles in advocating for gender equality and the elimination of harmful practices.



## SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Prevent exploitation and ensure fair wages by setting a minimum wage, strengthening labor protections, and enforcing safer working conditions, especially in high-risk informal sectors like construction, fishing, and domestic work.
- Improve job mobility for migrant workers – Vietnam and ASEAN labor ministries should launch regional training programs in IT, engineering, and sustainable agriculture, helping workers find stable jobs locally or safely migrate abroad. Strengthen bilateral labor agreements to expand legal job opportunities for Vietnamese to work in neighboring countries, such as Thailand.
- Support youth entrepreneurs – Provide low-interest loans and micro-grants for eco-tourism, ethical fish farming, and community businesses. Offer financial literacy and business training to help young entrepreneurs build sustainable livelihoods.
- Government incentives such as tax breaks, flexible work policies or subsidies should be provided for working mothers during maternity leaves.

## SDG14: Life Below Water

- Strengthen partnerships with ASEAN countries, international organizations, and local stakeholders through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Engage businesses, NGOs, and academic institutions to pool resources and expertise for innovative solutions.
- Enhance financial mechanisms by creating funding initiatives, to provide financial support for sustainable marine projects, waste management programs, and coastal ecosystem restoration.
- Empower communities by recognizing and funding community-led initiatives and ensuring their active involvement in decision-making processes. Valuing local knowledge, traditions, and rights should be at the core of conservation strategies, allowing communities not just to participate but to lead efforts that directly impact their livelihoods and environment.
- Evaluate the current state of marine and coastal capabilities in the main coastal area. Determine which infrastructural, knowledge, and conservational technological deficiencies require attention. Try to adapt advanced biotechnology and information technology such as upgrading conservation equipment, using high-resolution satellite systems, and applying real-time data collection platforms.

## SDG17: Partnership for the Goals

- Engage youth voices in policy-making by integrating youth representatives into national and local decision-making processes. Establish formal mechanisms such as youth advisory councils within government agencies and SDG task forces to ensure meaningful contributions from young people.
- Expand youth participation beyond climate action by increasing their role in economic development, gender equality, and governance. Encourage youth-led projects in entrepreneurship, STEM education, and policy advocacy by providing grants, leadership training, and networking opportunities with policymakers.
- Improve financial and technical support for youth initiatives by creating a National Youth SDG Fund. This fund should offer direct financial assistance, mentorship programs, and capacity-building resources to help young changemakers scale their impact.
- Strengthen corporate accountability in sustainable development by incentivizing businesses to invest in community-driven SDG initiatives. Implement tax benefits, funding schemes, and reporting frameworks that encourage private-sector support for youth-led and community-based projects.
- Enhance the representation of marginalized groups in decision-making by implementing quota systems and leadership programs. Ensure women, ethnic minorities, and rural populations have equitable access to policy making spaces and capacity-building programs.
- Promote deeper collaboration between NGOs, government agencies, and international donors through a multi-stakeholder SDG coordination hub. This platform should align funding priorities, share best practices, and support data-driven policy-making to maximize development impact.

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*The APFSD country and sub-regional briefs were developed through collective discussions and engagements between youth advocates at the APFSD Youth Forum in Bangkok on 19–21 February, 2025. The Vietnam drafting team consisted of Trần Quỳnh Hương, Trần Ngọc Dung, Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Huyền, and Lại Khánh Linh. Overall supervision was provided by the ARROW Call To Action team.*

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