

# WHITE BOOK 2025

## CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION IN VIETNAM





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## EDUCATION AGAINST POVERTY

**We founded the DucSonChild Association almost fifteen years ago**, with a single goal: to modestly contribute to the fight against extreme poverty in Vietnam.

In 2011, when our association was created, Vietnam was still a country only recently emerging from extreme hardship. It had joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the international community just three years earlier, in 2008, and was only beginning to establish itself as a new emerging economy.

**For a country still very poor at that time, our first conviction was that education remained the most effective means of lifting individuals—and the nation as a whole—out of poverty in a sustainable way.** Since then, for more than a decade, we have chosen to focus all our actions and resources on education.

Our conviction, in particular, has been that access to secondary and tertiary education is—and will remain—the key to national development. Since the pioneering work of American economist Theodore Schultz in the 1960s, we know that each additional year spent in school—whether in high school, vocational training, or university—benefits both the educated individual and society as a whole.



For Schultz, education represents “human capital”, an investment made in the individual that generates value both for the person and for the community. However, as with any form of capital, human capital requires investment, and the returns are only visible after several years. Thus, for many poor households, the years a fifteen-year-old spends in high school are perceived as a loss of income—an investment with uncertain future benefits.

For this reason, too many children from poor families give up their studies when they reach secondary school age. The prospect of an immediate income outweighs the perceived value of investing in many years of education.





This is obviously regrettable: for these children —bright and capable though they are—such a premature end to schooling confines them to low-skilled, insecure jobs, leaving them in permanent precariousness for the rest of their lives.

This situation is particularly acute in rural and peri-urban areas, far from major cities.

For poor families in the countryside, the cost of schooling becomes prohibitive as the child advances to secondary (high school) and then tertiary (university or higher) levels. Especially at the tertiary level, the prospect of spending between 1,000 and 2,000 euros per year—sometimes much more depending on the program—represents, for these families, several years of income and thus an almost unbearable financial burden.

**For millions of such households, a vicious circle of intergenerational poverty persists:**

- Parents who are too poor cannot afford to send their children to university, or can send only one child,

- As a result, the next generation often remains trapped in low-skilled, informal, and poorly paid jobs, without contracts or social protection.

This financial inability to acquire adequate human capital leaves an entire segment of the population—the poorest in the country —on the margins of economic development.

For these children, our response—similar to that of many NGOs in Vietnam before us —has been to provide scholarships so that education no longer represents a financial burden. Particularly at the tertiary level, where enrollment rates among poor families are very low, funding tuition fees and providing living stipends is crucial to enabling the poorest students to pursue their studies.

It must be remembered that in these remote rural areas, sending a child to university means sending them far from



home for several years. Living expenses—food, housing, transportation— and the emotional strain of separation from one’s family must also be added to the cost of tuition. Studying at university means moving to a big city, finding housing, settling there, and studying at the same time.

It is worth noting that even in the most remote and impoverished villages, faith in education remains strong. Children abandon schooling not out of choice, but out of necessity. During the many years we have operated our scholarship program, we have observed a very low dropout rate. The few cases of discontinuation generally involve students whose scholarships could no longer cover the rapid rise in university fees. Almost always, studies are interrupted out of necessity, not by choice.

For the vast majority of our scholarship recipients—more than fifty of whom have now successfully completed their studies—the

results have convinced us of the effectiveness of our efforts. Our means are limited, yet after nearly fifteen years, we are convinced that our decision to focus our resources on education as a tool to combat extreme poverty has been fruitful.

Today, our graduates hold qualified jobs, some have begun to rise through the ranks within their organizations. They are happy, financially independent, and permanently out of poverty. They have helped their families and contributed to the country’s development.

Consistently, they acknowledge the crucial role of scholarships in allowing them to escape their original social conditions. Their gratitude serves as additional motivation for us to continue our mission.

After nearly fifteen years of work in education in Vietnam, we have had the privilege to observe, study, analyze, experiment, and test.



- Chapter I provides an overview of Vietnam's education system, its performance compared to other countries, and the challenges ahead. Education is viewed as a key driver of economic development.

- Chapter II focuses on social access and equity in education—education as a tool enabling the poorest to break free from social determinism. This should be a priority area for a country like Vietnam.

- Chapter III gathers our observations, suggestions, and practical recommendations—possible avenues to improve both the performance and accessibility of the education system for the most disadvantaged.

- Chapter IV concludes with a series of testimonies—students, parents, and teachers—that illustrate concretely the challenges and bottlenecks in Vietnam's education system.

We have seen what works and what does not, identified obstacles and opportunities, and understood how organizations like ours can best help.

Listening to our scholarship students and their families has provided us with invaluable insights for all those, like us, committed to improving the situation of the poorest in Vietnam.

We felt it would be useful to share our experience, observations, and lessons learned.

This is the purpose of this White Paper, written fifteen years after our first reflections on the DucSonChild project. There remains much to be done in education for a country that is still poor but aspires to overcome poverty in the near future. Sharing a common understanding is the first step toward building a more comprehensive national education plan.

This White Paper is structured into four chapters:





# CHAPTER I

## **EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION: EDUCATION TO MAKE VIETNAM A DEVELOPED COUNTRY**



I - EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION : EDUCATION MAKES VIETNAM A DEVELOPED COUNTRY

Education as a pillar of the country’s economic development toward 2030

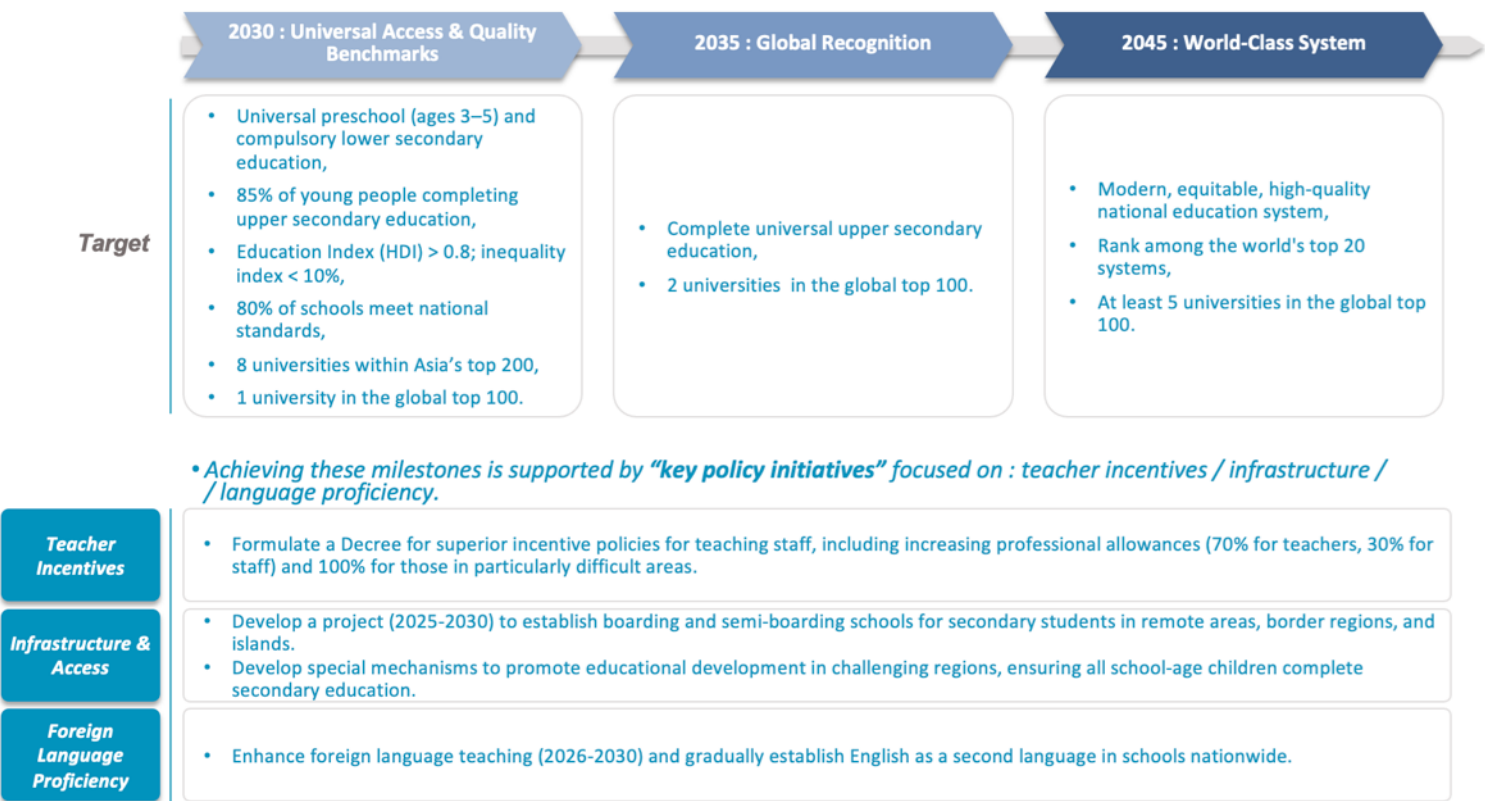
Vietnam’s national economic goal was reaffirmed in December 2024: by 2030, the objective is to become an upper-middle-income country, and by 2045, a developed, high-income country. In this perspective, education is expected to play a critical,

major role in making Vietnam a developed nation by 2045.

In this respect, the updated national education plan of January 2025 reaffirmed the main lines of the country’s strategy for the coming years. **The vision centers on two overarching objectives: first, universalization and access to education for all**, at least through upper secondary school (the target is for 95% of each age cohort to complete high school, i.e., to spend at least 12 years in school); **second, the modernization and improvement of higher education and the university network** (the goal is to improve the ranking of Vietnamese universities and increase

Vietnam’s ambitious education goals 2030 to 2045

- Vietnam has set clear, ambitious targets to transform its national education system, focusing on universal access, quality improvement, and global competitiveness,
- These goals require a fundamental renewal of mindset and strong political will across all levels of government,
- Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW on breakthroughs in education and training (August 2025).



the number of university graduates).

For the government— as the education development plan reiterates— education is a key lever in the country’s transition to economic development. Education spending, initially on primary and secondary levels in the early stages of development and then on tertiary education for middle-income countries, has long been known— since the literature on human capital— to be essential and indispensable for countries’ economic advancement.

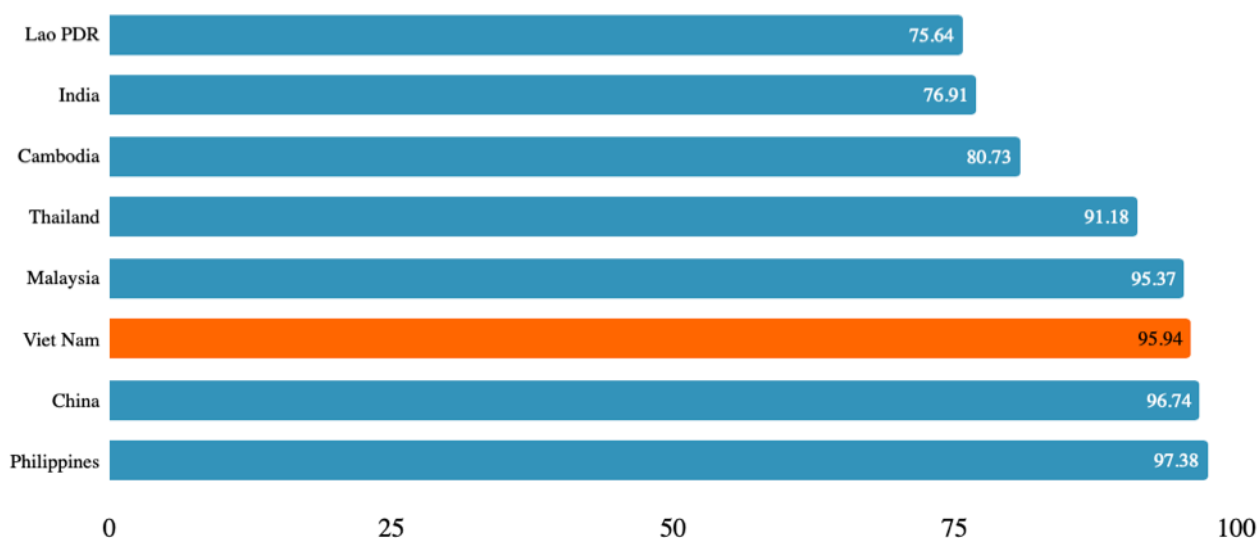
This willingness to increase investment in education has taken concrete form in measures such as a significant raise in teachers’ salaries in 2024 (after several years without indexation) and the waiver of tuition fees for children in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school, planned for 2025. In September 2025, the government again reaffirmed its ambition with targets concerning accessibility,

performance, costs, and investment in education.

The French economist Philippe Aghion has highlighted in his work the crucial role of education in countries’ economic development **[1]**. Aghion emphasizes that, empirically, emerging economies in a catch-up phase must invest heavily in primary and secondary education. At this stage— as shown by the example of East Asian countries— mass education in the early years of schooling for the whole population yields the highest return on investment.

Aghion’s analysis can be summarized and simplified as follows: when GDP per capita is around €5,000–€10,000, investing in the first twelve years of schooling (from primary through upper secondary) is most profitable during the catch-up phase. Training a

## Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above) Average 2019-2023



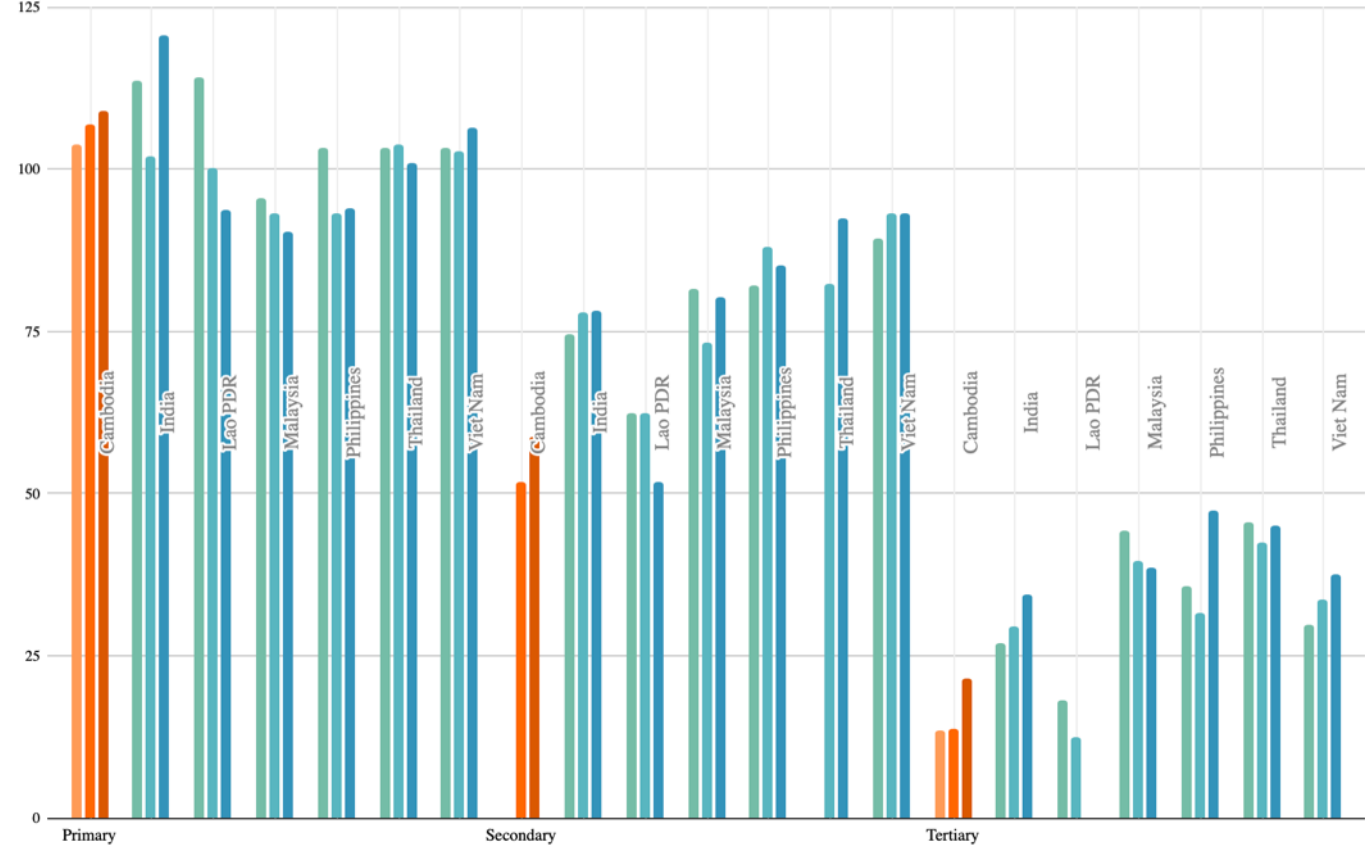
cohort of young workers who master basic educational fundamentals is sufficient in this initial stage. Such a strategy—akin to the path followed by Korea in the 1960s–1970s—proved more effective than the approach taken by certain Latin American countries at a similar level of development, which chose to invest in higher education and elite tracks rather than in mass education. According to Aghion, catch-up phases require little innovation but intense demand for trained workers—even if not highly qualified—enabling rapid industrialization. Investing in the early stages of schooling both lays the groundwork for higher education and rapidly raises overall labor productivity through foundational knowledge.

Vietnam is slowly but surely approaching the end of this stage. For years it has achieved high

enrollment levels in primary and secondary education, but— a persistent Vietnamese weakness— it has long struggled to translate encouraging results at the secondary level into robust outcomes in tertiary education and universities.

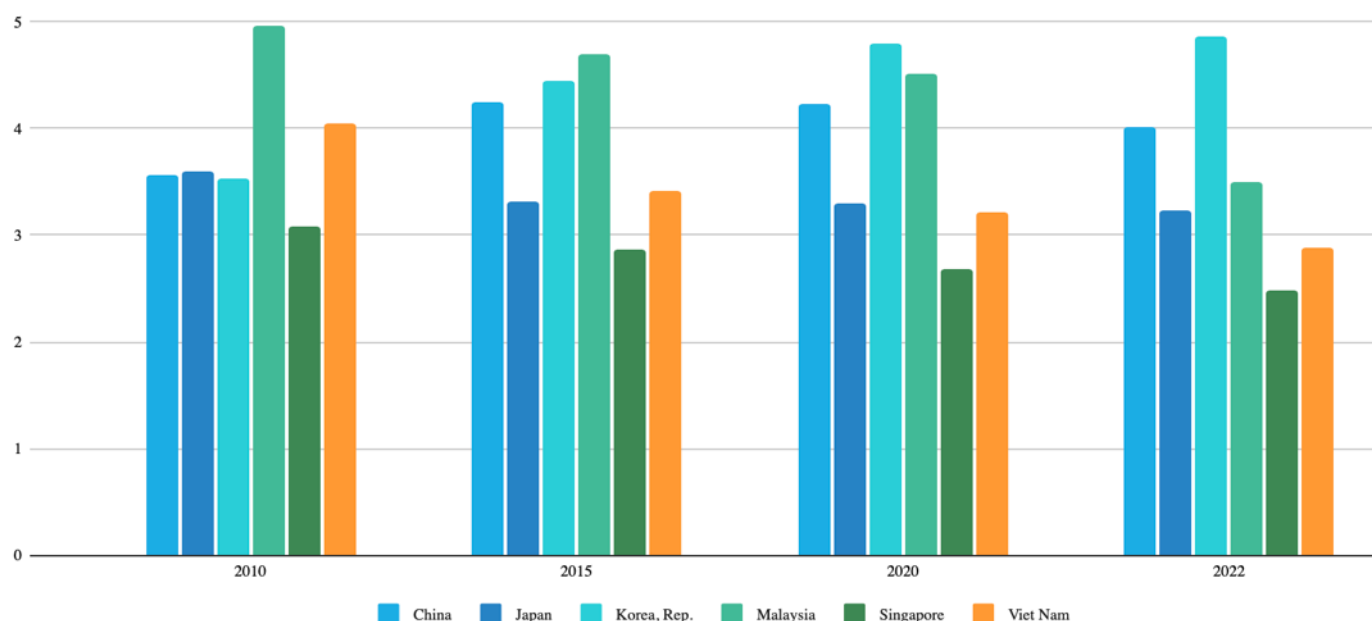
On this specific point, the Politburo’s resolution is welcome: it reaffirms a short-term priority on secondary (mass) education, and then, in the medium term, a focus on university performance. Tuition waivers and higher teacher salaries both move in the direction of strengthening education for all during the first twelve years—which, empirically, delivers the fastest productivity gains for emerging economies.

School enrollment 2015-2020-2024 (% gross)





## Education spending over GDP



### Mixed results at the secondary level in recent international assessments

Despite clear political will, education spending in Vietnam remains too low compared with other countries. For an emerging country, sustained economic development requires standing out in international competition, both in export markets and in attracting foreign investment. As things stand, education spending—both in absolute terms and as a share of output—remains too low to compete globally. Last year, Vietnam spent just under 3% of GDP on education, i.e., about 800 USD per student. France spends almost twenty times more (around 15,000 USD per student, on average).

Such spending results in low teacher pay compared with other countries and relatively modest investment in teacher training. In a global-competition context, one consequence has been Vietnam's surprising and worrying decline in PISA rankings and scores. It is unusual

—indeed contrary to the usual trajectory of developing countries— to observe a drop in PISA results, which are supposed to measure the acquisition of foundational skills.

Explanations for this decline—unexpected in a fast-growing country—may vary. Most likely, it reflects a mix of chronic underinvestment in secondary education combined with a relative inability to modernize and improve the public education system and curricula. The most recent results, measured in 2022 during COVID-19 in Vietnam, may also reflect that school closures were harder for Vietnam's system to absorb than for wealthier countries. In any case, the somewhat disappointing PISA performance of Vietnamese students in the latest cycle is a reminder that its effort in education is only beginning; Vietnam must continue to prioritize investment,

## 14 Vietnam PISA score and ranking

| Category    | PISA 2018           |         | PISA 2022           |         | Evolution |
|-------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|-----------|
|             | Student performance | Ranking | Student performance | Ranking |           |
| Mathematics | 496                 | 24      | 469                 | 30      | -6        |
| Reading     | 505                 | 13      | 462                 | 33      | -20       |
| Science     | 543                 | 4       | 472                 | 34      | -30       |

• *Definition of PISA : PISA is a global assessment conducted every three years, targeting 15-year-olds. It evaluates how well students perform in math, reading and science*

• *In 2018 Viet Nam's performance in reading, mathematics and science could not be fully ensured. For this reason, the OECD does not report comparisons of Viet Nam's performance in PISA with other countries.*

including in primary and secondary education, where the results currently place the country in the middle of the pack.

Close attention should be paid to future PISA cycles and other international rankings. The 2022 scores may be considered disappointing given Vietnam's longstanding tradition of studious effort—students naturally spend a lot of time on schoolwork, both at school and at home. In Vietnam, the value of schooling hardly needs to be explained to parents and students; academic effort is deeply rooted in cultural heritage. Public education appears to suffer from inefficiency in addition to underinvestment. PISA matters also because it measures the learning of the cohort about to enter university. If results are too low, university study will become difficult for a portion of the age group about to enroll. Investment in tertiary education is only effective when fundamentals are mastered upon leaving high school. We should therefore scrutinize upcoming PISA scores, particularly in light of recent measures and the August 2025 resolution to increase resources

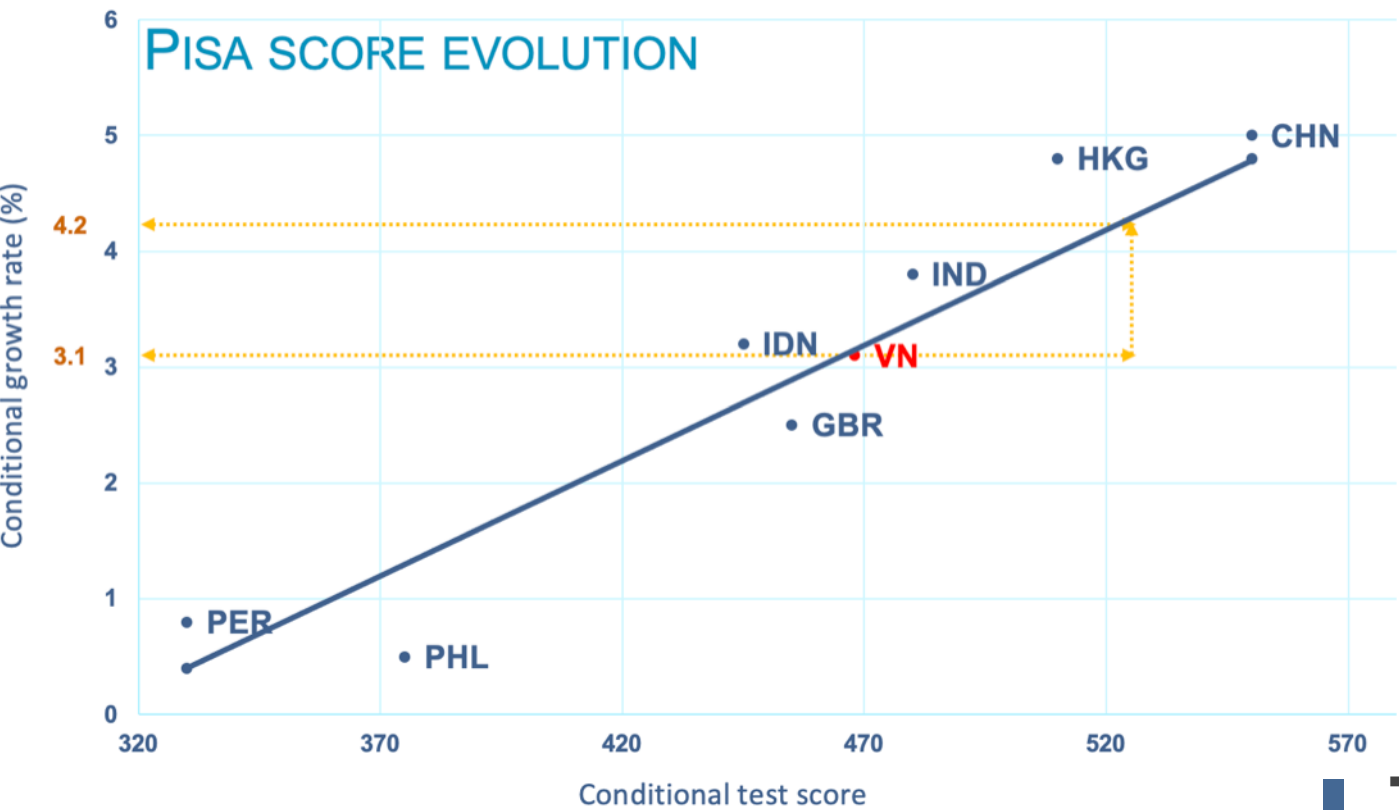
and funding for public schools. In addition to these welcome measures, teaching methods need modernization, drawing—where appropriate—on international precedents at the secondary level. Chapter III of this White Paper proposes several cases that could inspire Vietnam.

To conclude this reflection on primary and secondary education, we can cite the work of education economists Hanushek and Wössmann [2] : for countries' economic development, quality of investment matters more than its sheer amount. They suggest using PISA scores as a benchmark of education performance; empirically, they find a correlation between PISA scores and long-run growth rates.

For Vietnam, extrapolating their results yields the following interpretation: a 30-point increase in PISA scores (from 470, the average across mathematics, science, and reading) could enable an additional 1 percentage point of annual growth for several decades. Over the long term, the gains may be substantial: with

# CORRELATION PISA SCORE vs ECONOMIC GROWTH (Hanushek et Wossman)

- Vietnam PISA average score 468,
- An increase of PISA average score from 468 to 525 (top 15 countries) could result in an increase of 1.1%pt in GDP growth (from 3.1% to 4.2%)



conservative growth assumptions, such an improvement in PISA could raise GDP per capita from 9,500 USD to 11,000 USD by around 2040 (a 15%+ difference over 15 years, all else equal).

## The development of universities: Vietnam’s next challenge

Primary and secondary education take precedence during the catch-up phase—where Vietnam currently stands. Philippe Aghion argues that as the economy shifts toward higher value-added sectors and approaches the technological frontier, the capacity to innovate becomes critical. At that

stage, investment in tertiary education becomes essential. Vietnam is not quite there yet, but is approaching quickly; moreover, the lesson from developed countries is that we should prepare now for the transition to an innovation-driven economy. This requires investing in tertiary education, with the aim of training students whose skills meet economic needs and building innovation ecosystems that bring together businesses, research centers, and universities capable of standing out in international competition.

Vietnam has not yet reached this stage, but the structural weakness of its universities

16

QS ranking of top Vietnamese universities in ASIA

Target 2030

▶ 4/8 universities within Asia’s top 200

▶ 0/1 university in the global top 100

| 2025         | 2024              | Institution Name                                        | Subregion Rank    |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Rank display | Rank display prev | Institution                                             | Rank in subregion |
| 127          | 115               | Duy Tan University                                      | 26                |
| 161          | =187              | Vietnam National University, Hanoi                      | 40                |
| 184          | =220              | Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) | 46                |
| 199          | 138               | Ton Duc Thang University                                | 51                |
| =333         | 291-300           | Nguyen Tat Thanh University (NTTU), HCMC                | 63                |
| =348         | 351-400           | Hue University                                          | 65                |
| =369         | 301-350           | University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City                | 66                |
| =388         | 401-450           | Hanoi University of Science and Technology              | 67                |
| 421-430      | 401-450           | Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education | =73               |
| 421-430      | 501-550           | University of Da Nang                                   | =73               |
| 481-490      | 651-700           | University of Transport and Communications              | =83               |
| 491-500      | 701-750           | Van Lang University                                     | 86                |

▶ QS Ranking : annual list that ranks universities based on six indicators: academic reputation, employer reputation, student-to-faculty ratio, research citations per faculty, international faculty ratio, and international student ratio. Compiled by the British firm Quacquarelli Symonds, the rankings aim to assess universities on teaching, research, employability, and internationalization

calls for a longer-term strategy of investment and upgrading. The second pillar of the education plan to 2045 therefore prioritizes higher education; in the medium term, the ambition is to have several Vietnamese universities among the world’s top 500 (QS global ranking), while increasing student intake (the target is at least 33% of an age cohort entering university, and 45% in post-secondary education overall—see Figure 1 above on the Politburo’s latest resolution and university admission targets).

We noted above the decline in PISA for secondary students. Yet, on international comparison, Vietnam remains relatively strong at the secondary level. Compared with other Southeast Asian countries—

our main competitors for the new wave of foreign investment (e.g., relocating from China) —Vietnam’s secondary-level performance places it toward the top of the group. The weak point lies in tertiary education and university performance, where Vietnam is consistently relegated to the back of the pack, regionally and globally.

This is all the more regrettable because university entrance exams are highly selective, requiring intense preparation due to the limited number of places available each year. In other words, students entering Vietnamese universities are relatively strong (at least within



## Public Expenditure on Tertiary Education (% of GDP 2016)



Southeast Asia), yet after four or five years, their degrees and skills still place them toward the bottom internationally. This is unfortunate: Vietnamese universities squander an advantage in the quality of the students they enroll.

The first priority is investment to modernize our universities, which the education plan also targets. Tertiary education in Vietnam has long suffered from chronic underinvestment. A 2020 World Bank report on higher education in Vietnam [3] noted that from 2005 to 2020, Vietnam invested less—both in absolute terms and

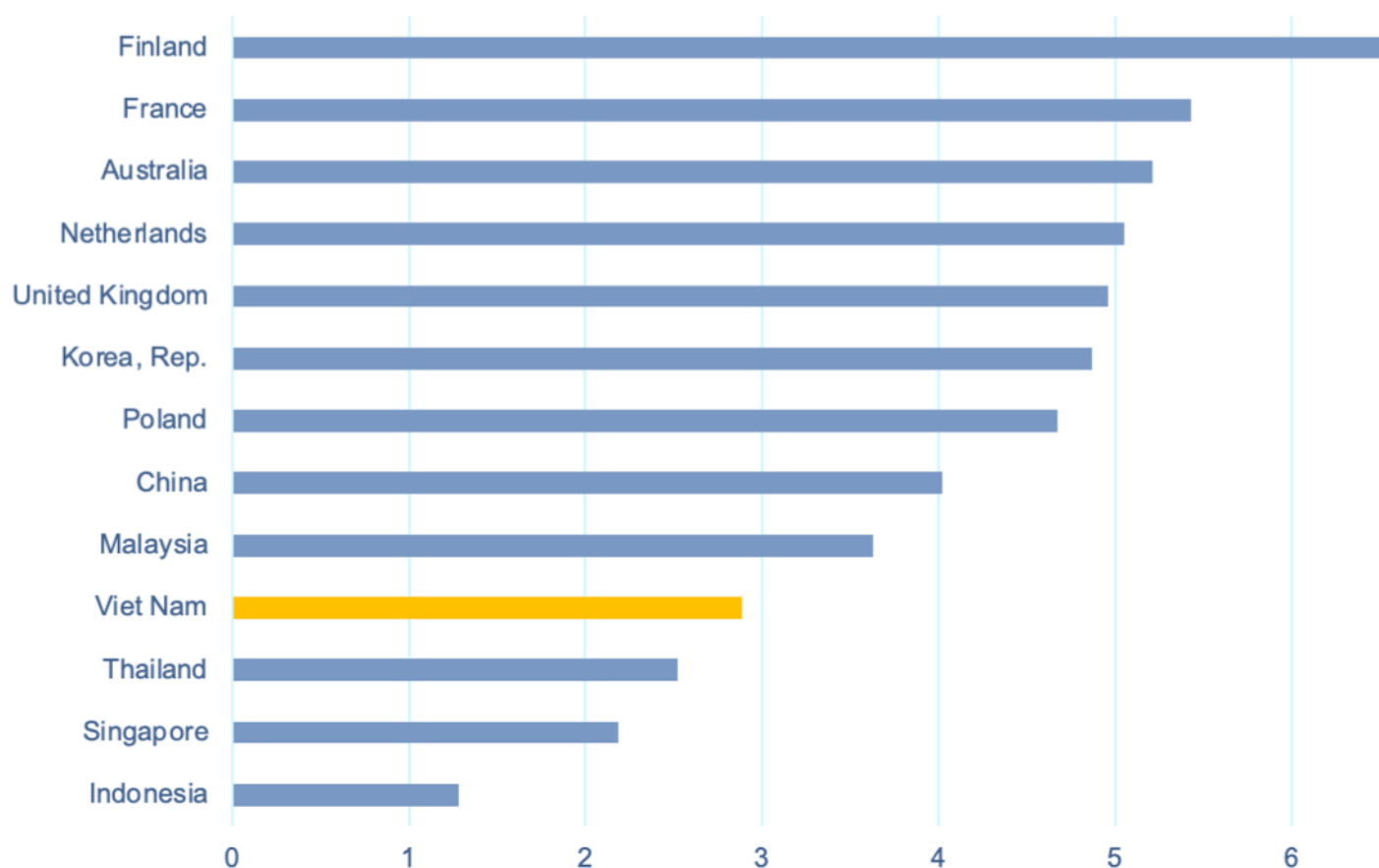
as a share of public spending—in universities than other Southeast Asian countries. The new plan's objective is a minimum of 3% of the state budget for higher education (versus less than 1% up to the 2020s). Improving tertiary education

requires very substantial investment, with more uncertain returns than at the secondary level.

Unlike investment in the early years of schooling, which relies on fundamental knowledge, higher education must train future skilled workers for the economy and productive sectors—needs that are by nature changing and variable. We should welcome the increase in university budgets, but also be concerned about the rising costs borne by students (to be discussed in Chapter II).

Continuous improvement of our university system requires both more resources and a larger volume of students entering and being trained at university. It is encouraging that the 2025 national education plan sets the course for massification (33% of an age cohort by 2030, then 45% by 2050, with

## Spending on education (% of GDP, 2022)



70% in public universities), alongside significant budget increases compared with previous years.

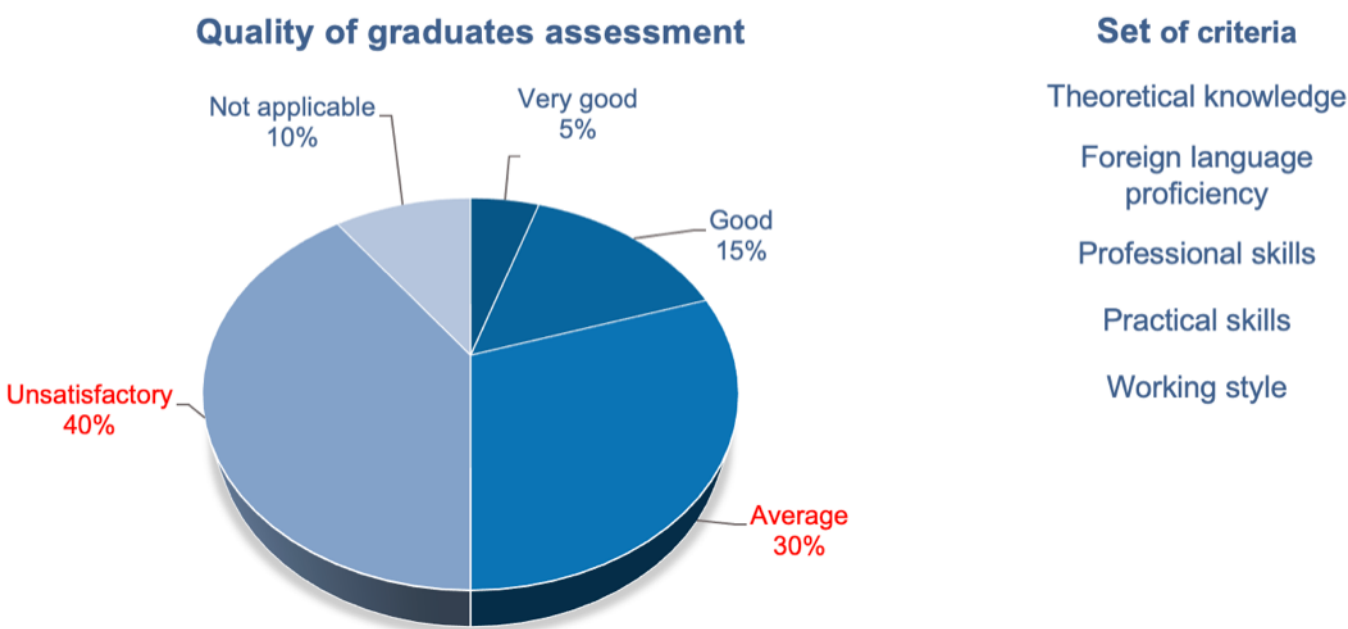
Even so, in higher education, competitiveness depends not only on how much we invest, but also on how effectively we invest—notably, on our ability to align universities with the needs of the economy. Economist Joseph Stiglitz refers to countries entering a development phase and nearing the technological frontier as entering a “knowledge economy” [4]. In such an economy, collaboration and knowledge-sharing are critical; in particular, firms, universities, and research centers work together to train students with skills required by the labor market. In a knowledge economy, universities sit at the center of a knowledge-sharing ecosystem, enabling universities, research institutes, the private sector, and investors to work together in a spirit of

innovation and creation.

Vietnam lacks such an ecosystem, and the knowledge and skills taught in our universities remain too far removed from what the labor market requires. Le Quoc Khanh, a professor at Vietnam National University, Hanoi [5], notes that in a recent survey of private-sector employers, respondents estimated that only 5% of graduates from Vietnamese universities possess the required skills upon graduation. Employers report very weak performance by Vietnamese public universities in transmitting the skills companies need. Too often, it is private universities that fulfill the central role in this knowledge-sharing system (for example, the ecosystem created by FPT and its universities, which train engineers and technicians whom the group later employs).

Professor Le Quoc Khanh further observes that

• A survey of 60 companies in Ho Chi Minh City found that employers rated only 5% of survey participants were assessed very good, 15% good, 30% average and 40% unsatisfactory, highlighting a significant skills mismatch.



curricula remain highly theoretical and are controlled by university deans and the Ministry of Education and Training, without consultation with the private sector.

As a result, students often leave after four years of university with knowledge poorly aligned with business needs or market realities. Applied internships are still not commonplace, and private-sector involvement in training remains limited. More generally, the openness of our universities—both internationally and to the private sector—is too low, effectively siloing universities from external realities. In higher education, near-constant updating of programs, curricula, and knowledge is essential; yet a siloed organization, with limited exposure to international or private-sector collaboration, constrains our capacity for change, adaptation,

and ultimately innovation.

The consequence is low rankings and limited reputation for many higher-education institutions, despite enrolling strong students. Large budget increases for universities are very good news, but still insufficient to make our universities competitive.

This is, moreover, the main objective of the national education plan: by 2030, to have 8 universities in Asia’s Top 200 and one in the Top 100 (as of today, four Vietnamese universities are in Asia’s Top 200—Duy Tan University, VNU Hanoi, VNU Ho Chi Minh City, Ton Duc Thang University—and none in the Top 100).



# CHAPTER II

## **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: EDUCATION, MERITOCRACY, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY**





## II - EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: MERITOCRACY, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

### Education and Social Mobility: Education as a Driver of Upward Mobility

Our previous chapter focused on the mission of education for economic performance, by training future productive workers who meet the needs of the economy. This chapter examines the other essential dimension of education: reducing social inequalities from one generation to the next. That mission of the school can be summed up by the words of Jules Ferry, France's Minister of National Education under the Third Republic, in 1870, in his speech on equality in education:

***“Equality in education is not a utopia; it is a principle; in law, it is incontestable, and in practice, within limits. This apparent utopia belongs to the order of things possible ... because equality is the very law of human progress; it is more than a theory: it is a social fact. The task of our time is surely no less difficult: to make disappear the last and most formidable of inequalities that come from birth — the inequality of education.”***

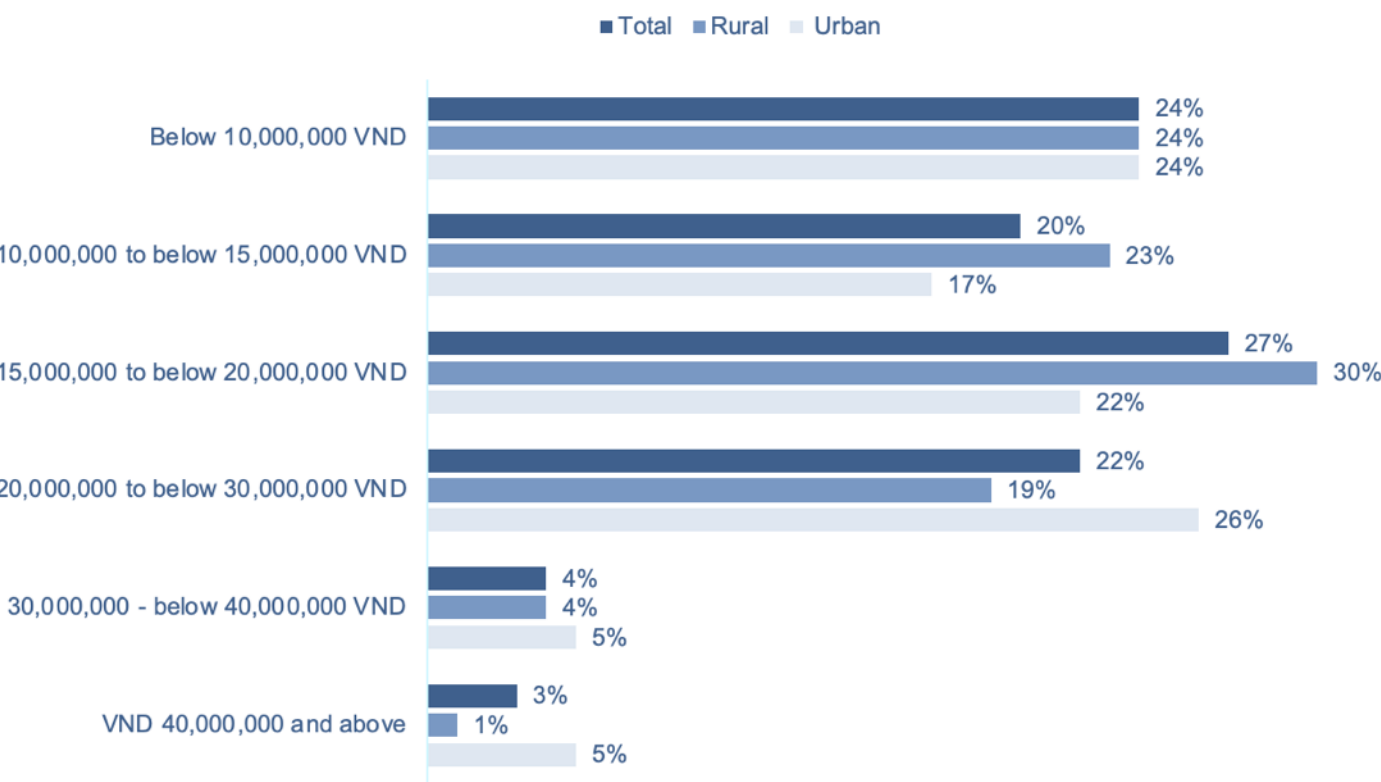
Free and compulsory education, which France was among the first countries in the world to establish, is meant to ensure equity among citizens in access to

education. The logic is that, because education enables individual development and social ascent, the role of the state is to equalize starting conditions in education, so as to guarantee a certain equality of opportunity among children of the same generation in their social advancement. From this perspective, education has a meritocratic mission: children of a generation, given the same educational conditions, distinguish themselves according to academic merit, within a framework of fair competition.

In the same spirit, Vietnam has made **education for all—compulsory and affordable**—one of its missions (Law on Education 2019 – Luật giáo dục 2019 No. 43/2019/QH14, effective 2025), which confirms the state's obligation to provide all children access to public primary schools (beyond primary school there is no formal legal compulsion, although education at least through lower secondary has, with rare exceptions, been nearly universal for decades).

It is in this social-equity spirit—not only for economic reasons—that the Vietnamese government has made primary and secondary education officially free for all students starting in the 2025 school year (public-school tuition is now fully covered for everyone—equivalent to a saving of €100–€200 per child per year).

Mass schooling and universal literacy have long been achievements in Vietnam: everyone, even in the most remote regions, has access to public schools, trained teachers, and an education that at least transmits the fundamentals. Illiteracy has long since



| Monthly household income in VND    | Urban | Rural | Total |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| VND 40,000,000 and above           | 5%    | 1%    | 3%    |
| 30,000,000 - below 40,000,000 VND  | 5%    | 4%    | 4%    |
| 20,000,000 to below 30,000,000 VND | 26%   | 19%   | 22%   |
| 15,000,000 to below 20,000,000 VND | 22%   | 30%   | 27%   |
| 10,000,000 to below 15,000,000 VND | 17%   | 23%   | 20%   |
| Below 10,000,000 VND               | 24%   | 24%   | 24%   |
| Total                              | 100%  | 100%  | 100%  |

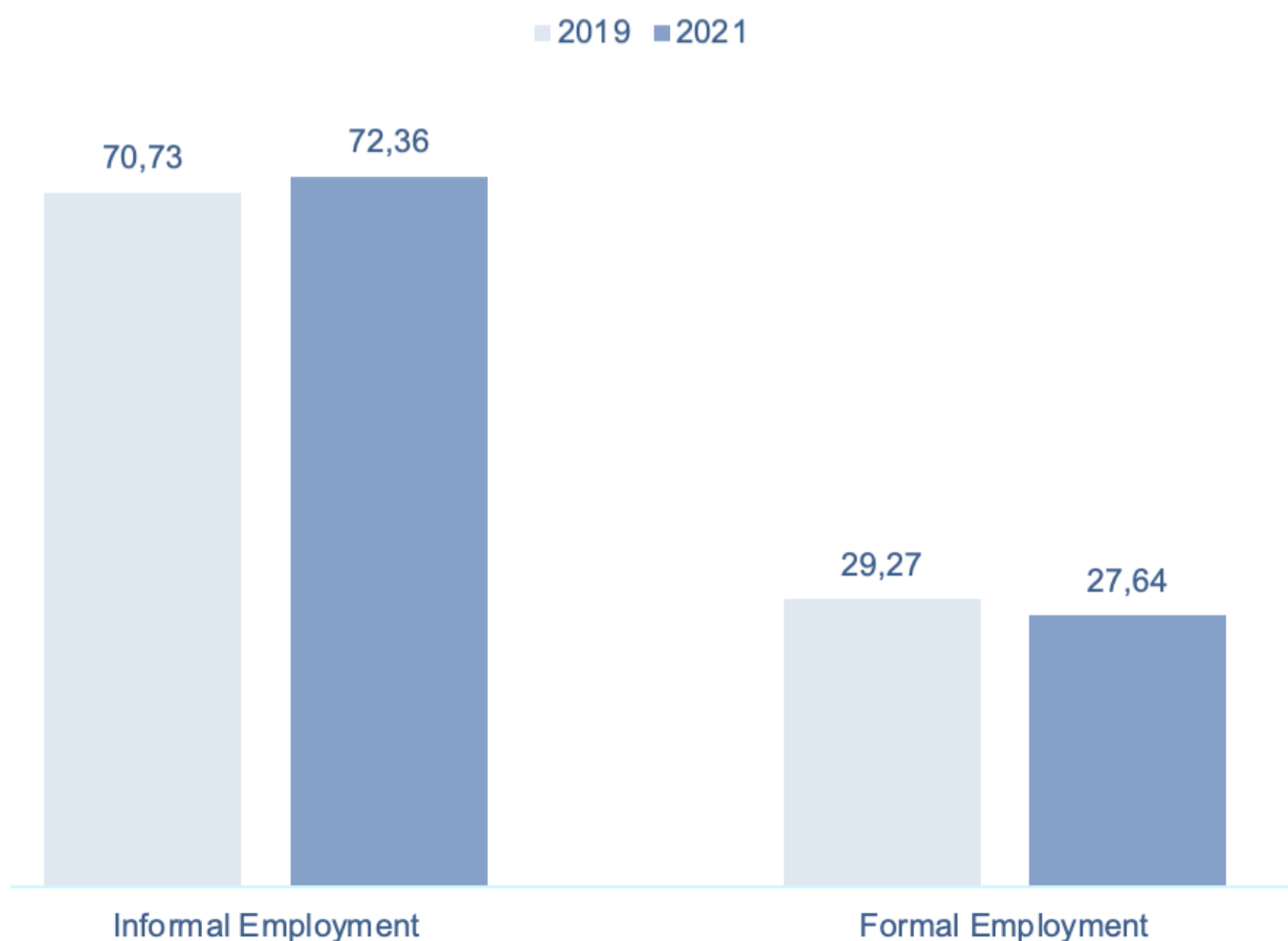
disappeared, and universal schooling at least through the end of lower secondary has been achieved for years. It is worth commending that, although still a poor country, Vietnam has quickly delivered basic education to almost all children in each age cohort, regardless of social origin.

Compared with other developing countries, this strong performance likely reflects both the government’s determination to build schools for all across the country and a cultural factor: Vietnamese families naturally believe in the virtue of education for their

children. This factor is crucial in poor countries.

As economists Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee remind us (summarized in their book “Good Economics for Hard Times”), supply-side policies (expanding free educational provision for families) are not sufficient to educate an entire generation; family engagement and participation are also needed—parents must be convinced of the benefits of education.

## Structure of the labor market in Vietnam



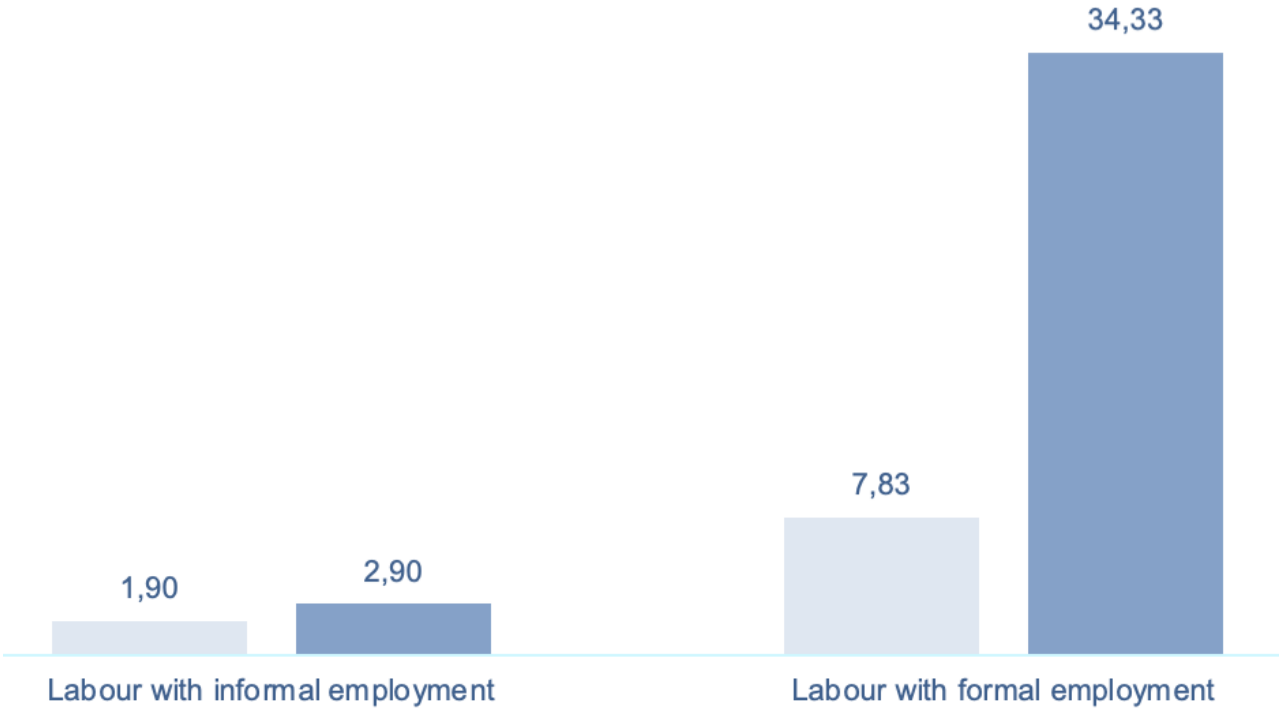
### Accessibility and Schooling for All

Accessibility and schooling for all are almost achieved at the lower-secondary level. The challenge of fair access arises at the subsequent stages. In particular, in Vietnam's labor market, the real "Grail" seems to be a tertiary credential—a university degree or other programs (cao đẳng or professional/vocational education). Such credentials open access to formal employment contracts and white-collar jobs, or plant technician positions. These are not only higher-paid, but also confer the protections that come with official contracts.

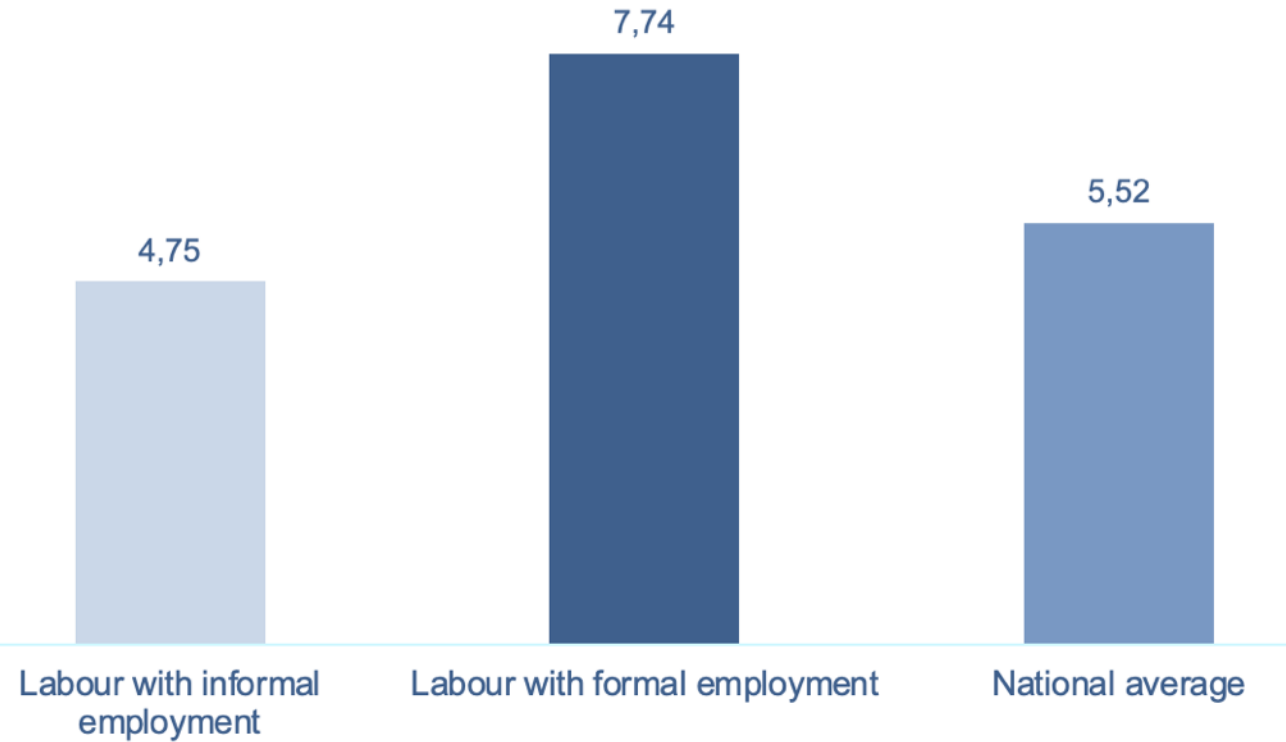
The majority of jobs in Vietnam remain precarious and informal, without the protections that a standard employment contract confers. There is a status divide between protected and precarious jobs, and this dividing line essentially separates those with tertiary credentials from those without. Beyond wage differences, there is a difference in status and social protection: those without a university degree are often confined for life to week-to-week or day-to-day jobs, with very limited protection against accident, old age, unemployment, or illness. As noted in the previous chapter, university

# Employment structure by the levels of education of workers 2021 (%)

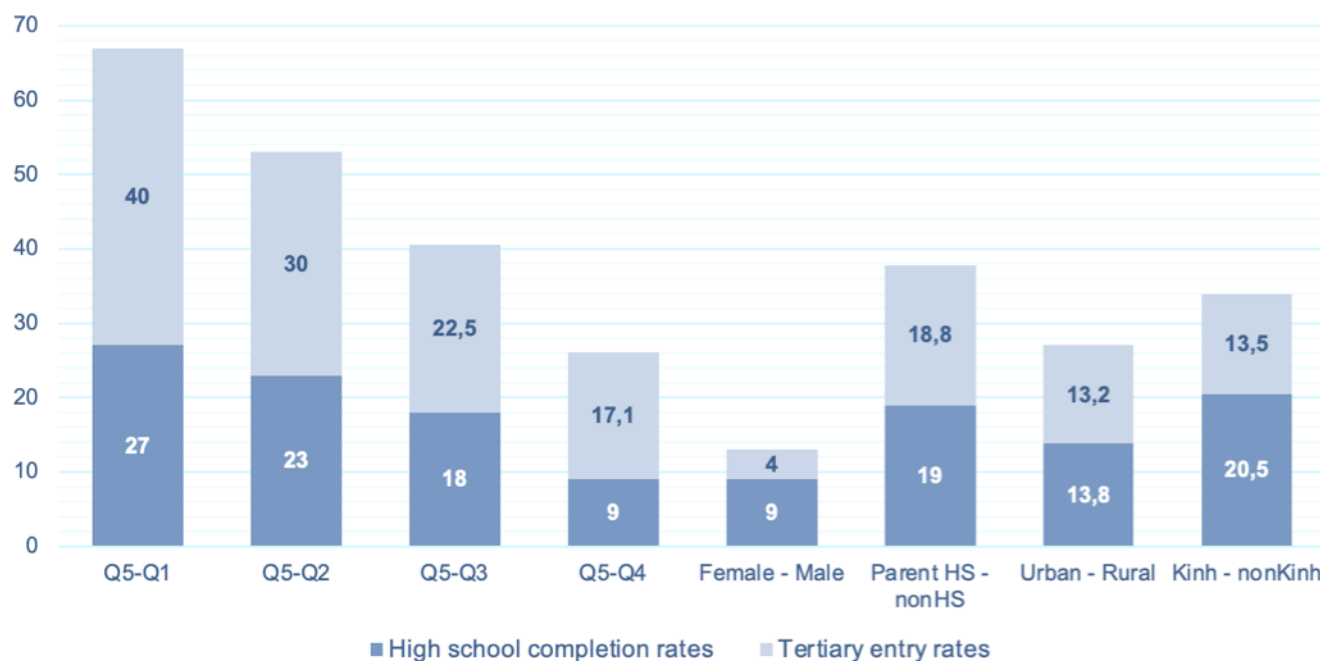
College Higher education



## Average monthly income 2021 (Million vietnamese dong/ person/month)



## Difference in education access, by income quintile



places are limited, yet the advantages for those who obtain a degree are decisive. Access is therefore difficult, via highly selective entrance exams. Unfortunately, this selectivity does not rest solely on students' merit. Sociological profiles show that degree attainment rates are strongly correlated with parents' financial capacity, as highlighted in the World Bank's 2020 study [6].

While in principle the exams are open to all, they require several years of preparation, and substantial effort and financial investment, in time and energy, to secure success. One needs a mix of financial investment (notably, quasi-mandatory extra classes in 11th and 12th grade) and knowledge of the system (what ensures success, how to prepare, how to navigate it).

To succeed, students must first gain admission to a good high school in the region. Networks help secure a place; as early as grade 9, children are under strong pressure to compile the best possible school records. From lower

secondary onward, private tutoring (sometimes with the classroom teacher) is common; in high school it becomes almost mandatory: for at least the three subjects students plan to take on the university exam, they must take extra classes—otherwise they miss entire portions of the syllabus needed for the exam.

At a minimum, based on what we found at the Phu Thuong Center, costs run about VND 400,000 per month per subject; for three subjects, that is VND 1,200,000 per month. Over 9 months, this is nearly VND 11 million (about €400 per year)—the bare minimum. These costs add to tuition, books, and occasional school maintenance fees; overall, we estimate a 12th-grader preparing for the exam needs VND 15–20 million (€600–€700), with no guarantee of success.

Children at the Phu Thuong Center often come from the remote, very poor, rural districts of Thừa Thiên Huế province, such as Phong Điền, Phú Lộc, and A Lưới. In these rural and poor

## Tuition cost and trend from 2004 to 2018

| Costs                                     | 2004 | 2010 | 2016 | 2018  | Trend                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tuition cost, USD                         | 105  | 251  | 473  | 574   |  |
| Total cost, USD                           | 217  | 470  | 844  | 1,242 |  |
| Tuition as % of total cost                | 48   | 53   | 56   | 46    |  |
| Total cost as % of per capita expenditure | 34   | 27   | 43   | 54    |  |

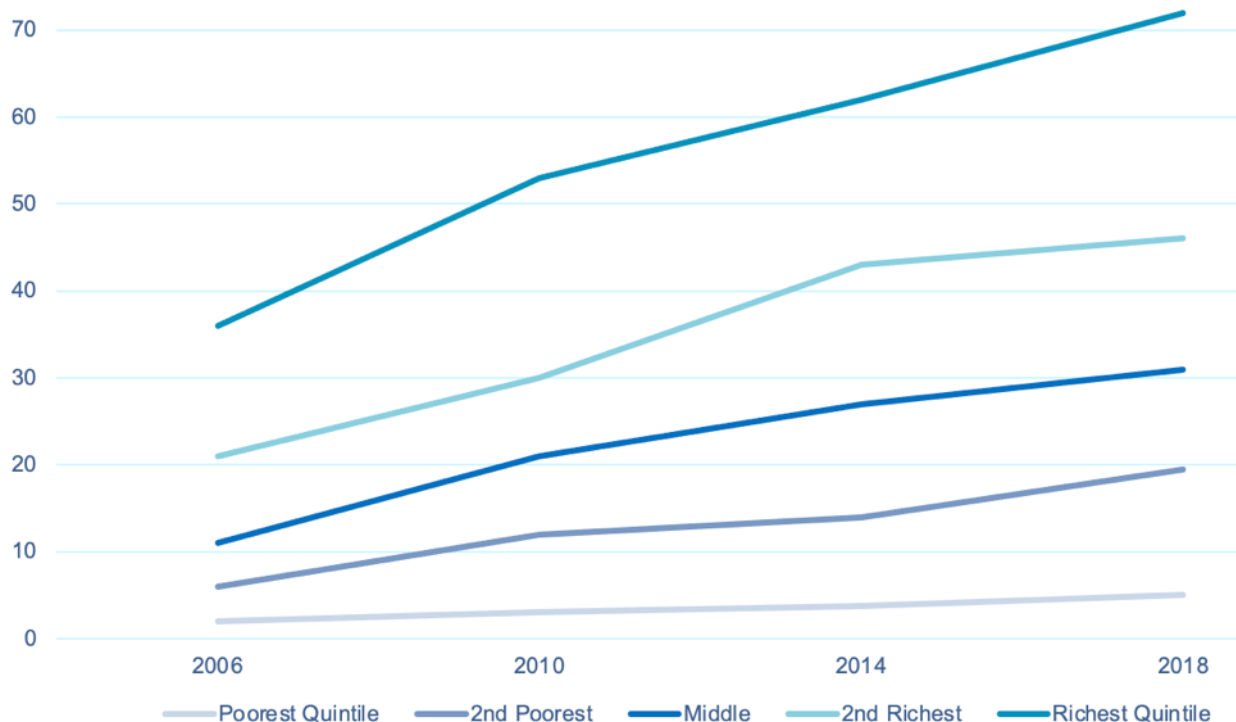
districts, university access rates are very low. High-school access rates are already well below the national average, and passing the university entrance exam is exceptional. All of the children at our centers acknowledge that without Phu Thuong's support it would have been virtually impossible to pursue higher education.

They need both close, daily coaching and preparation support, which their family situations do not allow, and substantial financial aid. For the families whose children we

sponsor, spending VND 15–20 million over three years is simply impossible (state aid for these families, when it exists, is very modest). Often we observe that siblings of the sponsored children who did not receive guidance or financial help are forced to stop at high school; only those supported by our association or another have the “luxury” of continuing.

We see too many capable, intelligent children dropping out at fifteen, because their educational prospects are too

## Tertiary enrollment rate (%) by income quintile





uncertain, and the cost—in time and money—too high.

In short, we observe a clear social fracture in university access: children who inherit cultural, educational, economic, or social capital from their families enjoy a large advantage over less-endowed peers. Too often, those who reach university are children of the best-educated parents of their generation. Access to high school already reveals inequalities, and it exacerbates one of Vietnam’s major, persistent inequalities in 2025: access to university. In an emerging economy like Vietnam, university access is guaranteed for

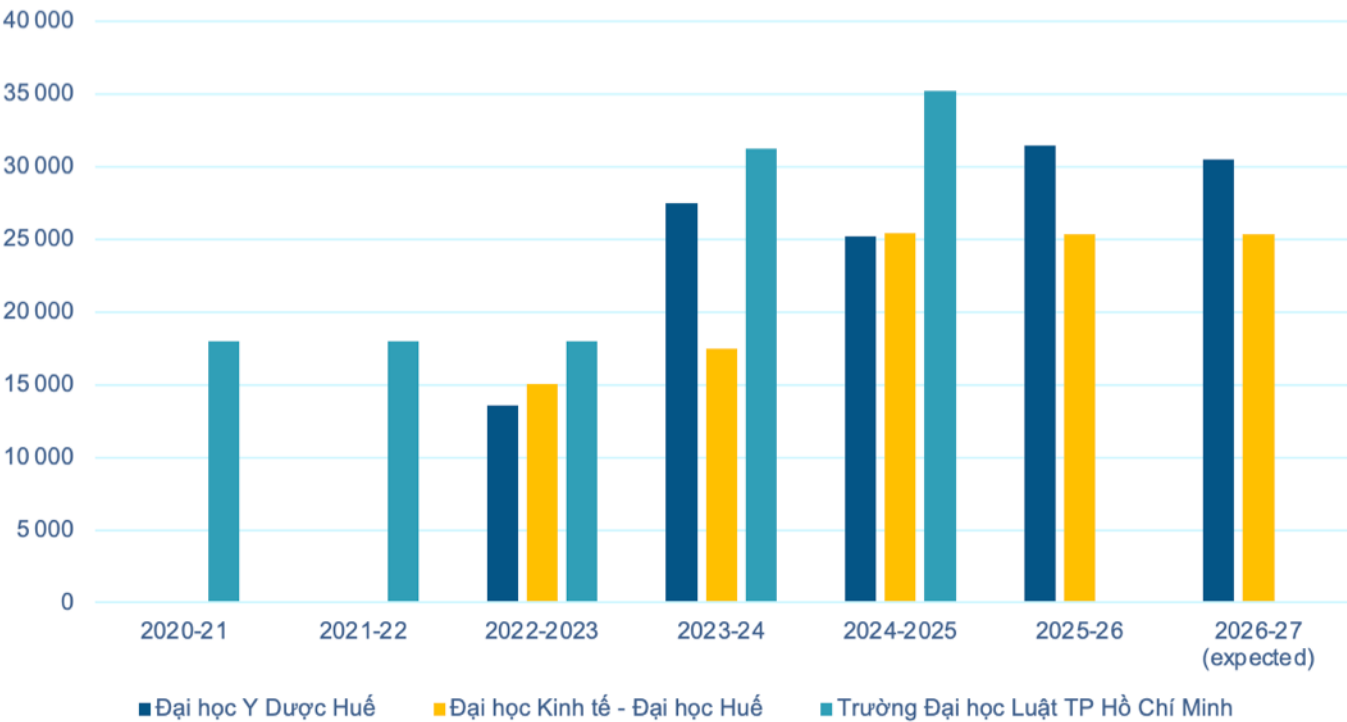
future social and professional status.

**The Recent Surge in University Tuition Fees**

To improve the competitiveness of Vietnamese universities, a series of decrees since 2018 has aimed to gradually increase their autonomy. Autonomy, especially financial autonomy, placed universities in charge of their own budgets and free to set tuition fees.

According to the World Bank’s 2020 report (written shortly before full financial autonomy took effect), tuition already accounted for about 70% of university budgets. Autonomy resulted in loss of state funding, even as universities were expected to become more

**Tuition per University (VND mil/year)**



competitive, modern, and high-performing. The resulting rise in operating costs (they had to increase faculty salaries, upgrade facilities to forge international partnerships), combined with the reduction or removal of public subsidies, naturally caused sharp tuition inflation since the end of the COVID years.

**A few examples where we have directly observed sudden tuition increases:**

- ***Ho Chi Minh City University of Law: from VND 17 million (2020–2021) to VND 35 million per year (2024–2025) — doubling in five years, i.e., +16%/year.***
- ***Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy (general medicine): from VND 12 million to VND 24 million per year — about +15%/year.***

These increases are representative of the national trend, even on the lower end. On average, and likely to continue in the short term, tuition has risen 10–15% per year—doubling in four years.

This tuition surge alone—moreover opaque and hard to anticipate—has deepened inequalities in university access for children from the poorest households.

While it is difficult to quantify the true impact, our small-scale observations show that as tuition rose, dropout rates increased sharply (we needed time to adjust scholarship amounts to the new fee levels). For the 2024–2025 intake (September 2024), among 30 scholarship students, we unfortunately recorded—for the first time—7 dropouts (over

20%). Higher costs were one contributing factor (though not the only one). This proportion differs markedly from previous years, when only one or two dropouts occurred annually.

Consider the financial burden on the poorest households: for a poor household earning VND 10 million per month (combined parental income of VND 5 million each, below the national average of VND 8 million/month—i.e., VND 120 million/year, about €4,000/year), sending a child to university (e.g., Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy, with VND 24 million/year tuition in 2025) already consumes 20% of annual income. Add living expenses conservatively estimated at VND 24 million/year (i.e., under €100/month for housing, clothing, food, healthcare, and essentials), the total is VND 48 million/year, or 40% of the household budget. In other words, students must work alongside their studies or receive aid/scholarships to cover tuition.

For children in the first and second income quintiles (the poorest 40%), this is a major burden, raising questions about the value of continuing education, at least in terms of expected return on investment for these families.

How many of them will be willing and able to dedicate the time, energy, and finances to send several children to university? The World Bank's 2020 study already showed large disparities between the poorest and richest in access to high school and

university, and that was before the doubling of university tuition. Unquestionably, class disparities in access to upper secondary and university have widened as tuition has climbed. The trend toward university access being ever more correlated with income in recent years will likely intensify without corrective policies.

### The Dangers of a Two-Tier Society

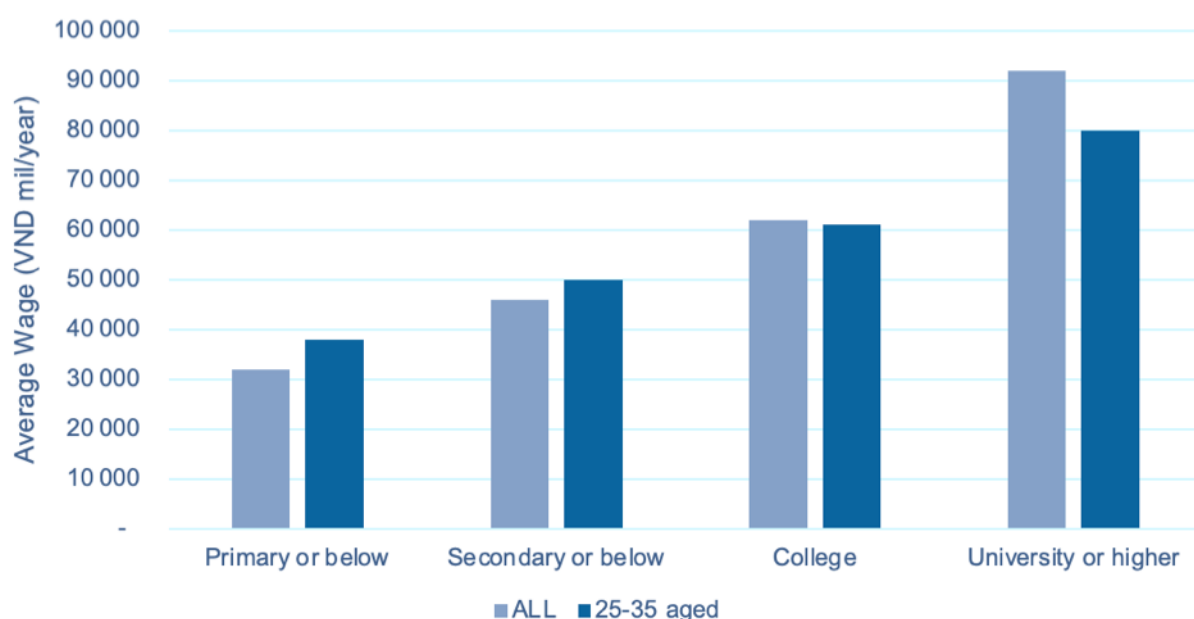
There is also a danger of reproduction and bifurcation: a split between families whose children can access university and those who are shut out.

The dividing line is financial, and higher tuition feeds this financial segregation; but it is also social: poorer families, whose parents did not attend university, cannot guide their children's educational choices.

We risk moving toward a two-speed society, where families with university-educated parents are those whose children capture places in the most prestigious universities, because they can invest time and money in their children's human capital. University and education, in principle, should equalize conditions—but the recent reform, unaccompanied by any scholarship system for the poorest, risks raising barriers to university access for low-income households.

In effect, we may end up with a two-speed society: over time, as Vietnam develops, 30–40% of each cohort who receive higher education will occupy skilled jobs, while the remainder will hold less-skilled, likely precarious, contract-less, lower-paid jobs—filled by those with few educational credentials. In a fast-growing economy like Vietnam's, this divide means the fruits of growth will risk being shared

## Average wage by education level, 2016



ever more unequally.

Our scholarship students are children of precarious workers—in the rice fields, farms, construction sites, streets, and factories; their parents have often sacrificed a great deal to see their children rise socially.

Since COVID, their wages have not doubled; yet they have powerlessly witnessed a vertiginous rise in all schooling costs.



# CHAPTER III

## SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN VIETNAM





### III - SOMME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Drawing on the findings of the previous chapters, we put forward several recommendations so that education can become a lever of development for Vietnam in the years ahead. **Our recommendations fall into two broad categories: (i) improving educational performance and (ii) improving accessibility.**

We develop the accessibility dimension in greater detail, as it has been the focus of our actions for nearly fifteen years. Rather than prescribing granular public policies, we offer general lines of suggestions that could usefully guide Vietnam's future education policies.

**These lines are grounded in our field experience and in precedents from education policies successfully implemented in other countries before Vietnam**



## #1 : A general increase in public investment in education in the short and medium term

Compared with other countries in the region—or with countries at a similar past stage of development—Vietnam spends too little on education overall.

This under-spending appears both in the share of GDP invested and in the absolute amounts per student. It translates into stagnating performance indicators, such as PISA, even though Vietnam remains a developing country for which one would expect steady gains as incomes rise.

Underinvestment shows up in low teacher salaries and insufficient funding for teacher training and school infrastructure. Ultimately, it shifts financial burdens onto parents (e.g., paying for tutoring with school and high-school teachers, or for building repairs) and dampens system performance. Yet, as the work of

economists Becker and Schultz on human capital has shown, education is a high-return investment—though its payoffs are indirect and long-term.

By way of example, at comparable development stages, Korea spent over 6% of GDP, Singapore 5%; Malaysia still spends over 5% today, whereas Vietnam's development plan projects under 4%. That projection is aspirational; actual spending will likely be lower. In recent years, it has been around 3% of GDP and 15% of total public expenditure. We do not recommend a specific spending threshold; we merely recall what other countries invested. Education does not appear to be the top priority in the country's future public-



investment strategy. Social infrastructure (especially education) seems secondary to physical infrastructure (the largest line item in the development plan). South Korea and Singapore—the closest examples of rapid and spectacular escape from underdevelopment—built their strategies on massive investment (public and private) in education at a similar stage. Skill upgrading and poverty reduction go hand in hand with higher education spending, notably at the upper-secondary and tertiary levels (where public underinvestment is now most severe).

In higher education in particular, current resources are far below regional peers. The

ambition to improve university performance in international rankings, stated in the 2025 national education plan, will not be realized without a significant increase in public investment in tertiary education. We do not set numeric targets, but current funding levels appear insufficient in the context of international competition and of aspirations to become a developed or upper-middle-income country.

### **Our suggestions:**

- **Study in greater detail the long-term, direct and indirect returns to education; on this basis, consider increasing education spending and investment at the current stage of development.**

## **#2 : Make upper-secondary performance an absolute priority —and stand out internationally**

In our current context, additional resources should first target improving student performance at the middle and upper-secondary stages.

This is essential to ensure a large pipeline of future productive adults in tertiary or vocational tracks; moreover, investment in tertiary education is effective only when the system has fulfilled its core missions at earlier stages. By the end of high school, students must command basic competencies in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The system's performance at the primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels is measured by its ability to equip the majority with these fundamentals.

Performance must be benchmarked internationally. For foreign investors, the skill level of the workforce, the country's average educational attainment, and the mastery of fundamentals are key decision criteria. PISA should be the flagship metric of system performance.

Research in the economics of education shows that PISA gains are quickly reflected in faster GDP growth. Vietnam's current government objectives do not include targets for improving PISA or other performance indicators (TIMSS, etc.). A goal of entering the top 15, and eventually the top 10, on educational performance indicators such as PISA is not inconsistent for a country like Vietnam; other





Confucian-heritage countries consistently top the rankings.

Simply adding money may not suffice to raise lower- and upper-secondary performance. Once again, Singapore and Korea offer useful lessons. In Singapore, faculty consultations in the 1970s–80s

adapted methods and curricula for greater effectiveness based on classroom feedback. In Korea, improvements—especially at the high-school level—came from opening to the private sector, which educated nearly half of high-school students. The private sector, under contract and state oversight, enabled greater agility in adopting effective teaching methods and curricula, introducing healthy competition in secondary education.

### Our suggestions:

- **Make improving PISA results and rankings a priority objective; top-15 placement is attainable over the long term, as better test outcomes correlate with stronger economic development.**

## **#3 : A system of scholarships, support, coaching, guidance, and tutoring for the most disadvantaged high-school students to facilitate university access for the less privileged**

Vietnam's structural problem lies in access to upper-secondary school and university. Poorer strata are far more likely to stop before grade 12, and very few enter university.

Beyond tuition costs—a main driver of dropout—we observe insufficient support and guidance for the less well-off. In poor areas far from major cities or quality schools, it is normal for students not to progress to higher education and to take low-skill jobs after lower secondary. Many of our students, very talented with strong results, only enter higher education when they are in nurturing



environments like the Phu Thuong Center, where staff advise, coach, and supervise them.

**At DucSonChild, we are convinced that environment matters greatly;** being in a center where university is the norm, and studying in better, more prestigious high schools, has allowed our center to achieve very high university placement rates.

The first step is to make accessibility—especially for the poorest—a target. The 2025 education plan moves in this direction, but we deem it insufficient. For example, the vast majority of our current scholarship students do not qualify for public scholarships. They are very poor and

disadvantaged, with no social predisposition toward higher studies. There should be concrete targets for university entry among the poorest quartiles/quintiles (whose access to upper-secondary and university, as we have seen, is very low). Such targets would motivate education personnel—within MOET, provincial DOETs, university leaders, and secondary teachers—to expand access for the poor. Targets could be more or less binding, potentially in the form of minimum quotas.

We must also address private tutoring, which is quasi-mandatory for university admission. We estimate VND 1,200,000 per month for tutoring in three subjects to have a reasonable chance at the exam. In effect, this is selection by money:



students unable to afford tutoring have a very low chance of passing. It is difficult to dismantle a system now deeply ingrained and accepted by students, parents, and teachers.

A short-term solution would be education loans or scholarships for high-schoolers based on parental income. Think of it as a grade-12 loan to finance exam preparation.

With one million 12th-graders in 2024, such a program would cost USD 50–80 million per year, targeting the poorest quartiles/quintiles (150,000–200,000 students) at €200–€400 per student for the senior year and exam prep—significantly improving access to university.

It could be paired with a civic-service commitment: beneficiaries tutor or mentor junior students later, as we strive to do. We believe such a mechanism would greatly facilitate access first to upper-secondary,

then to university for the poorest.

**Our suggestions:**

- **Set concrete accessibility targets for upper-secondary and higher-education entry among the poorest quartiles/quintiles; where appropriate, consider minimum provincial quotas.**
- **Consider granting a scholarship at least for grade-12 students—€200–€400 per year—potentially indexed to civic-service reciprocity (tutoring, helping younger students, now or later).**

#4 : A system of scholarships and preferential, state-guaranteed loans for all students

Of all our recommendations, this seems most fundamental. The surge in university and graduate-level tuition has triggered numerous dropouts or forgone university attendance.

We observed 20% of one cohort dropping out in the year tuition rose by over 15%. Our students represent the poorest strata; we can infer at least as large an effect on other poor students without our scholarships. At

current levels, tuition is a prohibitive barrier: without financial aid (say €800/year ~ VND 20 million), tuition equals more than a poor family’s earnings over one or two years (much of which must pay for essentials).

Such increases contradict basic educational accessibility. We propose a scholarship/co-financing system for the poorest, essential to allow those who pass the entrance exam to





access the training they merit. Several formats are possible (drawing on international practice). One option: the state or provinces pay universities directly for students in public institutions.

Coverage could be full or partial, depending on household resources (e.g., 100% for incomes below VND 30 million/year (~€1,000); 50% for VND 30–45 million (~€1,000–€1,500); 25% for VND 45–60 million (~€1,500–€2,000)). Support could be scholarships (paid directly to the university) or zero-interest loans repaid by the student after graduation. With starting salaries of VND 7–8 million/month, rising fairly quickly to ~VND 10 million, repaying VND 1–2 million/month

would clear the loan in 4–5 years. A mix of grants and loans is straightforward to implement. Scholarships do exist, but they are too modest and exclude far too many needy students (most of our students receive no state scholarship).

Admittedly, in a country where informal work is widespread, assessing household income is challenging and may require dedicated staff. However, this must not be a pretext to avoid building a scholarship system. The cost is relatively modest. The two poorest income quintiles constitute 10–15% of students among ~2 million nationwide—i.e., ~300,000 potential beneficiaries: 100,000 at 100% coverage,



100,000 at 50%, and 100,000 at 25%. Assuming VND 50 million/year (~€1,300) in tuition, the program cost would be ~USD 208 million/year.

It would nearly pay for itself in the medium to long term: official statistics indicate an unskilled worker earns ~VND 7 million/month, a university graduate ~VND 11 million. Beyond national productivity gains and higher contributions, the VND 4 million/month wage gap yields higher income-tax receipts. A non-qualified worker pays ~VND 5–6 million/year in theory (likely less due to informality); a graduate pays ~VND 10 million/year on average. For 300,000 beneficiaries, additional tax could be ~USD 190 per

year per student, i.e., ~USD 57 million/year—implying <4 years to cover program costs (for a grant-only design, not counting a loan component).

### **Our suggestions :**

- **Design a tertiary-education financing mechanism funded by the state/provinces, paid directly to universities enrolling poor students, targeted to the lowest income quintiles, potentially with a sliding scale of support.**



## #5 : Employer partnerships in an apprenticeship-style model to co-finance university studies

Extending the previous recommendation, companies could co-pay higher-education costs under an apprenticeship-type system.

**Today, Vietnamese university programs offer few internships or professional experiences. Embedding longer work periods within curricula would expose students to, and integrate, the private sector and employers.**

This could occur between the third and fourth years (or the penultimate year). Universities interested in recruiting interns could pay for the fourth year or part of a student's studies, with the intern slated to become a future employee.

In a more developed apprenticeship model (e.g., France), the firm pays tuition, the student alternates work and study, and commits to work a set number of years (otherwise repaying the tuition). A pilot phase could involve a panel of large companies, domestic and foreign, to launch the scheme.

We are confident they would be interested in recruiting well-trained, competent workers and would help test the model. This would deepen private-sector integration into the training of students and future workers, and equip Vietnamese graduates for the workplace, making them more job-ready —

addressing a structural weakness of Vietnamese universities. Greater employer–university engagement would broaden university financing options and raise competitiveness in a global landscape.

### Our suggestions:

- Establish university–private-sector partnerships whereby firms co-fund students' studies for those they plan to recruit.
- Pilot the scheme with a panel of large employers that hire significant numbers of new graduates each year.





## #6 - Greater flexibility and openness in educational programs, particularly at university

Teaching methods and teacher training (pre-service and in-service) remain highly centralized under MOET.

This centralization is effective at primary and lower-secondary levels, but appears less effective as students progress. At the university level, decentralization and agility in curriculum design seem more effective than current centralization.

Even at upper-secondary, drawing on Singapore's example, reforms in the 1980s granted greater school autonomy and relied on roundtables, consultations, and classroom-level feedback to identify what works by discipline.

Agility in assembling the best educational curriculum to achieve defined objectives was at the heart of Singapore's plan.

At the university level, curricular freedom should be a natural evolution following financial autonomy. Such agility is key to making universities more competitive and more effective in their educational mission. It must allow rapid updates to curricula in response to, for example, advances or innovations in a field.

A concrete example: in economics courses, too little is devoted to recent



work (economics is a young, fast-evolving discipline), and too much to theoretical canons —which should certainly be known, but also complemented to provide comprehensive more up-to date training relevant to the latest evolution of the discipline.

With the current curriculum, Vietnam has not produced internationally renowned economists—an observation that extends to many other disciplines.

### **Our suggestions:**

- At upper-secondary, with a view to improving PISA, consider organizing consultations and roundtables among high-school teachers, instructors, and education staff to discuss effective strategies for boosting system performance, curricula, and methods.
- At universities, consider greater academic autonomy aligned with international competition, enabling faster response and agility in a rapidly changing world.



# CHAPTER IV

## TESTIMONIES FROM OUR STUDENTS





## IV - TESTIMONIES FROM OUR STUDENTS

To conclude this white paper, we have gathered testimonies from our current and former students over the years.

Their voices provide concrete examples of how profoundly a scholarship can **transform a life**. These young people come from extremely poor backgrounds — some of them orphans — who have studied at our Phu

Thuong Center and received our support from secondary school through university. Over time, we have had the privilege of assisting more than one hundred students. However, many other deserving children still lack the support they need. **Through this white paper, we hope to contribute to the ongoing reflection on how to build more inclusive and equitable education policies for the future.**

—

*“In the future, I want to become a sponsor myself, to help poor children in Phu Thuong and in Vietnam. I will visit Phu Thuong and organize activities as well as donate money for the kids, the same way that sponsors around the world helped*





me before. I think children have to grow in a good environment with good education to become successful people. I want to thank donors in France, Australia, the U.S. and Vietnam. You changed my life and that of many children in Vietnam. With all due respect, I am so grateful and pleased to be a child who was sponsored. I hope you are always healthy and happy. Thank you!"

—  
***"My father died 13 years ago, killed by the terrible flooding in Hue province that year.***

My father was the breadwinner in our family, so that day, when I was only 9 years old, my world and family were shattered. My mother, who had previously been a stay-at-home mother caring for children, had to take on the role of the family's primary breadwinner,

supporting the family's finances as well as raising the young children to become responsible adults. Understanding the poor family conditions, I have always tried to study and help my family to get out of poverty over the years. My brother has been out of school since the 10th grade in order to work and support the family. As for me, I have been instructed by my mother to try to study at university in order to help my family later. But the cost of attending college was too expensive, and I know that my college road is lengthy, and my ambition of attending university may not be accomplished. Being adopted by Phu Thuong Center changed the course of my life. From the start of my 12th grade until the university admission exam, I remained at the



Phu Thuong center. In Phu Thuong, I was raised, educated, and supported by the supporting staff. It can be said that Phu Thuong Center changed my life. After I graduate and have a stable job, I want to help a poor student at Phu Thuong. One day, I would like to sponsor one student until that student graduates, just as my sponsors have helped me in the past. Through this, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the donors, sponsors in France and around the world, and the Phu Thuong staff who have helped me throughout my academic journey. I shall never forget your generosity.”

—  
***“In 2017, my father passed away in a motorbike accident.*** Our family has four members, including my mom, my elder sister, my older brother, and me. Currently, my sister is a fifth-year medical student at Hue University of Medicine and Pharmacy and my brother is a third-year student at the University of Science

and Technology in Da Nang city. Before, when my father was still alive, both of my parents had to work really hard on a daily basis to make ends meet. After my father’s passing, my mom had to work day and night, and my two older siblings had to do part-time jobs after school to ease the burden on my mother’s shoulders. Fortunately, when I was an 11th-grade student, I was accepted into Phu Thuong, as the staff there heard about my family’s financial hardship. My family and I are so grateful for all that Phu Thuong and the staff have done for me. I think that without the great support from Phu Thuong, I could not make it this far. After I graduated from high school, I gave all the study materials that I had to other junior students at Phu Thuong so they would have good resources for their studies. I am willing to help other students at Nha Bao Tro with their mathematics since this is my strength. I think after I graduate from medical university and can





make a living, I will donate a part of my salary to buy new books and necessary stationery for students at the beginning of the new school year.”

—  
**“After graduating from university, I hope to be able to work at the Biological Research Center, so hopefully I can bring more benefits to poor farmers in Vietnam.** The Phu Thuong Center helped me continue to go to school, created the best conditions for me to focus on studying, and taught me the necessary skills to be able to live independently throughout the years. Later, I promise will contribute money to the support fund of Phu Thuong Center for poor and disadvantaged kids, share my experiences, and advise students so that they

can choose the right path for themselves as well as participate in volunteer activities organized by the school or by Phu Thuong Center.”

« I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the donors and sponsors who have supported and accompanied Nhà Bảo Trợ Phú Thường and us during the past time. I grew up without my father, but my mother made sure I was well taken care of. She specifically ensured that I would have a full education. I have lived with my grandmother since I was 2 years old. Because my grandmother was sick, the house was not good enough, and my mother worked far away so my uncle recommended me to Nhà Bảo Trợ Phú



Thượng to continue studying and have a place to live. I feel extremely fortunate that I lived and studied in this place. »

—

« **Honestly, if it weren't for Nhà Bảo Trợ Phú Thượng, I probably wouldn't have been the person I am today.** This place has helped me a lot in every way. I am so grateful for the staff here because they helped me a lot. They taught me how to be a good person, gave me a place to live, and paid for all my study expenses. Thanks to them, I could get to university. I always feel lucky and grateful to have the opportunity to live in Phu Thuong. I feel very appreciative of what I had and have, so returning to help students in Nhà Bảo Trợ Phú Thượng and poor students in

Vietnam is something I will definitely do. I will save some money to help the children in Nhà Bảo Trợ Phú Thượng, and at the same time, I will appeal to my fellow students to raise funds to help them somewhat. I also want to contribute a little bit of youth to help the community by participating in volunteer clubs and teaching English to disadvantaged children when I have time. »

—

« **My father works as a farmer. My mother passed away from a serious illness a few years back.** I am extremely grateful to DucSonChild Association for the scholarship they have awarded me over the years. The support from DucSonChild has allowed me





to go to school and pursue my dream of becoming a healthcare nurse for my family and the community. I have used all of the funds to pay for tuition, buy books, and focus on learning. Especially during the difficult COVID-19 time, thanks to the help of the generous donors, I was able to overcome the most difficult times and continue attending school. I always make time to meet with the children at Phu Thuong to support their studies when I have free time. We chat, and I always encourage them to see their difficult background as obstacles that they can overcome on their journey to adulthood. We are always a family and ready to help each other when needed. I used to think I was the most unfortunate child until I met many children who faced even greater difficulties than me. I hope that poor kids never give up on their dreams and always strive to overcome challenges. Good people are always around us, and luck always comes to those who never stop trying. »

—  
***“My mother is old and often sick, so our family income is quite unstable.*** During my 4 years in college, I was very fortunate to receive support from DucSonChild, which helped me with tuition fees and other expenses. With the money the association helped me get, I could take care of myself and reduce the burden on my mother. I think that in order not to disappoint the donors who helped me, I have to be a good person and help people in difficult situations like

mine. First of all, for the children at Nha Bao Tro Phu Thuong, I will come back and support them somewhat within my capabilities.”

—  
***“At first, I dreamed of studying at Đà Nẵng University of Science and Technology, and I was able to achieve the required score in grade 12.*** However, because of my family’s financial situation, I decided to stay in Hue, where the tuition is more affordable. I believe this choice is practical and still gives me good opportunities for my future. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the donors in France for their generous support. Their help gives me and many other students the opportunity to continue our education and pursue our dreams. I promise to study hard, improve myself, and use this opportunity to build a better future. Thank you very much for believing in us.”

# NOTE FROM THE EDITORS AND DUCSONCHILD

**The aim of this white paper is to offer fresh perspectives on the challenges facing education in Vietnam.**

We share several avenues for reflection, acknowledging that they are not exhaustive. We would have liked to explore some of the issues raised in greater depth — such as reforming teacher training, strengthening collaboration between universities and the private sector, and improving access to education for the most disadvantaged children.

This white paper is intended for a broad audience.

- **For policymakers and education professionals,** it seeks to enrich reflection by combining field experience with international examples.
- **For our donors,** it aims to provide a broader understanding of how education can drive social progress and how our work — made possible only through your loyal support — contributes to this larger mission.
- **For our students,** it is a reminder of why our organization exists and what we strive to achieve together.

Our white paper is not meant to be comprehensive. We regret not having had the time or resources to conduct a more extensive survey or longer interviews with teachers, employers, and education experts in Vietnam and abroad. Likewise, we would have liked to further develop the case studies and lessons drawn from other countries.

This publication presents the perspective of our organization, grounded in our field experience and daily engagement with students. We hope to expand on some of these themes in future editions.

**This white paper is freely available in three languages — Vietnamese, French, and English — and can be downloaded directly from our website.** We hope that the reflections presented here will contribute to ongoing discussions about improving both the quality and accessibility of education in Vietnam.

**Our association operates entirely through donations and the generosity of our supporters.** If you find this work valuable, we kindly ask two small gestures: share it, and consider making a donation. Every contribution directly supports our educational and

humanitarian activities.

We express our deepest gratitude to all the volunteers who contributed to the creation of this white paper.

*This work was originally written in French and subsequently translated into English and Vietnamese with the assistance of AI. All translations have been verified by the authors for accuracy, clarity, and readability.*





# Source and references

[1] (source) : <https://cae-eco.fr/Education-et-croissance>)

[2] (source : [https://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BWoessmann%202020%20Education\\_knowledge%20capital\\_and\\_economic%20growth.pdf](https://hanushek.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Hanushek%2BWoessmann%202020%20Education_knowledge%20capital_and_economic%20growth.pdf))

[3] (source : <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/217a6a99-9687-5481-8d02-01e4e5d8ff99/content>)

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[5] (Source : [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381537481\\_CHALLENGES\\_TO\\_THE\\_HIGHER\\_EDUCATION\\_OF\\_VIETNAM\\_IN\\_THE\\_TIME\\_OF\\_INTERNATIONAL\\_INTEGRATION](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381537481_CHALLENGES_TO_THE_HIGHER_EDUCATION_OF_VIETNAM_IN_THE_TIME_OF_INTERNATIONAL_INTEGRATION))

[6] (source : <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/347431588175259657/pdf/Improving-the-Performance-of-Higher-Education-in-Vietnam-Strategic-Priorities-and-Policy-Options.pdf>.)





# About Ducsonchild

**Officially established in 2011**, Duc Son Child is a humanitarian organization whose goal is to contribute to the development of Vietnam, and more specifically, the city of Hue. To achieve this, we have chosen to focus our attention on the youngest and most vulnerable children by working in partnership with orphanages and homes for underprivileged children in the city.

For these children, we have created a scholarship program, and we also provide occasional support to other orphanages and homes.

**At Duc Son Child, we believe that education is the key to providing lasting support for these children.** Our aim is to give them the necessary support to continue their studies.

Throughout the year, we conduct various fundraising activities to attract donors. The funds raised finance our scholarship program and help support our partner orphanages and homes. Furthermore, we organize humanitarian missions every summer with a team of volunteers eager to dedicate some of their time to the children in our centers.

**Our association is composed entirely of volunteers, who assist with fundraising and participate in humanitarian missions.** The executive board is responsible for administrative matters, scholarship monitoring, organizing projects on-site, and serving as the liaison with the various homes and orphanages.

The majority of our members are based in France (our headquarters are in Créteil), while the remainder are in Vietnam, working closely with the orphanages and homes. This proximity is invaluable for the day-to-day management of our projects.

The Duc Son orphanage was the first home with which we implemented our scholarship program. Initially, we worked exclusively with this home and its 140 children. Over the years, we quickly decided to expand our reach (and our scholarship program) to other centers in the region.

**LINK TO OUR WEBSITE**

**<https://www.ducsonchild.com>**

**LINK FOR A DONATION**

**<https://www.ducsonchild.com/dons>**

# At DSC, we believe education can shape a better future

**Un immense merci pour votre générosité et votre engagement !**

Grâce à vous, nous pouvons offrir aux enfants un avenir plus lumineux.

Votre aide fait une réelle différence, et nous sommes profondément reconnaissants de vous avoir à nos côtés

***Avec toute notre gratitude  
L'équipe de DSC***

**A huge thank you for your generosity and commitment!**

Thanks to you, we can offer children a brighter future.

Your support truly makes a difference, and we are deeply grateful to have you by our side.

***With all our gratitude,  
DSC team***

**Xin chân thành cảm ơn sự rộng lượng và tận tâm của bạn!**

Nhờ có bạn, chúng tôi có thể mang đến cho các em nhỏ một tương lai tươi sáng hơn.

Sự giúp đỡ của bạn thực sự tạo nên khác biệt, và chúng tôi vô cùng biết ơn khi có bạn đồng hành.

***Với tất cả lòng biết ơn,  
hội/nhóm DSC***

