SYSTEM CAPACITY GRANT – CONCEPT NOTE

Country:	Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
Coordinating agency:	Viet Nam Association for Education for All – VAEFA
Co-grant agents:	UNESCO and UNICEF
Implementing entity:	Ministry of Education and Training - MOET
Project name:	Learning Foundations for All – Strengthening Viet Nam's Education System for Equity and Inclusion
Timeframe:	3 years (2026-2028)
Total budget:	$2,350,000

I. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Viet Nam has experienced rapid and sustained socio-economic development over the past few decades, transitioning from a low-income to a lower-middle-income country, and now setting its sights on becoming a high-income country by 2045. Over the past ten years, the country has maintained an average annual GDP growth rate of around 6-7 per cent, positioning itself as one of the most dynamic economies in the region. Key drivers of this growth include a vibrant and expanding private sector, deepening integration into global value chains, and a young, increasingly urbanized population. The digital economy is also emerging as a new engine of growth, expected to contribute up to 30 per cent of GDP by 2030.[1]

Despite this impressive progress, Viet Nam continues to face persistent inequalities that risk leaving segments of the population behind. At the national level, the multidimensional poverty rate stands at 4.2 per cent. However, in regions with higher concentrations of ethnic minority communities such as the Northern Midland and Mountainous Areas and the Central Highlands, the rates are significantly higher, at 12.8 and 10.8 per cent respectively.[2] These disparities are particularly evident in access to quality education and human development outcomes across geographic regions, ethnic groups, and vulnerable populations such as children with disabilities. As the country moves into its next development phase, narrowing these equity gaps is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity to sustain inclusive growth.

Recognizing that long-term prosperity depends not only on economic dynamism but also on inclusive human capital development, Viet Nam has placed education, science and technology at the heart of its national development strategy. Under the leadership of General Secretary To Lam, there is a deliberate focus on four interlinked priorities: (i) maintaining strong, inclusive economic growth on the path to high-income status; (ii) building a highly skilled and adaptable workforce to meet the demands of a changing

[1] https://moit.gov.vn/en/news/ministerial-leaders-activities/digital-economy-expected-to-account-for-20-gdp-by-2025.html. Accessed 25 June 2025

[2] National Statistics Office. 2022. Results of the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey 2022.

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labor market; (iii) ensuring that the principle of "leaving no one behind" is reflected across all sectors; and (iv) leveraging education as a foundational enabler to realize these national goals.

Education, therefore, sits at the nexus of Viet Nam's long-term vision for equitable, inclusive, sustainable development. As the country aspires to reach high-income status by 2045, strengthening its human capital base, starting from early childhood and extending across the entire learning continuum, is not only a social imperative but an economic necessity. By prioritizing education, the country seeks to harness its transformative potential to reduce persistent social disparities and cultivate a workforce equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values needed in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. This national priority is embedded in key policy frameworks, including the Education Development Strategy 2021-2030 with a vision to 2045, and is reinforced by ongoing structural reforms, targeted investments, and collaborative efforts across ministries and development partners.

As of July 2025, the Government of Viet Nam has been restructured across both central and subnational levels to improve the efficiency and coherence of public administration. At the central level, several ministries and agencies have undergone institutional consolidation and functional realignment to streamline operations and reduce overlap. At the provincial level, the governance structure in all provinces has shifted from a three-tier to a two-tier model, resulting in the dissolution of district-level authorities. This shift reassigns planning, management, and service delivery responsibilities directly to provincial and commune-level authorities. These administrative changes carry important implications for the education sector, particularly in areas such as coordination and accountability mechanisms and enhancing capacity across all levels to effectively implement the national education agenda.

II. RATIONALE

Viet Nam has made remarkable strides in education over the past decades, achieving universal access to primary education and substantial gains in early childhood, secondary, and higher education enrolment. At the national level, gender parity across key education indicators has been largely sustained, with girls enrolling, completing school, and achieving academic outcomes at rates equal to or even higher than boys at all levels. Central to this progress is a strong national commitment to ensuring education for all children, reflected in ongoing efforts to dismantle and remove barriers faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds through major reforms such as tuition fee waivers, provision of free school meals, and increased teacher salaries. Yet, beneath the achievements lie persistent challenges, ranging from inequities in access to quality education, to disparities in learning outcomes across regions and population groups, driven by intersecting factors such as poverty, ethnicity, disability, and gender. While aggregate indicators suggest gender parity, gender norms continue to shape educational choices, learning experiences, and future opportunities, especially for girls in ethnic minority and remote areas. More specifically, girls in rural areas continue to face a heightened risk of school dropout due to entrenched gender stereotypes and financial pressures. Additionally, while higher education enrolment is higher

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among women than men, female participation remains concentrated in social sciences and education fields rather than in STEM disciplines, despite STEM being a national priority.[3]

In line with its policy on the universalization of pre-primary education for five-year-old children (one year before entering primary school), Viet Nam has achieved impressive results, with 97.6 per cent of five-year-olds attending organized learning programmes and minimal disparities observed across different child groups such as by wealth quintile, gender and ethnicity.[4] However, similar progress has not yet been achieved for younger age groups, where access to early childhood education (ECE) remains limited and uneven. Among children aged 3-4, the national non-attendance rate in ECE stands at 20 per cent with a slight gender gap – 18 per cent for boys and 21 per cent for girls, but the figure is significantly higher among some ethnic minority groups, for example, 62 per cent of Khmer children in this age group do not attend school. Non-attendance is notably high in regions with large ethnic minority populations, such as the Central Highlands and the Mekong River Delta, where 28 per cent and 52 per cent of children aged 3-4 are not attending any ECE classes, respectively.[5]

Children with disabilities in Viet Nam continue to face significant barriers to accessing quality education. The 2023 National Survey on Persons with Disabilities[6] highlighted these disparities: while the net enrolment rate for children with disabilities in primary education stood at 68.1 per cent compared to 95.2 per cent for their peers without disabilities, enrolment declined sharply at higher levels. Only 53 per cent of children with disabilities were enrolled in lower secondary education and just 30.8 per cent in upper secondary education, in contrast to 90 per cent and 76.6 per cent, respectively, among children without disabilities. Moreover, students with disabilities often contend with a lack of physical infrastructure, assistive technologies, and adequately trained teachers in regular schools. Although national and international large-scale learning assessments do not provide data on the learning outcomes of children with disabilities in schools, findings from the 2021–2022 Sustainable Development Goals on Children and Women (SDGCW) survey revealed that only about 70 per cent of children with functional difficulty aged 7-14 had acquired foundational reading and mathematics skills – compared to 83 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively, among their peers with no functional difficulty.[7] Nevertheless, disaggregated data on children with disabilities, particularly by gender, household wealth, ethnicity, and severity of disability, remain limited, making it difficult to fully understand the extent and nature of disparities, including potential gendered patterns of disadvantage. This data gap hampers efforts to design targeted, equity-oriented interventions that leave no child behind.

[3] Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences. 2025. National survey on gender equality – Research and assessment of gender equality for sustainable development.

[4] National Statistics Office and UNICEF. 2021. Survey measuring Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goal indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021, Survey Findings Report.

[5] Idem.

[6] https://www.nso.gov.vn/tin-tuc-thong-ke/2024/11/thong-cao-bao-chi-ve-ket-qua-dieu-tra-nguoi-khuyet-tat-nam-2023/. Accessed 16 June 2025.

[7] National Statistics Office and UNICEF. 2021. Survey measuring Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goal indicators on Children and Women 2020-2021, Survey Findings Report.

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Viet Nam's education data system has expanded significantly over the years, providing a valuable foundation for planning and policy development. However, further strengthening is needed to fully leverage the wealth of existing databases managed not only by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) but also by other line ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, in order to reduce inconsistencies and enhance interoperability. Key indicators essential for effective monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), particularly those related to learning outcomes, are either missing or not aligned with international standards, making it difficult to comprehensively track progress. While disaggregated data by key equity dimensions such as gender, disability and ethnicity is available to some extent, it remains limited, hindering efforts to identify disparities from an intersectionality lens and inform responsive policy formulation.

Against this backdrop, MOET, in collaboration with partners from the Education Sector Group (ESG), conducted an Enabling Factors Analysis, which identified four priority areas, along with their underlying enabling factors or bottlenecks[8], to drive system transformation: (1) inclusive and equitable early childhood education, (2) education for ethnic minority children, (3) disability-inclusive education for children with disabilities, and (4) data strengthening and digital transformation. These priorities echo the lessons drawn from the 2011–2020 Education Sector Analysis (ESA) and build on the strategic directions outlined in Viet Nam's Education Development Strategy for 2021–2030, with a long-term outlook toward 2045. Both documents highlight a common truth: addressing these equity-related disparities is essential to unlocking the full potential of the education system and delivering on the promise of inclusive and equitable quality education and learning opportunities for all children in the country.

Building on the key priorities identified, this proposed project sets out to be a catalyst for meaningful transformation in Viet Nam's education system. By strengthening how data and evidence are used to inform planning, policymaking, and monitoring, the project aims to ensure that decisions are grounded in the realities of all learners. It places gender-responsiveness at the heart of its approach, promotes more inclusive coordination across the sector, and ultimately supports more efficient and equitable investment in education. With its catalytic nature, the project seeks not just to deliver results, but to spark broader reforms that create lasting change benefiting all children in Viet Nam.

Under the leadership of MOET and with the technical assistance of UNESCO and UNICEF, the proposed project focuses on three interconnected programmatic areas: inclusive and equitable early childhood education (with targeted support for ethnic minority children and children with disabilities of ECE age), disability-inclusive education for children with disabilities, and data strengthening coupled with digital transformation. This strategic focus ensures close alignment with, and the ability to harness, the current momentum in the national policy landscape driven by, among others,: (1) the Government's efforts to develop a new ECE curriculum and expand universal access to ECE for children aged 3-5; (2) the Master Plan on Specialized Schools and Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) for the period 2021-2030 with a vision to 2045; and (3) the national digital transformation agenda, which spans all sectors, including education. The project is also designed to complement the ongoing Ramping Up initiative, implemented

[8] The bottlenecks, which have been identified and analysed in the accompanying EFA report, will be summarized in the next section.

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by MOET and Save the Children with support from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) – through a Multiplier Grant – and the Nippon Foundation, which also focuses on inclusive education for ethnic minority children and children with disabilities with a relatively stronger emphasis on the former. Additionally, this project reinforces GPE's approach to driving education system transformation by addressing critical enabling factors within a coherent, government-led framework.

III. SUMMARY OF ENABLING FACTORS ANALYSIS

As the project is built around key interventions or activities designed to address obstacles to system transformation, particularly those identified through the Enabling Factors Analysis, it begins by outlining the enabling factors that underpin the proposed activities.

With support from GPE, the 2011-2020 ESA report, conducted through a participatory and consultative approach, identified a set of systemic constraints that were subsequently incorporated into Viet Nam's Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045. Building on this foundation, the Enabling Factors Analysis (EFA), culminating in the national workshop held on 28–29 June 2023 with the participation of MOET departments, the GPE Secretariat, and ESG members, sought to further identify systemic bottlenecks and capacity gaps. The analysis placed particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and ethnic minority children. Data strengthening and digital transformation were also recognized as critical cross-cutting priorities for system strengthening.

The primary objective of the EFA exercise was to identify enabling factors for strengthening system capacity in a participatory, evidence-based manner, consistent with GPE's guidelines. Consensus was reached among ESG members on four enabling factors considered pivotal to unlocking meaningful and sustainable education system transformation in Viet Nam. A summary of these enabling factors is provided below:

1. Data and Evidence

Viet Nam has made important strides in strengthening its education data systems, providing a solid foundation for planning and policy development. However, further enhancements are needed to fully align with international SDG 4 monitoring indicators, particularly those related to learning outcomes, to support more effective tracking of progress and the design of targeted interventions. Improving the integration and interoperability of existing databases would also reinforce ongoing reform efforts and strengthen evidence-based policymaking and planning. A critical gap lies in the availability of disaggregated data to monitor equity and inclusion in education in Viet Nam. While some data exists, information on children with disabilities, particularly regarding their access to education and learning outcomes, remains scarce, hindering efforts to assess their inclusion and guide responsive policies and services. Similar limitations affect data on ethnic minority children and migrant children – particularly intersectional data needed to identify barriers faced by those with multiple vulnerabilities and other vulnerable groups. More consistent and cross-disaggregated data are needed to identify and address disparities. In the ECE sub-sector, the absence of a national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism presents a significant barrier to generating data and evidence needed to track the implementation of

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universal ECE policies and assess their impact across different population groups. With digital transformation now a national priority cutting across all sectors, it is timely to further improve the education data system and M&E mechanisms to better inform evidence-based policymaking and deliver on the commitment to leave no child behind.

2. Gender-Responsive Sector Planning, Policy, and Monitoring

While Viet Nam's Gender Parity Indices across key education monitoring indicators remain strong, this achievement largely reflects gender sensitivity, acknowledging different needs and power dynamics, rather than a fully-realized commitment to gender responsiveness or transformation. In many cases, efforts stop at integrating gender sensitivity into planning and policy, without consistently addressing the root causes of gender inequality, such as ingrained attitudes, biases, and norms. These underlying issues can still be found in various aspects of educational delivery, including teaching practices and textbook illustrations. Transforming these requires a systemic shift in mindset and practice, not only among policymakers and planners but also among teachers, school leaders and other practitioners on the ground.

Additionally, limited attention has been given to how gender intersects with other forms of disadvantage, such as poverty, disability, migration status or remote geographical location, which can intensify exclusion and deepen inequities for certain groups, especially ethnic minority girls and girls with disabilities.

Despite investments in gender-sensitive planning, robust gender-responsive M&E mechanisms are still lacking, particularly consultative and participatory mechanisms. For transformative changes, it is critical, among others, to establish an M&E framework that embeds gender considerations throughout the policy cycle, from planning to implementation arrangements and concurrent capacity building.

3. Sector coordination

3.1 Inclusive Dialogue and Coordinated Action

The Government of Viet Nam has established formal mechanisms for transparent policy consultation, which MOET has actively utilized to shape education policy. These include the publication of draft policy documents and engagement through workshops, expert interviews, and digital platforms to gather input from across the sector. These mechanisms enable diverse voices to contribute to education policymaking. Although digital platforms offer cost-effective tools for consultation and stakeholder engagement, disparities in digital infrastructure and access, particularly in remote or socio-economically disadvantaged areas, may hinder the inclusiveness of these processes. Specifically for disability-inclusive education, intersectoral coordination is essential to advancing the rights and learning outcomes of children with disabilities, as this requires close collaboration between the education, health, and social protection sectors. While initial progress has been made, practical mechanisms for joint planning, service delivery, and data integration still require significant strengthening. The ESG, as a formal dialogue mechanism, presents an opportunity to foster more regular, structured discussions around education sector priorities and partners' joint support for the implementation of the 2021-2030 Education Development Strategy, with a vision to 2045.

3.2 Coordinated Financing and Funding

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While public investment in education in Viet Nam remains significant, opportunities exist to further strengthen planning and resource allocation to better meet long-term sector goals. Currently, the sector operates without a comprehensive medium- to long-term expenditure framework, which can make it more challenging to strategically prioritize investments and align them with evolving learner needs and system-wide reforms. Budget allocations are often based on inputs rather than being closely linked to education outcomes or differentiated needs. With around 90 per cent of education spending managed at the subnational level, further development of mechanisms to support coordinated, results-oriented financial planning could help maximize the impact of resources across different levels of the system. In parallel, external aid in the education sector is predominantly delivered through standalone projects, which may limit opportunities for alignment with national systems and strategies. Decree 114/2021/ND-CP issued in 2021, which is being revised to reflect more simplified and progressive provisions of the revised 2024 Public Investment Law, provides a positive step toward more harmonized financing by allowing for aligned modalities in investments in education. While pooled education financing is not yet fully developed, the Decree offers a precedent for more coordinated and strategic funding models in the future.

4. Volume, Efficiency, and Equity of Domestic Financing

Although the 2019 Education Law stipulates that 20 per cent of the state budget should be allocated to education, this target has not consistently been met in practice. The education spending also remains relatively modest in absolute terms given the actual size of the economy and the large school-age population. At the same time, the current budget allocation framework, which is not yet strongly incentive- or needs-based, may limit opportunities to foster teacher motivation, performance, and system responsiveness. This challenge is compounded by the absence of a fully developed decentralization policy that delegates financial decision-making to the school level, which can further restrict the efficient and context-specific use of funds. As a result, vulnerable groups, e.g., children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, and those living in poverty, may not fully benefit from existing investments without more targeted and flexible support mechanisms. Moreover, with over 80 per cent of the education recurrent expenditure on teacher salaries, limited resources remain for essential professional development activities that enhance teaching quality and, ultimately, learning outcomes among students. Finally, the concept of “socialization” in education is understood primarily in terms of resource mobilization, rather than fostering broader societal engagement. Addressing these issues progressively could help enhance equity and efficiency in public education financing – an imperative that has become even more pressing in light of recent government restructuring and major education sector reforms, including the introduction of tuition fee waivers for students in public schools and the universalization of early childhood education for children aged 3–5.

IV. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Overall Objective

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The proposed project aims to strategically reinforce Viet Nam's education system governance and delivery capacity, with a strong focus on advancing equity, inclusion, and quality for all learners, especially the most marginalized, including children with disabilities and ethnic minority children. Closely aligned with the Government's priorities outlined in the 2021–2030 Education Development Strategy – as well as the findings of the Enabling Factors Analysis report and the 2011-2020 Education Sector Analysis report, the project seeks to accelerate progress where transformative change is most achievable and needed in the context of Viet Nam by focusing on three high-impact areas: inclusive and equitable early childhood education, disability-inclusive education, and data strengthening and digital transformation. These areas have been strategically selected for their potential to support and catalyze broader reforms, accelerate gender-responsive and evidence-based policy formulation and implementation, and build digitally adaptive, data-informed, and results-oriented systems. Ultimately, the project will contribute meaningfully to Viet Nam's ambition of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all children, in line with national development priorities and SDG 4.

2. Project Activities

To support the achievement of the overall objective and address the identified enabling factors and system bottlenecks, a set of activities is proposed across three interlinked components. These activities have been developed by the relevant technical departments of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), namely, the Early Childhood Education Department, the Department of General Education, and the Department of Science, Technology and Information, under the overall leadership of MOET to ensure coherence, system-wide impact, and long-term sustainability.

It is important to note that these components are grounded in the four priority areas previously endorsed by MOET leadership and key stakeholders: (1) inclusive, gender-responsive and equitable early childhood education, (2) education for ethnic minority children, (3) disability-inclusive education for children with disabilities, and (4) data strengthening and digital transformation. The first two areas have been strategically consolidated into a single component, i.e., Component 1, reflecting their shared targets and strong synergies in advancing equity and inclusion from the early years.

The proposed activities are firmly anchored in Viet Nam's overarching Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045, approved under Decision No. 1705/QĐ-TTg (December 2024). This Strategy articulates the national vision for a modern, inclusive, and high-quality education system, with clear priorities on system transformation, digital innovation, and equitable access to learning opportunities. It provides the strategic direction and legal foundation for the activities proposed under this project, which have been further operationalized through MOET's Action Plan (Decision No. 1164/QĐ-BGDĐT, May 2025), outlining implementation responsibilities, timelines, and targets across all levels of the education system.

Component 1: Inclusive, gender-responsive and equitable quality early childhood education

Investing in ECE is one of the most impactful strategies to promote inclusive and equitable learning outcomes. In Viet Nam, this priority is being advanced through the development of a new national ECE curriculum supported by UNICEF that is gender-transformative and promotes social-emotional learning,

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digital literacy and disability-inclusion, marking a significant milestone in the country's education reform agenda. For the first time, the curriculum explicitly includes children with disabilities, underscoring a shift toward a more inclusive and responsive ECE system. Once finalized, it will be piloted for tentatively 3 academic years then rolled out nationwide. In parallel, the Government is intensifying efforts to expand universal access to ECE for all children aged 3 to 5, building on previous gains in reaching five-year-olds. This commitment is firmly anchored in Resolution No. 42-NQ/TW (November 2023) of the Central Party Committee, which sets a national target to achieve universalized ECE for children aged 3–5 by 2030. To fully realize this ambition, continued attention is needed to strengthen implementation capacity, particularly in reaching disadvantaged groups and ensuring adequate capacity among teachers and education managers from central to school levels. The proposed project supports and complements this momentum by focusing on quality, inclusion, and system-wide capacity to deliver equitable early learning opportunities at scale.

Activity 1.1: Develop and disseminate guidelines and a corresponding training manual, including e-learning modules, on the implementation of the new Early Childhood Education Curriculum with an integrated value- and competency-based approach, with a strong focus on gender-transformative approaches, equity, and inclusion.

This activity aims to ensure that the nationwide rollout of the new ECE curriculum is guided by inclusive, evidence-informed processes. The guidelines together with the corresponding training manuals will support ECE teachers and education managers in translating the curriculum into practice while addressing the diverse learning needs of all children, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. As part of the implementation roadmap, the curriculum will first be piloted in selected provinces. Lessons learned from this piloting phase will be synthesized to refine the guidelines and ensure they are contextually appropriate and scalable before full national adoption.

This includes the development and dissemination of guidelines for education managers and teachers on, among others: (i) developing equitable, inclusive and gender-responsive school educational plans; (ii) developing and organizing educational activities in line with the new ECE curriculum; (iii) child development assessment that supports teachers in adapting learning plans to meet the needs of each child and ensures that children develop holistically and school readiness; (iv) promoting family and community engagement in early child care and stimulation and early education for children both in school and at home; (v) scaling up the use of mother tongue-based approaches (for six ethnic minority languages: H'Mong, Thai, Bana, J'rai, Ede, Khmer) to strengthen foundational literacy among ethnic minority children and better prepare them for primary education – this draws on results and lessons learned under the ongoing Ramping Up project for nationwide scaling in alignment with the new curriculum; and (vi) fostering inclusive and equitable innovations in preschool management through digital platforms and technologies.

Activity 1.2: Identify bottlenecks and develop solutions to improve access to and the quality of inclusive early childhood education and care for children with disabilities.

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This activity aims to strengthen inclusive practices in ECE institutions by identifying key barriers and translating insights into practical solutions. The process will generate evidence to inform better teaching, care, and support for children with disabilities in ECE, with the goal of improving learning and developmental outcomes and guiding future scale-up. This activity also contributes to improving access to ECE for children with disabilities in inclusive settings and plays a key role in supporting the implementation of the new ECE curriculum, with a strong focus on disability inclusion.

This includes: (i) conducting an assessment (which includes a policy review and school surveys) to identify specific challenges in and solutions to improve access to and the quality of education, teaching, and care for ECE-aged children with disabilities; and (ii) developing practical guidelines and tools as well as capacity building for education officials, teachers, school managers and staff to strengthen disability-inclusive teaching and care practices and improve learning and developmental outcomes among children with disabilities.

Activity 1.3: Assess gaps and design policy and programmatic responses for universal early childhood education for children aged 3-5 years old.

This activity seeks to generate actionable insights and strengthen policy and operational guidance to support Viet Nam's goal of universalizing access to early childhood education for all children aged 3–5.

This includes: (i) evaluating the current policy framework related to universal preschool education and its implementation to generate evidence on gaps and challenges, and to propose targeted actions, solutions, and policy recommendations that inform the development of a government decree and its associated implementation programme in line with the National Assembly's endorsement on universalizing ECE for children aged 3- 5; and (ii) developing training manuals and materials and conducting training workshops in support of universalizing access to ECE for 3-5-year-old children across the country.

Note: UNICEF will assume technical leadership for activities under Component 1 and will be accountable for the use of GPE grant funds in their implementation.

Component 2: Disability-inclusive education for children with disabilities

Strengthening disability-inclusive education is a critical priority in Viet Nam's efforts to ensure that no child is left behind. This commitment is clearly reflected in Decision No. 403/QĐ-TTg, issued by the Prime Minister on 25 February 2025, which approves the Master Plan on specialized schools and Inclusive Education Resource Centers for the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050. The Decision outlines a long-term roadmap for developing a national network of specialized schools and inclusive education resource centers, with a strong emphasis on improving coordination, service delivery, and professional capacity to support learners with disabilities. It prioritizes the transformation of selected specialized schools into IERCs to broaden their outreach and enable more community-based, inclusive support to mainstream schools. In the meantime, it calls for improving the quality and relevance of specialized schools that remain, ensuring they meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities. The proposed project's

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activities under this component – focusing on data and evidence generation, capacity-building, the development of national guidelines, and improved intersectoral coordination – are designed to operationalize key elements of this Master Plan related to IERCs and accelerate its implementation across both central and local levels. Effective implementation of this Master Plan is expected to significantly improve access to quality education for children with disabilities and contribute to the realization of a more inclusive, equitable education system in Viet Nam.

Activity 2.1: Strengthen the knowledge base on education for children with disabilities, including data on access, quality, and equity, as well as country-relevant best practices to inform the design and implementation of evidence-based inclusive education policies and programmes.

This activity aims to build a stronger evidence base to inform disability-inclusive education policymaking and programming by addressing critical data gaps and drawing on proven practices that can be adapted to or replicated in Viet Nam's context.

This includes (i) collecting and analyzing available data on access, learning outcomes, and barriers faced by children with disabilities; and (ii) identifying and documenting country-relevant best practices from Viet Nam and other contexts to support the development of inclusive, evidence-informed education policies and programmes.

Activity 2.2: Develop standardized processes for the development of learning materials, management, and quality assurance to enhance the quality of education for children with disabilities.

This activity aims to improve the quality of disability-inclusive education by introducing national standards and processes for accessible learning materials and service delivery through IERCs.

This includes (i) developing guidelines for the design, adaptation, and production of accessible learning materials aligned with national curricula and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles; and (ii) establishing a quality assurance framework for IERCs, including national standards, performance indicators, and monitoring tools to improve service delivery and strengthen linkages between IERCs and mainstream schools.

Activity 2.3: Strengthen central-local and intersectoral coordination to improve access to and the quality of education for children with disabilities.

This activity aims to develop the foundational building blocks for a national-level unit responsible for coordinating disability-inclusive education, as outlined in Prime Minister's Decision No. 403. By defining its core functions, including intersectoral coordination, monitoring, research, and capacity development, and strengthening institutional linkages across stakeholders at national and subnational levels, the activity supports the creation of a more integrated and effective national system for disability-inclusive education.

This includes: (i) conceptualizing a national-level unit responsible for disability-inclusive education, including the implementation of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 403, with clearly

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defined functions in intersectoral coordination, monitoring, research, and capacity development; (ii) building the capacity of core teachers and education managers in disability-inclusive education; and (iii) supporting the implementation of unified management software on disability-inclusive education to enhance planning and monitoring among education institutions across the countries.

Note: Component 2 will be implemented under the overall technical and coordination lead of UNICEF, with UNESCO contributing technical expertise. Both Grant Agents will be accountable for the use of their respective allocated funds to ensure effective implementation. Under Activity 2.3, UNICEF will lead the (i) conceptualization of a national-level unit responsible for disability-inclusive education, including the implementation of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 403, with clearly defined functions in intersectoral coordination, monitoring, research, and capacity development, whereas UNESCO will lead the (iii) support to implement a unified management software on disability-inclusive education to enhance planning and monitoring among education institutions across the countries. Both the grant agents will jointly lead the (ii) building the capacity of core teachers and education managers in disability-inclusive education. Details on the cost items to be managed by each agency are reflected in the budget template and subject to adjustments, as needed, during implementation.

Component 3: Data strengthening and digital transformation

Strengthening education data systems and advancing digital transformation are critical to building a more inclusive, accountable, and resilient education system in Viet Nam. Despite an extensive pool of education data, the system remains fragmented, misaligned with international SDG 4 indicators, and largely lacks disaggregation by gender, disability, and ethnicity. These gaps hinder evidence-based planning, particularly for equity monitoring and early childhood education, where the absence of a national M&E system impedes policy implementation. At the same time, digital transformation has emerged as a national priority. Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (December 2024) of the Central Party Committee, the highest body of the national political system, and the Government's Resolution No. 71/NQ-CP (April 2025) of the Government of Viet Nam call for a nationwide digital learning movement and improved digital and technological competencies among civil servants, educators, and the wider public. Aligned with these mandates, this component focuses on three interlinked broad activities: strengthening education data systems, enhancing digital competencies, and building subnational capacity for inclusive, evidence-based planning, laying the foundation for a modern, connected, and equitable education ecosystem.

Activity 3.1: Strengthen the education data system to support inclusive, gender-responsive, and evidence-based planning and decision-making in the context of digital transformation

This activity aims to strengthen education data systems within the broader context of digital transformation, from central to subnational levels, by enhancing Education Management Information System (EMIS) functionalities and introducing new ones based on practical needs, especially for collecting and using disaggregated data (e.g. by gender, disability status, and ethnicity). By using and adapting UNESCO's EMIS readiness and maturity assessment methodology and tools, the activity promotes a more inclusive, interoperable, and responsive data ecosystem to support equitable planning and decision-making across the education sector.

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This includes: (i) conducting a thorough assessment of the existing EMIS, with a focus on digitalization, infrastructure, data disaggregation, and institutional capacity; (ii) producing a comprehensive report outlining key findings and actionable recommendations for EMIS enhancement; (iii) developing technical guidance on data standards, classifications, and system requirements to improve coherence and interoperability; and (iv) delivering targeted capacity development activities for education planners, managers and data officers on applying the technical guidance and EMIS tools, with an emphasis on inclusive, evidence-based education planning, promoting consistent disaggregated data collection, reporting, and analysis starting from the school level.

Activity 3.2: Assess and strengthen digital learning resources and educator capacity to support inclusive digital transformation

This activity aims to assess the status of digital learning repositories and the capacity of education personnel to develop digital content, and to propose practical solutions for enriching the national repository in line with the digital transformation agenda. It focuses on meeting diverse learning needs from early childhood through end-secondary education, while strengthening educator capacity to create and use digital learning materials. Finally, the activity aligns with the ongoing literacy and continuing education programs, reinforcing a system-wide approach to inclusive and equitable learning opportunities, particularly for learners in remote or disadvantaged areas.

This includes: (i) conducting a comprehensive assessment of the scale, content quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of existing digital learning repositories – prioritizing materials officially reviewed and endorsed by MOET, local education authorities and education institutions; (ii) evaluating educator capacity, identifying content gaps and user needs, and formulating actionable recommendations to strengthen the digital repositories, supported through expert consultations and aligned with national digital transformation goals; and (iii) developing capacity-building materials and delivering targeted training workshops to enhance the capacity of education personnel in designing, creating, and effectively utilizing using digital learning content.

Activity 3.3: Strengthen local education managers' capacity for inclusive, gender-responsive, and evidence-based policy planning and monitoring in a two-tier administrative context[9]

This activity aims to strengthen the capacity of central and subnational education managers to plan, implement, monitor, and learn from education policies within Viet Nam's two-tier administrative system. It builds on the data and system improvements under Activity 3.1 and

[9] Following recent administrative reforms in Viet Nam, the three-tier government structure (provincial-district-commune) has been restructured into a two-tier model nationwide. District-level administrative entities have been formally removed, consolidating governance at the provincial and commune levels. This restructuring is intended to streamline administrative processes and improve the efficiency of public service delivery, including in the education sector.

promotes the integration of gender equality, equity, and inclusion across all stages of the policy cycle.

This includes: (i) conducting capacity assessments to identify capacity gaps and enhance inclusive, evidence-based policy development and implementation across all levels within the new two-tier administrative structure; (ii) developing a practical Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) toolkit to guide subnational managers in tracking progress and improving policy outcomes; and (iii) organizing targeted training workshops to strengthen planning and MEL capacities, with a strong focus on gender, equity, and inclusion.

Note: UNESCO will assume technical leadership for activities under Component 3 and will be accountable for the use of GPE grant funds in their implementation.

To ensure alignment with the GPE System Capacity Grant guidelines and facilitate accurate budgeting, the three components of this proposal have been systematically mapped against the three pre-defined financing windows. This mapping enables clearer categorization of activities in accordance with GPE's strategic focus areas and allows for more effective allocation of resources across components. Specifically, activities under Component 1 primarily align with Financing Window 1, focusing on gender-responsive planning and inclusive policy development from the early years. Component 2 spans all three financing windows: Window 1 through its emphasis on inclusive policy and guideline development, Window 2 through its support for intersectoral coordination, and Window 3 through its efforts in capacity building and service delivery improvements for disability-inclusive education. Component 3 is fully mapped to Financing Window 3, given its strong focus on system capacity strengthening, adaptive learning at scale, and enhanced data use to inform planning and decision-making. To improve data availability and use, the component includes targeted approaches to improve data accessibility, build user capacity, foster a data culture among education stakeholders in the context of increasing digitalization, and promote regular feedback loops from local to national levels to support continuous improvement. This structured alignment enhances coherence across the proposal and supports more targeted and accountable use of GPE funds.

The table below provides a detailed mapping of the proposed activities under the three project components, indicating how each aligns with the relevant SCG financing windows. This overview is intended to illustrate how the project's design strategically leverages available funding streams to support coherent and mutually reinforcing interventions across all priority areas.

	Financing Window 1: Strengthen gender-responsive planning and policy development for systemwide impact	**Financing Window 2:** Mobilize coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change	**Financing Window 3:** Strengthen capacity, adapt and learn, to implement and drive results at scale
Component 1: Inclusive and equitable early childhood education			
Activity 1.1	**X**		
Activity 1.2	**X**		

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Activity 1.3	**X**		
Component 2: Disability-inclusive education for children with disabilities			
Activity 2.1	**X**		
Activity 2.2	**X**		
Activity 2.3		**X**	
Component 3: Data strengthening and digital transformation			
Activity 3.1			**X**
Activity 3.2			**X**
Activity 3.3			**X**

3. Contribution of proposed activities to the overall objective and enabling factors

The proposed interventions under the SCG contribute directly to Viet Nam's overarching objective of strengthening education system governance and delivery capacity, with equity, inclusion, and quality at the core. They offer targeted responses to system-wide bottlenecks identified in the Enabling Factors Analysis, including gaps in data and evidence use, gender-responsive planning, intersectoral coordination, and equitable financing.

By enhancing the inclusiveness, gender-responsiveness and quality of **early childhood education** in Viet Nam, particularly for children with disabilities and ethnic minority children, the proposed project targets a high-impact entry point for long-term learning and equity, thereby laying a stronger foundation for lifelong learning for children in the country. Viet Nam's current effort to universalize ECE for all children aged 3-5 and the development of a new national ECE curriculum presents a pivotal opportunity to reshape the foundations of the education system. The project supports this dual momentum by strengthening the capacity of teachers, school principals, and education managers to implement quality ECE with a strong emphasis on gender, equity, and inclusion, thereby reducing disparities from the earliest stage, promoting school readiness, and improving outcomes throughout the learning cycle.

In the area of **disability-inclusive education**, the proposed project goes beyond service delivery and focuses on embedding inclusion into the core functioning of the education system by enhancing intersectoral coordination, developing quality assurance frameworks and standardized approaches to the provision of education and the development of accessible learning materials. The project also focuses on building the capacity of teachers, school principals, and education managers to deliver inclusive education, equipping them with the tools and skills needed to address diverse learning needs in mainstream classrooms. By embedding these elements into existing education structures and processes, the project helps shift disability inclusion from isolated efforts to a systematic and sustainable approach that ensures children with disabilities are supported as an integral part of Viet Nam's broader education development agenda.

Through targeted interventions in **data systems and digital transformation**, the project strengthens transparency, efficiency, and responsiveness across the education sector. It supports the digitalization of core education management functions, particularly the EMIS ecosystem, to enable more effective

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statutory planning, monitoring, and reporting process. The use of disaggregated, policy-relevant data enables more accurate identification of disparities and informed decision-making. At the same time, enhanced digital competencies empower education managers and teachers to design, implement and systematically monitor equitable, inclusive, gender-responsive policies. Together, these efforts advance Viet Nam's digital transformation agenda in education and improve system-wide governance and service delivery.

Collectively, these contributions reinforce Viet Nam's progress toward the strategic goals set out in the Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045, and SDG 4. They help unlock the enabling conditions required for transformative change by aligning national priorities with the system-level capacity needed to deliver inclusive, equitable, and resilient education for all.

V. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

The project will be implemented under the leadership of MOET, with support from the two designated Grant Agents – UNESCO and UNICEF. UNESCO and UNICEF will collaborate closely, drawing on their complementary expertise to provide coordinated and high-quality support to MOET across key areas such as technical and coordination support, project monitoring and oversight, and quality assurance. This partnership ensures that both international standards and national priorities are reflected in the implementation process. UNICEF will take the technical lead on Component 1 (inclusive and equitable early childhood education), while UNESCO will lead on Component 3 (data strengthening and digital transformation). Component 2 (disability-inclusive education) will be jointly supported by both grant agents, drawing on their complementary expertise, i.e., UNICEF will serve as the technical and coordination lead, leveraging its extensive experience in disability-inclusive education policy and system strengthening in Viet Nam, while UNESCO will contribute strategic support in line with its mandate and comparative advantage.

In addition to providing the aforementioned support, UNESCO and UNICEF will be accountable to GPE and the ESG for the effective and transparent management of project funds in cooperation with MOET. This includes overseeing financial planning, procurement, disbursement, and reporting in line with GPE guidelines and the agencies' own fiduciary standards. Both GAs are responsible for ensuring that resources are used efficiently and in full compliance with applicable regulations. Financial and programmatic reporting will be shared regularly with GPE and the ESG as per GPE's guidelines, thereby ensuring robust oversight and promoting collective accountability for results. This will be facilitated through the SCG coordinating agency, the Viet Nam Association for Education for All (VAEFA), which plays a central role in bridging dialogue among the Grant Agents, MOET and ESG members during the implementation of the proposed project.

VI. MONITORING

UNESCO and UNICEF will play a central role in monitoring the effective implementation of the project in close partnership with MOET. Leveraging their complementary technical expertise, longstanding partnerships with MOET, and operational presence in Viet Nam, the two agencies will work jointly to

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ensure that activities are implemented as planned, results are tracked, and challenges are promptly addressed throughout the project lifecycle.

To ensure strong project performance and accountability, the GAs will adopt a multi-pronged monitoring approach that includes:

- **Joint annual and quarterly work planning:** UNESCO and UNICEF will support MOET in developing detailed annual and quarterly work plans aligned with agreed timelines, milestones and results indicators. These work plans will serve as the basis for regular performance tracking and timely course corrections.
- **Regular coordination meetings and technical reviews:** Frequent coordination meetings will be held with concerned MOET Departments to review technical progress, identify bottlenecks, and adapt implementation strategies as needed.
- **Field monitoring and technical support missions:** Joint field visits by MOET and the GAs will be organized, as needed, to assess on-the-ground progress and provide hands-on technical assistance for activities that require field-level engagement, such as assessments and capacity-building at the subnational level.
- **Support to MOET-led monitoring efforts:** Where applicable, UNESCO and UNICEF will provide technical assistance to strengthen MOET's own monitoring tools and processes, such as data collection, reporting templates, and monitoring protocols, to ensure national ownership and institutional learning.
- **Progress reporting to the ESG:** In partnership with relevant MOET Departments, UNESCO and UNICEF will provide regular progress updates to the ESG, with facilitation support from VAEFA – the coordinating agency for SCG in Viet Nam. Feedback from the ESG throughout the implementation period will be incorporated to inform and refine implementation strategies where feasible.

VII. RISKS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The following table presents a summary of the key risks that may affect project implementation, along with corresponding mitigation measures designed to proactively manage potential challenges and ensure smooth and effective delivery of the project's objectives.

Risk Category	Description of Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Policy Continuity	Evolving priorities or adjustments in the education policy landscape may affect the pace or focus of implementation.	Medium	High	Ensure alignment with long-term national strategies and legal frameworks. Maintain regular dialogue with MOET and ESG

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				members to adapt activities if needed.
Coordination Across Stakeholders	Challenges in harmonizing efforts across Departments may affect synergy and efficiency.	Medium	Medium	Promote joint planning and regular coordination meetings with the participation of all concerned MOET Departments, UNESCO and UNICEF.
Institutional restructuring and staff turnovers	Potential delays due to ongoing large-scale administrative restructuring in Viet Nam causing leadership changes and staff turnovers	Medium	Medium	Closely monitor the evolving administrative landscape and engage proactively with MOET and subnational authorities to align timelines and responsibilities. Anticipate capacity gaps, especially among commune-level education staff, and provide support as needed.
Financial Flow and Management	Delays in fund disbursement or limited absorptive capacity may impact timely execution of activities.	Medium	Medium	Establish clear disbursement plans and provide management support to MOET Departments. Ensure regular review and adaptive planning.
Procurement and Third-Party Engagement	Delays or variation in service delivery quality from consultants and service providers	Medium	Medium	Ensure robust selection, clear deliverables, and ongoing monitoring by MOET Department with technical support from. UNESCO and UNICEF
Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and	There is a risk that project personnel, implementing partners, or third-party providers may engage in or fail to prevent sexual	Low	High	Enforce strict compliance with UNESCO and UNICEF's PSEAH policies and institutional frameworks.

Harassment (PSEAH)	exploitation, abuse, or harassment during project implementation, particularly in field-based activities.			Include PSEAH-related clauses in all contracts and partnership agreements under the project.

VIII. KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE PROJECT

1. Value for Money and Sustainability

The proposed project delivers strong value for money by strategically targeting high-impact, system-wide bottlenecks with cost-effective and evidence-based interventions. Each activity is grounded in national priorities and aligned with good global practices, leveraging the comparative advantages and proven technical expertise of both UNESCO and UNICEF. The project is designed to complement ongoing investments, including the ongoing Ramping Up project implemented by MOET and Save the Children with support from the Global Partnership for Education (through a Multiplier Grant) and the Nippon Foundation, to avoid duplication and maximize synergies within the education sector in Viet Nam.

Value is further enhanced through a clear focus on long-term system capacity strengthening rather than short-term service delivery. By addressing foundational challenges such as the capacity of teachers and education managers, institutional coordination, and inclusive data systems, the project generates catalytic effects that improve efficiency, reduce fragmentation, and enable smarter use of limited resources.

Sustainability is built into the project design through strong national ownership, direct implementation by concerned MOET Departments, and full alignment with Viet Nam's Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045. All interventions are co-led with MOET and designed to be scalable, replicable, and integrated into existing structures to ensure continuity beyond the life of the grant.

UNESCO and UNICEF bring robust fiduciary assurance through internationally recognized implementation and financial oversight modalities, cost-efficiency, transparency, and risk mitigation. In addition, the lates 2022 EU-UN Cost Norms in Viet Nam will be applied for budgeting purposes, reinforcing value for money through standardized and reasonable costing of activities, travel, and personnel inputs in line with donor expectations and international best practices.

2. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

The proposed project upholds gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) not as an add-on, but as a guiding thread woven throughout every component of its design and delivery, the project adopts an integrated approach, i.e., ensuring that all activities, from guidelines development to capacity building and data system strengthening, are responsive to the barriers that disadvantaged children face.

In early childhood education, this means embedding inclusive practices into how teachers engage with children, how families are engaged to enhance learning experiences and developmental outcomes for

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children, and how inclusive, conducive learning environments are created. Attention is also paid to the often-overlooked intersection of gender, wealth, ethnicity and disability status, which can compound disadvantages for children facing several vulnerabilities.

In disability-inclusive education, the project moves beyond awareness-raising to build practical systems such as standardized support services and accessible learning materials that can sustain equitable participation. It also invests in strengthening intersectoral collaboration so that education systems work hand in hand with health, social protection, and community services to meet the holistic needs of children with disabilities.

The project promotes the systematic use of disaggregated data (e.g., by gender, disability status, and ethnicity) to inform inclusive education planning and foster social inclusion. Digital transformation plays a catalytic role in this process, enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of data systems to enable equity-focused decision-making and planning. By revealing which groups are being left behind and why, such data helps ensure that policies and programmes are responsive to the specific needs of the most marginalized learners. Disaggregated data also enables timely course correction and more equitable resource allocation under the current Education Development Strategy 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045. In doing so, it strengthens data-driven decision-making and supports the development of a more inclusive, socially cohesive education system where all children, regardless of background or ability, can learn and thrive.

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