British Council

> Next Generation

Vietnam – August 2020

Image front cover

Young artist listening to recording of local
community music, FAMLAB Community
Music Residency, Gia Lai province.
Photo by Le Xuan Phong

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> Acknowledgements

Disclaimer

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> **Forewords**

Since the launch of Đổi Mới reforms in 1986, Vietnam has seen its population increase by almost 60 per cent and is projected to reach 120 million by 2050. With impressive economic development, dramatic societal change and increasing participation in the global economy, Vietnam continues to be on the rise. In the midst of this impressive growth and increasing global recognition, British Council's Next Generation Vietnam research provides a clear statement from the country's youth (aged 16 to 30) about their concerns and aspirations for the future in Vietnam.

The British Council's Next Generation research aims to investigate and understand the attitudes and experiences of young people from countries undergoing change, whether it is economic, political or social. It is part of the British Council's commitment to explore youth voice and choice, to amplify youth voice and support effective engagement with young people on youth policymaking. To date, research has been undertaken in other countries including Ethiopia, Germany, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Kenya, Myanmar, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, Zimbabwe and the UK.

From the research, we see that Vietnamese youth clearly recognise and appreciate improvements in education, employment opportunities, and the opening and modernising of wider society. However, like their peers in other countries in the series, in order to feel confident and secure about their future, Vietnamese youth want and need more, including a greater focus on life skills and links between education and employment. There are differences in

some views and expectations between rural and urban young people regarding the roles and value of community and the state; however, the research has also shown greater consensus on progress made regarding equality across gender, ethnicity and LGBTQI and the need for this to be further developed and sustained. It is interesting to note that whilst young people want their voices to be heard and to influence change, they also express concern about corruption at different levels, which will prevent their voices being heard, and their ability to impact change in areas of wider importance, including environmental protection.

Significant socio-economic changes within a generation have powered many changes in Vietnam. The British Council commissioned Next Generation Vietnam in 2019, before we had heard of Covid-19. We publish the research at a very different time, when the world continues to undergo overwhelming change as a result of the economic and health crises wrought by a global pandemic. Vietnam's response has further strengthened its position on the world stage. The British Council welcomes the opportunity to work with partners and stakeholders across the country to respond to the challenges and aspirations expressed by young people for their future, and to support them in reaching their full potential. We look forward to proving to Vietnamese youth that not only are their voices heard, but that their views are valid and their recommendations meaningful to a country on the rise.

Donna McGowan,
Director Vietnam, British Council

Over the last 30 years, Vietnam has transitioned from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle-income economy, and one of the few to meet most of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals before 2015. With golden age population, innovation and investment, the people of Vietnam have good reason to be optimistic about a future of the Digital Age and knowledge economy over the next 20 years.

Like many countries around the world at this point in history, the major challenge in the coming wave of digitalisation will be to boost labour productivity to avoid the 'middle-income' trap, while securing high employment rates, social inclusion and justice. These times of great turbulence have profound impact on people of all ages, but most tremendously on today's generation of young people. They are the one who will shape the way the nation adapts to those challenges and missions.

This generation is the first that could completely eradicate extreme poverty, while at the same time the last to be able to prevent unsustainable growth caused by depletion of the country's natural resources. Yet, too often, young people in this land are prevented from fulfilling their potential as the change agents and social entrepreneurs we long for.

That is because throughout the country, youth lack access to the quality and affordable education and skills training which would earn them opportunities to create livelihoods and improve their lives. They are often struggling to have their voice heard due to the heavily Confucian-rooted culture with political representation dominated by seniors.

On occasions when young people do make positive moves in their communities or societies, their efforts may face ignorance, or be undervalued.

While the population pyramid of Vietnam is being turned upside down at an unprecedented rate, this Next Generation Vietnam research sketches a panoramic view of Vietnamese young citizens, their vulnerabilities, struggles and needs, yet also their aspiration, drive and commitment to act for a more sustainable and desirable society. Echoing the voices of Vietnam's first generation, born during the country's ever explosive period since the 1986 Đổi Mới in the language of science, this report provides its readership with valuable insights and an anchor for further exploration to help our young men and women thrive their potential to be our partners for change in the future.

As a state educational official and also member of the advising team, I believe this piece of research has successfully laid the ground for better understanding and effective investment for youth development with a view to the future of Vietnam.

Lê Anh Vinh, Deputy Director General, Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences

Ministry of Education and Training

Member of Advisory Board to Next Generation Research Vietnam

George Orwell once said: 'Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.' In Vietnam, this situation is even more noticeable. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and Đổi Mới 1986, Vietnam has experienced various significant socio-economic changes, while moving from a state-owned to a market-oriented economy. Abrupt changes led to discrepancies in the mindset of different generations, and resulted in major misunderstanding and pressure for each.

In a Vietnamese family, it is not uncommon to see the frustration between its members: 'Why are you children too ungrateful and selfish? Why are you so conservative and never try to understand your child's emotions?' This reality has undoubtedly hampered millions of youngsters to reach their full potential. And the only way to improve the situation is to strengthen mutual understanding and trust.

As the country and its people endeavour to achieve a higher status in the world, Vietnamese people, including business owners, policymakers, educators and other changemakers, need more findings from professional and scientific research to see the real problems, set the right expectation and guide the next Vietnamese generation to excellence.

On the other hand, each youngster also needs to understand the diversity of lifestyles, beliefs, values in their batch, to collaborate better and create unprecedented impacts together, especially when mutual co-operation has been proven a desirable approach and become a worldwide trend.

Regardless of the limited resources, I believe this Next Generation Vietnam research provides an extensive overview of the next generation of Vietnam and proves itself beneficial not only for the previous and current generations, but also for the next ones to come. It will also open up different related topics for further research in the future.

As a young Vietnamese and a member of the advising team, I would like to send my warmest thanks to the research team and the British Council for compiling and delivering this meaningful and impactful report.

Tran Viet Anh, Founder, Spiderum

Member of Advisory Board to Next Generation Research Vietnam

> Executive summary

The next generation of Vietnam has experienced remarkable changes. Starting with the Đổi Mới government reforms launched in 1986, the economy and society have undergone double transitions. While transforming into a 'socialist-oriented market economy', the country has seen exceptional economic development and well-curated globalisation. In doing so, Vietnam has emerged from among the lowest-income nations to a stable lower-middle-income country (Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 2005; Turner & Nguyen, 2005, p. 1,693–1,710). This study aims to comprehensively illustrate the accompanying changes in the lives of Vietnamese from ages 16 to 30 – the next generation – amid dynamic socio-economic shifts in contemporary Vietnam.

The next generation of youth rightly sees Vietnam as a thriving country, developing while delivering improved living conditions for its citizens. Rural respondents have seen tremendous gains in a short period and remain satisfied with growth. Urbanites, while still enthusiastic, are starting to see more marginal returns from development and wonder what will come next.

On the economic front, Đổi Mới and resultant growth from it has mostly delivered: the next generation benefits from a booming economy with more jobs and diverse occupations. Technological improvements and overall development afford those who have grown up in the past three decades significantly higher salaries compared with their parents. Young people also see positive changes when it comes to gender equality in the workplace and beyond. Nearly two-in-three Vietnamese youth (65 per cent) believe that job opportunities for their cohort have improved over the last five years. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds and rural areas strongly feel that quality of life and livelihoods have improved significantly since their parents' generation.

Meanwhile, an entrepreneurial spirit thrives in Vietnam. Nearly four in ten (37 per cent) respondents to our surveys plan to eventually start their own business – regardless of their socio-economic background. During interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), respondents lauded entrepreneurship as offering authority and freedom unmatched by working for others.

Education, too, is improving. More than three-quarters of those surveyed (77 per cent) across the country feel schooling has improved since previous generations. However, two in three youths (68 per cent) also think people their age have difficulty finding jobs fitting their studies and desired field of employment. This gap underscores a need to continue retooling school curricula to meet 21st-century demands through teaching skills such as creative communication, critical thinking, and time management.

At the same time, opening Vietnam to the world has led to dramatic societal changes felt by the next generation. Their lives are intensely digitised, interwoven with internet access and social media, the latter of which plays a crucial role in defining identity for around one-third of respondents across Vietnam. For many, life without the internet or social media is unimaginable. As one respondent from Nghe An put it, 'a day [without the internet and social media] would feel like a century' (FGD female, 20–24).

With more information and global exchange, social values are shifting: evidence from discussion groups showed that young Vietnamese take great pride in improved gender equality in the country – and feel excited that society is becoming increasingly modernised and open-minded. When surveyed, four in ten (39 per cent) respondents ranked gender equality among their top five priority issues.

Young LGBTI-identifying respondents, too, have also witnessed the public's knowledge and perceptions of them improve tremendously. They are optimistic about their future as the country has lifted a ban on same-sex marriage, despite a lack of legal options for same-sex unions and concerns over a lack of acceptance in conservative rural areas.

The next generation – at least those living in cities – also express a newfound preference for individualistic values, as opposed to collectivist ones. Interestingly, rural respondents do not feel this trend. Whether inculcated by capitalist individuality or simply modernity-induced loneliness – classified as a disease by some psychologists – there is a clear urban–rural divide when it comes to feelings of collectivism and community (Cacioppo, Cacioppo & Capitanio, 2014). Support for collectivism in rural areas correlates with support for civil service and improved perceptions of government responsiveness, both of which are seen less in urban areas.

Though optimistic for the future, the younger generation of Vietnamese is well aware of the challenges they and their peers confront every day – as well as the social issues their country faces. At an individual level, they put great stock in seeking better living conditions, education, and financial stability. While looking at the government and society, they believe that policymakers should prioritise tackling corruption, improving the protection of the natural environment, ensuring food safety and quality, and providing excellent education and employment opportunities. There is also a widespread dichotomy between having a strong opinion as to which issues matter while perceiving an individual inability to affect change, especially when the issues concern government or authority figures.

Perhaps this is because, while Vietnamese youth feel well-supported by their local communities, most interviewees feel disconnected from broader, national issues. Nearly all FGD respondents find that their voices are not heard by society at large – only by intimate circles of friends and family, along with their followers on social media. In order to be heard by society, they point out, one needs to have a title and authority, prestige of some form, or money. Everyday youth see themselves as having little power to influence society, except, perhaps, through social media and their close friends. They crave the ability to speak openly about issues seen in society: they want to have a voice. Moreover, they want to see tangible actions made in response. They want to be heard.

In keeping with the desire to be heard, during final validation workshops, Next Generation respondents reflected on the findings of this study. They developed a list of goals and recommendations for Vietnam.

For the next generation, in an ideal future Vietnam:

- there are no more impoverished households
- education for all, including in rural and mountainous areas, is guaranteed
- people can live a peaceful life, not a chaotic one
- young people have many opportunities to access and learn advanced technologies
- infrastructure is impressively modern and accessible by all
- growth is sustainable for both humans and the environment
- policies from the state are transparent
- there are policies to protect workers, human rights, and the natural environment.

Select recommendations

Respondents from the next generation also provided specific suggestions on how to address the most pressing issues illustrated through the nationwide survey, FGDs, and interviews. All recommendations are included at the end of this report.

To combat corruption, respondents suggest:

1. increasing enforcement of anti-corruption laws and continuing the government push against corruption
2. raising official salaries in lower-ranking positions in the public sector
3. implementing tech-based transparent transactions with receipts and digital payments for penalties and fees to ensure that citizens know where the money they paid goes.

To increase political engagement and to better listen to their voices, respondents suggest:

1. extending the ability to vote on further regulations on local issues in their town or commune
2. continuing to create platforms for actualising human rights and creating avenues to listen to more people's voices in policymaking arenas through online and offline forums
3. working on efficient methods to support and resolve administrative procedures more rapidly.

To help protect the natural environment, respondents suggest:

1. investing in clean energy solutions such as electric cars and motorbikes
2. encouraging education campaigns to protect the environment, for example more extensive, nation-wide tree planting campaigns

3. ensuring that wastewater, sanitation and environmental regulations are adequately enforced for consumers and businesses alike
4. providing more trash and recycling options for citizens.

To help improve gender equality, respondents suggest:

1. providing a safe platform for young women to express their ideas where people can be daring and not afraid to speak out bold ideas
2. providing better welfare coverage and shelters for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)
3. enacting policies to provide shelter and care for children of survivors, especially those in shelters.

Lastly, to improve the economy and entrepreneurship, respondents suggest:

1. developing a public checklist of what start-ups must do to adhere to administrative procedures from their conception through to implementation
2. improving administrative and taxation guidelines for small businesses and social enterprises, perhaps through a transparent web portal on all policies for taxation
3. assisting with access to capital through formal loans or assistance funds for small businesses and start-ups to facilitate setting up new businesses.

> Chapter 1:
Setting the scene: Transformations and current research

Vietnam has experienced remarkable economic development accompanied by social transformations over the past three decades. According to the World Bank, these primarily stem from the reform policies launched in 1986, the Đổi Mới (renovation). Đổi Mới sought to transform Vietnam into a 'socialist-oriented market economy'. During the Cold War-era in the 1980s, Vietnam faced economic stagnation, leading to the initiation of Đổi Mới policy in the latter part of the decade. As a result, the country moved towards a market economy through new policies including, for example, legal processes for setting up new enterprises, an increase in foreign direct investment, and trade agreements. Reforms also included: de-collectivization of agricultural production, economic liberalisation, increased foreign trade and investment, and increased private ownership. In other words, market liberalisation (King et al., 2008, pp. 783–813). As a result of this liberalisation and sensible oversight, Vietnam has become increasingly competitive in the global economy.

Owing to Đổi Mới, the country has cultivated exceptional economic development and globalisation – shifting the socio-economic environment of Vietnam (Turner & Nguyen, 2005, pp. 1,693–1,710). This has continued until the present day and transitioned its stature from being among the world's lowest-income nations into that of a lower-middle-income country, with an economic growth rate fluctuating around five to seven per annum (World Bank National Accounts Data, 2018; Library of Congress Federal Research Division, 2005).

Reforms have brought changes to the state subsidy system. The government removed subsidies for education, employment, and healthcare which has increased absolute poverty figures, along with increased inequality (King et al., 2008, pp. 783–813; Hayden et al., 2017, pp. 232–249). Both of these are cited as critical reasons for internal migration among young people in search of employment opportunities in urban areas (King et al., 2008, pp. 783–813; Rushing, Dec. 2006, pp. 471–494; Boothroyd and Pham, 2000 cited in Nguyen, 2015, pp. 172–194). Based on the Gini coefficient index, a composite measure showing income inequality with lower figures showing a more egalitarian distribution, Vietnam's coefficient grew from 35.7 in 1992 to 38.7 in 2012 (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Oxfam, meanwhile, notes that it is likely that the data from the World Bank Gini index may underestimate the actual situation in Vietnam as the most wealthy are likely to under-report their income and are less likely to be reached by household surveys. As a stark reminder of growing inequality, Oxfam (2017) calculated that the richest person in Vietnam earns more in a day than the poorest Vietnamese earns in ten years.

The country's demographic outlook has also shifted significantly over the last three decades. The 97 million inhabitants as of 2018 reflect a remarkable growth from some 60 million in 1986. In official terms, the Vietnamese government defines youth as Vietnamese citizens aged 16 to 30, as stated in the Law on Youth 2005 (Ministry of Home Affairs of Viet Nam, 2012). The share of youth between ages 15 and 29 accounts for around a quarter of the country's population, based on the 2017 census, making them the highest share of the youth ever in Vietnam (OECD Development Centre, 2017).

When adding children to that calculus, Transparency International and Towards Transparency (2014) estimate that Vietnamese people under 30 account for almost half of the population.

Vietnam has invested heavily in its youth, as reflected in the issuance of youth development programs issued by all ministries or ministry-level agencies and all provinces throughout the country, stemming from the Vietnamese Youth Development Strategy 2011–20. The strategy, which defines young people as those citizens between 16 and 30 years old, was developed with the aim to:

Create a generation of Vietnamese youth that is comprehensively developed, highly patriotic, in possession of a revolutionary morality, citizenship awareness and socialism ideology, education, professional skills and employment, civilized way of living, good health, life skills, the will to develop one selves [sic], pro-activeness and innovation to master sciences and advanced technologies; to help engender a quality young workforce that meets the needs of the era of accelerating industrialization, modernization and international integration; and to promote the youth's roles and responsibilities in building and protecting the country.
Ministry of Home Affairs of Viet Nam (UNFPA Translation), 2012, p. 16

On that front, education in Vietnam has improved significantly in several areas. The latest international PISA Assessment for Math and Science in 2018 saw Vietnam outperforming many developed countries such as the UK and the US (Centre for Global Development, 2018).

The school enrolment rate, too, has increased markedly. Gross tertiary education enrolment in Vietnam grew at a striking rate from ~three per cent in 1990 to ~28 per cent in 2016 (World Bank, 2019).

In terms of employment, with the economy becoming more open amid a more permissive regulatory environment, Vietnam has attracted substantial foreign direct investment (FDI). Much of this owes to the Foreign Investment Law enacted in 1987 and subsequently amended in 1996 as Law no. 67 and again in 2014 as the Investment Law (Collins in Xhu & Benson, 2005, pp. 176–194). However, demand and supply of labour are mismatched in many sectors. Evaluations have noted that young people in Vietnam do not have enough information on the labour market to make appropriate educational and career choices. Coupled with a preference for tertiary education instead of vocational or non-formal education, employers face a mismatch of skills. Recouping these entail on-the-job training or other supplementary efforts (British Council, n.d.; OECD Development Centre, 2017).

Culturally, Đổi Mới, liberalisation and globalisation have all shaped changes in the social and cultural life in Vietnam. Observers have remarked that the next generation of Vietnamese has gradually begun adopting globalised attitudes. This marks a shifting generational focus, on the whole, from being collectivist to more individualistic (Nguyen, pp. 172–194). Several academics have suggested that young Vietnamese are now shifting their priorities towards becoming highly educated while advancing their personal and career goals ahead of marriage and familial responsibilities (King et al., 2008, pp. 783–813; Tambyah et al., pp. 175–187). An influential personal network remains key while earning more money and accumulating wealth and consuming

updated news and online cultural products, have become – to outside observers – hallmarks of the next generation. Before Đổi Mới, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of familial harmony over personal pursuits, but that appears to be shifting. Still, speculation remains that the next generation retains an 'intergenerational dependence' on their parents, because of which they tend to base their decisions in life on their parents' opinions (International Labour Organization, 2015).

Critical gaps in existing research

The success of Đổi Mới policies has been at the centre of literature and publications focusing on Vietnam. Many research publications frame their studies by noting how Đổi Mới has led the country's socio-economic transformations, in turn impacting countless aspects of life in Vietnam. However, illustrations of Đổi Mới and how it changed the trajectory of a new Vietnamese generation tend to focus on specific aspects of life – for example, education, employment, and values, rather than looking at generational experiences writ large.

While the country revolutionised after the implementation of Đổi Mới, Vietnam faces new challenges and opportunities. Studies of the recent growth in Vietnam have been gradually emerging in the academic and policymaking world – mainly in the disciplines of economic and political analysis. Lacking, however, is literature assessing how these changes relate to the lives of younger generations in Vietnam.

Most prior studies of Vietnamese youth, apart for government reports such as the 2019 Population and Housing Census and the Report on Vietnamese Youth (2015–2018), draw mainly on secondary data analysis and limited qualitative approaches. While these approaches allow for in-depth

exploration, they are not representative. As far as government census data goes, the General Statistics Office of Viet Nam produces regular datasets. However, the latest Vietnam Population and Housing Census that is publicly available dates from the year 2009 and, as of writing, only preliminary figures are available to the general public.

No previous study has yet attempted to study youthful aspirations and opinions across Vietnam comprehensively. As noted by the Ministry of Home Affairs and UNFPA, 'currently, there is no comprehensive national survey of all youth-related issues in Vietnam' (2019, p. 4). This study aims to fill that gap. In doing so, we employed a mixed-methods approach. Initially, we held consultations with over 20 research experts whose input informed a large scale (n=1,200) nationally representative survey (detailed in Appendix 1). Next, we held focus group discussions with over 100 youth across the country spanning from the North to South based on different urbanities. Also, we conducted in-depth interviews (n=20) with youth from unrepresented backgrounds, aiming to gain extensive insight from a diverse and inspirational young population. Finally, we held validation workshops with youth groups in Hanoi and HCMC to validate and critique the findings of this study – along with our advisory board members.

Next Generation Vietnam assesses data from those approaches in a multifaceted way, covering young people's views and changing perceptions of family, education, employment, social life, priority issues, and international relations. The study concludes by visiting their perceptions of their future – Vietnam's future. We aim to faithfully illustrate the lives of the Vietnamese next generation, as told to our research team, amid the rapid socio-economic changes fuelling dynamic change in contemporary Vietnam.

> Chapter 2: Methodology

This Next Generation Vietnam study draws on a diverse range of methodologies and data collection techniques, divided into four phases of data collection and analysis. The central aims of this research are to:

- provide an understanding of the make-up, experiences, needs, attitudes and aspirations of young people (age 16 to 30) in Vietnam in 2019

- highlight gaps and opportunities for youth voices to be amplified and engaged by policymakers, as well as examples of best practice

- provide recommendations for how policymakers and other key stakeholder audiences could improve conditions for and engagement with young people.

The first phase involved kick-off meetings, the formation of an advisory steering group, stakeholder interviews, a comprehensive literature review, and baseline media analysis to lay the foundation for the project and further data collection process with young Vietnamese people.

The second phase entailed quantitative research: a nationally representative face-to-face survey was conducted to ensure rigour, given that a national representative approach would be difficult to achieve using only online recruitment strategies. A 35-question survey instrument was designed with insight obtained from the first phase and which was reviewed to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness within the Vietnamese context by British Council Vietnam and the advisory steering group. This nationally representative face-to-face survey was conducted with 1,200 respondents across the country between the ages of 16 and 30.

The sample was drawn using stratified multi-stage sampling. We subdivided the country into six administrative regions. We developed a set of soft quotas (gender, age group and household income) to guarantee that every population segment in the country is represented. Due to budgetary and research limitations, within each region, we selected two provinces plus Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to conduct interviews in both urban and rural areas based on the following (full sampling framework in Appendix 1):

The third phase moved into a qualitative approach, including a combination of focus groups discussions (n=18 FGDs, participant n=108) drawn from the general youth population. Next came in-depth interviews (n=20) using purposive sampling with young people from unique circumstances who might not have been reached through general sampling. These approaches allow for rigorous verification and contextualisation of the findings from the quantitative phase, and more in-depth understanding of the lives of youth in specific circumstances who were not reached by the quantitative survey.

This phase was conducted in six different locations, covering Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) for urban and peri-urban areas, along with two rural provinces. IDIs were also conducted in two additional rural provinces to reach young respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The fourth and final phase involved the analysis of collected data and verification of the analysis. Lastly, consultations and validation workshops were held with British Council Vietnam and the advisory board. Two new youth validation discussion groups and in-depth interviews with young entrepreneurs, owing to the intense interest in entrepreneurship found through the research. These were conducted to validate the preliminary findings and shape recommendations based on those whose opinions matter most in this research – the next generation of Vietnam.

A detailed methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Sampling framework

Sample size	n=1,200
Gender	Male 50%, female 50%
Age	16–30 years – Nationally representative as per the General Statistics Office (GSO, 2014)
Income groups in Vietnam Dong (VND)	15,000,000 or higher
	7,500,000–14,999,999
	4,500,000–7,499,999
	3,000,000–4,499,999
	1,500,000–2,999,999
	0–1,499,999
13 provinces selected	Thai Nguyen, Son La, Hanoi, Hai Phong, Thai Binh, Nghe An, Danang, Dak Lak, Ho Chi Minh, Dong Nai, Tay Ninh, Can Tho, An Giang

Regions/ Provinces	Sample n =
Northwest	**50**
Son La	50
Northeast	**50**
Thai Nguyen	50
Red River Delta	**380**
Hanoi	300
Hai Phong	40
Thai Binh	40
North Central Coast	**100**
Nghe An	100
South Central Coast	**60**
Danang	60
Central Highlands	**70**
Dak Lak	70
Southeast	**360**
Ho Chi Minh City	300
Dong Nai	30
Tay Ninh	30
Mekong River Delta	**130**
Can Tho	70
An Giang	60
Total	**1,200**

Thai Nguyen

Son La

Hai Phong

Thai Binh

Hanoi

Nghe An

Danang

Hoang Sa Islands Vietnam

Dak Lak

Tay Ninh

An Giang

Dong Nai

Ho Chi Minh

Can Tho

Truong Sa Islands Vietnam

0   100   200 km

> Chapter 3: Social life and societal fabric

Family life

Parents

Family is close to the heart of Vietnamese youth. Based on our nationally representative survey, three in four (75 per cent) respondents reported that family is the primary factor defining who they are, and while four in five (80 per cent) placed family as at least a partial factor of self-identification. Filial piety remains an essential value for Vietnamese youth, with respect for parents strongly upheld. Eight out of ten surveyed (80 per cent) agreed that they feel their parents are generally right – as they are usually more experienced. Existing research notes that, in broad keeping with Confucian values, Vietnamese youth face substantial pressure when attempting to exert their own decisions (Rushing, 2006, pp. 471–494; Valentin, 2007, pp. 299–315; ILO, 2015). On the flip side, parents often feel the need to protect their children as a way to express their affection. In keeping with those findings, members of the next generation with families of their own prioritise them when making life decisions. During focus group discussions (FGDs), respondents – regardless of demographic factors such as urbanity (living in a city or countryside), age, ethnicity or gender – felt their parents are the first point of contact for advice on challenging issues. For them: 'We are influenced by our family because…parents always want the best for us. We don't want to disappoint them' (FGD female, 25–30, peri-urban, Ho Chi Minh City).

While eight in ten (79 per cent) of those surveyed reported valuing their parents' advice, three quarters (75 per cent) also feel empowered to 'make their own rules for how to live their life', reflecting a growing sense of independence and autonomy within the next generation.

Qualitatively, respondents feel that 'now parents do not interfere as much. They allow us [their children] to have more authority to make decisions' (FGD female, 20–24, Nghe An).

Work and family

Among the next generation, around four in ten feel pressured to pursue the types of education (38 per cent) and work (40 per cent) preferred by their family. Indicatively, while FGD participants expressed that their parents featured in their educational decisions, more in urban or peri-urban areas felt open to making their own choices when compared with rural respondents. This qualitative finding contrasts with the survey data, which showed less of a discernible urban–rural split:

When I was choosing a university, I had to consult with my parents to see if they can afford to send me to attend a school or not.

FGD male, 16–19, An Giang

Meanwhile, financial status and lucrative job opportunities are top of mind when it comes to parents' decisions about their children's education. Youth feel that their parents are likely to have a clear vision for their career paths. Focus group participants reported that parents and family networks have considerable influence over their decisions. As family life is prized, especially in rural provinces, jobs near home are viewed particularly favourably:

When I graduated from university, based on our family network, I could have a position at this company which is not a major that I studied. Luckily after I started working, I figured out that it suits my competency.

FGD male, 25–30, HCMC

Wading into the balancing act between family and work, a slight margin more of the next generation prize family over a successful career – but plenty prefer careers or have mixed feelings on the matter. When asked whether career success was more important than having a family, only three in ten (30 per cent) agreed, while about four in ten (43 per cent) disagreed. A quarter (25 per cent) had no clear preference. This changes slightly with age, with less importance given to careers at older ages: 28 per cent of 24- to 30-year-olds choose the career, compared with 33 per cent of 16- to 19-year-olds. Women (28 per cent) are also slightly less likely to place careers over family compared with men (33 per cent). A female participant stated: 'I would only think of marriage when I graduate from school and have a stable career' (FGD female, 20–24, HCMC).

Similarly, during FGDs, married respondents and young parents emphasised family factors in every decision they make. For example, working hours and schedules are given deep consideration when choosing a job in order to spend time with family. Like their peers across the world, many next-generation Vietnamese people are willing to work for less pay or in jobs they do not particularly enjoy in order to have time for their family. New tech also affords professional flexibility for remote working and the ability to be with family without compromising on work:

I have a family and small children, so I don't want to feel pressured on time. I can still do the work from home – it's the 4.0 era.

FGD female, 25–30, An Giang

Figure 1: Proportion agreeing with the statement 'My own career success is more important to me than having a family' by age and gender

Legend: Strongly agree | Agree
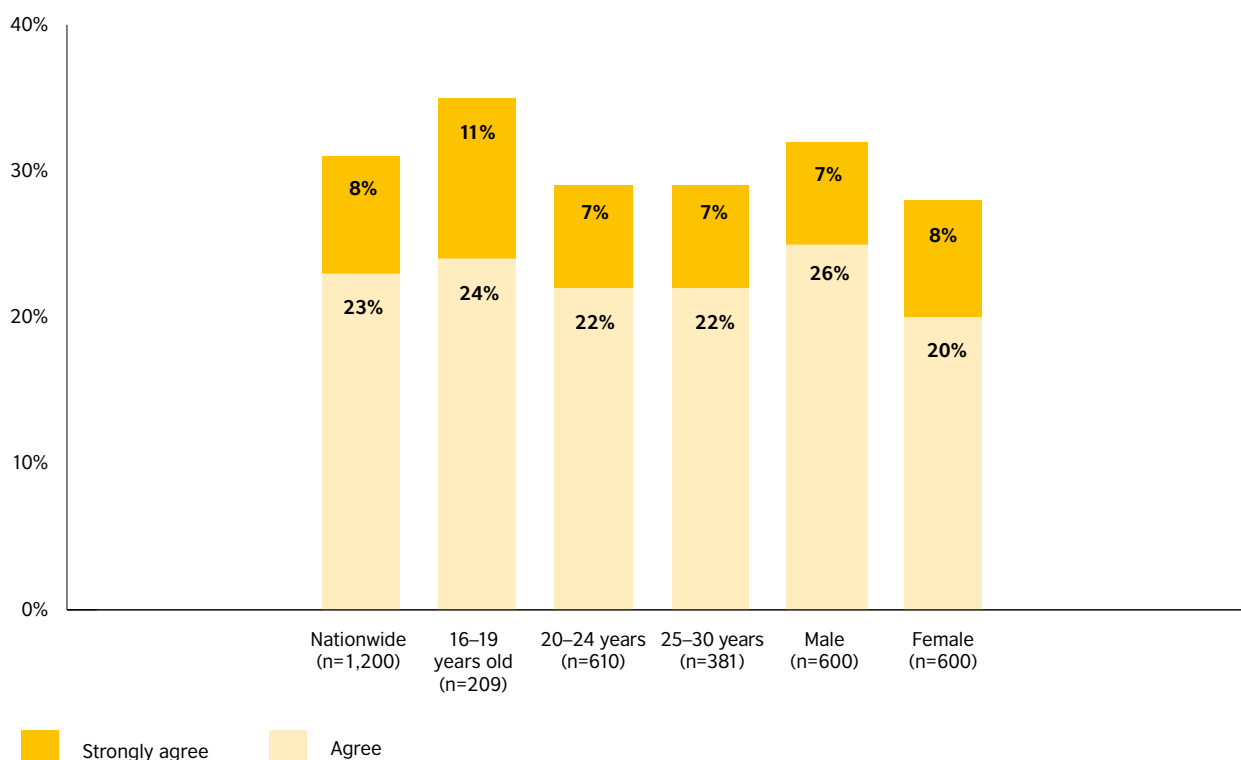
Raising a family

Most of the next generation are optimistic about their prospects of raising a family. Three in four (74 per cent) of those surveyed are optimistic that they will be able to raise a family. Men (77 per cent) are more optimistic than women (70 per cent), as are more educated people: 76 per cent of those educated to a high school level or above, compared with 68 per cent with only secondary school or less. Across gender and education, when it comes time to get married, youth in FGDs across the country generally feel that 25 to 30 years old is just right. When asked why, respondents noted that, by then, one is mature enough to take care of a family's future, while having had time to work, achieve a measure of financial stability and have life experiences before marriage. Arranged marriages are, according to perceptions voiced in FGDs and in-depth interviews, less common than for previous generations. Adolescent women stated in focus groups that they no longer face pressure to rush into marriage. They feel women are increasingly financially independent, reflecting improved gender equality in Vietnam. In the words of a young female respondent: 'Before getting married, I would like to have a period of time after my graduation to experience being a youth, doing what I like.' (FGD female, 16–19, Ho Chi Minh City).

Figure 2: Respondents who report feeling very or slightly optimistic about their future expectations of raising a family by gender, education and socio-economic status

Legend:
- Very optimistic
- Slightly optimistic
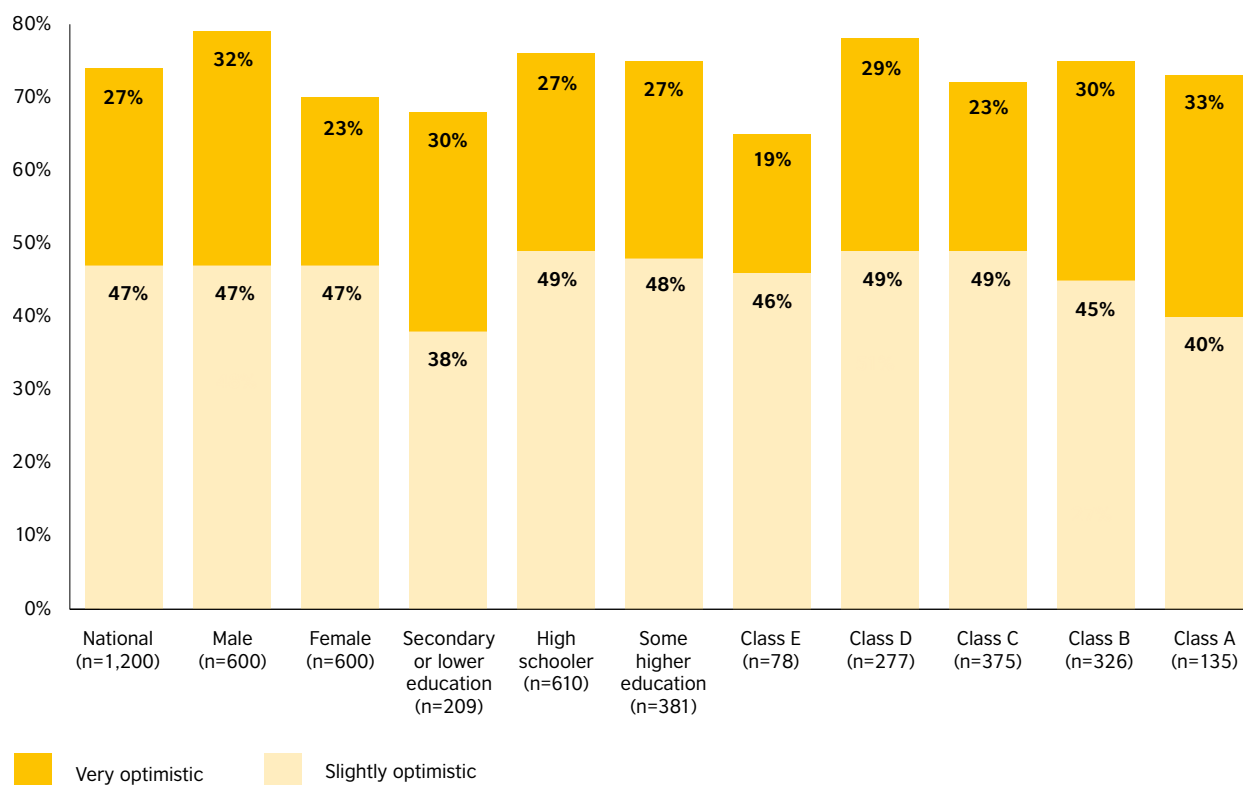
Participants in the FGDs expressed a general desire to have their first child either right after getting married or within a year. In their parents' time, getting married and having children early in life was normal, but now people in the next generation are not confined by the idea that a family must have many children to take care of parents. Instead, this generation is mindful of the costs associated with child-rearing and – generally speaking – feel that abortion has become socially acceptable for Vietnamese. As one respondent put it: 'In the past, whenever you got pregnant, you would keep the baby. But now people can decide whether to keep it or not based on their financial ability or their parents. That's why the abortion rate is high now' (FGD female, 16–19, Thanh Tri).

Societal issues

Societal issues are front of mind for the next generation, especially for those hailing from the South and Ho Chi Minh City. Overall, worries centre around a perceived decline in morality across Vietnam referred to in FGDs as an 'ethics recession' defined by increasing drug use, criminality, and localised violence. For an FGD participant in Ho Chi Minh City: 'The economy is developing, people have more opportunities and quality of life is improving. Yet it also brings more issues to society. People have more pressure in life, creating more society's vices' (25–30 FGD). Meanwhile, survey respondents reported that Vietnamese society is facing an overall decline in integrity, with people becoming less honest and genuine.

When asked to list pressing social issues, after basic material needs such as food safety and security, employment, quality living conditions, and access to clean water, 39 per cent emphasised gender equality, 19 per cent equality for ethnic minorities, and 14 per cent for peace, justice and strong institutions. The ever-present use of social media in Vietnam underpins these perceptions singled out in FGDs and IDIs as the most likely influence over how social issues are seen. In the survey, when seeking out trusted information, this generation turns first to social media (73 per cent), followed by the internet and web pages (69 per cent), and television (59 per cent) to provide facts (see the *Digital life* section for more analysis). A participant from peri-urban Hanoi concluded that 'social media is a good place to search for any necessary information and anything that I care about' (FGD female, 25–30, Thanh Tri).

Figure 3: Proportion of survey respondents selecting the following as one of their top five most pressing social issues (n=1,200)

Social issue	Percentage
Food security	70%
Stable employment	70%
Adequate living conditions	58%
Clean water and sanitation	58%
Access to higher education	44%
Gender equality	39%
Access to quality healthcare	37%
Access to technology and innovation	26%
Tackling corruption	26%
Clean energy	24%
Equality for ethnic minorities	19%
Peace, justice and strong institutions	14%
Climate action	14%

Generational value

Vietnam, along with most of the world, has found itself immersed in information online. Even inside this global trend, the next generation of Vietnamese is particularly internet inclined. Socio-economic shifts, combined with this exposure to far more foreign content and ideas, underscore new values that denote an intergenerational divide defining young people from previous generations.

A decline of collectivist values and a shift towards individualism

During focus groups, Vietnam's next generation – at least those living in cities – revealed a strong preference towards individualist values, as opposed to collectivist ones. When examined, loose community ties – relationships between people in neighbourhoods, for example – are perceived to be weakened since their parent's generation.

This slow decay of social capital, as coined by Putnam (2000), is consistent with existing literature on Vietnam which emphasises that young Vietnamese are becoming increasingly individualistic (King et al., 2008, p. 783–813; Tambyah et al., 2009, p. 175–187; Nguyen, 2015, p. 172–194). Focus group participants in urban settings reported that they feel less engaged with their local communities, especially when compared with their parents and grandparents. Coupled with the popularity of virtual entertainment and portable devices, they felt that meaningful face-to-face engagement has tapered off.

This trend is felt acutely by urban and peri-urban focus group respondents, though not by rural respondents. One participant reported that she chooses not to interact with her neighbours 'because my neighbourhood is not worth paying attention to' (FGD female, 25–30, peri-urban, Hanoi).

On the other hand, rural communities retain strong communal bonds. In a rural community in Nghe An, male respondents agreed that people in their community are friendly and that they have a close relationship with their neighbours and support each other when needed (FGD male, 25–30, Nghe An). Whether inculcated by capitalist individuality or simply modernity-induced loneliness – classified as a disease by some psychologists (Cacioppo, Cacioppo & Capitanio, 2014) – the urban–rural divide when it comes to the feeling of community belonging is clear.

In a similar vein, FGD respondents' perspectives on socialism have changed significantly compared with their parents. Urban and peri-urban youth perceive teachings on the subject to be traditionalistic and outdated, given the current economic and global environment.

Highlighting urban–rural divides, this trend is less pronounced for rural respondents, especially for those belonging to ethnic minorities who were interviewed for this study. Members of those groups, usually dwelling in rural areas and benefiting from well-designed public services, tend to view traditional values and teachings quite positively. All groups see Vietnam's rapidly growing economy positively, though they also feel less-positive externalities and growing pains.

Additionally, urban youth report adhering less strictly to traditional Vietnamese cultural traditions and customs. Female respondents from Ho Chi Minh City, for example, noted that society has abolished many old-fashioned customs and is becoming less superstitious. On the other hand, many of the in-depth interview respondents among several ethnic minorities in rural areas remarked that they take pride in traditional cultural activities such as festivals that provide a sense of grounding and group identity. Members of the Kinh, H'Mong, Muong, Ede, Xinh Mun, and Thai ethnic minorities, along with Muslim and Catholic religious minority respondents were interviewed for this study. For example, a member of the Muong ethnic group appreciates that 'my ethnic group has annual traditional festivals. I really enjoy [them]. It is very important not only to myself but to my whole village' (IDI male, 30, Dak Lak, Muong ethnic group).

Materialistic values

An openness to market-based growth and development policies have led to an increase in living standards – but have also exposed the next generation to materialistic values. Young Vietnamese are immersed in online socialisation and spend an average of two hours and thirty minutes on social media each day (Kepios analysis of Facebook data in We Are Social, 2019, p. 32–35). For example, among the 62 million social media users across the country, ~75 per cent of whom are between 13 and 34 years old (ibid.). Many, according to focus group respondents, observe online gloating about material wealth on social media. Immersive social media poses a challenge for youth, particularly those who come from lower-income

households. Anecdotally, participants from HCMC noted that school fights have taken on a classist element – kids flashing wealth symbols such as Gucci handbags and sparking jealous fights – all fuelled by social media. With more materialistic desires, marriage is often dictated by, as explained by one respondent from An Giang: 'Material things [that] determine everything, [because] without money, without a career, we cannot find a wife' (FGD male, 20–24).

Progress on gender and LGBTI equality

The next generation takes pride in improved gender equality and considers the issue a critical one to address. When surveyed, four in ten (39 per cent) respondents ranked gender equality among their top five priority issues. While choosing between 13 options, the next generation places it cumulatively as the sixth most important issue, with only stable employment (70 per cent), access to education (44 per cent), adequate living conditions (58 per cent), food security (70 per cent), and clean water and sanitation (58 per cent) given higher priority.

However, in the workplace, evidence from the survey implies there is still substantial room for improvement. Six in ten (63 per cent) respondents think that some jobs are only for men and some only for women, a view held by both genders. However, men are more likely to believe in gendered jobs: 66 per cent (male respondents) versus 59 per cent (female respondents). Interestingly, this finding is not consistent with views from the focus groups. In a group setting participants espoused a consistent view that women and men can work in any job and do not have to be bound to any gender stereotype. This difference in findings may be due to increased social desirability bias – wanting to be seen positively by other participants – in the focus groups:

I think now men and women are equal in terms of ability. Therefore they can do each other's job. The thing is some types of job is more suitable for a specific gender, like construction work.

 FGD male, 16–19, Nghe An

Though many believe jobs can be gendered, on average, more than eight in ten (84 per cent) feel there are equal opportunities for men and women in the job market. Again, men were slightly more likely to report a rosy picture, with 87 per cent reporting equal opportunities compared with 81 per cent of women. Still, overall perceptions of gender equality are positive.

Outside the working world, in qualitative research, young Vietnamese agreed that women no longer have to be rushed into marriage, be dependent on men, or solely take care of their household. Women are seen to have more agency and independence: 'Women now are more financially independent. We have more say when it comes to marriage – in the past, once married women had to stay at home to take care of their families' (FGD female, 20–24, HCMC).

Meanwhile, many in the next generation perceive increased openness about sexuality compared to the past. On the issues of pre-marital sex or the acceptance of LGBTI individuals, values seem to be shifting. Based on in-depth interviews with young LGBTI identifying people, they are highly optimistic about the future as the country has lifted a ban on same-sex marriage, despite a lack of legal options for same-sex unions. They have witnessed an improvement in the public's knowledge and perceptions of LGBTI individuals. Generally, young LGBTI individuals interviewed report being accepted by their family and friends. Those interviewed for the study had not personally experienced substantive discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, though they are worried about a lack of acceptance in conservative rural areas:

I am hopeful for optimistic change. The fact that Vietnam has dismissed the ban on same-sex marriage has already been considered a breakthrough for the LGBTI community. In the future, I just hope that people will be more understanding about the LGBTI community.

IDI male, 25, LGBTI individual

LGBTI individuals, remarked on an increase in LGBTI positive representation in the media. For example, a female LGBTI participant reported that many television shows are working to educate the public to have a positive attitude towards the community. During validation sessions, meanwhile, working group members noted seeing more pop icons, such as actors, who openly express their sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTI youth interviewed for the study reported to admire and follow influencers, both local and international, who share the same identity as them, for example Thiên Minh, Gil Lê, Tom Daley and Neil Patrick Harris.

Digital life

The internet and social media have become deeply interwoven with the daily lives of Vietnamese. Based on reports from social media consultancies We Are Social and Hootsuite, in their *Digital in Vietnam* reports, Vietnam has witnessed fast growth in internet use from 50 per cent penetration in 2016 to 66 per cent in 2019 (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019). At the same time, social media users have nearly doubled from 37 per cent of the population in 2016 to 64 per cent in 2019.

Like in other globalising countries, digital life has integrated into the lives of young Vietnamese seamlessly in several ways. For surveyed respondents, approximately one-third of respondents (35 per cent) reported that social media plays a role in defining who they are today. Sixteen- to 19-year-olds (43 per cent) are more likely to say social media defines them than their slightly older peers – 33 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds and 32 per cent of 25- to 30-year-olds.

Figure 4: Proportion of survey respondents saying the following are one of the top five factors that make them how they are today (n=1,200)
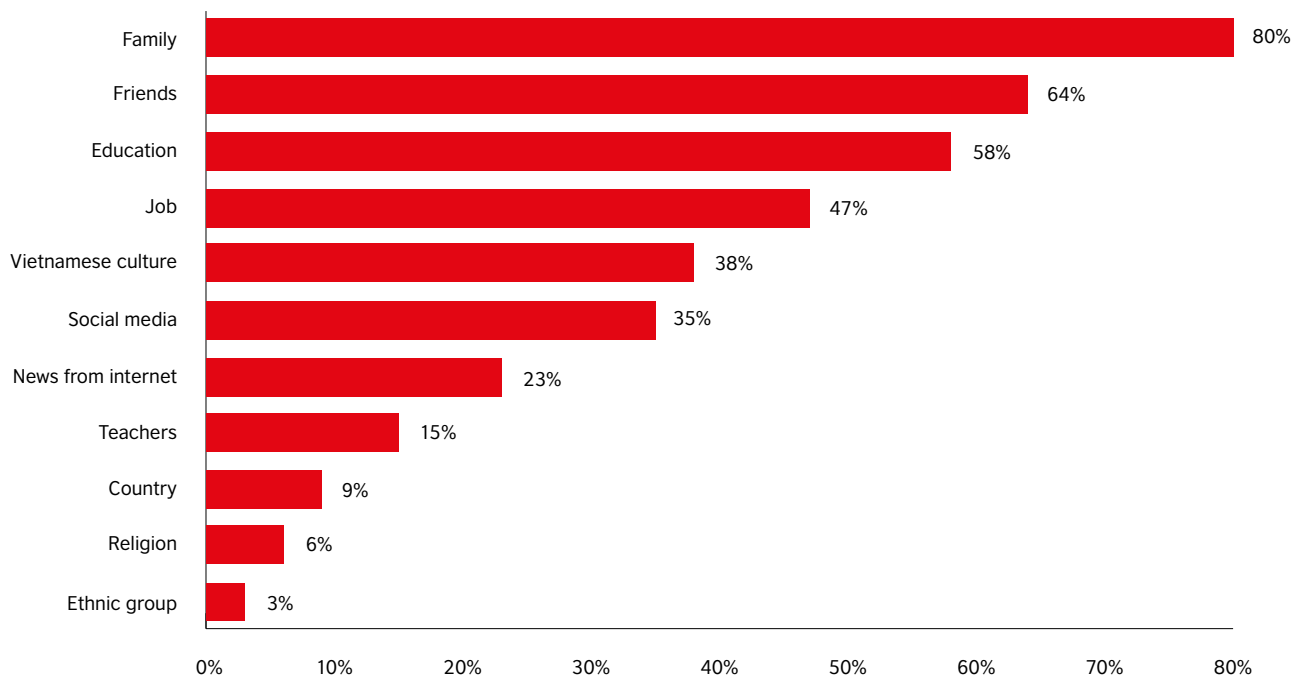
In FGDs, social media platforms and connecting with the world through them has become the most enjoyed pastime, particularly on Facebook and Zalo, Vietnam's homegrown messaging app with a diverse range of features. In keeping with their widespread popularity, based on survey results, social media and the internet are also the most trusted source of information on current news and employment opportunities. For many FGD respondents, life without the internet or social media is unimaginable. The internet is completely integrated into their lives. As one respondent from Nghe An put it, 'a day [without the internet and social media] would feel like a century' (FGD female, 20–24).

Gaming

Online gaming or e-Sports [1] is highly popular among males and, at least indicatively through qualitative research, is becoming increasingly popular among females. [2]

Online games have also become a communication channel through inbuilt chat functions, in a similar fashion as social media platforms. Young gamers connect with new people through online games and sometimes find these turn into offline friendships. Anecdotally, in FGDs respondents mentioned that online game chat functions even allow some to find romantic acquaintances online.

Similar social media platforms, different uses

During focus group discussions, participants examined different ways in which social media platforms and apps are used across different use cases in Vietnam today. These include serving as:

A virtual space to interact and connect

Like youth around the world, Vietnamese youth enjoy connecting with their friends, family, and people who share the same interests online. For most all, social media offers a place to connect with people who share similar ideas which form the genesis to shape offline relationships. Key platforms here include Facebook, Instagram, and Zalo.

A marketplace for goods and services

E-commerce, as emerged during focus group discussions and interviews with young entrepreneurs, is increasingly popular among Vietnamese youth who act both as consumers and sellers. Marketplace apps and delivery apps offer internet users convenience and the opportunity to earn a modest living. Meanwhile, live-streamed sales on Facebook groups for selling products are popular among young women. Transportation and hospitality services are also available through online applications – the horizontally integrated marketplace of Grab comes to mind.

E-wallet and banking applications then provide ease of payment when making transactions online. Critical marketplace apps and platforms include Facebook, Lazada, Sendo, Shopee, and Tiki. [3]

A recruitment network

Respondents report through the survey that internet/web pages (57 per cent) and social media (51 per cent) are the most trusted sources for employment and educational opportunities, with the level of trust increasing among the older age cohorts (56 per cent and 60 per cent for 25- to 30-year-olds compared to 44 per cent and 47 per cent for 16- to 19-year-olds). Facebook groups, according to focus group respondents, are regularly used to simplify the job-hunting process for youth.

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1 > Based on the International e-Sports Federation, e-Sports is a competitive sport performed in a virtual environment in which physical and mental abilities are exercised to create victory conditions through generally accepted rules.
2 > Youth in focus groups note playing a wide range of desktop and mobile games including: Arena of Valor, Avatar, CrossFire Legends, CandyCrush, Cookie Jams, Dau Tien Dai, Farm Blast, FIFA 20, Football Dream, Free Fire, Half-Life, League of Legends, Lien Quan Mobile, Naruto, PUBG Mobile, We Escape, and ZingSpeed Mobile.
3 > Popular e-Wallet apps are Momo and Zalo Pay. Meanwhile, for delivery services, people turn to: Baemin, Grab Food, Go Food and Now. Transportation and hospitality apps of note include: Grab, Go Viet, and Traveloka.

Figure 5: Proportion of survey respondents selecting the following sources of information as their most trusted for jobs and education (n=1,200)

Source	Percentage
Internet/web pages	57%
Social media	51%
Friends	51%
Family	43%
Teacher	36%
Newspapers (including websites)	32%
Television	28%
Community members (e.g. religious leaders, teachers)	17%
Radio	15%

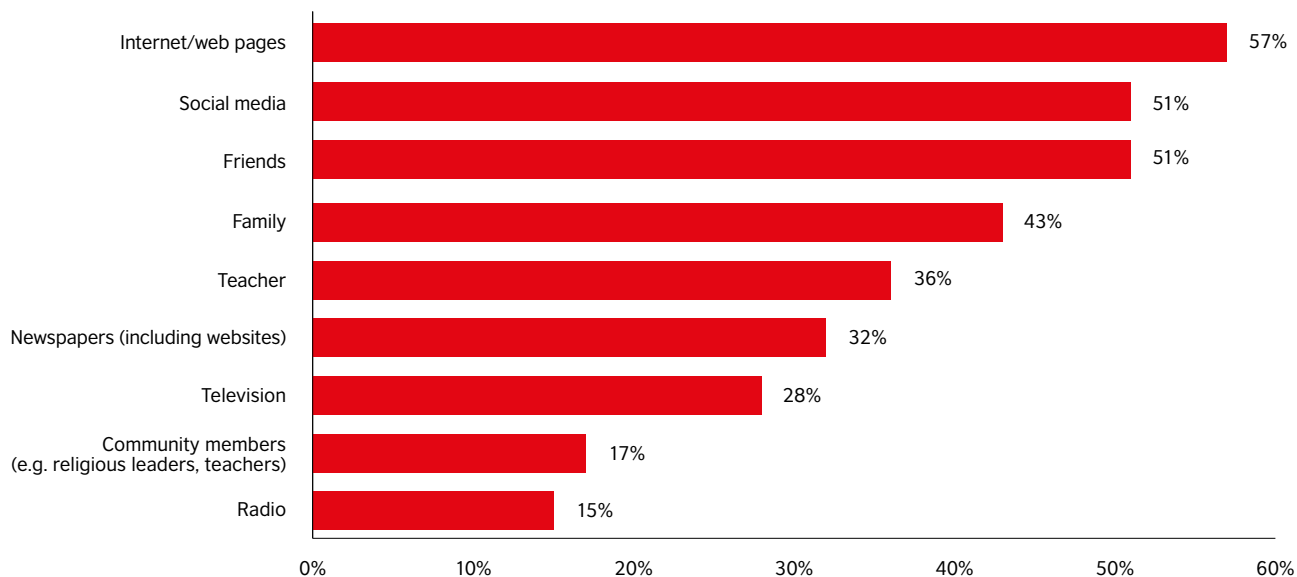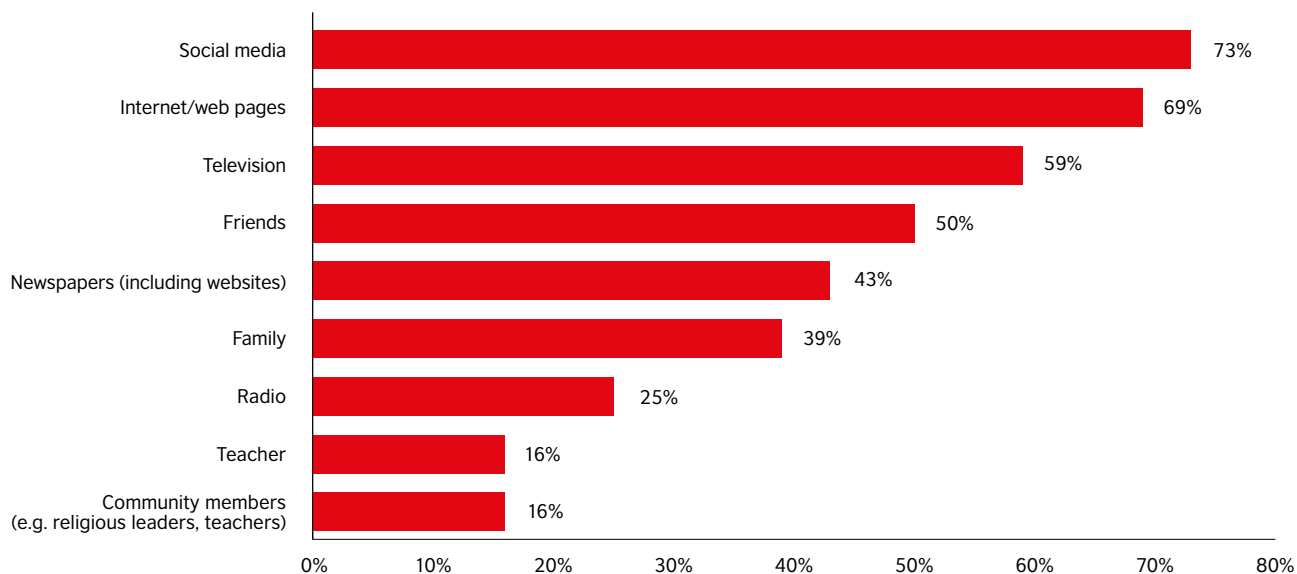**Figure 6:** Proportion of survey respondents selecting the following sources of information for current affairs (n=1,200)

Source	Percentage
Social media	73%
Internet/web pages	69%
Television	59%
Friends	50%
Newspapers (including websites)	43%
Family	39%
Radio	25%
Teacher	16%
Community members (e.g. religious leaders, teachers)	16%

A trusted news source and learning platform

Youth overwhelmingly turn to social media (73 per cent), the internet/web pages (69 per cent), and television (59 per cent) as trusted sources of information for current events. Information sourced through friends (50 per cent), newspapers (43 per cent) and family (39 per cent) are also popular. Anecdotally, in focus groups, the accessibility of information online, coupled with perceptions of higher reliability and less interference in reporting, seems to bolster internet-based mediums rather than traditional sources such as newspapers. The next generation also uses online platforms to study and develop new skills – for example by listening to audiobooks or reading e-books and looking for lessons that are related to, or that go beyond their school curriculum. While this is mostly positive, some respondents worried about becoming overly dependent on the internet as a handy source of information, in turn struggling to deeply understand or memorise their lessons the same way their parents did in the past (FGD male, 20–24, peri-urban, HCMC). In similar form, another rural respondent noted that: 'Now, we normally read books online or even go to YouTube to listen to audiobooks, rather than reading paper ones' (FGD male, 25–30, Nghe An).

An entertainment platform

Based on FGDs, consuming media content is the most popular pastime for most participants. Young Vietnamese netizens consume a wide range of content from movies, television shows, television series, short video content, vlogs, game streaming, prank videos and memes, music videos, concerts, and music online. Both domestic and international sources feature strongly in their media diets. Vietnamese content

is appreciated due to its relatability to their everyday life and for language accessibility.

As relatability and cultural accessibility play an essential role, youth particularly enjoy content from Asian countries, especially from China, Hong Kong, Japanese, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Western films and television shows are consumed to a lesser extent as, when examined in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, participants do not always enjoy reading subtitles and may find Western actors' appearances are unfamiliar. The thematic content of Western films and media is also not always perceived to be as accessible.

Japanese Anime as a genre is enjoyed by many, but mainly by younger males, as it reported to bring out romantic aspirations for Vietnamese youth. Participants feel it encourages youth respondents to bring forward their best qualities and to strive for self-betterment.

FGD participants often reported, for some exclusively, watching online content on YouTube. Dominant channels include video game streaming, pranks, vlogs, and food content. Participants mentioned YouTubers including Dinology,[4] Giang Oi,[5] and Quynh Tran Jp[6] as people they usually watch.

For youth from particular backgrounds reached through the study, namely ethnic and LGBTI minorities, the internet and social media platforms are a place for them to seek a sense of community online. Culturally relevant media are vital to setting this sense of belonging. They look to consume media from artists that come from their community. For example, LGBTI respondents listen to singers[7] from the LGBTI community and might watch the LGBTI talk show *Come Out*. Meanwhile, other ethnic

groups[8] build and reinforce cultural identity through cultural consumption:

I like the singer Y Moan,[9] who also comes from my ethnic minority group. He is a famous artist that can write and sing many great songs about the Highlands and ethnic people.

IDI male, 30, Dak Lak, Ede ethnic group

A dating and matchmaking service

Young netizens also look to social media platforms, online games, and dating applications for identifying potential girlfriends or boyfriends. Qualitatively, this trend appears to be slightly more prominent among male respondents compared with female respondents.

A place where youth have their voices heard

Across FGDs and IDIs, the next generation sees social media as the first place they can express themselves without worrying about judgement. When young Vietnamese face grievances or concerns in life, social media platforms serve as a place to voice it out to the world. Whether it is personal problems, concerns about work or study, or social problems, young netizens will post on their social media to open up the conversation with their social media friends. With sensitive issues, for example, corruption or sexual harassment, social media is seen as the only platform they can speak out on, considering the overall low levels of free speech in the country:

On social media, we can freely talk about what we want or care about and interact with other people, without having to worry about other people's opinion or social influence.

FGD male, Nghe An, 16–19

4   > Dinology is a Vietnamese lifestyle and vlog YouTube channel centred around Dino Vũ which has over 303,000 subscribers (Jan, 2020).
5   > Giang Oi is a Vietnamese lifestyle channel focusing on YouTuber's life and her journey to adulthood. Has over 1,160,000 subscribers (Jan, 2020).
6   > Quynh Tran Jp is a Vietnamese vlog channel from a Vietnamese living in Japan. Has over 2,350,000 subscribers (Jan, 2020).
7   > Lâm Quốc Khải, Vietnamese transgender singer from singing contest 'Solo cùng Bolero 2018' and Gil Lê.
8   > Ede and Muong ethnic minority members interviewed.
9   > Y Moan is a popular singer from Ede ethnic ethnicity.

Towards that end, the uses of multiple personas and fake accounts online are striking. Some reported setting up multiple accounts and social media pages to posts or to send messages to their other accounts about their sadness or grievances. For example, one male respondent speaks to himself through his accounts to resolve personal issues: 'I have two different Facebook accounts. I send messages to the other account just to talk to myself about my problems' (FGD male, 16–19, An Giang). For another respondent, multiple accounts are the way to claim voice and agency: 'I set up ten pages on social media. Whenever I'm sad, I'll write a post at one of these pages to voice it out' (FGD female, 20–24, HCMC).

The dark side of social media

Comparatively, youth generally perceive more positives than negatives when it comes to social media. However, despite the convenience that social media brings, they are very aware of its negative sides. Despite perceiving social media as the most reliable source of information, the next generation is also mindful of the pervasiveness of false information and fake news online. In qualitative interviews, a minority also remarked on their low trust of information online. For this conscious, digitally literate group, they are wary of how false viral information can be and take extra caution to verify the information they see online. One focus group in Ho Chi Minh City (male respondents, 25–30 age group) mentioned that they take steps to verify information on social media. Methods used for this include checking the comment sections and cross-checking with different sources to validate the information.

With the popularity of online shopping and e-commerce, young Vietnamese are aware of online shopping fraud – most commonly products not reflecting their online description, poor product quality, and delivery no shows. Privacy breaches and internet crimes are also, as noted in focus groups, concerns when surfing online. Meanwhile, the previously mentioned growth of materialistic values

among youth is a concern frequently linked to social media patterns. Some FGD participants report an increase in online bragging culture, summarised by a female respondent that 'because of social media, some people show off their wealth. It motivates greediness from others' (FGD female, 25–30, HCMC).

Human versus virtual interaction

Focus group participants felt that excessive use of social media could result in disconnection from the physical world, which can manifest in problems ranging from physical health difficulties, laziness, and a lack of interaction with people beyond a core circle. Based on FGDs, young urbanites seem more likely to rely on virtual entertainment than relaxing in the physical world. As described by a female respondent in Ho Chi Minh City, 'these days, I spend 80 per cent of my free time [in] self-entertainment online and the remaining 20 per cent [with] my friends' (FGD female, 25–30, peri-urban, HCMC).

In contrast with urbanites, rural interviewees, especially those in tighter-knit ethnic minority communities, emphasised the importance of their immediate locality, human interactions and outdoor activities. During IDIs, local activities noted include playing sports, fishing, visiting pagodas, walking agricultural, and playing kites. Especially among ethnic minority groups, human interactions form the core of daily life, with gatherings of family and friends featuring strongly along with community gatherings such as ethnic festivals. Still, it is crucial to note that young Vietnamese, regardless of their urbanity, enjoy virtual entertainment. Digital life is mainstream.

Offline pastimes

While online activities are incredibly popular, in their offline free time, young Vietnamese enjoy a wide range of activities. Sharing food while spending time with their families and friends is, according to interviews, the most common way to socialise. Still, young foodies actively look for popular

cafes and restaurants via food blogs, social media reviews, and food review apps, reflecting the digitisation of offline activities. Social media boosts Instagrammable delicacies, such as the ubiquitous milk tea shops found on many corners across Hanoi and HCMC. The centrality of food in social and private space likely informs the 70 per cent of youth ranking food safety as the most pressing issue in their daily lives (see Figure 3, above). Concerns around accessing clean and safe food also came up numerous times in focus groups – worries which are discussed more in-depth in Chapter 7 of this report.

Sports

Meanwhile, playing and watching sports retain a broad appeal to the next generation and form a lens through which to view the world. Around one in five respondents (18 per cent) are members of a sports club or leisure organisation, increasing to around one in four for men (24 per cent). Football is the most popular sport for Vietnamese and, according to focus group discussions, represents a space to socialise with likeminded people.

However, sports are not just a national enterprise: they represent a connection to the world and an arena for soft power competition. The Vietnamese National Team's recent success on the international level underscores a pride placed in sports which also advances the national interest. Interestingly, sports can also foster positive perceptions of other states. When analysing the success of national team coach, Park Hang-seo, a South Korean, the research team found a clear link to acutely positive perceptions of South Korea off the pitch. In similar keeping, survey respondents feel the UK has the best standing when it comes to international sports (54 per cent), likely due to the English Football Premier League's popularity. The prowess of the UK is trailed by favourable views of France (46 per cent) and the USA (43 per cent) in sports, all countries in the top six of overall attractiveness globally (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Ranking of countries with most favourable views of sports per survey respondents (n=1,200)

Sports	
1	UK
2	France
3	USA
4	Japan
5	Korea
6	China
7	Thailand
8	Australia
9	Singapore
10	Malaysia

Travel

When it comes to travelling in Vietnam and overseas, Vietnamese youth have a robust appetite. According to focus group discussions, moving around in Vietnam is appealing due to its minimal cost, short travelling time and diverse range of cultures. Travel at home is 'relaxing and peaceful' with stunning nature. Outside Vietnam, while visa requirements can be a barrier for youth, travel destinations in Asia and Europe are seen as most attractive to survey and FGD respondents. When asked about the most attractive countries, respondents gravitate to Western and East Asian countries. South Korea (82 per cent), Japan (81 per cent), the USA (79 per cent), and the UK (77 per cent) are the most attractive countries, according to the respondents (see Figure 7).

In focus groups, participants described their criteria for travel destinations as being: cost, unique architecture and culture, famous travel attractions, beautiful landscapes, security and climate. At the same time, soft power projection factors into decisions. In interviews, both South Korea and Thailand featured as popular travel destinations because of the popularity of their exported TV shows, as well as their actors and actresses.

South Korea, as mentioned above, is viewed as having helped Vietnam achieve international success in football – and is lauded by many for K-Pop music, television shows, film, and food. The success of South Korean soft power projection (the so-called Korean Wave) is strikingly notable across sectors – from sports to arts and culture. Meanwhile, the willingness of the Korean government to bolster pop culture through engaged public diplomacy has been flagged by commentators across diplomatic corps as an approach worth emulating. The success of the country's cultural exports in Vietnam reflects a winning approach for that strategy.

Thailand, meanwhile, is viewed positively for its television exports, which in-turn drive tourism interest in the country. In keeping with the internationalisation of sports playing out in perceptions of countries, travel preferences also seem to hold a clear relationship to overall attractiveness rankings of states. We return to this trend in Chapter 5.

Figure 7: Proportion of survey respondents selecting either attractive or somewhat attractive when asked how attractive the following countries are (n=1,200)
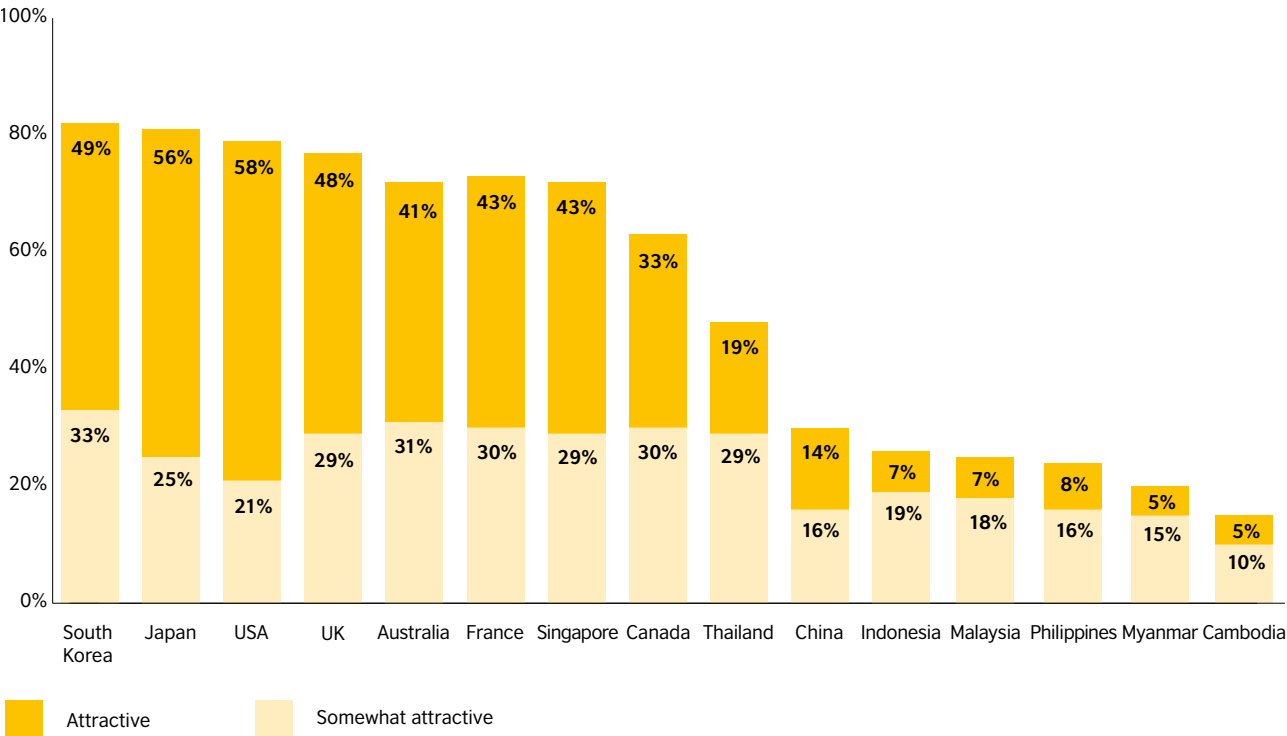
> # Chapter 4: Education, skills and employment

Education

Vietnamese youth are, overall, a well-educated group. Educational reforms carried out by the government appear to have benefited them. In terms of educational attainment among surveyed youth, four in five (80 per cent) of 20- to 24-year-olds and nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) 25- to 30-year-olds completed high school.

Impressions of the Vietnamese education system

Youth are optimistic about the educational system. Nearly four in five of those surveyed agree that the quality of education in Vietnam is improving

(77 per cent) and three in four feel that the government has good policies in place for education (76 per cent). Youth who are still in high school (those 16 to 19 years old) are more likely to agree that the quality of education in Vietnam is improving (85 per cent) compared to 20- to 24-year-olds (74 per cent). A young female participant reflected that 'compared to the past, schools these days have better facilities and advanced and extensive curriculum' (FGD Female, 16–19, HCMC). This likely points to either youthful optimism that becomes tempered by working life, or to recent educational improvements at the secondary level.

Youth living in the Red River Delta and the Southeast are less likely to see education as improving (71 per cent and 73 per cent respectively) than the other regions – suggesting that improvements may not be occurring across all regions equally.

Figure 8: Highest level of education achieved by age group

Legend:
- Some high school or less
- Completed high school
- University/vocational
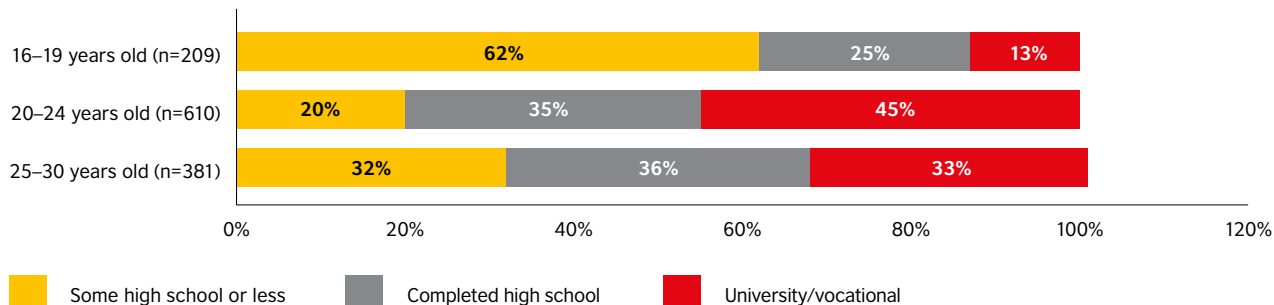
Figure 9: Proportion of survey respondents by region and urbanisation agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'The government has good policies in place for education'

	Strongly agree	Agree
National (n=1,200)	13%	63%
Northern Midlands and Mountains (n=100)	11%	73%
Red River Delta (n=380)	9%	62%
North and South Central Coast (n=160)	8%	71%
Central Highlands (n=70)	21%	36%
Southeast (n=336)	15%	51%
Mekong River Delta (n=130)	18%	67%
Urban (n=600)	12%	61%
Rural (n=600)	13%	63%
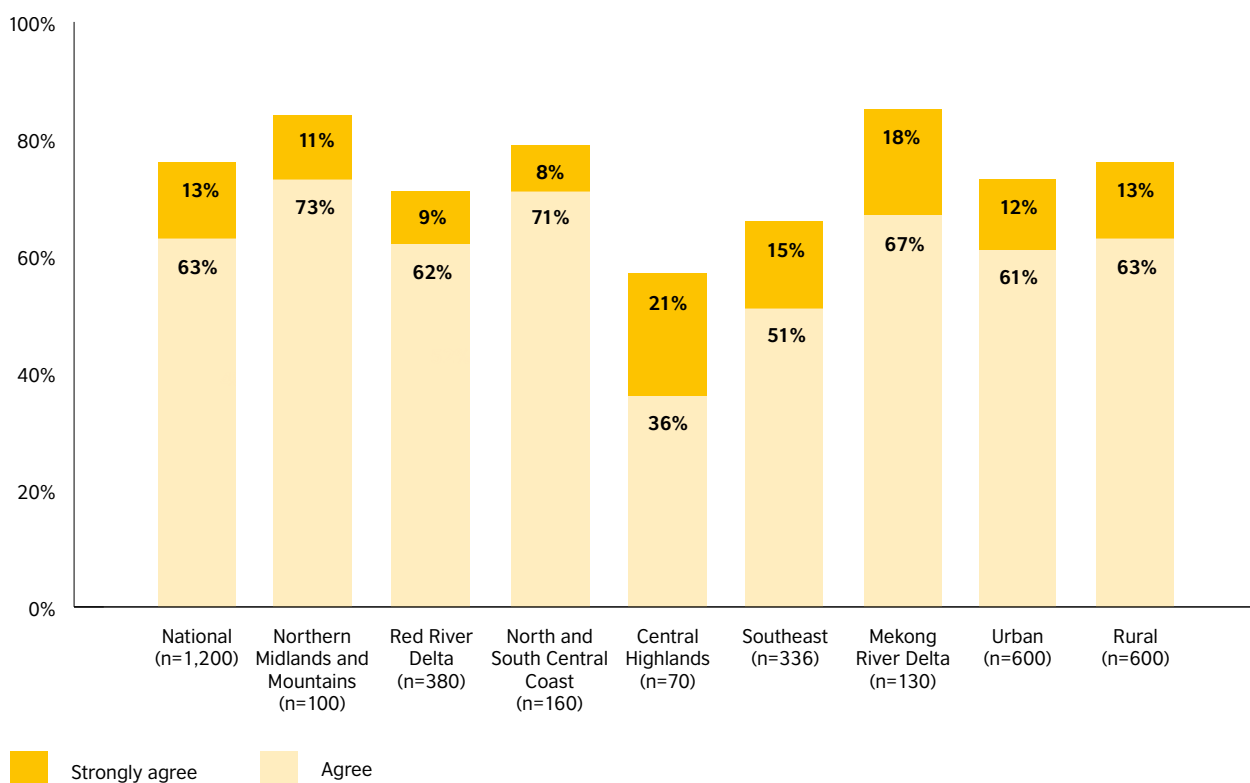
Besides, approximately six in ten agree that their education has adequately prepared them for life (62 per cent) and that career and educational opportunities were made clear to them in secondary school (60 per cent). Again, 16- to 19-year-olds were more likely to agree that career and education choices were clear (66 per cent), compared than those aged 25 to 30 years old (58 per cent), which could demonstrate recent improvements in the system or temperance of sentiment after joining the employment market.

The perceived positive changes speak well to the government's attempts to revamp its education system:

I think education at school is adequately preparing me for the future, particularly from the experiences shared by the teachers and other skills acquired from schools like communication skills.

FGD male, 20–24, Thanh Tri

Respondents see that tertiary education is improving – and is increasingly a requirement for skilled workers. FGD participants felt the comparative advantage of people with a bachelor's degree is lessening. As a respondent in Thanh Tri put it: 'Parents think that only a bachelor's degree would be enough to get a job, but nowadays it is not enough' (FGD female, 16–19). Young people feel the need to acquire higher degrees in order to set themselves apart in the employment sector – yet 59 per cent feel that completing higher education is too expensive.

Meanwhile, around half (49 per cent) believe that to get a good education – especially at tertiary level – one needs to move abroad to a country such as Japan, UK, USA or Canada. Afterwards, three in four (73 per cent) feel they would have better job opportunities upon return from studying abroad:

I think studying abroad is great. We can cultivate deeper knowledge and have more job opportunities when coming back to Vietnam, particularly in multinational companies here.

FGD female, 20–24, Hanoi

With six out of ten (59 per cent) feeling that completing higher education (master's, doctorate) is too expensive for people like themselves, barriers are still present in higher education. Interestingly, there is no relationship between social economic class (SEC) and perceptions of educational barriers due to cost.

Young Vietnamese recognise the improvements made to the education system but are also aware it has some way to go. They have witnessed improvements to the education system, most noticeably through an increasingly extensive curriculum and significant advancements in school facility quality. With greater access to different sources of information online and offline, Vietnamese students can expand their knowledge, in addition to studying in the classroom. Classes like foreign languages, presentation skills, or technology became widely available for young people, online and offline. Times have changed, and mainly for the better. In the words of one respondent:

In the past [education was] harder to pursue to the end. Our parents could only make it to fourth or fifth grade, and then eventually had to drop out of school to help our grandparents with the family situation.

FGD female, peri-urban, Hanoi, 25–30

Among youth from ethnic minority backgrounds, interviewees generally expressed satisfaction with the quality of schooling, though access challenges remain. Youth living in remote areas, ethnic minority youth, and youth in poverty receive partial or full schooling fee exemption as part of the government plan in boosting school enrolment (World Bank, 2011). As noted by feedback during analysis debriefing sessions, the government allows for ethnic minorities to receive additional points, or to waive entrance exams for tertiary schooling. School fee waivers from primary through to vocational school are also provided, a point viewed very positively by ethnic IDI respondents. Additionally, since 2010, government policy has officially advocated for preserving 'spoken and written languages for ethnic minorities' per decree No. 82/2010/ND-CP (Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, 2012).

Educational pathways

Two in three (64 per cent) youth with a vocational or university education say they chose their field of study due to a personal interest in the subject. In comparison, three in ten (31 per cent) chose it based on future job opportunities. While interest in the field and employability are prioritised by young Vietnamese, their perceptions of education and employment opportunities can be highly influenced by their parents. These findings may not fully reflect the youth's full interest in a given sector. As indicated by one respondent describing his experience in choosing an education:

I don't want to study nursing but my mom wants me to. She went to school and submitted an application for me. So now I have to take the exam.

FGD male, 16–19, An Giang

Young audience member attending an art exhibition in Ho Chi Minh City.
Photo by the British Council

Figure 10: Survey respondents' views on the Vietnamese education system (n=1,200)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The quality of education in Vietnam is improving	6%		15%	64%	14%
My education has adequately prepared me for life in general		17%	20%	53%	9%
Completing higher education (master's, doctorate, etc.) is too expensive for people like me		18%	22%	47%	13%
To get a good education you have to move abroad to countries such as Japan, UK, USA or Canada		26%	22%	40%	10%
People who get education in other countries have more job opportunities when they return home than people who study in Vietnam		12%	14%	57%	16%

Figure 11: Proportion of survey respondents selecting the following reason for why they choose their field of study (n=1,200)

Reason	Percentage
Interest in the field	64%
Good job opportunities	31%
Affordability	20%
Most relevant in order to achieve finding the job I want to do	16%
Preferred by family and friends	12%
Suggested by teacher/adviser	6%
I could not access the university/programme I wanted	3%
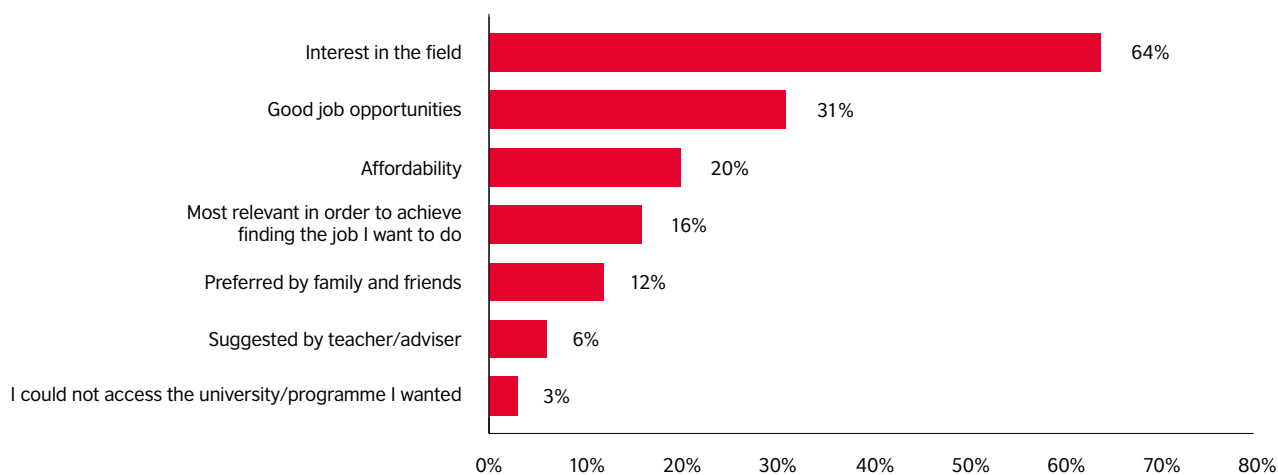
Secondary school options

Based on FGDs, public schools are perceived to be of overall sound quality by participants as the state has control over the curriculum and teacher recruitment process. At the same time, around half of the survey respondents feel the need to move abroad to obtain an excellent education. The perceptual divide between good and great education remains. Prestigious public schools are viewed as being excellent based on their university acceptance rate and employability of graduates. Still, some respondents criticised public schools for inconsistent quality, impractical curricula, low teacher quality, and – though not unique to public schools – the prevalence of corruption.

Vietnamese youth have similarly diverse views towards private schooling. Fees for schooling and administrative aspects are high but are also perceived to offer students excellent facilities and teacher quality. Respondents particularly praise a favourable teacher-to-student ratio and innovative teaching styles. Public-private schools, meanwhile, are generally perceived to be of the lowest quality compared to private and public schools.

International schools – of the sort branded and run with international curricula – are the highest regarded overall by Vietnamese youth due to excellent facilities, qualified and experienced teachers, practical, updated, and unique curricula, and a useful focus on soft skills. During FGDs, next-generation members put a high value on having an 'international standard' education. In the survey, half (49 per cent) believe that to get an excellent overall education; you have to move abroad to a country with an excellent education system. Youth from FGDs particularly praised the ability to interact in international settings in international schools, the ability to learn foreign languages, and close relationships with foreign countries which is beneficial for students who aim to study abroad. An education from these types of schools is felt to increase youth competitiveness in the employment sector, particularly in the private sector. At the higher education levels, the British University Vietnam (BUV) and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Vietnam (RMIT Vietnam) were mentioned by youth as having particularly stellar reputations. As noted by a young respondent, 'the term international means having good quality' (FGD male, 16–19, An Giang).

National curriculum

With multiple years of reform efforts under its belt and new endeavours at curricular reform ongoing, the Vietnamese government can point to significant improvements in overall curricula quality. Young adults have witnessed these, with nearly eight in ten (78 per cent) survey respondents reporting that education in Vietnam is improving. Given the focus on STEM [10] subjects, successful performance on the latest international PISA assessment for math and science in 2015 (reported in 2018) should be taken as a reliable indicator of improvement. Vietnam has outperformed many developed countries like the UK and US (Centre for Global Development, 2018).

Table 3: PISA scores by year

Year	Country	Science	Reading	Maths
2015 (OECD, 2018)	Vietnam	525	487	495
	OECD average	493	493	490
	US	497	498	481
	UK	514	499	494
2012 (OECD, 2013) – First year Vietnam joined	Vietnam	528	508	511
	OECD average	501	496	494
	US	496	497	470
	UK	509	498	492

10 > STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

While there are perceived significant improvement in school curricula and outcomes, respondents during FGDs expressed concerns that aspects can be excessive and inapplicable to their future career. Study hours at schools are long, condensing multiple subjects in one day. Further, a small group of participants sees some subjects irrelevant in their lives and careers: mainly dogmatically teaching socialist values, along with an excessive focus on STEM subjects, as pointed out by a male respondent, 'schools only teach in theory [and] lack effective practice. Also, some skills, such as communication skills have not been noticed' (FGD male, 20–24, An Giang). An increase in applicable life skills training is desirable among most participants, especially youth from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In the survey, some two in ten (18 per cent) of youths across the country disagreed that their education had adequately prepared them for life in general.

Teachers

Youth in the FGDs have noticed changes in teachers' teaching styles and their motivation in teaching. In terms of teaching methods, the next generation notices a shift away from disincentive and test-based methods towards a focus on giving students incentives and rewards for study. Perceptions of corporal punishment in schools have decreased due to the widespread use of social media and the deployment of surveillance cameras in many classrooms. Youth reported that social media has made the problem more noticeable and has drawn attention to the topic.

On the other hand, others reported that teachers in public schools have less motivation and enthusiasm in teaching students compared to private schools. Public schools perhaps fail to attract quality teachers due to low salaries – an overall reduction in the societal status of teachers was alluded to during focus group discussions when compared with previous generations. Teachers sometimes push students to attend their extra classes or else, as noted in FGDs, they risk facing verbal harassment in the classroom. There is speculation from the analysis team that teachers in rural areas may be more motivated, as the social status of teaching may still retain cachet. In contrast, the role of teachers in society may have been undermined by more eye-catching roles in urban areas. The national education law does allow for teachers to receive allowances and other preferential rewards while working in: 'areas with extreme socio-economic difficulties, specialised schools, schools for gifted students, boarding schools for ethnic minorities, and schools for people with disabilities' (World Bank, n.d.). Data from the study, however, can neither confirm or reject this point, leaving it for future research to decide.

Figure 12: Proportion of survey respondents disagreeing with the statement 'my education has adequately prepared me for life in general' by region
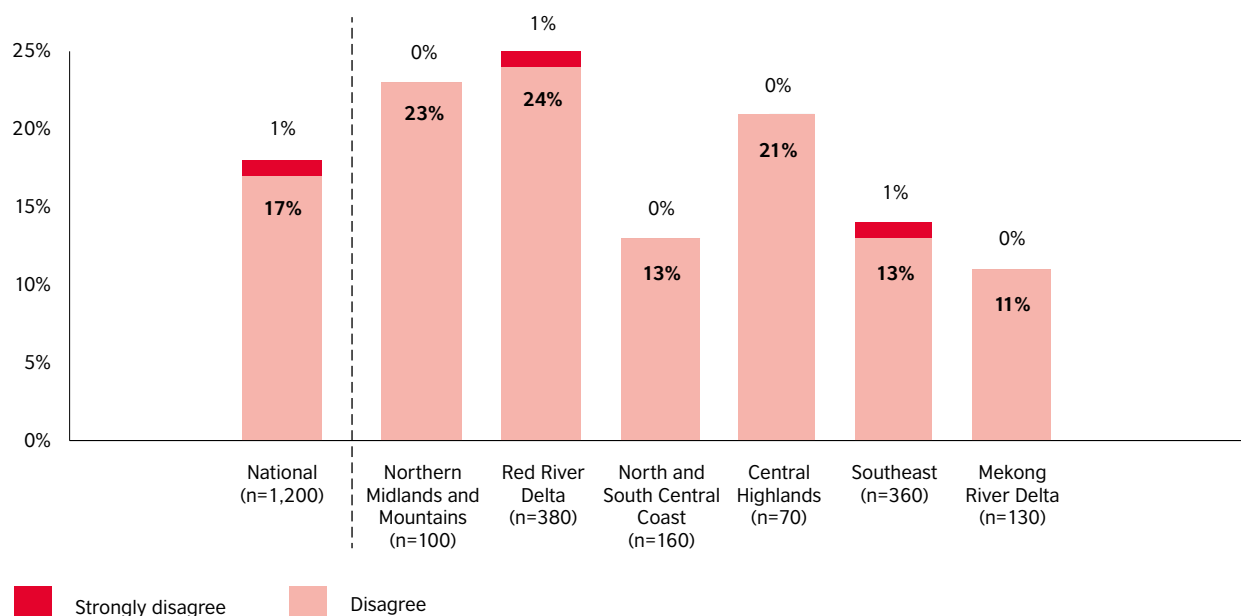
Barriers to education

School violence

Violence in educational settings frequently was mentioned as a concern for FGD respondents. Young Vietnamese perceive that student-on-student violence has been increasing, compared to the past. In contrast, teacher-on-student violence is not as prominent as it was, due to school surveillance systems and the use of social media to report these cases. Corporal punishment has also been rendered illegal by the Vietnamese Education Law of 2019 and the Law on Children of 2016. However, reports of emotional and mental abuse in schools, including bullying, shaming or scolding, continue to be relevant. As a young male respondent put it, 'now there is a new form of violence which is body shaming. This kind of violence is even more hurtful than physical violence' (FGD male, 16–19, An Giang). According to the OECD, 27 per cent of Vietnamese students report being bullied at least a few times a month (OECD, 2019). Young parent respondents in IDIs also noted concerns for their children's wellbeing, reflecting a strong concern that they might face physical abuse at school. Physical abuse at school, especially between students, was also pointed out in FGDs as a possible factor playing into school dropout rates.

Cost

Tuition fees, both for regular school and extra classes are one of the main barriers that prohibit youth from acquiring education. Keeping with research findings from Anh (2009) and the OECD (2017),s FGD and lower-income IDI respondents revealed that when families face financial pressure, school dropouts often result. Some students, while able to afford school education, had to give up on extra classes because their family cannot afford it. Occasionally, the school or local administration usually partially support the tuition fees (FGD participant, 25–30 peri-urban, Hanoi). Still, for others, the cost remains a severe barrier:

My study results are good, but I feel like my family can't afford for me to go to school anymore, so I chose to quit school which parents did not oppose.

FGD male, 16–19, An Giang

Family obligations were also mentioned by FGD participants as a contributing factor to school dropout, especially in rural areas. Families in challenging circumstances may need their children only to obtain a modest level of education to work, then to earn the income necessary to support the household. Interestingly, male FGD participants – but not female participants – pointed out that some students dropped out of school to get married or because they are pregnant:

Some one-to-two of students would drop out of school because they don't want to continue studying: they only want to make money, get pregnant, fight with other students, and can't afford the tuition fee.

FGD male, 20–24, peri-urban, HCMC

Prioritising work over formal education is one of the contributing factors for school dropouts as financial stability is desired by young Vietnamese. One IDI mentioned that she aimed to finish her secondary school and would choose not to continue into university level in order to pursue a path as an entrepreneur. Anecdotally, analysis group discussions centred around stories of earnings from street vendors that could sustain a family. During FGDs, several university students reported that they quit education once they started to work part-time jobs – whether to earn money or to get experience (FGD male, 20–24, peri-urban, Hanoi). For them, interest in further education faded after they started to earn money on their own: 'I do not want to study, going to school is boring, go to work to make money is more fun' (FGD male, 16–19, An Giang).

Presenting options for future study through a cost-benefit analysis of short-term versus long-term earnings could be one way to make up this information gap. Another option for consideration includes a youth entrepreneurship platform focusing on presenting clear information linking education to skills.

Physical access

For youth facing multiple barriers, especially those in rural areas, in ethnic minority communities or living with physical disabilities, distance and physical access to schools pose further barriers to educational access. Multiple kilometre rides to school are not uncommon among rural respondents, while poor road quality can pose a further issue. However, access to transportation also plays into urban students' considerations as well. In several IDIs with low-income youth, the ability to traverse cities to get to school via scooter or bus posed a cost barrier that precluded accessing campuses: 'There are two reasons that I dropped out of school: My family can't afford the tuition fee and I didn't have a vehicle to travel to school' (IDI male, 18, Ho Chi Minh City, out-of-school).

Additionally, the timing of classes is also an issue for would-be returning students who work during the day. Indicatively, this study found this to be particularly true for rural communities. However, it would bear more scrutiny in urban settings with busy workers from, for example, the service and hospitality sectors.

Extra classes

Based on the nationally representative survey, around seven in ten (68 per cent) of respondents felt the need to attend or pay for extra classes in order to get a good education in Vietnam. This requirement was viewed more stringently by those who had completed high school (71 per cent) compared to those with only some secondary or lower education (60 per cent). When asked in FGDs, the majority revealed feeling pressured to attend extra classes or to pay for private tutoring outside of school hours. This pressure comes from their peers or teachers who may coerce them to study long hours with the addition of extra classes after the school hours to receive content that otherwise would not be taught:

Extra classes are essential as the class hour at school is very short. Also, the teachers would give us tips to do the homework. Some of us take these classes because we don't want to be discriminated against by the teachers.

FGD male, 20–24, An Giang

Figure 13: Proportion of survey respondents agreeing with the statement 'you need to attend or pay for extra classes in order to get a good education in Vietnam' by region and level of education

Strongly agree   Agree
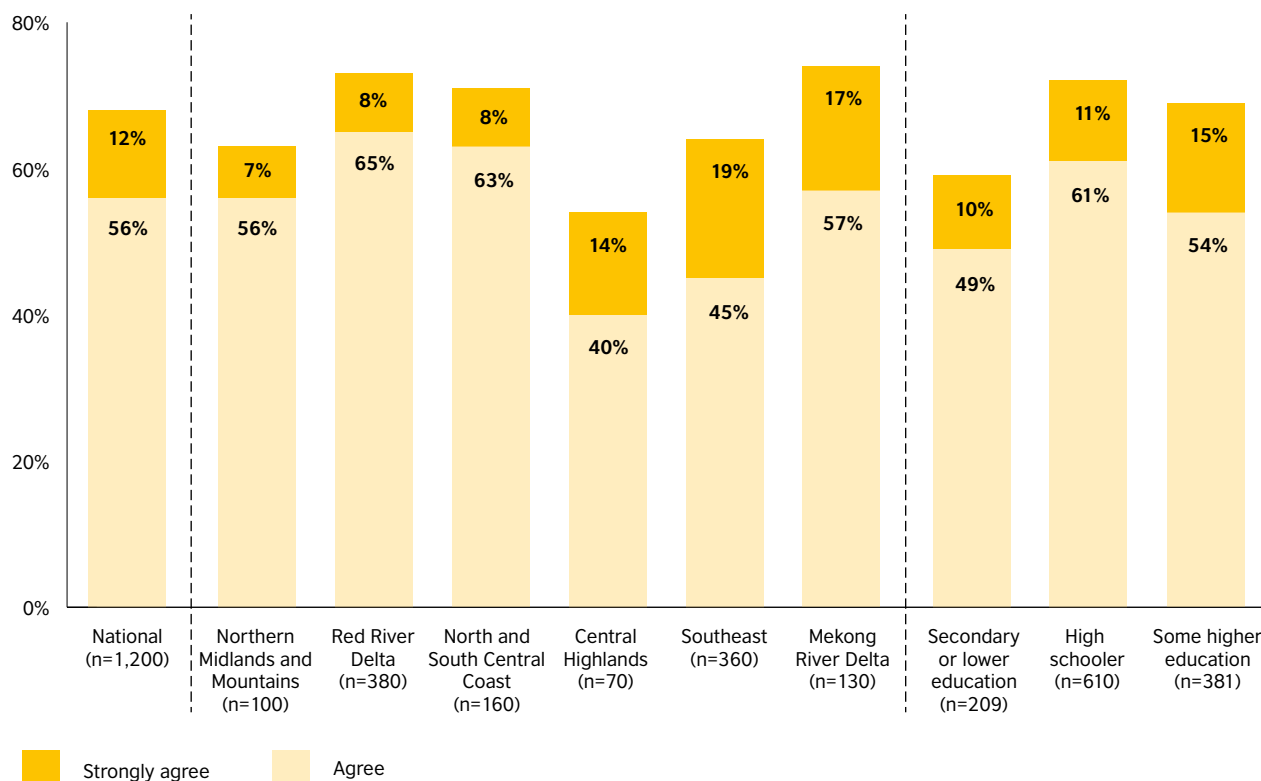
During FGDs, former students reported that some teachers are likely to pay closer attention to those who attend their extra classes and discriminate against those who do not. Young adults claimed that teachers sometimes withhold parts of the lesson during the school hours of classes to incentivise students to join their extra classes in order to pass the exams. During extra classes, respondents noted that teachers would give additional tips on the exams, or even give students the exact exam questions to practice in advance. Some students stated that the school period is usually too short, which is why they have to take extra classes for more facetime with their teachers and to clarify points that they do not understand in their school time. Apart from school subjects, skills like computer skills, negotiation skills, accounting and tax, and foreign languages are desirable

for future careers. All this happens despite an overall perception that extra classes should not be allowed:

Extra classes are forbidden by law but are still happening until now as teachers, especially in public schools, still need to earn more money as their official salary paid by the government is low.

FGD male, 25–30, HCMC

Pressure to perform

Many of the next generation face pressure from family to perform well in educational settings, with four in ten (38 per cent) of surveyed respondents agreeing they feel pressure to pursue education preferred by their family (see Figure 14 below). Still, a similar proportion (35 per cent) did not feel such pressure. According to FGD respondents, exam results are

prioritised by their parents and future employers. Stories told in FGDs noted that this pressure results in high levels of corruption in schools to adjust exam scores or even fabricate degree certificates. Parental pressure to pursue university education remains, despite the high volume of under-employed university graduates and demand for vocational skills and entrepreneurship. One participant pointed out that 'there are people resorting to cheating, bribing, adjusting the exam scores, and faking certificates to go to university' (FGD male, 25–30, HCMC).

Figure 14: Proportion (by region) agreeing with the statement 'I feel pressure to have the education preferred by my family'

Strongly agree Agree
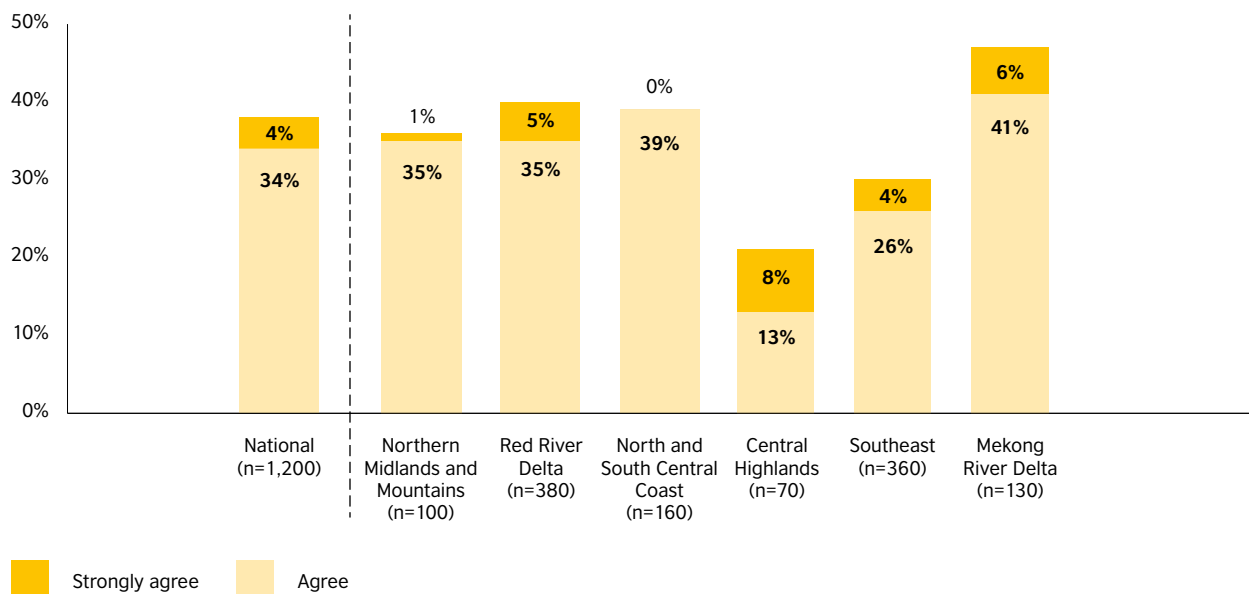
Figure 15: The top three general skills selected when asked 'what general skills do you think are most important when it comes to employment?'
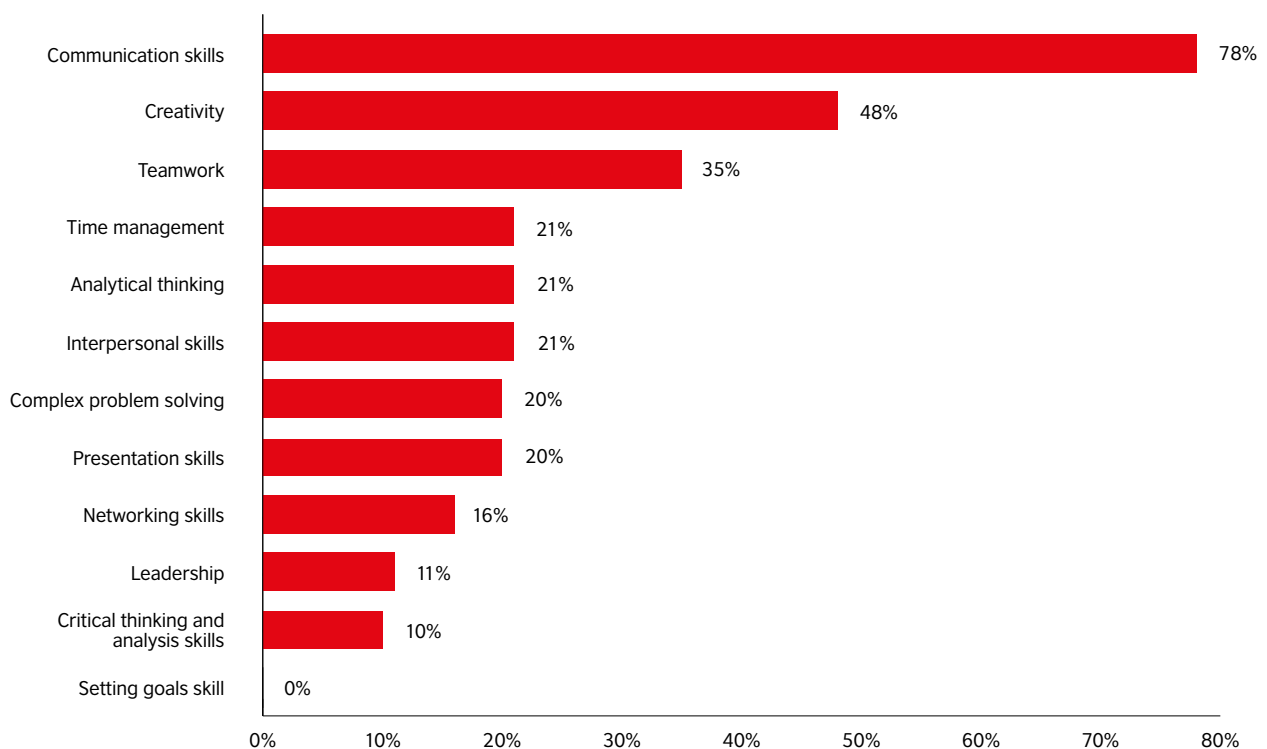
Figure 16: Proportion (by highest achieved education and region) reporting creativity in the top three general skills for employment
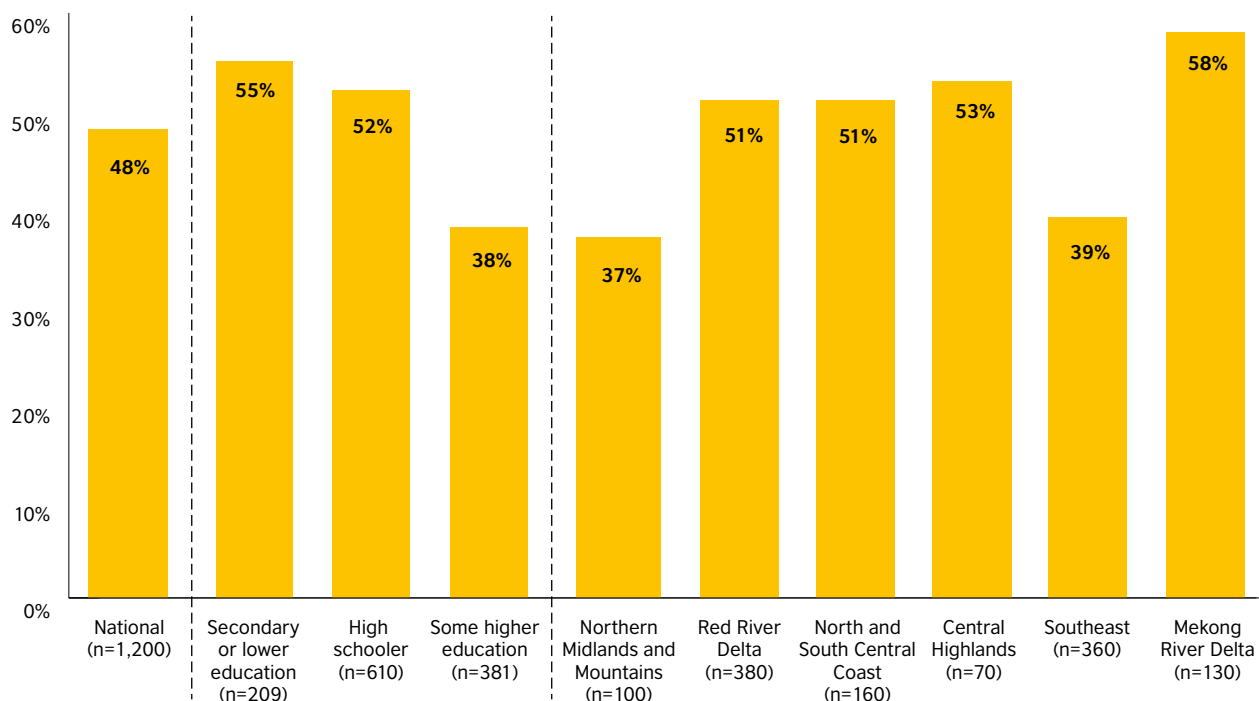
Skill gaps and how to bridge them

The skills and knowledge we obtain in school only meet around 30 per cent of the skills needed for their future work.

FGD male, 16–19, An Giang

The inapplicability of the Vietnamese school curriculum for particular groups of individuals is reported by FGD respondents to be one of the factors underscoring dropout rates. Others interviewed feel the quality of the education system has undermined valuation of education certificates – at least indicatively. Evidence from FGDs reveals that a minority actively decided to drop out of school because they were unsure if schooling would help them secure a job in the future. Some believed that the labour market does not value school certificates as they used to, and chose to drop out of formal education, apply for vocational training, and enter employment:

The certificates are not that valuable, [and it is] not worth completing school to get it. The ultimate purpose of everything is to make money anyway. So, studying some vocational skills and then earning money from that would be more reasonable.

FGD male, 25–30, Hanoi

Formal education often seems to fail at providing the full future skillset needed for 21st-century employability. When giving the top three skills for employment, respondents flagged communication skills (78 per cent) stood out as the primary skill, with soft skills such as creativity (48 per cent), teamwork (35 per cent), time management (21 per cent), analytical thinking (21 per cent) and interpersonal skills (21 per cent) coming next in the ranking.

Communication skills – when defined during FGDs – mean being able to communicate wisely and able to lead the conversations when communicating with different parties: 'communication skills are important but lack in every school' (FGD male, 16–19, Hanoi).

Respondents perceive these help with handling stressful situations while being persuasive – a path to career advancement.

While creative skills were the second most important for employment, qualitative perceptions on its applicability in the workplace vary. Some youth highly value creative skills as being essential for every profession and something that would set themselves apart from other candidates. Others saw the skills as necessary for some career paths. In other words, not all industries appreciate creativity:

I used to get fired because of my creativity. I tried to share my idea with my managers, but they didn't agree with it and did not let me explain. They thought that I was disrespectful, and they fired me. Since then, I have learnt the lesson of my life: to always follow the crowd.

FGD female, 25–30, Thanh Tri

Focus group participants want to boost critical thinking and other soft skills in public schooling. At the same time, they feel that international and private schools provide an environment in which students can already learn soft skills. Demand for life and soft skills, with an emphasis on self-reliance programs, is particularly prominent among youth with physical disabilities.

Meanwhile, a lack of career counselling or knowledge of the labour market among FGD participants and survey respondents is noticeable in complaints about un- or underemployment.

There was a lack of job orientation. We did not know which major in university we should pursue based on our competencies.

FGD male, 25–30, HCMC

To bridge skill gaps, young Vietnamese students create adaptive responses such as university clubs and extra classes to earn skills that they see necessary for their career path in order to stand out from the crowd: 'if you only rely on the knowledge in the class, it would only be regarded as 'acceptable.' If you want to understand the knowledge more deeply, the extra class is necessary' (FGD male, 16–19, Hanoi). University clubs offer students opportunities to expand their soft skills and provide chances to connect with potential employers. These offer positions to self-organise events and training, along with events designed to teach participants some of the most desired skills.

On-the-job training (60 per cent) and career counselling and mentoring opportunities (52 per cent) were among the top steps identified to address mismatches between aspirations and job market realities when asked in the national survey. Women are more likely to want career counselling (57 per cent) compared to men (48 per cent). Incorporating vocational training and technical skills in the school curriculum (37 per cent) was also highlighted as an essential initiative. These answers reinforce the sense that there are new skills or classes students feel they need before entering the workforce:

I think that vocational training is better than studying at university because I can study in a shorter time and gain practical experience. At the university, I would only study impractical theory.

FGD male, An Giang, 16–19

Figure 17: How survey participants consider addressing mismatch between your aspirations and job market realities (n=1,200)

Category	Percentage
On-the-job training	60%
Career counselling and mentoring opportunities	52%
Incorporating vocational training and technical skills in school curriculum	37%
Companies to provide skilling and upskilling opportunities to employees	30%
High-quality apprenticeship and internship opportunities that align skills to employment	30%
Having up-to-date information on which skills have the most demand	28%
Specific skill strategies and skill development programmes	23%
Government action/favourable economic policies	18%
Investment in entry-level employees by the private sector	14%
Promotion of entrepreneurship by government	11%

The employment landscape
Current job market

Overall, the next generation feels that job opportunities are improving. Due to the expansion of the Vietnamese economy spurred by Đổi Mới, both quantity and variety of jobs have increased in line with the emergence of new enterprises and companies. At the same time, technological improvements and overall development afford those who have grown up in the past two decades significantly higher salaries compared to their parents. Young people also see positive changes in public perceptions of gender equality in the workplace.

Nearly two in three Vietnamese youth (65 per cent) believe that job opportunities for their demographic cohort in Vietnam have improved over the last five years. Of that group, some 20 per cent feeling prospects have improved considerably. In comparison, only seven per cent hold that job opportunities have gotten worse and 28 per cent felt there was no change. Respondents between 25 and 30 years old are more likely (48 per cent) to say there is high availability of jobs when compared to younger, 16- to 19-year-olds (36 per cent). Most likely, they feel so because they have far more hands-on experience in the labour market.

As for domestic labour migration: a majority of respondents would be interested in either relocating to another province in Vietnam (62 per cent), Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City (78 per cent). Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is slightly preferred by respondents, as respondents see the availability of jobs there (52 per cent) to be significantly higher than Hanoi (36 per cent). During FGDs and analysis sessions, respondents also felt there to be greater transparency in the employment sector in HCMC, owing to more private-sector jobs compared with more in the public sector in Hanoi. FGD respondents perceive that public sector jobs often require personal, family, or political connections. On the other hand, they believe that private sector jobs of the sort more prevalent in HCMC are relatively more openly competitive.

Figure 18: Responses to the question 'over the last five years, how have job opportunities for young people in Vietnam changed' by region
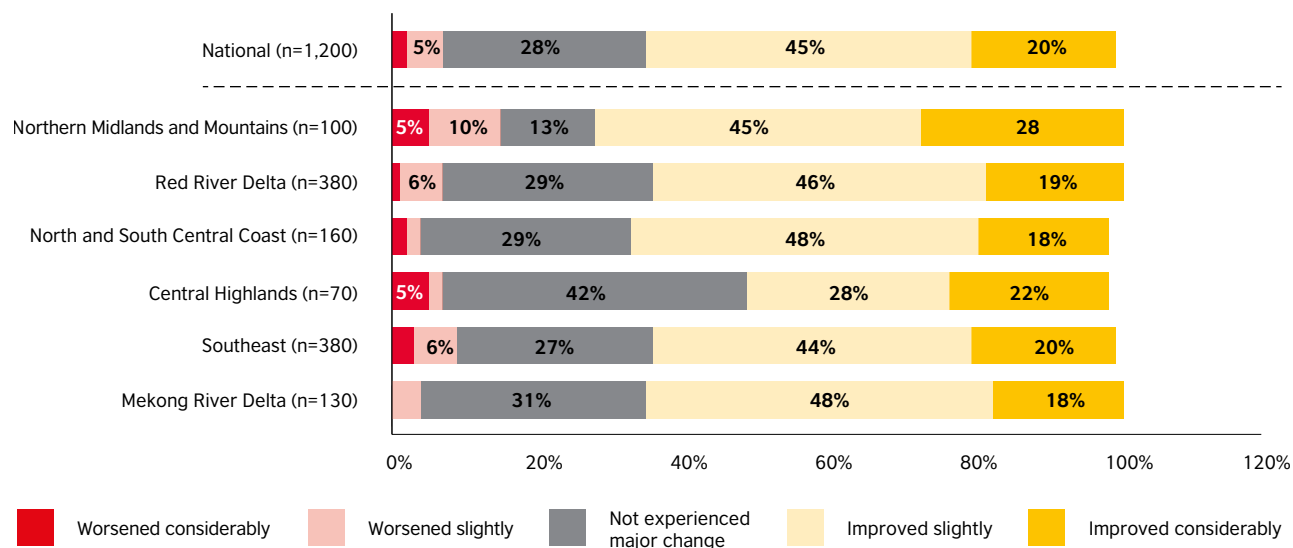
Youth from particular backgrounds and rural areas strongly expressed that their lives and access to work have improved significantly in the country since their parents' generation:

Young people today have better [working conditions] than our parents' generation because they have more options for work, such as working for a factory instead of working outdoors [under the sun] like our parents.

Out-of-school female IDI, 20, An Giang

In contrast, urban focus group participants expressed concerns that the labour market has been increasingly competitive, preventing them from securing employment in their desired roles. Coupled with high education attainment in Vietnam, many feel that the supply of young graduates exceeds the demand for labour, unlike in the past when those with higher degrees automatically had a greater chance of being employed. Skilled labourers feel this crunch particularly keenly: 'There are many jobs but it is very competitive because now everyone has a university degree. Even I work as a delivery driver after I graduated' (FGD female, 25–30, An Giang). Towards that point, based on the survey, around four in ten (42 per cent) respondents feel there is a high or very high availability of jobs that fit their needs. However, this varies significantly by age and region (see Figure 20). Those living in the Central Highlands region are particularly pessimistic: only 20 per cent report high or very high job opportunities. Meanwhile, around half of all respondents across Vietnam report average job availability.

Though many feel there are excellent opportunities, digging into the quantitative survey data reveals that two in three youths (68 per cent) also feel that people their age have difficulty finding suitable jobs. Regional variation plays a role here, with the Red River Delta (58 per cent), Central Highlands (60 per cent), and Southeast (61 per cent) reporting more significant difficulties in finding suitable jobs when compared to the Northern Midlands and Mountains (72 per cent), the North and South Central Coast (73 per cent) and the Mekong River Delta (78 per cent).

Figure 19: Proportion of survey respondents reporting the following locations when asked 'in the future, to what extent are you interested in working in...' (n=1,200)
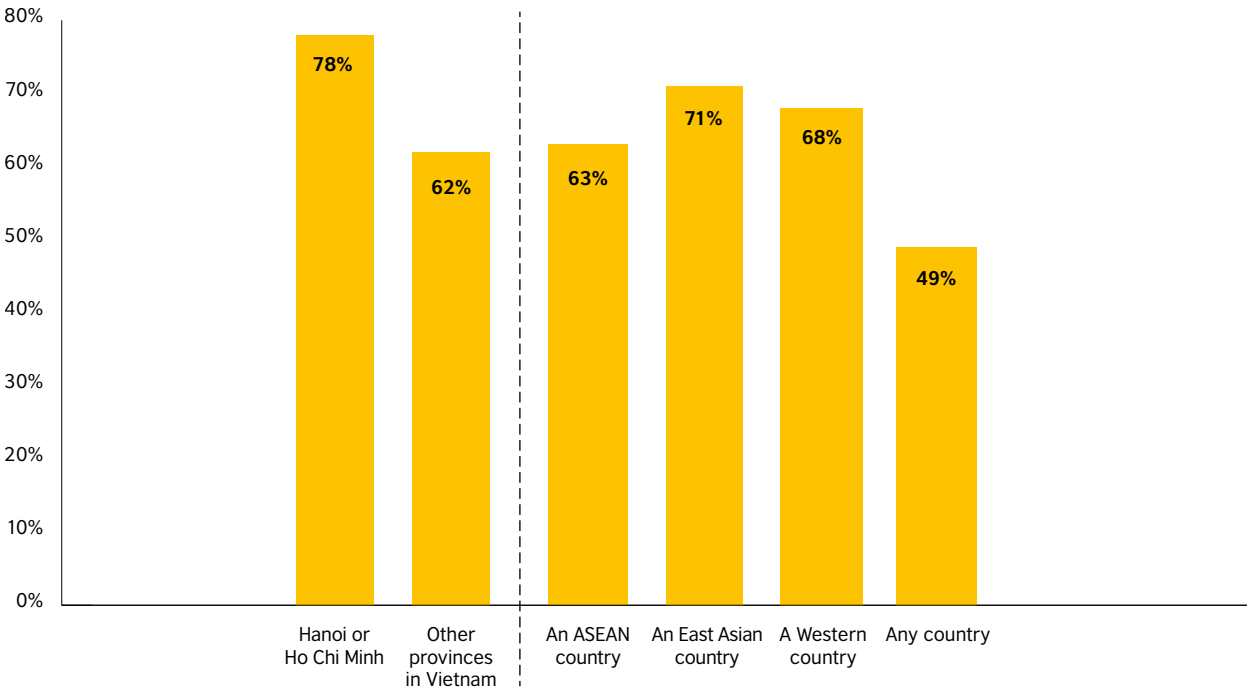
Figure 20: Proportion of respondents (by age and region) stating high or very high availability of employment opportunities that fit their needs
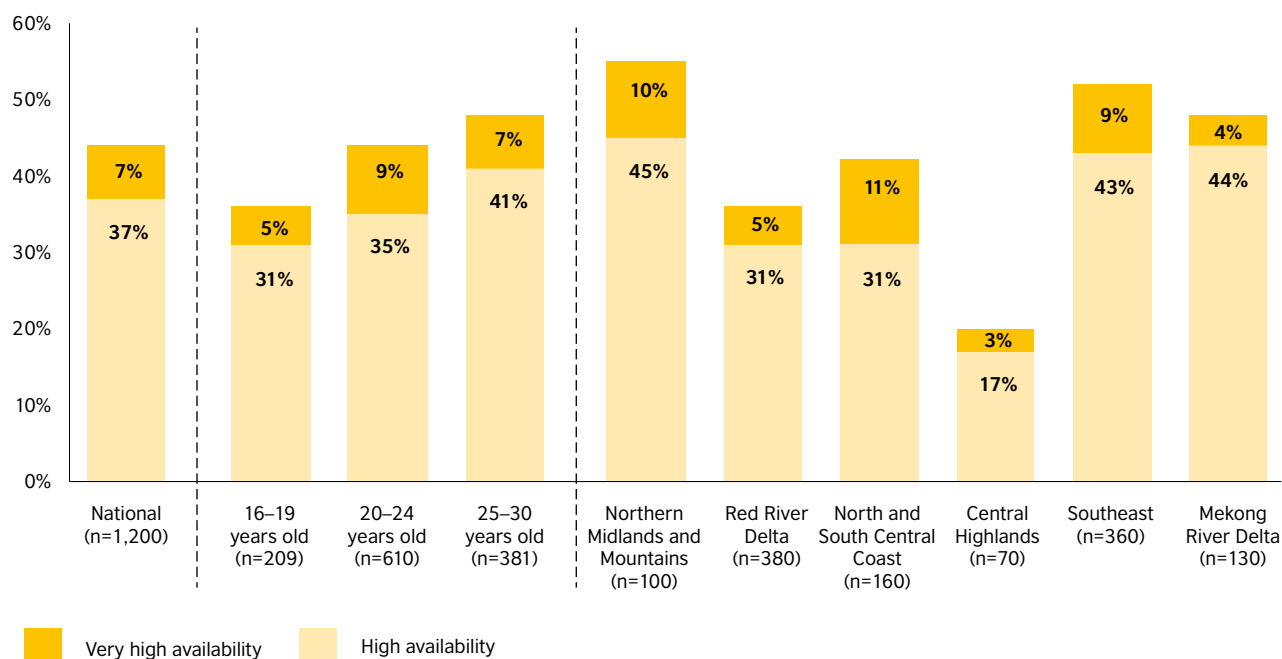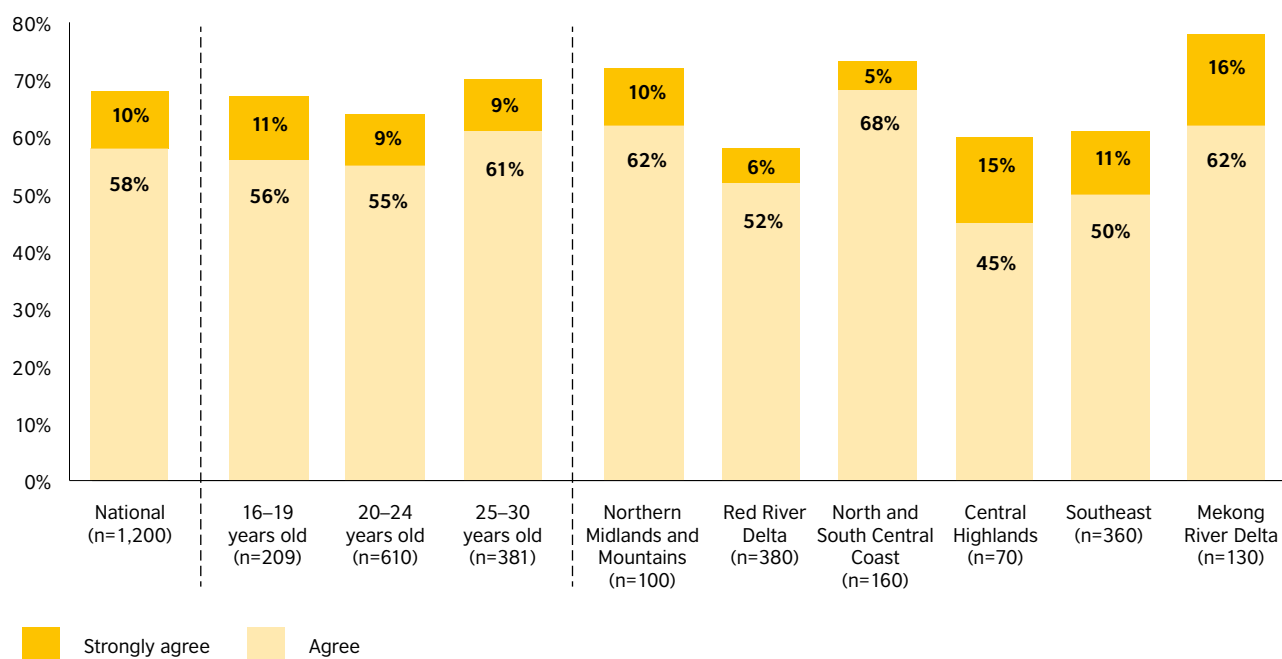

Very high availability　　High availability

Figure 21: Proportion of respondents (by age and region) agreeing with the statement 'people my age have difficulty in finding a suitable job'

Strongly agree　　Agree

Gender in the workplace

As noted previously, when asked in the survey about gender stereotypes and employment, most people, especially those in rural areas, retain gendered biases that some jobs are more suitable to one gender than others. During more in-depth conversations, however, most FGD participants demonstrate a consistent view that women and men can work in any job they like.

[The] social development of women, financially independent, women [can now] decide their own marriage. Once married, women in the past had to stay at home to take care of their families. Now, women also need to work.

FGD female, 20–24 HCMC

However, men's perceived physical aptitude is regularly mentioned as a factor that distinguishes male and female jobs. In FGDs and IDIs, many held that men could do the jobs that are 'more suitable' for women, while it is more challenging for women to do the jobs that are 'more suitable' for men.

Part-time jobs and side gigs

Part-time jobs and side gigs are often pursued by young adults, as financial sustainability and independence are priorities. While feeling pressured to gain employment in the field preferred by their family, for some a side job allows an outlet to explore other fields of employment. It also presents an opportunity to develop soft skills, including communication chops, while also making money on the side. For example, one respondent remarked that 'I'm working in an art gallery, where I can practice communication skills while forming [advancing] my passion for arts' (FGD female, 20–24, Hanoi).

Side jobs for youth might include work in the service industry, e-commerce (as a seller or delivery driver), or, for some lucky few, might be entirely online as for one respondent: I don't like my current job because it is not what I like. I like music. Now, I'm starting to work on a YouTube channel. I want to work in the music industry if possible (FGD female, 20–24, HCMC).

How youth land a job

Over half of the focus group participants reported that family networks and existing relationships had helped them land in their jobs. As family members exert tremendous influence over significant life decisions, often youth are introduced to career opportunities through their parents and extended family. Most of the time, according to FGDs, career opportunities come from family networks and parents' links to the employment sector of choice. Those in FGD seeming not to benefit from family connections noted concerns about nepotistic practices in the workplace. Beyond family, a few seek consultations with trusted teachers when making decisions on their career choices. While not all youth follow their parents or teachers' advice, some follow the advice when they consider other factors like employability or high tuition fees. However, a mismatch of education to career seems to hinder many, according to a youth entrepreneur interviewed for the study.

I believe that those who find difficulty getting employed are those who don't have a specific career orientation… Among [every] ten students I meet, there are nine of them did not know what major they should choose in college or they did not have a serious career path to follow correctly.

Entrepreneur Validation IDI, HCMC

As this generation continues to value close family ties, proximity to their home and working hours are prioritised when choosing a job, especially among young family members. Some prefer to work in a low salary job or jobs that they do not particularly enjoy in order to have time for their family, mostly among lower-skilled youth. Still, for others, cash is king: 'finance affects the decision whether or not you are eligible to study a field you like' (FGD male, An Giang, 20–24).

Current job satisfaction and dream jobs

Job satisfaction is generally high among youth, with over two-thirds (67 per cent) of surveyed respondents reporting satisfaction with their current jobs, with an additional quarter (22 per cent) saying they are very much so. However, this level of satisfaction is strongly associated with socio-economic class, with satisfaction rising from only 36 per cent in class E to 79 per cent in class A (the most affluent strata in the study).

Despite overall satisfaction, nearly half (46 per cent) of employed youth say their first job was a transition job not related to their field of study. For one-third (32 per cent), it was in their field of study, while another one in five (22 per cent) said it was not – yet they were satisfied with the job regardless. Youth with higher education levels are much more likely to have a first job in their field of study (59 per cent) compared with those who graduated secondary school (18 per cent) or who only attended some secondary school or less (19 per cent). A male participant reflected on his experience in a transition job:

I studied IT, but now I'm working in the HR department. I value the experiences I learned from this job significantly but it is not something I want to keep on doing. I still don't know which career path I want to pursue. I can't quit this job that I have because I have to earn a living.

FGD male, 25–30, HCMC

Figure 22: Proportion of respondents (by socio-economic class) reporting being satisfied with their current or most recent job

Very satisfied   Somewhat satisfied
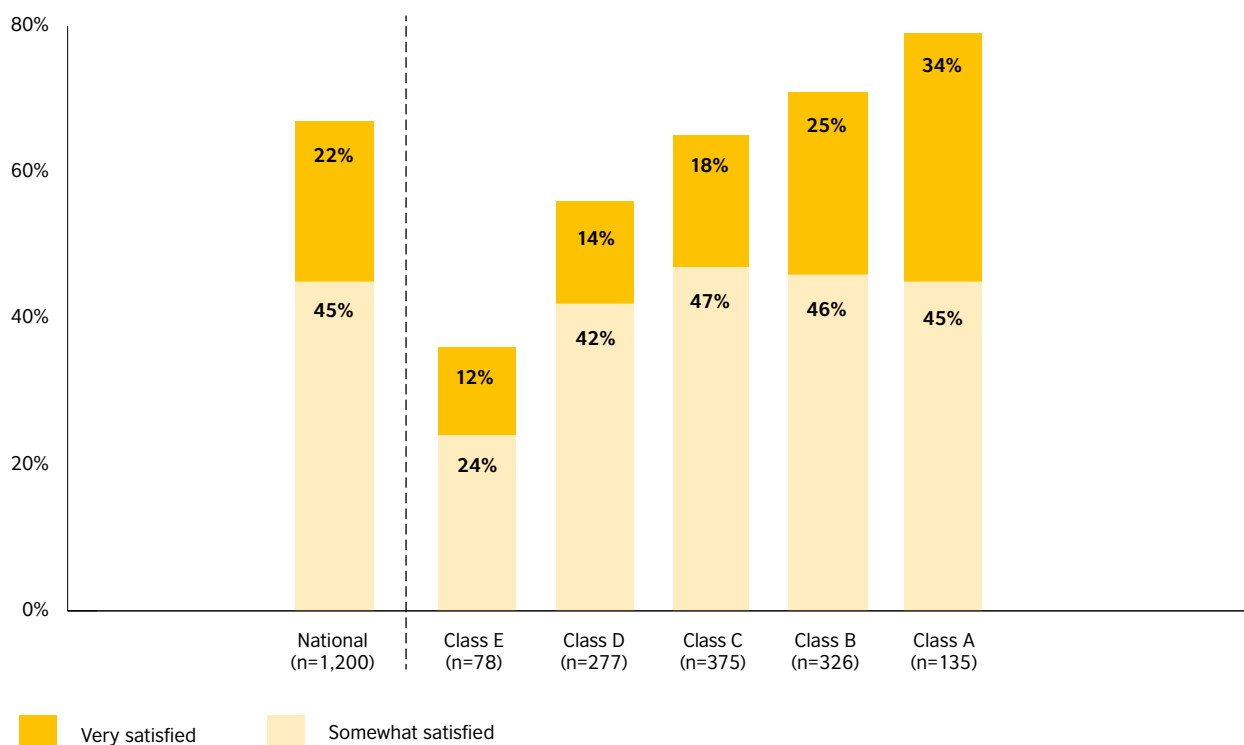
Figure 23: Proportion of respondents (by highest education and region) reporting that their first job was related to their field of study

Yes, it was related to my field of study   No, it was a transition job unrelated to my field of study
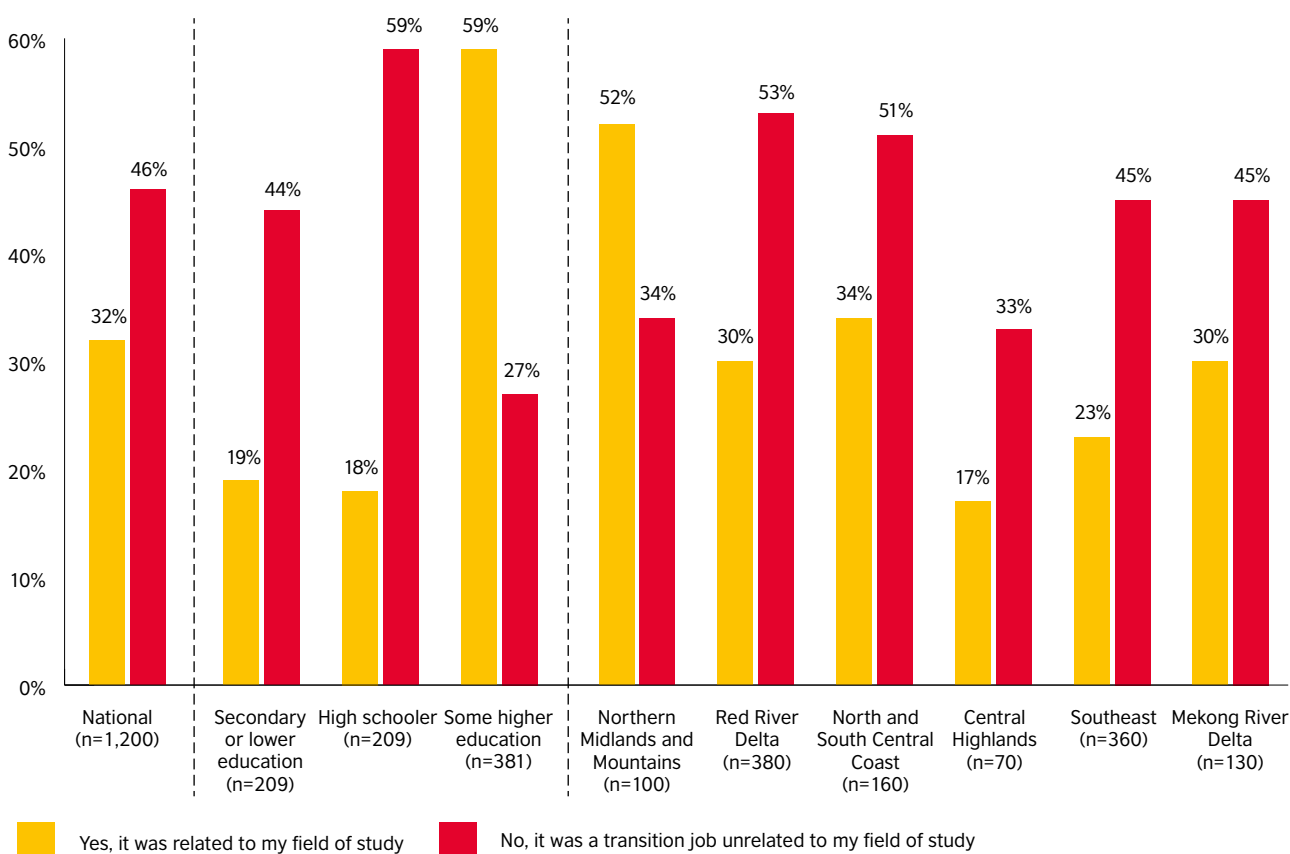
There is a gap between desired jobs among youth and those in which they ultimately work. Comparing the answers of youth who are still students or have not yet found a job with those who are in the workforce reveals some stark differences. The most noticeable: 13 per cent are employed in manufacturing, while only one per cent want to be employed in that industry. Wholesaling represents another industry with a large gap: seven per cent of respondents are

employed there, yet only one per cent wish to be in the sector. FGDs further revealed that those who are currently unsatisfied with their current jobs tend to seek opportunities in jobs that are in line with their education. During validation workshops, respondents in Hanoi noted that 'finding a job is not difficult, but finding a job that's suitable with career orientation is difficult.' At the same time, those in HCMC commented workers are 'quite numerous but they

do not meet the employer's [skill] requirements. [So] they still have difficulties in finding suitable jobs' (Validation FGDs, Hanoi and HCMC). A successful young entrepreneur interviewed for this study felt that the government should upskill teachers to provide better consulting 'at the high school level in choosing a career because it would be too late to choose after they enter colleges' (Entrepreneur Validation IDI, HCMC).

Figure 24: Comparison of survey respondents' current sector employment with their field of study

Current/most recent industry

Industry wish to work in
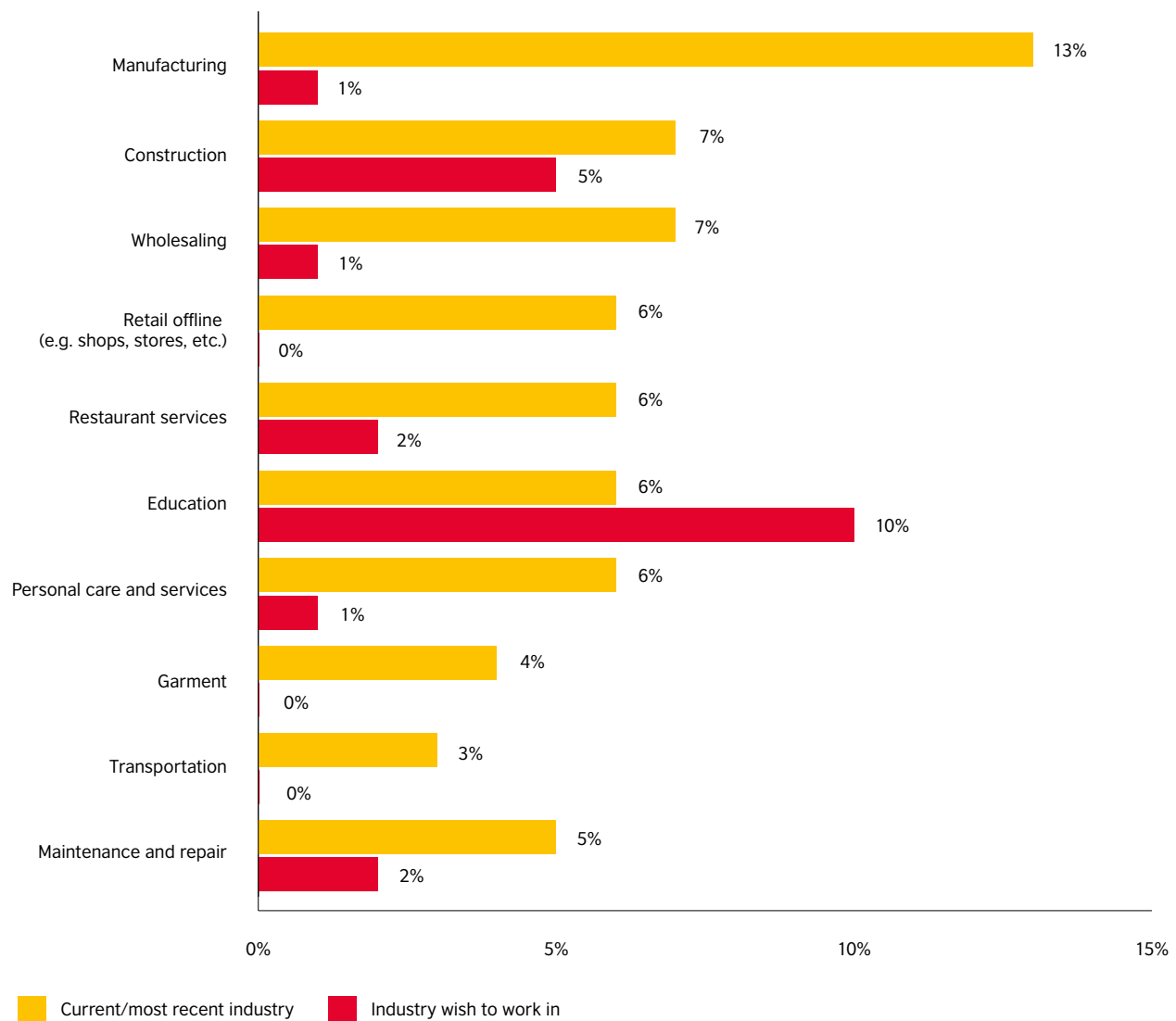
Table 4: Top ten industries (ranked) youth wish to be employed in compared with their current sector of employment (from Next Generation survey)

	Industry wish to work in	Current/most recent industry
Accounting	13%	3%
Education	10%	6%
Other travel services	8%	2%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	8%	1%
Engineering, design, or architecture	7%	3%
Construction	5%	7%
Health or medical services	5%	2%
Business services (e.g. accounting, consulting, advertising, business or market research)	5%	3%
Financial services: banking	4%	1%
Hotels or lodging	3%	2%

When comparing public and private sectors, FGD participants did not express a strong preference for employment in the public sector, which they perceived to be a shift from their parents' generation.

When asked about career advancement and dream jobs, respondents in discussion groups and interviews alike felt they would like to work in professions with a stable, adequate income (ranging from six to 30 million Vietnamese Dong, depending on location) and with excellent benefits (insurance). Others, like people across the world, would like a promotion, to maximise and expand their skills, have a better fit to their passions, promote more creativity in the workplace, and not have as many bureaucratic regulations to cope with. On the latter point, multiple interviews with successful youth entrepreneurs on difficulties with procedure and regulations from the government, both for social enterprises and fully private businesses (Entrepreneur Validation IDIs, Hanoi and HCMC).

A dream job for the next generation means one in line with their studies and passions. Some dream of jobs better suiting their skills, passions, and personalities. For some, being able to do what they are passionate about is more important than working in their field of study. Others mentioned that they would love to work in a field that is relevant to their hobbies or interests: 'if we can do what we love and [are] passionate about I'm sure we'll be able to perform well' (FGD female, 20–24, Nghe An).

For employers, the next generation most values workplaces where they can be active, proactive, and creative. They also want the ability to develop new skills and practice existing skills that could be beneficial for their future. Lastly, they crave a working environment that is safe and friendly, with bosses that treat them fairly, career advancement opportunities, and less intense pressures.

Entrepreneurship and e-commerce

The entrepreneurial spirit thrives in Vietnam. Participants in both quantitative and qualitative portions of this study expressed appetite to start a business, regardless of their background. During interviews and FGDs, respondents prided themselves on the fact that having one's own business offers authority and freedom which cannot be obtained by merely being an employee. Over one-third (37 per cent) of surveyed respondents said they had plans to start their own business eventually, including 20 per cent with plans to do so in the next five years:

I'm dreaming of opening a clothing store. I plan to work at this job for a few years to earn enough money, learn from my boss's business experience, and then later start my own business.

FGD female, 25–30, An Giang

Vietnam's next generation sees entrepreneurship as a way to learn quickly by doing quickly – because they have to do things on their own. In FGDs and IDIs, many noted that they are saving up capital while working as an employee in order to set up a business in the future. Frequently, respondents contemplate dropping out of school to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. Still, while others may be hesitant to start a business due to risks and financial constraints, it remains a desirable option to make a livelihood.

Meanwhile, for respondents with physical disabilities, being an entrepreneur offers them the opportunity to work on their own terms, without the constraints posed by ableist transportation barriers:

I want to set up a small office in my house to do Photoshop work. Because of my physical disability, I want to work at home so that I won't be so tired. But now I don't have enough money or capacity to do so. So [for now] I just keep learning the skill.

IDI male, 24, Yen Bai, physical disability

Vital ventures of interest mentioned by FGDs and IDIs participants include clothing shops, food and beverages, minimarts, and cash crops, including growing cocoa trees. Some in focus groups also viewed online clothing shops as a lucrative industry: 'We all want to have our own business. It might be busy, but we can be their own boss, [be] able to manage our time, learn faster as we have to do things by ourselves, and improve from our personal experiences' (FGD male, 25–30, Nghe An).

Successful start-up entrepreneurs are generally optimistic about a vibrant new start-up scene in Vietnam. In particular, they are excited about 'digital solutions that will surely continue to develop in the future, bringing more values to [our] products and work' and the increasingly flexible employment possibilities offered by new remote work (Entrepreneur Validation IDIs, HCMC and Hanoi).

They also feel that the start-up boom in Vietnam may be dying down in volume – but increasing in quality: 'In the past few years, start-ups have increased drastically, but statistics show that 90 per cent died in the first three years. But from now on, start-ups will go to a deeper [growth] direction rather than booming everywhere' (Entrepreneur Validation IDI, Hanoi).

Figure 25: Proportion of respondents planning to start or interested in starting their own businesses by employment or student status

Yes   No/not sure

Plans to start business (employed) (n=754)

Yes   No/not sure

Interested in starting own business (student) (n=453)
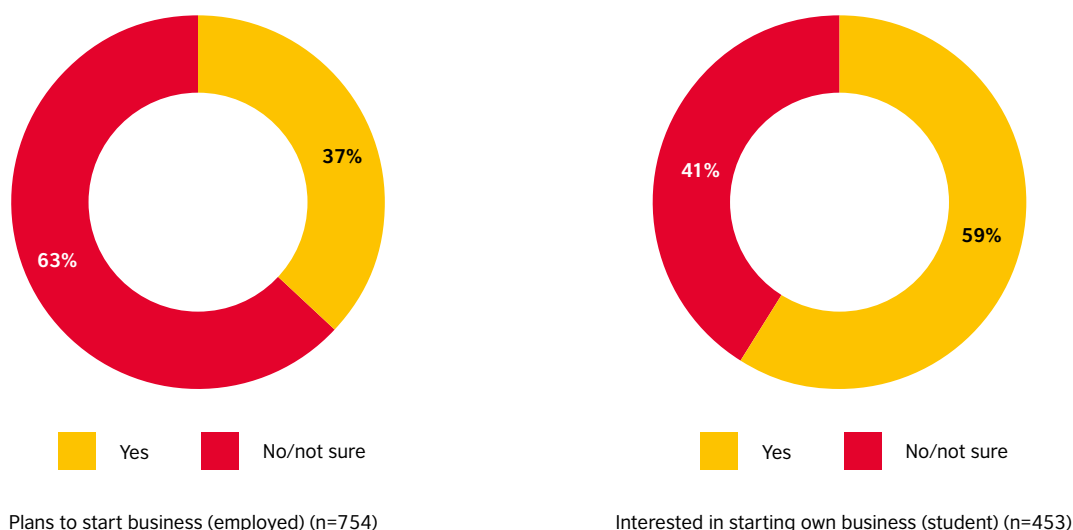
While over one-third (37 per cent) of those currently employed would like to start their own business, among those not currently employed, an impressive 59 per cent said they would be interested in starting their own business in the future. Those with plans to set up a business – and who are currently working – would generally like to do so in restaurant services (17 per cent), wholesaling (17 per cent), offline retail (16 per cent), and personal care services (11 per cent). Those not currently working but who are interested in setting up businesses are intrigued by travel services (13 per cent), agriculture (12 per cent), online retail (ten per cent), and restaurant services (eight per cent).

Challenges faced by entrepreneurs

Successful youth entrepreneurs interviewed for validation purposes presented several key challenges that they have faced in their efforts. Administrative procedures – red tape – poses a barrier for many would-be creators, especially when it comes to reporting taxes. Another female entrepreneur who started a social enterprise with good social aims found no relevant business code to classify her work, leaving her with difficulties to arrange bank accounts and locations for the project. For another, a possible change that could be made by the government would be to issue a 'checklist of what start-ups must do at the beginning so that they have guidelines to follow. This systematic & transparent information would be a guide for [me] and other start-ups to follow and know what they need to do exactly for a start-up' (Entrepreneur Validation IDI, Hanoi). Likewise, multiple entrepreneurs interviewed requested clear guidelines to follow. For example, currently, in the 'tax department, there are many policies to follow up, and each policy has a separate website. When all of them keep changing like this, it takes too much time and effort to study. There were some businesses only aware of the change when they got fined because they did not know they violated new policy' (Entrepreneur Validation IDI, HCMC).

Apart from red tape complaints, capital constraints are the primary concern noted both in validation interviews. For successful entrepreneurs and would-be start-up makers alike: 'I would want to open a clothes shop because I love fashion, but I don't have enough funding to do so' (IDI female, 16, Dak Lak, ethnic minority). For others who were able to launch their businesses, most were able to do so only through raising private capital from friends, family, and their own savings. If formal loans were easier to acquire, entrepreneurs feel they and others like them would have an easier time starting up their businesses.

Why international experience matters

The next generation generally sees international experience as a path to better living standards in the future. In a competitive job market, experience gained abroad is seen as being worth more when returning to Vietnam as it opens opportunities and empowers entrepreneurship. These sentiments are similar to those expressed by advocates of international-style education in Vietnam – a path to better life opportunities. Overseas education, particularly at the tertiary level is in high demand among Vietnamese youth, with an abundance of information available online through media sources (for example, Vietabroader, Trong Duc YouTube, YBOX).

Education overseas

Generally speaking, the next generation is not interested in permanently leaving Vietnam – instead, they want to simply work, study, and gain a comparative advantage to return home. Only about half (49 per cent) of youth feel that one has to move abroad to get a good education. However, nearly three in four (73 per cent) felt that those who do receive education abroad have an advantage in the job market when they return. Women and people in rural areas are more likely to agree that one has to move abroad for a good education than males and urban populations, respectively, likely pointing to structural barriers to high-quality local education:

Studying abroad offers us a dynamic environment, promotes our creativity, exposes us to different cultures, and most importantly, provides us with higher job opportunities when returning to Vietnam.
FGD female, 25–30, An Giang

Undoubtedly, overseas education is not accessible to all. Still, during FGDs, respondents note that studying abroad seems to offer independence and the space to cultivate creativity through practical curricula. Exposure to different cultures, the ability to learn new languages, and to partake in student-oriented and respectful teaching styles offered by overseas education are all appreciated. Western nations such as the USA (70 per cent), the UK (55 per cent), and Australia (43 per cent) are most highly regarded for higher education by surveyed respondents. Conversely, existing British Council research in Vietnam (n.d.) pointed out that overseas graduates may not necessarily have the expected skills on their return to their home country.

Though not based on employment data, according to opinions gathered in this study, those who have graduated overseas tend to have better employment opportunities on their return. One respondent mentioned that there is 'no achievement chasing habit' when studying abroad, unlike in Vietnam (FGD female, 25–30, An Giang). Still, many face barriers to access to education overseas, ranging from financial difficulties to language blocks and racism:

I'm concerned about life in another country. My friend shared that life in another country, without parents and friends near is really hard. Also, racism still happens in Western countries and [is targeted] specifically at Asian people.
FGD male, 16–19, Hanoi

Working abroad

Working abroad is highly valued by the next generation. Four out of ten respondents are very interested in working in another country in either East Asia, such as Japan, China, and Korea (38 per cent), or in a Western country, such as Australia, USA, Canada, and the UK/Europe (42 per cent). Qualitatively, most regard international working experience as a path to advance one's career, including when returning to their hometown. For example, one ethnic minority respondent is 'aiming to move to Japan to work as a mechanic. My high school teachers told me about some students who moved to Japan, and now they have a better future opportunity' (IDI male, 19, Nghe An, ethnic minority). This section is expanded on in the international perceptions portion of the report below.

Figure 26: Proportion of respondents somewhat interested and very interested in working in a different location to their own (n=1,200)

Very interested   Somewhat interested
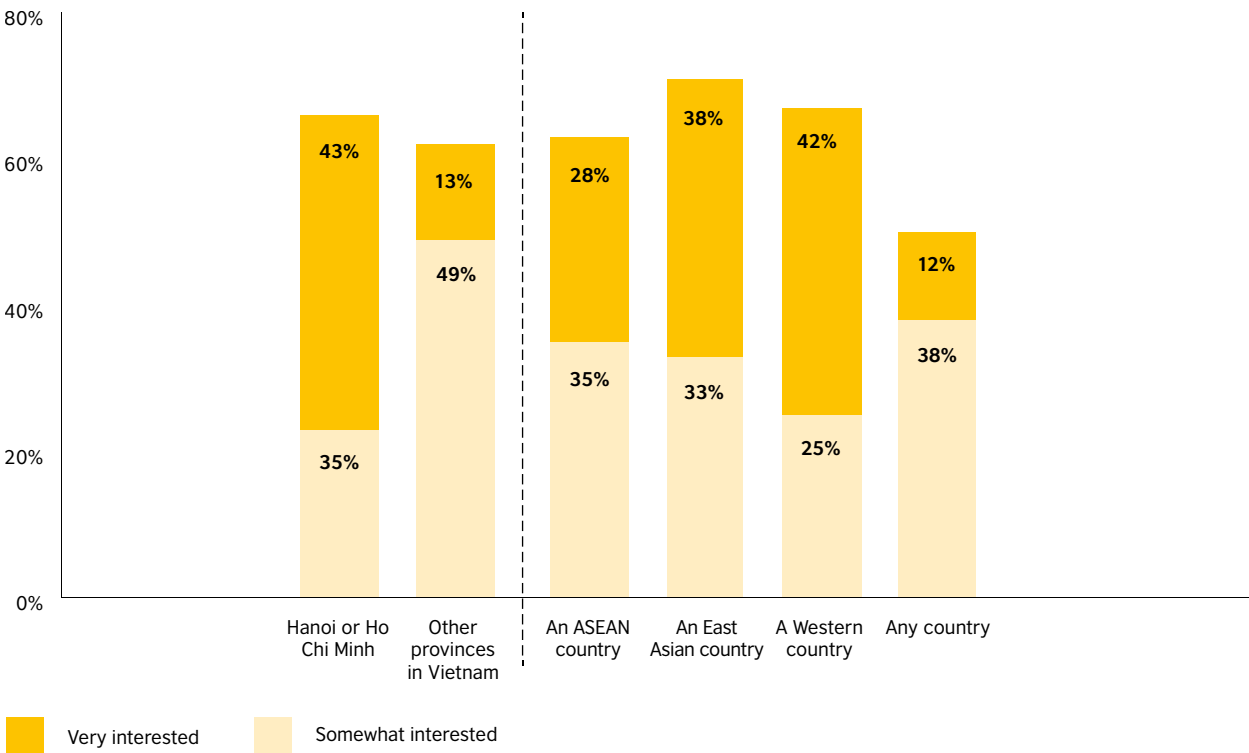
> # Chapter 5:
Vietnam in the world

Figure 27: Proportion of respondents positively associating each country with the following topics (n=1,200)

	Arts and music	Film and TV	Tech and innovation	Science
USA	60%	69%	79%	80%
Korea	47%	61%	49%	47%
UK	37%	51%	36%	40%
China	31%	28%	29%	28%
Japan	24%	22%	20%	23%
France	21%	20%	18%	19%
Australia	12%	7%	17%	10%
Thailand	7%	5%	13%	8%
Singapore	6%	5%	3%	2%
Malaysia	2%	1%	1%	1%
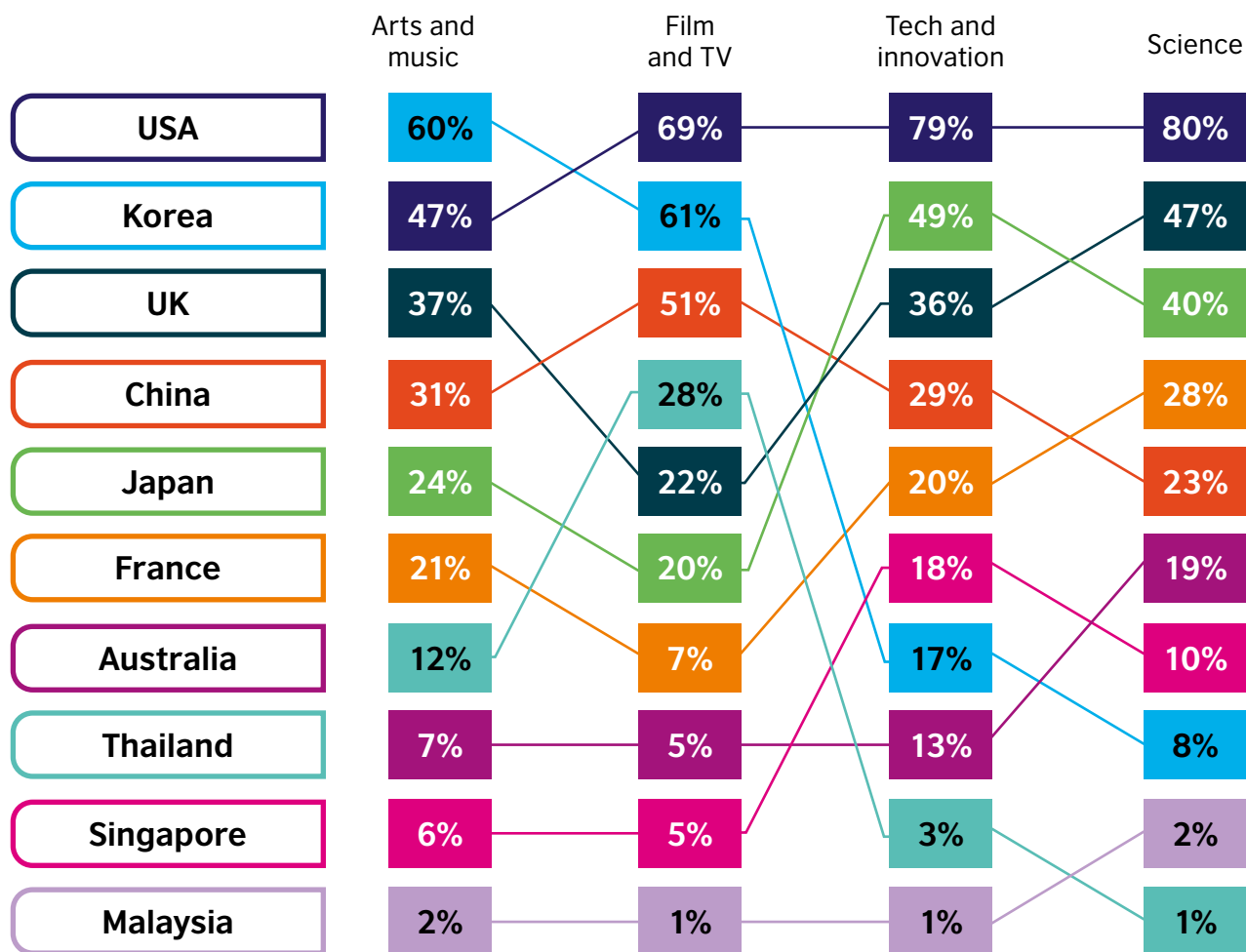
Most of the next generation praise the Vietnamese economy and living conditions for providing safety, a stable political situation, and thriving business opportunities. The focus group respondents take pride in the expansion of its economy, rich and varied cuisine, and a peaceful environment. The proliferation of access to online information has exposed this internet-savvy generation to other countries and cultures. Respondents generally find Western and East Asian countries to be the most attractive - more so than other ASEAN countries, except for Singapore. According to those surveyed. South Korea (82 per cent), Japan (81 per cent), the USA (79 per cent), and the UK (77 per cent) rank as the most overall attractive countries. Living abroad, according to focus group participants, is admired for the potential to have a clean and lush environment, traffic etiquette, social welfare and security, quality public transportation and infrastructure, adequate wages, food safety, and proper healthcare. At the same time, the idea of settling overseas worries this generation, with concerns around potential racism, high crime rates and the use of weapons in some countries.

Figure 28: Proportion of respondents reporting the following countries to be attractive or somewhat attractive to them (n=1,200)

Legend: ■ Attractive ■ Somewhat attractive
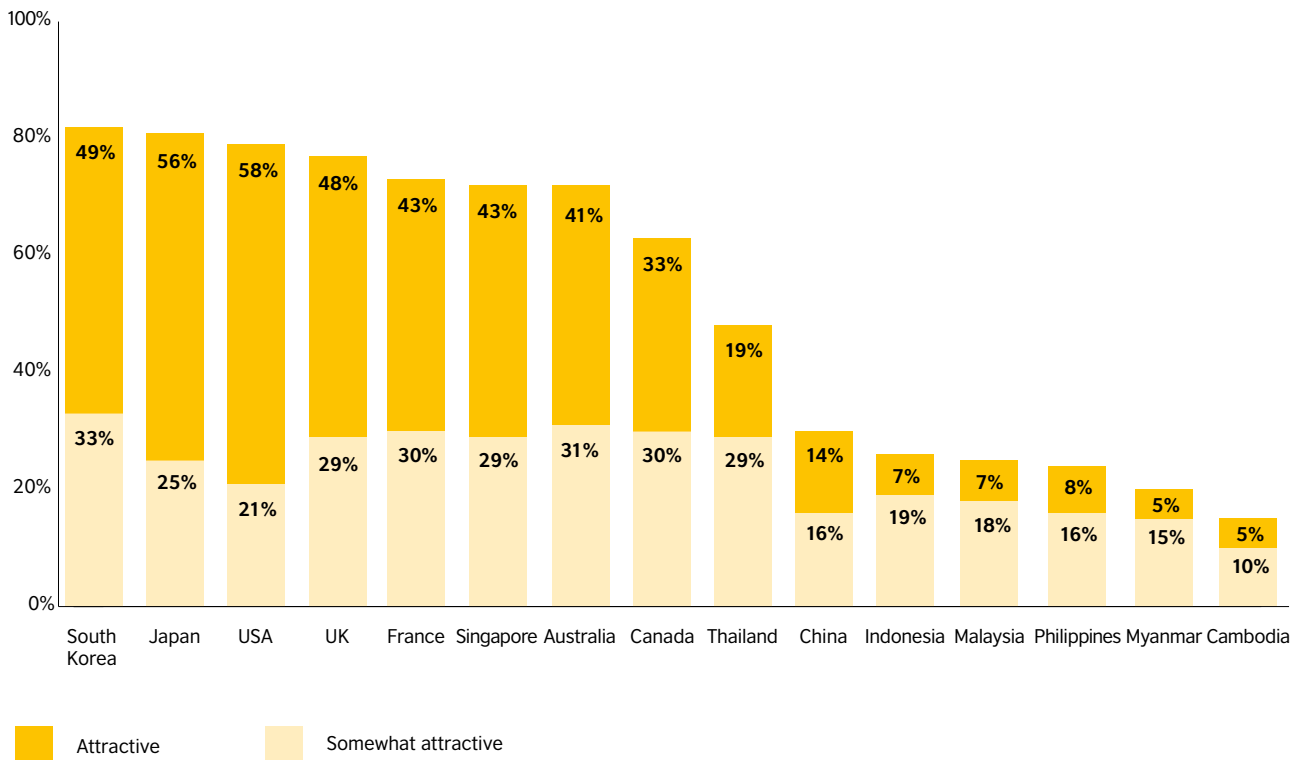
While respondents generally have positive perceptions of Vietnam and are optimistic about the future of their country, young Vietnamese tend to compare themselves to relatively higher-income economies and point out areas they aspire their country to grow in. For example, one FGD respondent still sees that 'Vietnam is a developing country; therefore, it will need to learn a lot from other countries' (FGD male, Nghe An, 16–19). In terms of perceptions of countries that lead the world on various issues, the US leads ranks for technology and innovation (78 per cent) and science (79 per cent), followed by Japan (49 per cent and 39 per cent) and the UK (36 per cent and 46 per cent). For the overall quality of life, the US (62 per cent), Japan (42 per cent) and the UK (39 per cent) rank as top picks. Intriguingly, urban youth have significantly higher opinions of Western countries than do rural respondents. A participant from peri-urban Hanoi commented that 'I would like to live in [more] developed countries like the US, UK, and Singapore. They are so modern and civilised' (FGD female, 16–19, Thanh Tri).

When it comes to education, Western nations such as the USA (70 per cent), the UK (55 per cent), and Australia (43 per cent) are highly regarded for higher education by surveyed respondents. Compared to higher-income economies, young Vietnamese – as evidenced through FGDs – would like their country to be focusing on innovative and practical teaching methods.

Table 5: Ranking based on the percentage of respondents positively associating each country with the following topics (n=1,200)

	USA	Japan	UK	Korea	Singapore	France	Australia	China	Thailand	Malaysia
Average overall rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Higher education	1	4	2	7	6	5	3	8	10	9
Career opportunities	2	1	4	3	7	8	5	6	10	9
Technology and innovation	1	2	3	7	6	5	8	4	9	10
Science	1	3	2	8	7	4	6	5	10	9
Art and music	2	5	3	1	9	6	8	4	7	10
Film and television	1	6	6	2	9	7	8	3	4	10
Overall life quality	1	2	3	6	4	7	5	9	8	10
Safety and security	1	2	4	6	3	5	7	8	9	10
Sports	3	4	1	5	9	2	8	6	7	10
Clean environment	3	2	5	4	1	7	6	10	8	9
Open and welcoming	2	1	5	3	4	8	7	9	6	10

Figure 29: Proportion of respondents who associate different countries with a good quality of life and world-leading technology and innovation (n=1,200)

Country	Quality of life	Technology and innovation
USA	62%	79%
Japan	42%	49%
UK	39%	36%
Singapore	38%	18%
Australia	27%	13%
Korea	24%	17%
France	20%	20%
China	5%	29%
Malaysia	2%	1%

Quality of life   Technology and innovation
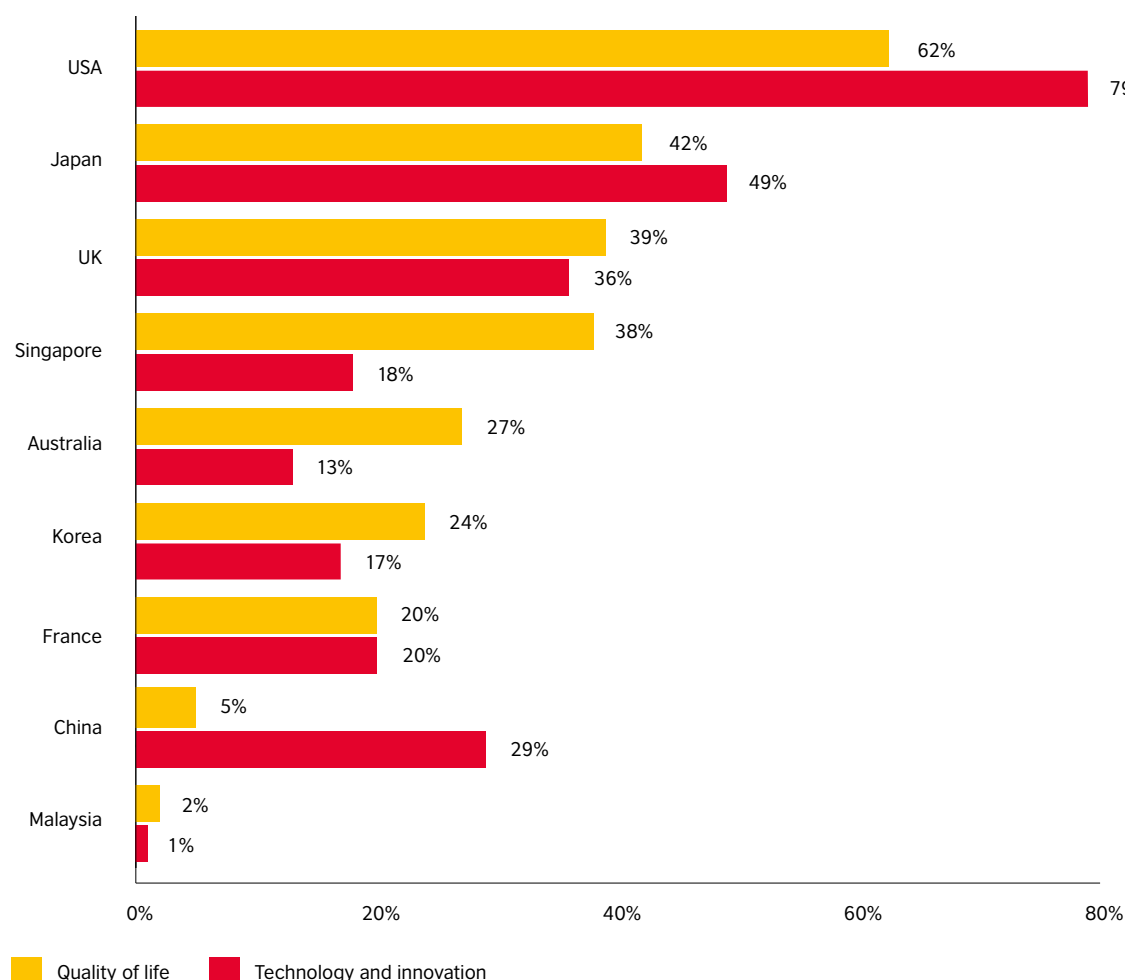
Migration

International experience, as stated elsewhere in this report, is generally seen as a path to better living standards in the future. According to the Department of Overseas Labour, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea lead as primary countries for labour out-migration (as of 2016), while remittance flows from overseas Vietnamese regularly place the country as the tenth highest earner of remittances globally (International Organization for Migration, 2020). Indicatively, IDI respondents with some vocational training are likely to consider relocating for career-related purposes as they perceive international experience would allow them better living standards. Most all still plan to return home; however: 'I plan to learn vocational work in German, and work there for some years to gain experience

and earn money. Then come back to my home village and open my own shop' (IDI male, Nghe An, ethnic minority). Urban youth, according to focus group discussions, also cast an eye abroad for work. Four out of ten respondents were very interested in working in a country in East Asia, such as Japan, China, and Korea (38 per cent) or a Western country, such as Australia, USA, Canada, UK/Europe (42 per cent).

Working abroad is seen as best placed in a few key countries: respondents place Japan (60 per cent), the US (47 per cent) and Korea (43 per cent) as providing the best job opportunities. Discussion group participants valued multicultural environments, soft skills training, competencies-based working environments, a disciplined working style, and better income when thinking about overseas jobs. Many respondents

felt Vietnam's work environment is comparatively stressful, offer lower salaries, and rely heavily on nepotism and personal relationships to gain employment. A rural participant expressed the appetite to work abroad:

I['d] like to work in the US because it is the most developed economy, [with] some states in the US have a lot of Vietnamese [population]. [It] is easy to find job opportunities, and have compatriots to help [and] support at work.

FGD male, An Giang, 20–24

Respondents from the Red River Delta and Southeast, along with urban respondents and those with at least a high school education were more likely to be interested in relocating to another country.

Figure 30: Proportion of youth attributing good education and career opportunities to different countries (n=1,200)

Country	Education	Career opportunities
USA	71%	48%
UK	55%	24%
Australia	44%	21%
Japan	27%	60%
France	25%	10%
Singapore	23%	20%
Korea	12%	44%
China	4%	20%
Malaysia	2%	7%
Thailand	2%	6%
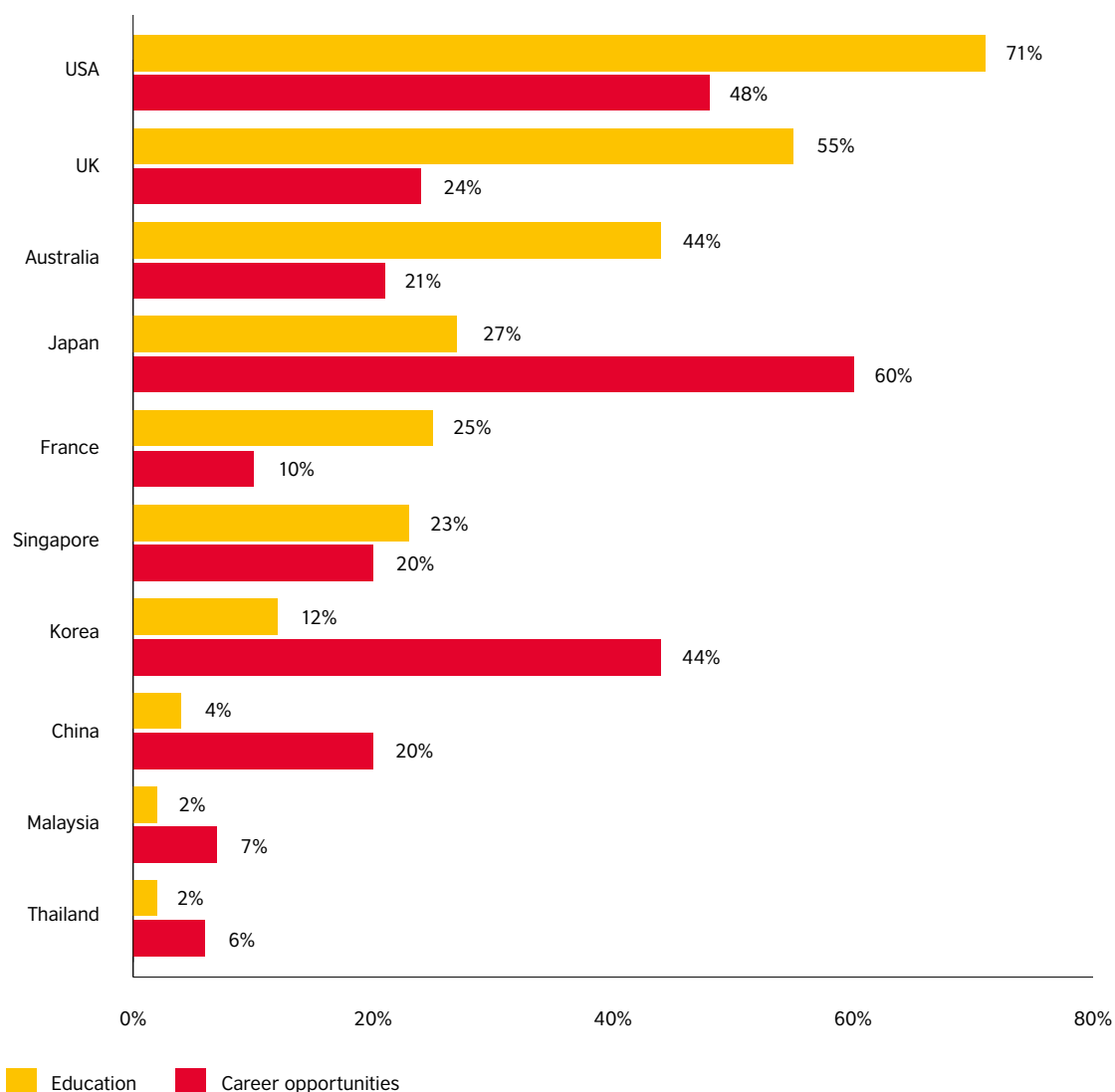
International cultural perceptions

In terms of politics and security, most of the next generation feels proud that Vietnam does not have security threats, such as domestic terrorism, of the sort many countries face. The recent North Korea–United States Hanoi Summit in 2019 also positioned Vietnam as a regionally peaceful and politically stable state. Positive attitudes towards the US and the current sitting president, Donald Trump, abounded in focus group discussions. For one respondent, he is well-received 'because he dares to do what he says because would do

anything for the country, uses his own money to beat…[other countries] and because he is rich' (FGD female, 25–30, peri-urban, HCMC). Meanwhile, the trade war between the US and China is seen by FGD participants to overall benefit Vietnam, given that manufacturing orders are shifting from mainland China to benefit local Vietnamese firms.

When it comes to entertainment and media, the US and UK spring to mind for young Vietnamese, with nearly two-thirds of respondents associating the UK with film/TV (61 per cent) and with arts and music (60 per cent). Two-thirds (69 per cent) prize the US

for its film and television, along with 47 per cent for its art and music. Youth enjoy content from Asian countries, mainly from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Still, for some respondents, there is no face like a familiar one.

I only prefer to watch Vietnamese movies, because the characters are closer, and I feel like I know them. Watching action and foreign movies seem irrelevant to my life.

FGD male, 25–30, Hanoi

Figure 31: Proportion of youth who associate different countries with films/TV and art/music (n=1,200)

Country	Film/TV	Art/Music
USA	69%	47%
Korea	61%	60%
China	51%	31%
Thailand	28%	12%
UK	22%	37%
Japan	20%	24%
France	7%	21%
Australia	5%	7%
Singapore	5%	6%
Malaysia	1%	2%

■ Film/TV   ■ Art/Music
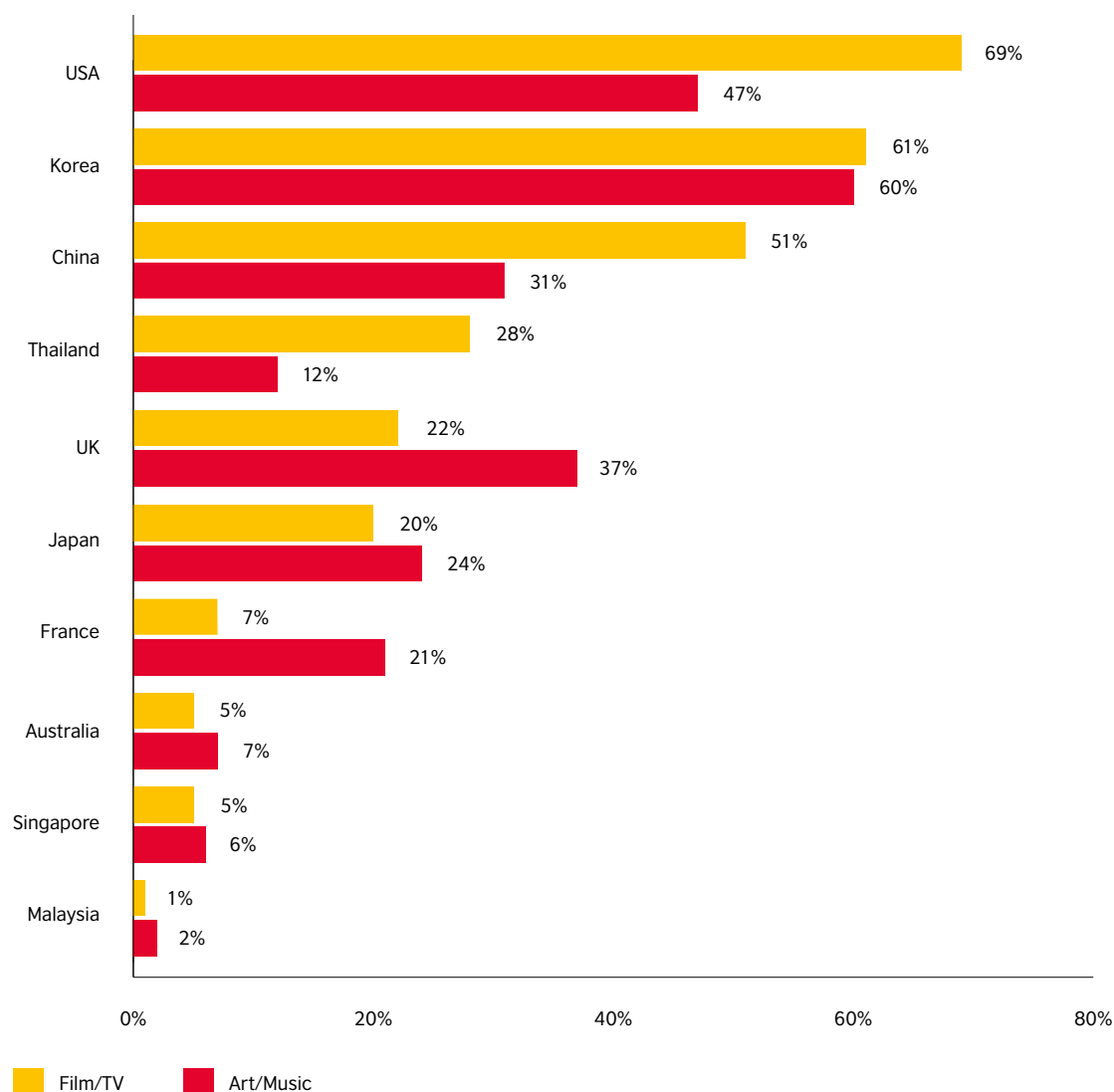
The youth reached through in-depth interviews – including rural respondents and individuals from ethnic minorities – mostly listen to Vietnamese musicians, television content, and films. They also enjoy Western television shows such as *MasterChef*, *The Voice*, and *Got Talent*, along with American and Japanese films. YouTube shows are a hit, ranging from cooking shows to foreign language video tutorials, along with a smattering of television programmes, provide avenues for visual entertainment. Vietnamese youth also consume Western films and television shows, though some participants prefer to avoid subtitled content: 'We can focus and enjoy the content and acting when watching Vietnamese content because we don't have to read the subtitle' (FGD female, 20–24, Nghe An).

Regional affairs

While Vietnamese youth view most countries positively, many noted concerns over expansive pushes by countries in the region. During the FGDs, numerous respondents worried about territorial tensions in the region that could risk undermining Vietnamese national sovereignty. As one participant put it, 'I'm worried about our country losing authority' (FGD male, 25–30, HCMC). When asked through the survey, Next Generation respondents also felt several regional powers were less likely to be associated with safety, security, and high quality of life. In FGDs, meanwhile, respondents pointed to worrying media coverage of foreign conglomerates in Vietnam not following local regulations, especially regarding environmental and food safety issues. These regional concerns underscore a fundamental desire by the next generation to see adherence to international and national legal standards for territorial integrity, environmental safeguards, and consumer safety.

> # Chapter 6:
> ## The future of Vietnam

Seventy-two per cent of survey respondents believe Vietnam will be better off in 15 years than it was before 2019. The next generation of Vietnam feels optimistic, by and large, about the future of their country. Those in rural areas are even more optimistic compared to their city-dwelling kin.

In the future, youth believe that the country will continue to grow as it attracts additional foreign direct investment (FDI). While cheap labour costs may have initially attracted FDI, youth believe that Vietnamese can learn swiftly to take advantage of opportunities to develop technologically. They also believe that the country can continue to take advantage of its geographical location (Youth Entrepreneur Validation IDI, HCMC). The enlargement of the Vietnamese economy does not seem to be in question. Expansion is here, from infrastructure and construction throughout the country to the growth of new sectors in Vietnam, including tech firms, automobile manufacturing (Vinfast), and tourism. For many respondents 'the economy is developing. The country is more modern. [And] education is getting better and improving each day' (FGD female, 25–30, peri-urban, Hanoi).

The next generation is proud of Vietnam's ever-growing tourism sector. They agree that Vietnam is a peaceful country with a 'beautiful landscape [that has not] yet been fully exploited' (FGD female, 20–24, Hanoi). It has a lot to offer when it comes to tourism, including its traditions, history, and diverse, delicious, and affordable cuisine.

Qualitatively, compared with other countries, the younger generation hopes for Vietnam to learn from other states' by focusing on sustaining local talent and the environment while fostering innovation and improving living standards. Adequate benefits, transparency in paperwork, improved corruption prevention, and increased roles in decision-making processes are seen to be crucial to the future of the country by most respondents.

Imagining the future

During final validation workshops as the next generation reflected on the findings of this study, they set a list of goals for Vietnam in 2035.

For the next generation, in an ideal Vietnam during 2035:

1. there are no more impoverished households
2. education for all, including in rural and mountainous areas, is guaranteed
3. people can live a peaceful life, not a chaotic one
4. young people have many opportunities to access and learn advanced technologies
5. infrastructure is impressively modern and accessible by all
6. growth is sustainable for both humans and the environment
7. policies from the state are transparent
8. there are policies to protect workers, human rights, and the natural environment.

Young artist attending FAMLAB Community Music Residency in Gia Lai province.
Photo by Le Xuan Phong

Chapter 7: Priority issues and recommendations

Though optimistic for the future, the younger generation of Vietnamese are well aware of the challenges they and their peers confront in their daily lives – as well as the social issues their country faces. At an individual level, they put great stock in seeking better living conditions, education, and financial stability. While looking at the government and society, they believe that policymakers should prioritise tackling corruption, improving environmental issues, ensuring food safety and quality, and providing excellent education and employment opportunities.

There is an apparent tension between these beliefs and how they might translate into individual actions, especially when the issues concern government or authority figures. Participants in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews indicate that they often distance themselves from macro-level issues and do not see themselves contributing tangibly to many of the issues they raise. Many reached through the qualitative portions of research do not feel empowered to express their voices and be heard in a meaningful way by those in positions of power (Youth Validation FGDs, Hanoi and HCMC).

Figure 32: Importance of issues for respondents and perceptions of the importance of issues for the government to address (n=1,200)

Issue	Importance to respondents	Importance to government
Food security	70%	54%
Stable employment	70%	42%
Adequate living conditions	58%	42%
Clean water and sanitation	58%	36%
Access to higher education	44%	51%
Gender equality	39%	30%
Access to quality healthcare	37%	34%
Access to technology and innovation	26%	35%
Tackling corruption	26%	67%
Clean energy	24%	20%
Equality for ethnic minorities	19%	31%
Peace, justice and having strong institutions	14%	33%
Climate change	14%	25%

■ Importance to respondents   ■ Importance to government

This dichotomy between knowing issues, but feeling powerless to take action to address them, is most recognisable when it comes to corruption – an issue seen again and again across nearly every aspect of this study. Around two in three (67 per cent) of survey respondents placed it as the number one priority for the government – yet less than one in five feel it is a priority issue on an individual level. Similarly, focus group respondents also consistently espoused concerns about corruption. Nonetheless, when asked about what they think they can do about corruption, nearly all felt that they could do precious little. A minority reported that they would try to convince their friends or family to act differently, while most commented on the need to resort to corruption or bribery themselves. They see corruption as something that the government, not individuals, should tackle: 'If I need to bribe, I will bribe the same way people do because it is already a mechanism, we are forced to do so, everyone does it' (FGD male, redacted location). Issues of corruption are examined more in a dedicated section below.

Priority issue caveats

It is also important to point out that, due to dependence on social media as the most trusted information medium and a lack of credible alternatives, the next generation's perceptions of current events may not fully reflect reality. While Vietnamese youngsters are aware of the rapid spread of information and misinformation online, especially negative information, the pervasiveness of social media news may lead to an exaggeration of real-life events. This study, with an explicit focus on opinions and desires, does not thoroughly examine all the issues presented by the next generation in an empirical light:

I have a low level of trust in online information. It can make us have a wrong perception or understanding of specific things or topics. The quick spread of false information also causes difficulties for brands if they are having scandal or issues.
FGD male, 25–30, HCMC

For example, in focus groups, young people reported that 'social evils' are on the rise, especially in the south. These range from criminal acts to drug crime, and to an unspecified decline in morality. However, this perception is strikingly inconsistent with monthly law violations data released by the Ministry of Public Security. In 2019 crime statistics, the trend line is nearly flat across the entire year, apart from a small peak in January (Ministry of Public Security of Vietnam, 2019). Similarly, statistics on environmental violations reveal decreasing incidents, especially towards the end of the year when data collection for this study occurred (ibid.). As highlighted by some participants in interviews, mass opinions are likely profoundly influenced by what youth have seen going viral online, in turn shaping their perception of social reality. [11]

As with most highly media inundated groups, the next generation's perception of the real world may not be consistent with the actual factual patterns. This should be kept in mind while reading the following section on priority issues.

Micro-level priority issues

At an individual level, access to necessities ranks as the top priority for Vietnamese youth. The top five, per nationally representative polling, are:

1. food safety (70 per cent)
2. stable employment (70 per cent)
3. adequate living conditions (58 per cent)
4. clean water and sanitation (58 per cent)
5. access to higher education (44 per cent).

Some gendered dynamics merit comment: women are more likely to prioritise access to health than men. Male youth (31 per cent) and urban (30 per cent) respondents are more likely to prioritise access to technology than females (22 per cent) and rural (24 per cent) respondents. Also, rural respondents have slightly different priorities than urban respondents – though their top five remain the same. Comparatively speaking, rural dwellers are more likely to prioritise access to health, peace, and ethnic minority equality than urban respondents.

When asked the top priorities for the government, respondents felt they were primarily the same as their own – with one major exception. Respondents feel that tackling corruption (67 per cent) is the number one priority issue for the government. The below-expanded sections are listed in reverse order of importance.

School life and access to education

Educational experience undergirds the next generation's identity: 58 per cent of surveyed youth report that education defines their self-identity, following family (80 per cent) and friends (64 per cent). Those with at least some higher education are more likely to attribute their education to their personality compared to those with high school education or less. When asked about issues that are most important to them, nearly half (51 per cent) felt that access to higher education is the most critical issue to them, likely reflecting demographic splits.

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11 > This stands in contrast to, as Karl Popper observed many years ago, the principle of reflexivity: belief by itself, in the case, does not seem to cause society to change.

Figure 33: Proportion saying education is a factor that defines who they are and access to higher education is essential to them

Education is a factor that influences who I am Access to higher education is important to me
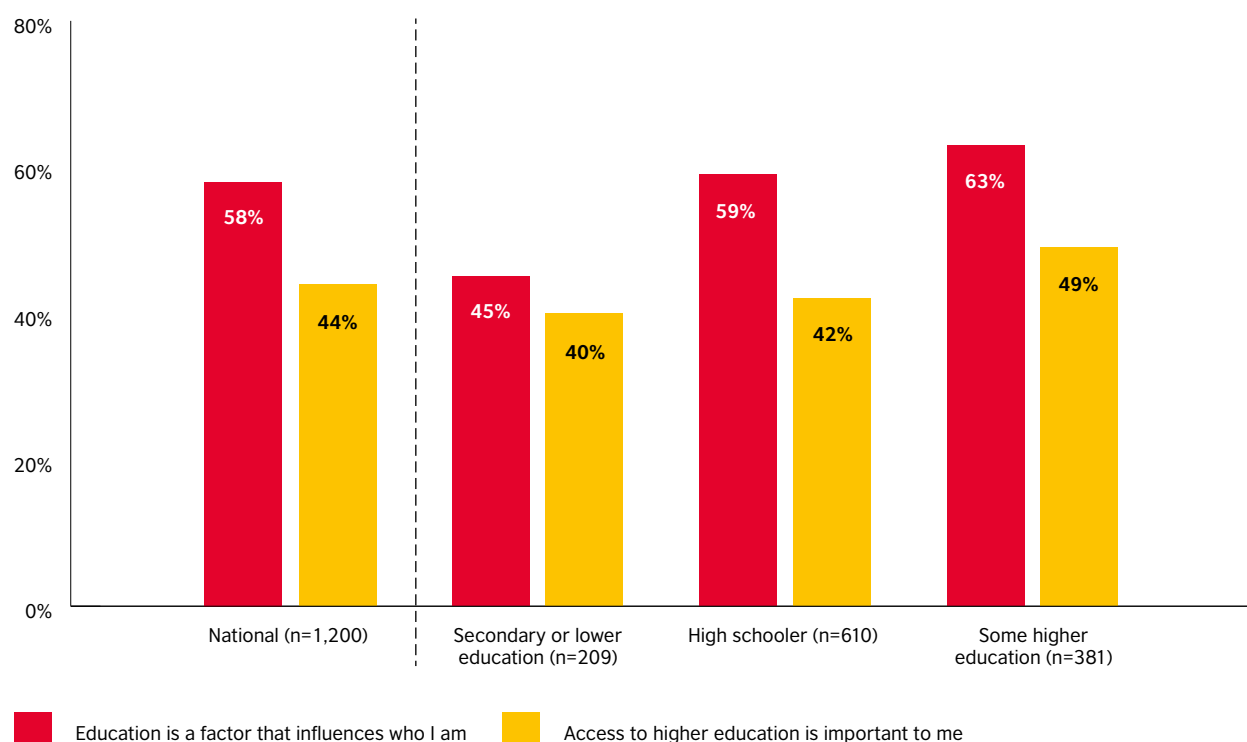
Life at school poses a concern for young Vietnamese, especially those who are closer to school age. Young adults aged between 16 and 19 and 20 and 24 are particularly concerned about teachers' behaviour and how it affects them, as noted in the education section. Focus group respondents reported facing corporal punishment, scolding, and bullying from their teachers. Respondents perceive teachers as holding lacklustre views on teaching, perhaps a reason why they frequently treat students negatively. Those who are still of school age expressed that they feel pressured to perform well in education, pushing them into expensive extra classes, and placing importance on exam scores and class rank. Theoretical curricula and its inapplicability, as spoken to before, hinder many youths from unlocking their

strengths and, for some, what their career paths could be. Meanwhile, during validation FGDs, respondents felt that soft skills training should be offered in school instead of dated subject matter and that students should be allowed to choose subjects that are suitable for them (Youth Validation FGD, HCMC).

Though not representative, individuals in both FGDs and IDIs expressed optimism about the education system in Vietnam. At the same time, many – from students to young employers - expressed concerns over the mismatch between an educational path and career options (Entrepreneur Validation IDI, HCMC). Access to career consultation can be lacking, affecting youth decisions to higher education. Providing earlier career consulting and training for teachers on its benefits could resolve this (Youth Validation FGD, HCMC).

Out-of-school youth face more significant barriers when it comes to their access to education and decisions to return to schooling. Financial means hinder their ability to continue to study or attend extra classes, coupled with problems with teachers. As noted in IDIs with out-of-school youth, several mentioned that bullying by classmates and teachers, even if not physical, can discourage them from studying:

I faced a number of difficulties at school. [One of them was that] I was bullied and discriminated against by my teacher. Students in the class were very divisive too. Those who are smart hang out together [this left]...me with only a few friends who wanted to hang out with.

IDI female, 18, out-of-school, Hanoi

For young Vietnamese people with physical disabilities, physical access to learning spaces remains one of the main challenges for them. Likewise, based on the limited interviews carried out in this study – which did not include individuals with other disabilities, such as mental or cognitive aspects – individuals with physical disabilities would like to see curricula adapted to their unique needs. As it stands, the lack of universal design in educational institutions can pose a barrier to them when accessing education.

Access to healthcare, food and sanitation

Access to necessities – healthcare and safe, healthy food – remains a concern for the younger generation. Food safety (70 per cent), adequate living conditions (58 per cent), and clean water and sanitation (58 per cent) are among the top five highlighted priorities for surveyed respondents across Vietnam. Females are more likely to put importance towards access to health than males. Rural respondents are more likely to prioritise access to health than urban respondents. When asked about challenges, one in three surveyed respondents mentioned access to healthcare as the second most significant challenge they face in life.

FGD participants mentioned that access to healthcare services in Vietnam is not seamless, while the quality of the services provided can be highly variable. Some commented that accessing healthcare services without lengthy procedures entailed resorting to bribes.

Meanwhile, with food at the centre of Vietnamese youth lifestyle, a majority of FGD participants felt that food safety is an alarming issue for them. When asked, many quoted numerous shocking and viral stories of fake food products, additives, and unsafe water supplies. The need to do better when it comes to food regulation and enforcement to provide safe nutrition is clear, as is the need to publicise better practical actions being taken by regulators more clearly:

I think the environment and food safety should be ranked as the most important because they are the situations that are happening now and directly affect our life. Many people die from cancer because the food is injected with chemicals and sprayed with overdosed pesticides.

FGD female, 25–30, Thanh Tri

I'm worried the most about health and sanitation. If we're not healthy, there's no way we can have a good life.

FGD female, 20–24, Nghe An

Financial stability and shelter (housing)

Financial concerns also are top of mind for Vietnamese youth looking into their future. These encompass financial sustainability (56 per cent), being financially independent (56 per cent), and concerns over not being able to pursue the career of their choice (55 per cent). FGD participants reflected that the ability to provide for their families is a particular point of concern for them, along with providing for their parents or, for young parents, their own family. Given that seven in ten (69 per cent) of those surveyed in the next generation have concerns about their ability to provide their children with a good education. Quite a few young individuals in discussion groups disclosed that they are struggling to make ends meet. Chief among their complaints in qualitative discussions across age groups are high tax and inflation rates – though both should be understood as opinions, not empirical fact:

We have witnessed high tax rates and rising inflation, while our wages remain the same. I think the situation would be worse in the next decade.

FGD male, 16–19, An Giang

Figure 34: Proportion (by age, gender and urbanisation) reporting access to healthcare as a top priority for themselves
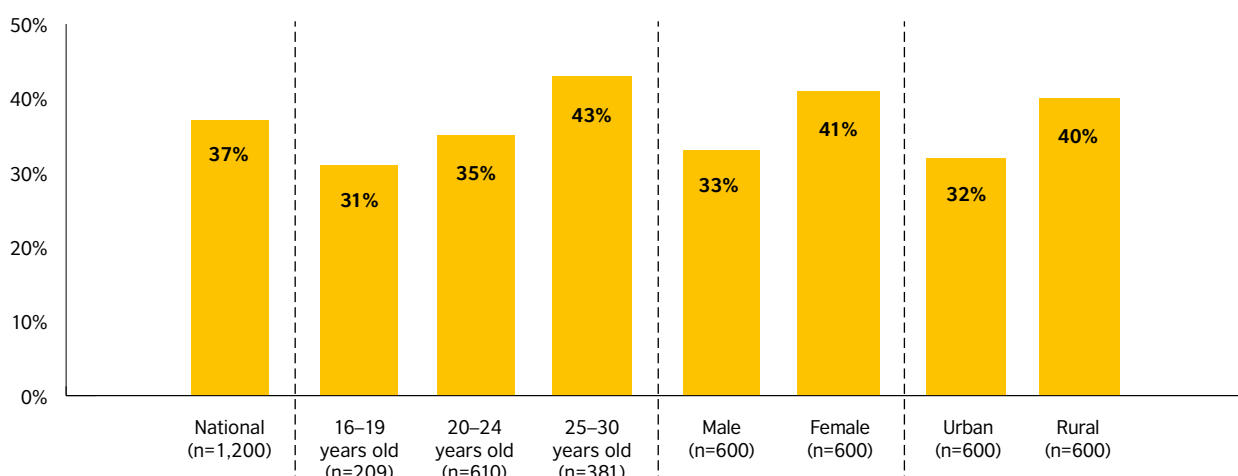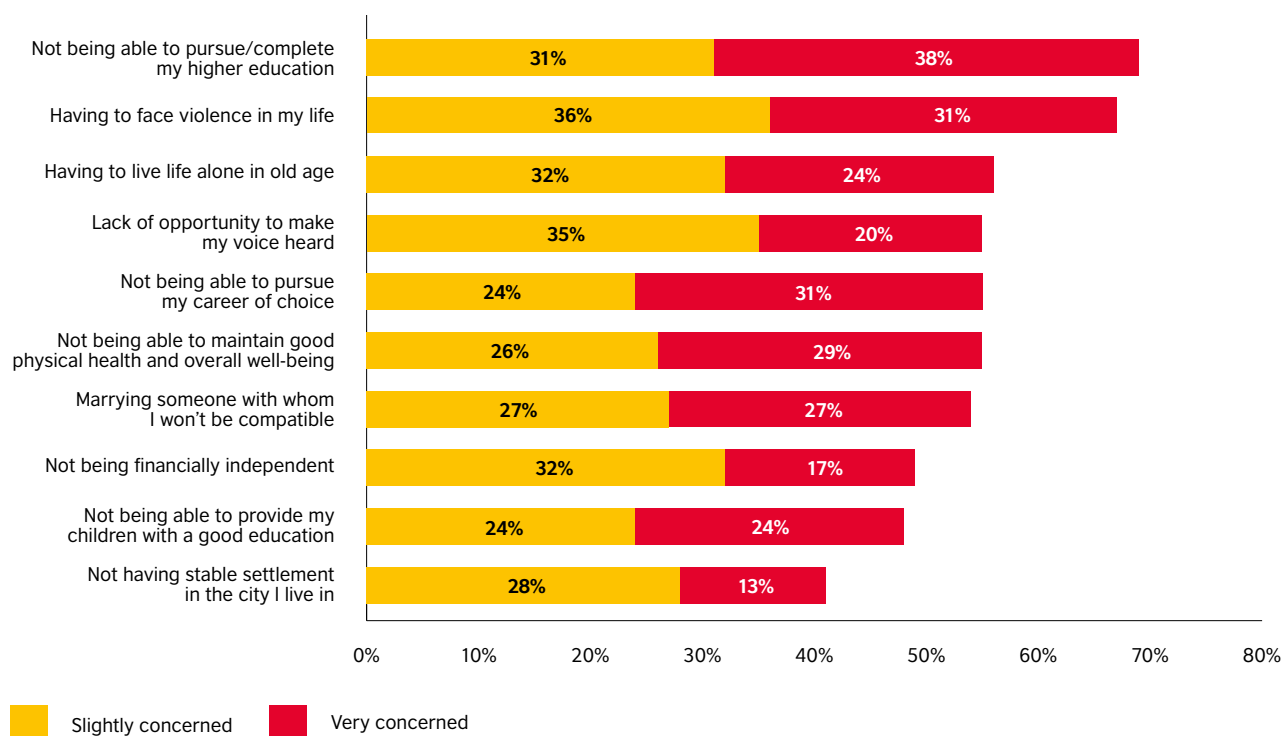
Figure 35: Proportion reporting being slightly concerned or very concerned on the following topics (n=1,200)

Topic	Slightly concerned	Very concerned
Not being able to pursue/complete my higher education	31%	38%
Having to face violence in my life	36%	31%
Having to live life alone in old age	32%	24%
Lack of opportunity to make my voice heard	35%	20%
Not being able to pursue my career of choice	24%	31%
Not being able to maintain good physical health and overall well-being	26%	29%
Marrying someone with whom I won't be compatible	27%	27%
Not being financially independent	32%	17%
Not being able to provide my children with a good education	24%	24%
Not having stable settlement in the city I live in	28%	13%

■ Slightly concerned   ■ Very concerned

In focus group discussions, the younger generation dreamed of jobs that would offer them a stable and adequate salary with appropriate benefits. Some complained that the current salary base is low and pay adjustments cannot keep up with the growing inflation in the country. Moreover, participants noted that some university graduates suffer from underemployment as the labour market becomes increasingly competitive. Lastly, looking at gender and urbanity divides from the national survey, women are more likely to be concerned about financial independence than males. At the same time, rural youth are more concerned about their ability to pursue the career of their choice compared with urban respondents.

Marriage and family

As family stands at the centre of young Vietnamese life, it should come as no surprise that most, when asked, envision being married soon – usually at around 28 years of age. Some reported, in FGDs, to feel the pressure to be financially stable to ensure they can care for their partner and family. For those who are already married, in a plight felt by young couples the world over, pressures from their parents to have children are a genuine life factor.

For LGBTI interviewed youth, while not representative, the desired age for marriage stands higher – at around 30 years old. Respondents share concerns around the difficulty to find a partner within the LGBTI community. While the legal recognition for same-sex marriage is yet to be granted, young LGBTI youth express optimism towards broadening LGBTI acceptance in the country. Having children for LGBTI individuals is not common in Vietnam, however engaged individuals expressed a desire to raise children, whether through adoption or artificial insemination, though they are acutely aware of the associated costs. An LGBTI IDI interviewee commented that '30 years old would be an ideal age for me to get married and have kids with my wife. [I would be] mature enough' (IDI female, 25, LGBTI, HCMC).

Bullying, harassment and abuse

As with young people around the world, exchanging views online, bullying, harassment, social expectation, and mental abuse figure into concerns. Many FGDs respondents are aware of the adverse effects of social media on their mental health, for example, due to body shaming or online bragging. Female Vietnamese in discussion groups expressed worries about social expectations concerning physical appearance and sexual harassment:

I didn't join any university clubs back in university because I was busy earning money to pay for my tuition fee. Also, I was very fat, so I felt self-conscious about my appearance and was afraid to communicate with other people.

FGD female, 25–30, An Giang

Macro-level priority issues

The economy

The next generation has seen a tremendous shift in Vietnamese economic fortunes in their lifetime. According to FGD respondents, they have witnessed a boom in construction, technological advancement across many sectors, and an improved transportation system across Vietnam. International tourism, too, is booming. As a result, young people feel that living standards in Vietnam have greatly improved.

On the flip side, compared to their parents' days, focus group participants reported that they had noticed an increase in inflation rate while wages have been mostly stagnant. This is not consistent with the consumer price index (CPI) growth and monthly average income per capita data from CEIC and the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (CEIC, 2019). Based on statistical data before the period of qualitative data collection during November 2019, CPI growth has remained rather stable (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019). The monthly average income per capita has shown an upward trend over the past decade, nearly tripling in size from 2008 to 2018 (preliminary data). Perceptions are not always fully reality, though macroeconomic data, too, is not always entirely reliable.

As noted elsewhere, most youths agree that Vietnam in recent years has seen an exponential increase in job opportunities and are entrepreneurial in their outlook (Youth Validation FGD, Hanoi). On the other hand, others worry that job opportunities are decreasing because supply is higher than demand, reflecting a competitive market; new graduates do not have all the skills they need for the job market; and salaries remain low on the whole (Youth Validation FGD, HCMC). Similarly, other FGD respondents report that degrees are less valuable than ever due to educational inflation. Concurrently, highly skilled professionals might also migrate to work in other countries, resulting in brain drain.

Successful youth entrepreneurs interviewed for validation purposes presented several key challenges that they have faced in their efforts. Administrative procedures – red tape – pose a barrier for many would-be creators, especially when it comes to reporting taxes. Another female entrepreneur who started a social enterprise with good social aims found no relevant business code to classify her work, leaving her with difficulties to arrange bank accounts and locations for the project. When asked, they offered the below suggestions to fuel their drive to create new enterprises and ideas.

To improve the economy and entrepreneurship, Next Generation respondents suggest:

1. developing a public checklist of what start-ups must do to adhere to administrative procedures from their conception through to implementation

2. improving administrative and taxation guidelines for small businesses and social enterprises, perhaps through a transparent web portal on all policies for taxation

3. assisting with access to capital through formal loans or assistance funds for small businesses and start-ups to facilitate setting up new businesses.

Gender equality

Roughly four in ten (39 per cent) of respondents surveyed prioritise gender equality in the topmost essential priorities for them. Females were more likely to rank this (41 per cent) compared with males (37 per cent). Evidence from discussion groups showed that young Vietnamese take great pride in improved gender equality in the country – reflecting pride in society becoming modernised and open-minded. Among LGBTI individuals interviewed, discrimination is not widely reported, and optimism is the norm for LGBTI community members: 'people these days are more open about relationships between men and women, pre-marital sex, and accepting transgender people.

And sex education [is now to] be taught at schools' (FGD female, Hanoi, 16–19).

Still, sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) emerged as one of the concerns from female focus group participants and in-depth interviews. A group of respondents have witnessed sexual harassment in educational institutions, as well as domestic violence: 'In my school, there was a teacher who sexually harassed a female student. She became pregnant and they have to get married' (FGD female, 25–30, An Giang). Similarly, with other concerns, the use of social media offers a platform for violence survivors to raise their voices and find support. Vietnam has made progress on SGBV, though there is room for improvement.

To help improve gender equality, Next Generation respondents suggest:

1. providing a safe platform for young women to express their ideas where people can be daring and not afraid to speak out bold ideas

2. providing better welfare coverage and shelters for survivors of SGBV

3. enacting policies to provide shelter and care for children of survivors, especially those in shelters.

The environment

Vietnamese youth are acutely aware of environmental issues in their country, with seven in ten survey respondents (69 per cent) reporting that they see themselves contributing to the future of Vietnam through environmentally beneficial contributions.

Changes since their parent's era have brought positive transitions: economic development and increased employment opportunities. Yet these as a double-edged sword when unchecked. Several FGD participants see the depletion of the Vietnamese natural world as a necessary trade-off for the growth of the economy. Others worry about pervasive deforestation, the expansion of a heavily polluting manufacturing sector and the conversion of agricultural land into

factories. Additionally, the ever-growing tourism sector is seen as contributing to environmental degradation.

Some in the next generation view technology as a solution for environmental issues, but others hold that technological advancement cannot keep up with the depletion of the environment. For one, 'environmental pollution increases faster than the level of technology development, so it is difficult to improve the environment' (FGD male, 20–24, An Giang). Also, some FGD respondents noted that Vietnamese people seem to have a low overall awareness of environmental conservation. For them, Vietnam lacks excellent waste management and recycling procedures, as observed by a participant. One participant particularly praised Taiwan as a model for Vietnam to follow when it comes to waste management (FGD male, 25–30, Nghe An).

Interviewed participants from rural areas and ethnic minority backgrounds have an even higher propensity to voice their environmental concerns, as they take intense pride in Vietnam's natural landscape. Given that the livelihoods of rural area respondents are more dependent on ecological wellbeing, short term denudation and land cultivation for intensive crop cycling and industrial deforestation are causing long-term damage for rural area labourers reliant on its ecological resources to sustain their lives.

Nonetheless, it is to note that the logical leap from focused environmental concerns to climate change action is unclear. Seven in ten of those surveyed (69 per cent) wish to contribute to Vietnam's future through environmental affairs. However, only about one in nine (14 per cent) rank climate change among their top five priorities. Still, many in group discussions expressed support for environmental issues and seemed aware of actions they could take towards protecting the environment, such as limiting the use of plastic packaging.

When asked about clean energy and climate action, only 24 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, feel that these issues hold importance. There is a lack of connection between environmental issues that are proximate, such as waste management or pollution, to more considerable climate changes. Female participants from Ho Chi Minh City (16–19) age group agreed that they have not thought of what they can do to help their community. They can only do small things like collecting trash in the alley but are not aware of ways to leverage their action on climate change issues.

When placed into decision-making scenarios, youth in validation workshops suggested the following:

For individuals:

1. limiting the use of plastic material and encouraging people to use materials that are safe for the environment instead

2. planting vegetables at home and shifting to organic foods

3. practising self-awareness in classifying wastes and recyclables as rubbish

4. receiving communication and education support from the government on the above.

For policymakers:

1. investing in clean energy solutions such as electric cars and motorbikes

2. encouraging education campaigns to protect the environment, for example more extensive, nation-wide tree planting campaigns

3. ensuring that wastewater sanitation and environmental regulations are adequately enforced for consumers and businesses alike

4. providing more trash and recycling options for citizens.

Declining community engagement

Vietnamese youth generally feel well-supported by their local communities, yet also feel disconnected from larger, national issues. A majority feel they can access residential community services (71 per cent), information about events and developments in their community (61 per cent), engage in residential community development (56 per cent), and engage in community social activities (65 per cent). Overall, 61 per cent feel their residential community supports them.

This likely plays into the opinion held by over half of surveyed respondents (55 per cent) who see themselves contributing to the future of Vietnam through community development. Male youth and those in rural areas feel more likely to contribute to community development than females and urban respondents.

Though the next generation living in rural areas feel well-supported and engaged in their local communities, urban youth feel less engaged at the community level. Only one-third of urban respondents feel involved in planning and decision making in their community (27 per cent), while only slightly more feel that their opinions are valued in the community (35 per cent). Indicative data from FGDs suggests social bonds between people at the neighbourhood level in cities is less than at other points. Vietnamese are less likely to socialise with their neighbours as lifestyles have changed to more individualistic ones – even in more rural areas. As noted by a male participant from An Giang, 'in the past, the relationship between neighbours was closer and everybody would know what happened with each other. Now due to our busy lives, people only care about their own business' (FGD male, 16–19, An Giang).

Despite moderate engagement in their local communities, participation in community activities such as clubs or organisations is mixed and quite low in urban areas. Half (51 per cent) of respondents stated they participate in clubs or organisations. In urban areas in the Red River Delta (64 per cent) and the Southeast (61 per cent), respondents were most likely not to participate compared to all other regions. Of those who were involved in

social groups, youth groups (24 per cent), sports clubs/leisure organisations (18 per cent), and trade unions (14 per cent) were the most popular. Youth who have at least a high school education and who are at least 20 years old are more likely to be involved with youth groups than younger respondents and those with secondary education or less.

Lack of voice and agency

During FGDs, almost all participants expressed a consensus that they do not feel their voices to be heard by authorities – only by close circles of friends and family, along with their social media friends. Nationwide, survey respondents reported this as a significant concern for the future, with some five in nine (55 per cent) saying they were concerned about the lack of any opportunity to have their voice heard. When it comes to finding a place to express their hardships, young Vietnamese often feel they are too insignificant to have anyone listen to them. Instead of older tools for expression, social media and, to a lesser extent, alternative online media outlets act as the channels utilised by youngsters to voice their thoughts and concerns without any judgement:

We felt heard at school, and in class [but] sometimes we weren't taken seriously. On social media, we can freely talk about anything we want without having to worry about other people's opinions.

FGD male, 16–19, Nghe An

Generally speaking, as mentioned in the last section, youth feel supported by their local communities. However, they do not feel empowered with any decision-making abilities. In order to be heard by society, the youth pointed out in FGDs that one needs to have some authority, a position in society, or money. Everyday youth see themselves having little power to influence society, except through social media and among their close circles of friends and family.

Whenever they encounter or witness social issues, for example, corruption or violence, many report in FGDs that they are inclined to accept it and do not report it – as they do not see a link to influence societal change. Some reported that when they provide feedback to officials, they are 'listened' to, but were not heard. They crave the ability to speak freely about issues seen in society. Moreover, they crave to see tangible actions made in response to their feedback (FGD, 25–30, location redacted).

When asked in validation workshops to provide constructive suggestions, the Next Generation respondents felt that overall public policy opinions should be framed towards the development of society and work to promote ways to allow more people to be heard and valued.

To better listen and provide a voice to them, Next Generation respondents suggest:

1. continuing to create platforms for actualising human rights and creating avenues to listen to more people's voices in policymaking arenas

2. working on efficient methods to support and resolve administrative procedures more rapidly

3. being transparent with policymaking activities and provide more participatory budgeting, especially at local levels.

Limited engagement with political issues

In general, most youth feel disconnected from broader national issues, especially politics. Survey data shows that about three in four (78 per cent) of Vietnamese youth have no engagement with Vietnamese politics, while only seven per cent believe they are somewhat engaged in politics. Only four per cent report having ever engaged in a political discussion through an informal club, while one per cent or less report taking part in other political activities. This overall low engagement with political

issues mirrors previous research (for example, Grinter, 2006, p. 151–165; Valentin, 2007, p. 299–315; HCMCYU, 2012 cited in OECD Development Centre, 2017). The NextGen survey data also shows that only around 24 per cent are engaged in youth groups (with participation declining among older respondents). Only 12 per cent engage with charities, humanitarian societies or similar organisations – and an additional five per cent with community-based organisations (small, local NGOs). Those figures hold steady across all age cohorts.

Meanwhile, some 44 per cent of all surveyed have been a part of the Communist Youth Union. It is worth noting that the percentage reporting having joined the Youth Union at any point *declines* with age, from 51 per cent of 16- to 19-year-olds answering in the affirmative compared with 39 per cent of 25- to 30-year-olds. As might be expected, the percentage reporting having voted at least once increases with age: 62 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds report having voted, while 73 per cent of those between 25 and 30 feel report doing so. These figures are consistent with FGD findings.

I have thought about contributing to my local administration, but I do not think it would work well because anything related to the government is very hard to change.

FGD male, 20–24, location redacted

Consequently, most youths express a desire to keep a distance from politics and civil service. A majority of youth do not see themselves contributing to politics, civil service, nor the army/police. However, youth in rural areas feel closer to policymakers – often through family connects – and view the above much more favourably. Without those connections, most surveyed youth saw themselves contributing to the future of Vietnam through business (77 per cent) – not through formal structures. Again, we see the entrepreneurial spirit among the youth.

Figure 36: Participation in political activities for all ages (n=1,200)

Activity	Percentage
Voted	56%
Joined the Communist Youth Union	44%
None of these	26%
Engage in political discussion through an informal club (e.g. school, university)	4%
Taken an active part in a campaign	1%
Posted political messages on your social media	1%
Joined a political party	1%
Held a political position	1%
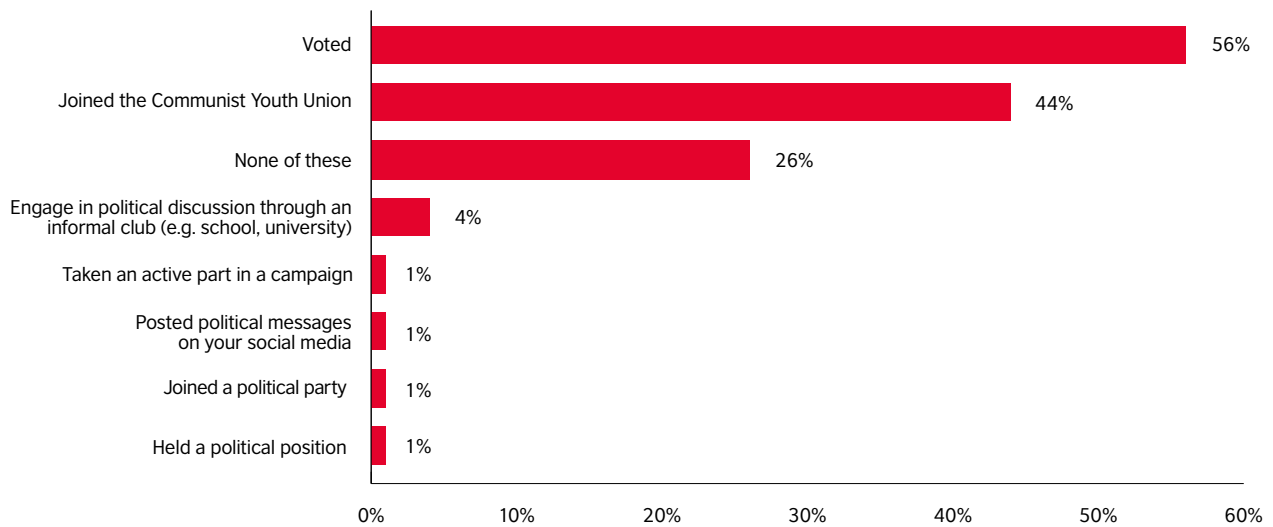
Figure 37: Declining community engagement in some areas (n=1,200)

	Joined the Communist Youth Union	Voted
National (n=1,200)	44%	56%
Secondary or lower education (n=209)	23%	47%
High schooler (n=610)	43%	52%
Some higher education (n=381)	57%	67%
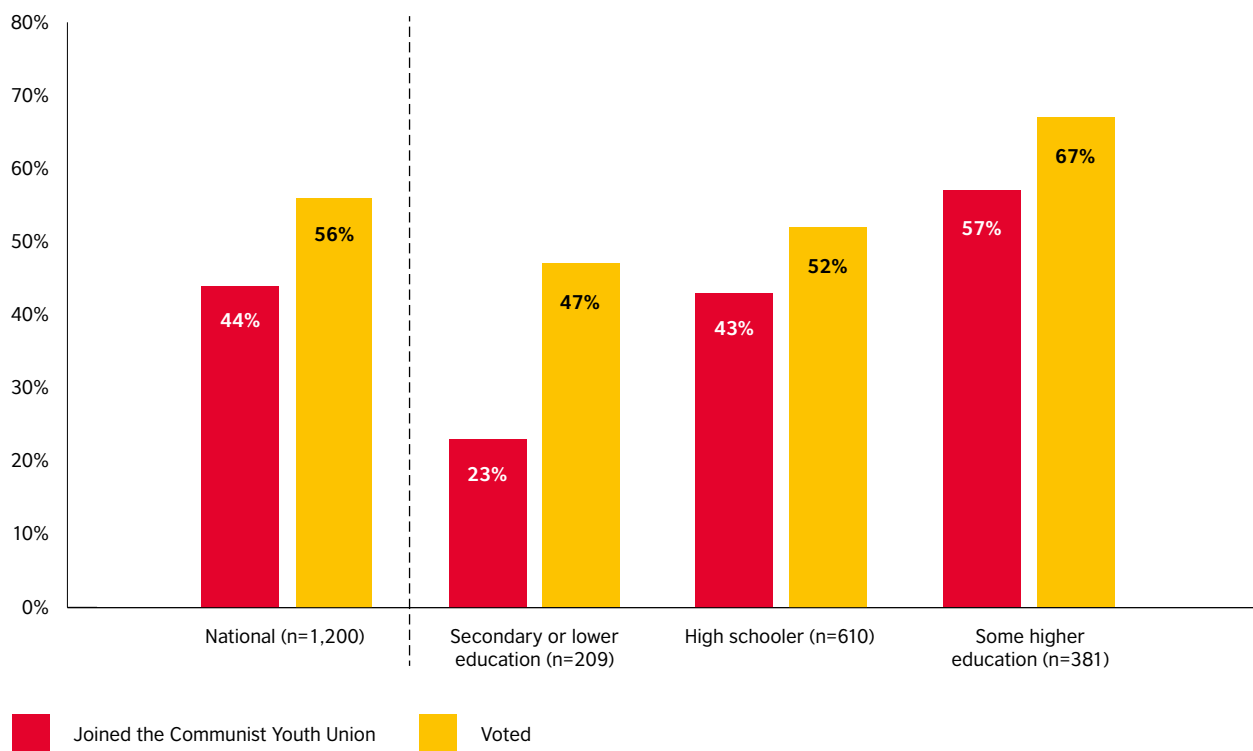
Figure 38: Proportion of youth who feel supported by their communities (n=1,200)

	Likely	Very likely
Environmental affairs	55%	14%
Business	55%	12%
Community development	50%	5%
Research and development	28%	3%
People's assembly	20%	2%
Civil service	20%	2%
Army/military	18%	2%
Civil society/NGOs	17%	2%
Police	10%	1%
National Assembly	8%	2%

■ Likely   ■ Very likely
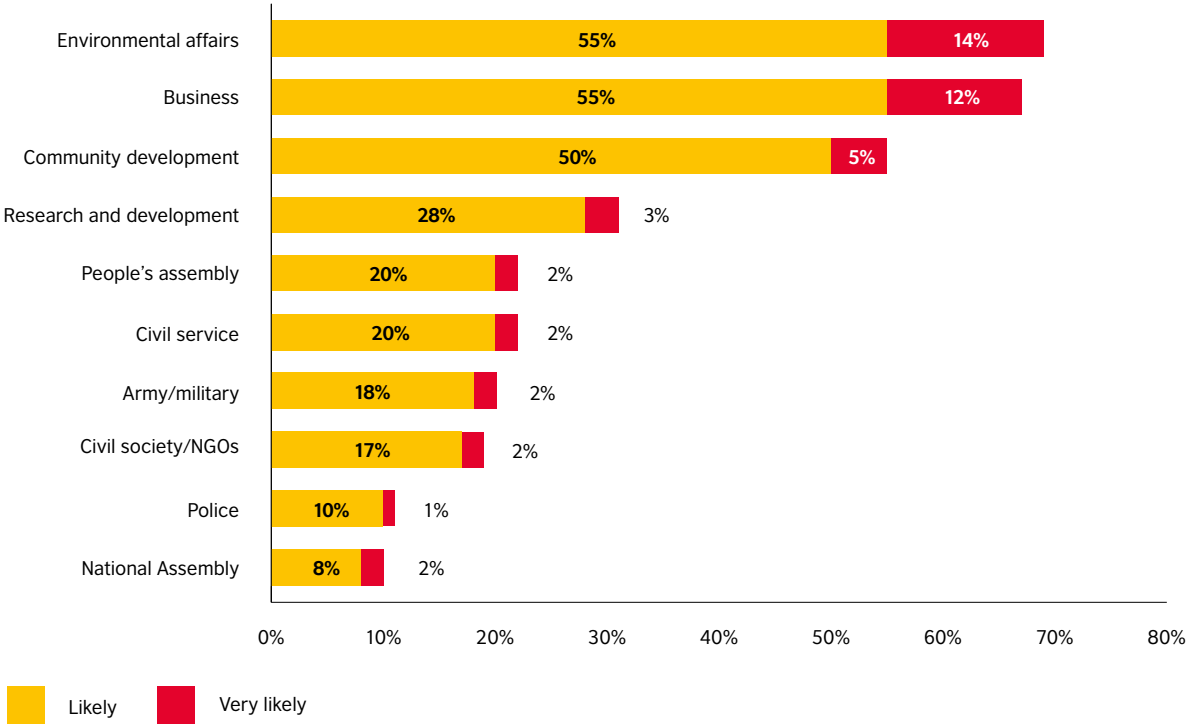
Figure 39: Nationwide responses to 'Which would make the biggest difference in increasing youth participation in political activities?' (n=1,200)

If I could vote on more decisions in my immediate local area	39%
None of these	28%
If I had better knowledge about how politics works	27%
If I could vote on more decisions that affect my city	17%
If there was more information on existing opportunities to get involved	15%
If I could vote on more decisions that affect the whole country	15%
If I could vote on more decisions that affect my province	14%
If there were new ways to engage with politicians	12%

Evidence from FGDs further reflected that those who live in urban and peri-urban areas are more critical of politics. At the same time, for rural youth, the government appears more accessible and valued. As described by a Xinh Mun ethnic minority member from Son La, 'there is a politician who is a representative of our village. We really like and admire him. He is supportive of us villagers' (female IDI respondent).

The perceived future of youth in politics seems unclear. Less than half feel they will have an opportunity to express themselves politically (46 per cent), have their voices heard (49 per cent) or influence the way things are done in Vietnam (46 per cent). While marginalised rural youth are more likely to be engaged in politics due to a higher level of trust towards officials, they also express similar concerns as their urban counterparts when looking into the future:

All of the problems require actions from the government. We are too young and have no position in society. So, there is nothing we can do.

FGD 25–30, peri-urban, HCMC

To increase political engagement, Next Generation respondents suggest:

1. giving the ability to vote on further regulations within their town or commune (39 per cent)

2. receiving more information and education on how politics work in Vietnam (27 per cent).

Perceptions of pervasive corruption

Corruption is the highest macro-level priority for the next generation, with two in three expressing that tackling corruption (67 per cent) is the number one issue facing the government. According to indicative FGDs, corruption persists at nearly every level of

society and affects everyday life, from education to employment; from local administration to central procedures. Compared to their parents' time, youth feel that corruption has worsened significantly. A participant from Ho Chi Minh City put it that 'we are seeing more [corruption]. During our parents' [time] they would corrupt in the dark, but now it is more public' (FGD participant, peri-urban). When dealing with government officials, some respondents found that bribery is essential to bypassing otherwise onerously lengthy administrative procedures. These apply even when accessing routine healthcare services: 'If you do not have money, you would need to wait for everything even at the hospital' (FGD male, 16–19, location redacted).

Engaged youngsters during group discussions also reflected that preferential treatment is pervasive in society. People with high social status in society or those who are well-off financially tend to receive preferential treatment across the country. Respondents feel this is particularly true for those involved in parts of the administration. Additionally, FGD respondents noted that less qualified might be employed in government roles due to connections, worsening the standards against corruption in the country.

While most FGD respondents feel corruption is a national challenge, many would resort to bribery if needed: 'If I need to bribe, I will bribe the same way people do. Because it is already a mechanism, we are forced to do so. Everyone does it' (FGD male, 20–24, location redacted). The younger generation is aware that bribery can get better exam scores or get admitted to individual education institutions. In the employment sector, meanwhile, respondents reported that nepotism plays a significant role when applying

for jobs: 'You must be rich or have a relationship in order to get a job. Otherwise, you can only stay at home and do nothing' (FGD male, 25–30, location redacted).

This generation views government efforts to tackle corruption very favourably. While they do not yet feel empowered to report corruption, based on the discussion groups, they would like to. As it stands, most feel they can express concerns online or too small circles of close relations. The use of social media platforms to voice their concerns on corruption must be done with great caution.

When asked what would make a difference in combating corruption, many mentioned that increased enforcement of anti-corruption rules, as is rolling out now, along with increased official salaries in public sector roles might lessen the pervasive institution of bribery.

When asked what policymakers should do to combat corruption, respondents suggest:

1. increasing enforcement of anti-corruption laws and continuing the government push against corruption

2. raising official salaries in lower-ranking positions in the public sector

3. to make punishments more stringent, perhaps by punishing both people who pay and receive bribes

4. elevating transparent transactions for penalties and fees to ensure that citizens know where the money they paid goes by shifting to receipts and bank card payments

5. cultivating more legal knowledge among citizens, so that when they face such situations, they could advocate better for themselves

6. making the salaries of public officials transparent and public for all to see.

> **Conclusion**

The next generation of youth rightly sees Vietnam as a thriving country, developing while delivering improved living conditions for its citizens. Rural respondents have seen tremendous gains in a short period and remain satisfied with growth. Urbanites, while still enthusiastic, are starting to see more marginal returns from development and wonder what will come next.

On the economic front, Đổi Mới and resultant growth from it has mostly delivered: the next generation benefits from a booming economy with more jobs and diverse occupations. Technological improvements and overall development afford those who have grown up in the past three decades significantly higher salaries compared with their parents. Young people also see positive changes when it comes to gender equality in the workplace and beyond. Nearly two-in-three Vietnamese youth (65 per cent) believe that job opportunities for their cohort have improved over the last five years. Those from ethnic minority backgrounds and rural areas strongly feel that quality of life and livelihoods have improved significantly since their parents' generation.

Meanwhile, an entrepreneurial spirit thrives in Vietnam. Nearly four in ten (37 per cent) respondents to our surveys plan to eventually start their own business - regardless of their socio-economic background. During interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), respondents lauded entrepreneurship as offering authority and freedom unmatched by working for others.

Education, too, is improving. More than three-quarters of those surveyed (77 per cent) across the country feel schooling has improved since previous generations. However, two in three youths (68 per cent) also think people their age have difficulty finding jobs fitting their studies and desired field of employment. This gap underscores a

need to continue retooling school curricula to meet 21st-century demands through teaching skills such as creative communication, critical thinking, and time management.

At the same time, opening Vietnam to the world has led to dramatic societal changes felt by the next generation. Their lives are intensely digitised, interwoven with internet access and social media, the latter of which plays a crucial role in defining identity for around one-third of respondents across Vietnam. For many, life without the internet or social media is unimaginable. As one respondent from Nghe An put it, 'a day [without the internet and social media] would feel like a century' (FGD female, 20–24).

With more information and global exchange, social values are shifting: evidence from discussion groups showed that young Vietnamese take great pride in improved gender equality in the country – and feel excited that society is becoming increasingly modernised and open-minded. When surveyed, four in ten (39 per cent) respondents ranked gender equality among their top five priority issues. Young LGBTI-identifying respondents, too, have also witnessed the public's knowledge and perceptions of them improve tremendously. They are optimistic about their future as the country has lifted a ban on same-sex marriage, despite a lack of legal options for same-sex unions and concerns over a lack of acceptance in conservative rural areas.

The next generation – at least those living in cities – also express a newfound preference for individualistic values, as opposed to collectivist ones. Interestingly, rural respondents do not feel this trend. Whether inculcated by capitalist individuality or simply modernity-induced loneliness – classified as a disease by some psychologists – there is a clear urban–rural divide when it comes to feelings of collectivism and community

(Cacioppo, Cacioppo & Capitanio, 2014). Support for collectivism in rural areas correlates with support for civil service and improved perceptions of government responsiveness, both of which are seen less in urban areas.

Though optimistic for the future, the younger generation of Vietnamese is well aware of the challenges they and their peers confront every day – as well as the social issues their country faces. At an individual level, they put great stock in seeking better living conditions, education, and financial stability. While looking at the government and society, they believe that policymakers should prioritise tackling corruption, improving the protection of the natural environment, ensuring food safety and quality, and providing excellent education and employment opportunities. There is also a widespread dichotomy between having a strong opinion as to which issues matter while perceiving an individual inability to affect change, especially when the issues concern government or authority figures.

Perhaps this is because, while Vietnamese youth feel well-supported by their *local* communities, most interviewees feel disconnected from broader, national issues. Nearly all FGDs respondents find that their voices are not heard by society at large – only by intimate circles of friends and family, along with their followers on social media. In order to be heard by society, they point out, one needs to have a title and authority, prestige of some form, or money. Everyday youth see themselves as having little power to influence society, except, perhaps, through social media and their close friends. They crave the ability to speak openly about issues seen in society: they want to have a voice. Moreover, they want to see tangible actions made in response. They want to be heard.

Suggestions for future research

This research project provided a sweeping overview of an entire generation's experiences. As such, despite attempting to provide insight from less-represented groups, several key caveats would be well served to explore in future research. Namely, these include:

1. an in-depth examination of the 54 ethnic groups inside Vietnam and how members of the next generation among those diverse communities perceive generation change. This should go beyond the groups included in this study (Kinh, H'Mong, Muong, Ede, Xinh Mun, and Thai ethnic community members; along with Muslim and Catholic religious minority respondents)

2. a deep dive of the entrepreneurial drive of the new generation and how to best facilitate supporting the potential mechanisms of social and economic growth it might convey

3. a deeper examination of the specific hopes, dreams, and needs of next generation members with non-physical disabilities

4. enhanced exposition on the policy implications of the topline suggestions in this study, ideally by subject matter experts who could carry on the preliminary suggestions of this study developed by layperson respondents.

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> Appendix 1:
Methodology and approach

The Next Generation Vietnam study employed a diverse range of methodologies and data collection techniques, divided into four phases of data collection and analysis. The central aims of this research are to:

- provide an understanding of the experiences, needs, attitudes and aspirations of young people (age 16 to 30) in Vietnam in 2019
- highlight gaps and opportunities for youth voices to be amplified and engaged by policymakers, as well as examples of best practice
- provide recommendations for how policymakers and other key stakeholder audiences could improve conditions for and engagement with young people.

This Next Generation Vietnam study sought to explore the following key questions:

1. What is the demographic composition of young people (age 16 to 30) in Vietnam?

2. What type of education and work are young people in/ pursuing?

3. What are the motivations for, challenges and experiences of pursuing different types of educational routes and what jobs are available with each?

4. What are the motivations and strategies for pursuing different types of jobs? What are the challenges of different job routes, and why?

5. What are the different types of activities young people pursue outside of education and work? What are the drivers, benefits and associations with different types of activity and who typically engages in these?

6. To what extent do young people actively engage in social, religious or political activities at a community, regional or national level? How are these activities conducted and pursued, and for what purpose?

7. Where are the online and offline spaces that different young people spend time in? For what purpose, who occupies these spaces, how can these be described?

8. Who are the role models and influencers for young people on different topics e.g. health, education, politics etc. How do they differ and why?

9. How would young people describe their relationships with their family and close peers. What are the challenges and benefits of this close network, for young people?

10. Where do young people turn for trusted information on different topics, when, how and why?

11. What are the perceptions of other countries in the region and globally, including the UK, US, Europe, China, ASEAN, and what is Vietnam's place in the world? What are the drivers of these perceptions?

12. What are the ambitions and hopes for the future? And what are the most significant concerns or constraints? How do different people strategise to achieve these ambitions or resolve these challenges?

The approach to answering these questions is broken down into four distinct and consecutive phases, allowing for the research findings to inform the next phase, iteratively, as well as for meaningful stakeholder-engagement throughout.

The first phase involved kick-off meetings, the formation of an advisory steering group, stakeholder interviews (n=20), a comprehensive literature review, and baseline media analysis to lay the foundation for the project and further data collection process with young Vietnamese. The second phase of the methodology is conducting nationally represented face-to-face quantitative surveys with young people throughout the country (n=1,200). The third phase moved into a qualitative approach, including a combination of focus groups discussion with the general youth population and in-depth interviews with young people from unique circumstances who might not have been reached through general sampling. The final phase involved the analysis of collected data and verification of the analysis. Additional validation workshops, youth validation discussion groups, and in-depth interviews with youth entrepreneurs were conducted to validate preliminary findings and shape policy recommendations.

The first phase laid the foundation for the project. The insight gained from this phase is used to fine-tune and shape the focus of the research later on into Phase 2–4 of the project.

Kick-off meeting

To kickstart the research project and refine relevant information, the research team hosted a face-to-face kick-off meeting in Hanoi, including the project director, quantitative research leader, youth policy adviser and fieldwork director.

At this meeting, the following points were discussed and confirmed:

- key points of contact and key stakeholders
- roles and responsibilities within our respective teams
- background and objectives for the project
- any key documentation that can inform the research preparation
- any recommendations for key stakeholders to engage in the research, and preferred approaches to relationship management
- project plan and key meeting dates and deadlines
- any initial concerns or risks
- ongoing file sharing approaches.

Advisory committee consultation

In this phase, engagement with British Council's advisory committee, i.e. taskforce members, was made at the start of the project to refine and advice on the following areas:

- the associated risk of the research and mitigation
- the research methodology and approaches
- quality assurance of the research
- advocacy of the research.

Advisory committee consisted of representatives from policy development organisations and youth leaders and representatives from different backgrounds. The same advisory committee was engaged in Phase 4 of the research, to validate the preliminary research findings.

Stakeholder interviews (n=15)

A series of stakeholder interviews (n=15) were conducted in order to: maximise the understanding of British Council's goals and approaches to the Next Generation survey; gather the expertise and perspectives of key stakeholders in Vietnam's socio-political landscape and youth policy; identify approaches to the research and research dissemination that can optimise the utility of the research.

Working in collaboration with the British Council, the research team developed a bespoke approach to each contact, based on current relationships, and recruited either a face-to-face meeting or phone-based interview.

The research team engaged with stakeholders in the following categories:

- internal British Council stakeholders such as: experts based in Vietnam and/or engaged in youth policy; and those engaged in the Next Generation research globally
- representatives of youth organisations
- Vietnam-based policymakers in key government departments
- local NGOs who work on youth programming
- media and creative industry stakeholders who engage youth audiences.

Literature review

Given the importance of understanding country-level context and sensitivity and the breadth of work that can impact on and therefore engage young people, and the extensive research undertaken already by academia, international organisations, and policymakers among others, the research team conducted an initial literature review and phase of desk research to give context to and inform our lines of questioning for the primary phases of research.

Over 26 pieces of research and publications have been reviewed. The process included internal British Council research or documentation relating to Vietnam, a review of government policy related to young people, including key legal instruments and governance mechanisms, desk research to identify existing or potential quantitative indicators relating for youth participation, and desk research to identify significant 'moments' in the country's recent history that may have influenced and/or engaged young people, among others.

Online and social media analysis

Online and social media analysis was conducted to identify leading online influencers of young people age 16 to 30 and examples of where they may have discussed similar themes, top media publications or platforms that target young people on these topics and dominant topics e.g. particular websites, YouTube channels, etc., top social media discussion groups and the dominant topics of interest, and specific channels that are of interest to particular target groups e.g. ethnic minorities, people with physical disabilities, etc. This is used to inform the research questions and discussion guide and gain the context of young people's online behaviours and interests.

As a result of Phase 1, a quantitative survey was designed and reviewed to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness within the Vietnamese context. A nationally representative face-to-face survey was conducted with 1,200 respondents, age between 16 and 30 years old. This approach ensures rigour and a national representative approach which would otherwise be difficult to achieve using only online recruitment strategies. The respondents were nationally representative of the following indicators; urbanities, age, gender, and household income.

The sample was created using stratified multi-stage sampling, which is a combination of stratified sampling and

multi-stage sampling. Stratified sampling determined quotas based on urban/rural status, age, gender, and income, while multi-stage sampling was applied at the administrative level (region, province, district, etc.) to select respondents. We subdivided the country into six regions equivalent and developed a set of soft quotas to guarantee that every population segment in the country is represented. Due to budgetary and research limitations, within each region, we selected at least two provinces (plus Hanoi and HCMC) to conduct interviews in urban and rural areas. Each region has a minimum of 200 respondents and a minimum of 300 respondents in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The data was later weighted based on Vietnam National Census 2014 to ensure representativeness.

The survey was piloted to assess comprehension of the survey and ensure its correct use throughout the remainder of the fieldwork. The final sample per province, gender, age group, and household income are detailed below. Quantitative data was collected from 26 June to 26 July 2019. Once the survey was ready, the research team conducted training of the fieldwork team, covering the following topics:

- overall project information and its objectives
- team set-up and structure
- the logistical plan and operations day to day
- survey methodology – data collection methodology, quality control methodology and data processing methodology information
- sampling plan, sample household selection and replacement plan
- data delivery formats template development
- survey tools – go through question by question
- mock interviews and role-plays
- specific youth-sensitivity training and correct approach to gaining parent consent
- a project information evaluation test – interviewers need to participate in a small test aimed to reinforce learned skills after the training ends.

Quality control procedures were implemented throughout the fieldwork. These included:

- a daily check on all (100 per cent) interviews on key quality indicators i.e. the GPS, length of interview, interviewer productivity)
- all interviews were sound-recorded via the Survey-To-Go platform
- twenty per cent of interviews were observed physically or listened to via recording file by the field supervisor to confirm the skills and approach of the supervisor
- forty per cent of interviews were monitored in terms of answers to 8–10 crucial questions in the survey. If any errors were found, then interviews were replaced
- thirty per cent of interviews also had a 'post-check' from the team leader, who would call the respondent to validate a couple of key pieces of information, such as their age, gender, profession, whether they received their incentive and whether the interviewer was polite and appropriate. The local supervisor also visited the house if there were any concerns for an in-person conversation with the respondent.

Table A: Province and urbanity quota

No.	Province	Urban	Rural	Total
1	Thai Nguyen	25	25	50
2	Son La	25	25	50
3	Ha Noi	150	150	300
4	Hai Phong	20	20	40
5	Thai Binh	20	20	40
6	Nghe An	50	50	100
7	Đa Nang	30	30	60
8	Dak Lak	35	35	70
9	Ho Chi Minh City	150	150	300
10	Đong Nai	15	15	30
11	Tay Ninh	15	15	30
12	Can Tho	35	35	70
13	An Giang	30	30	60
	Total	600	600	1,200

Table B: Gender and urbanities quota

Gender	Percentage	Urban	Rural	Total
Male	50%	300	300	600
Female	50%	300	300	600
Total	100%	600	600	1,200

Table C: Age group quota

Age group	Percentage	Urban	Rural
16–19	31%	187	186
20–24	35%	206	209
25–30	34%	207	205
Total	100%	600	600

Table D: Household income quota in Vietnam Dong (VND)

Group	Household income	Percentage	Urban	Rural	Total
F	Less than 2,000,000 VND	1%	1	8	9
	2,000,001–3,000,000 VND				
E	3,000,001–5,000,000 VND	7%	40	38	78
D	5,000,001–7,500,000 VND	23%	155	122	277
C	7,500,001–10,000,000 VND	31%	169	206	375
B	10,000,001–15,000,000 VND	27%	166	160	326
A	15,000,001–20,000,000 VND	11%	69	69	135
A1	20,000,001–25,000,000 VND				
A2	25,000,001–30,000,000 VND				
A3	30,000,001–40,000,000 VND				
A4	40,000,001–50,000,000 VND				
A5	50,000,001–60,000,000 VND				
A6	Above 60,000,000 VND				
Total		100%	600	600	1,200

Phase 3: Qualitative approaches

The study adopted two qualitative approaches during this phase: focus group discussions with the general youth population and in-depth interviews with youth with distinctive backgrounds. These approaches allowed the study to gather for rigorous insight, verify verification and contextualisation of the findings from the quantitative phase, and gain more in-depth understanding of the lives of youth in specific circumstances with special backgrounds who were not reached by the quantitative survey and where focus groups did not allow.

All respondents were recruited by a local research partner who could validate the consent forms. Both groups and interviews were moderated by consistent Vietnamese, highly trained moderators with skills in discussing sensitive topics with young people and facilitating group discussions, including in online environments.

Focus groups were conducted in six different locations as follows:

- North: Hanoi (urban)
- North: Hanoi (peri-urban)
- North Central: Nghe An (rural)
- South: Ho Chi Minh City (urban)
- South: Ho Chi Minh City (peri-urban)
- South Central: An Giang (rural only).

Data collection techniques

When conducting research into sensitive topics, with young people and/or in group discussions when there can be some initial shyness, respondents often need hypotheses or stimuli to push against to shape and refine their answers. The following exercises enabled the moderator to go beyond surface-level responses and explore the deeper aspirations and frustrations of young people:

- physical spectrum statement tests where respondents are invited to position themselves along a spectrum of perspectives between two polarising views and explain why they might/might not move from one position to another

- visual media portrayal or narrative examples (from the media or imagined) to assess recall of certain stories about key policy issues or problems that young people face, and their own interpretation of the problem

- frustration or experience shopping trolley sorting exercises based on being aware of certain challenges or potentially have experienced a problem personally

- reference group or 'spheres of influence' tests, i.e. identifying whom respondents would trust for support on certain problems, and defining what would be a normal or acceptable response be it a family member, teacher, peer or media source

- injunctive norm questions types, e.g. 'what would someone from your community think or do if...' type questions allow us to explore what is considered a reference group norm when faced by certain challenges as a young person.

Training

Once the discussion guides were ready, the research team commenced the two-day long training of the two moderators to ensure their understanding of the objectives and qualitative approaches used. The briefing and training included:

- overall project information and its objectives
- the logistical plan and operations day to day
- sample and background on respondents
- transcript formats
- survey tools – go through question by question
- mock interviews and roleplays
- specific youth sensitivity training and correct approach to gaining parent consent.

The research team had observed at least six of the focus groups based in the urban areas, to ensure the guides are working effectively and make changes to the guide as necessary.

Focus group discussions (n=18)

A total of 18 FGDs of six to eight respondents per group were conducted (participant n=approx. 108), including groups in rural locations and with low household income respondents.

The FGD sample is broken down with the following considerations:

- **age:** groups will differ by three age categories to allow for an in-depth discussion about that particular life-stage e.g. education, further education and/or the job market, as well different pressures relating to family, marriage, housing, etc.
- **gender:** FGDs will be homogeneous and evenly numbered between male or female, to allow for a comfortable conversation on gender gaps and discrimination
- **household income:** groups will be separated income levels which differ between urban and peri-urban areas and rural areas.

The detailed breakdowns of FGDs are as follows:

Table E: Detailed breakdown of FGDs (n=20)

Sample:
c. 108 Vietnamese youth population aged 16–30 – 18 focus groups of 6

Quotas:
Sample size: n=108

Gender:
Male = 54 (9 FGDs)

Female = 54 (9 FGDs)

Age:
16–19 years = 36 (6 FGDs) – no university students

20–24 years = 36 (6 FGDs) – including university students

25–30 years = 36 (6 FGDs)

Income:
Urban and peri-urban areas

HI 15,000,000 or higher = 24 (2 FGDs)

MI: 7,500,000–14,999,999 = 36 (4 FGDs)

LI: 0–7,499,999 = 48 (6 FGDs)

Rural areas:
HI: 7,500,000 or higher = 24 (2 FGDs)

MI: 4,500,000–7,499,999 = 36 (2 FGDs)

LI: 0–4,499,999 = 48 (2 FGDs)

Type of school:
For 16–19 years FGDs = soft quota mixture of private and different public school types attended

Locations:
1. North: Hanoi (urban – quận) = 18 (3 FGDs)

2. North: Hanoi (peri-urban – huyện) = 18 (3 FGDs)

3. North central: Nghe An (rural only) = 18 (3 FGDs)

4. South: Ho Chi Minh City (urban – quận) = 18 (3 FGDs)

5. South: Ho Chi Minh City (peri-urban – huyện) = 18 (3 FGDs)

6. South Central: An Giang (rural only) = 18 (3 FGDs)

In-depth interviews (IDIs) with youth with particular backgrounds (n=20)

Twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals in specific circumstances which may make discussing their experiences difficult to discuss in a group context. These included members of ethnic and religious minority groups, the LBGTI community, individuals with physical disabilities, and out-of-school youth – whose backgrounds overlapped with low-income households. The breakdown of the sample is illustrated below:

Table F: FGD distribution by province and age group

	FGDs distribution	16–19	20–24	25–30	Total
North	Hanoi	M-HI	F-HI	M-MI	3
	Hanoi (peri urban)	F-LI	M-LI	F-MI	3
	Nghe An (rural)	M-MI	F-LI	M-LI	3
South	Ho Chi Minh	F-MI	F-HI	M-HI	3
	Ho Chi Minh (peri urban)	M-LI	F-LI	M-MI	3
	An Giang	M-LI	M-MI	F-LI	3
	Total	6	6	6	18

Table G: IDIs distribution by province and youth background

IDIs sample	Ho Chi Minh City – urban	Ho Chi Minh City – peri-urban	Hanoi – urban	Hanoi – peri-urban	Rural areas
LGBTI		1M/1F	1M		
Physical disability				1M	1M (Nghe An)
Out-of-school	1F	1M			1F (An Giang)
Ethnic minority					1M/1F (Dak Lak), 1M/1F (Son La), 1M/1F (An Giang), 2M/1F (Nghe An)
Religious minority	2F				
Low-income households					1M (An Giang)
Total	3	3	1	1	12

Phase 4: Analysis and research validations

After the collection of data in the first three phases, the research team consolidated and analysed the data collected. Analysis of weighted quantitative data was done in SPSS and Tableau, while qualitative data were analysed in NVivo using grounded theory coding based on a priori codes identified during phases one and two.

To validate the preliminary findings, three validations steps have been taken to clarify the findings obtained from the field, ensure the contextual accuracy of the analysis, and shape policy recommendations based on the engaged stakeholders, being the next generation and policymakers in Vietnam.

Validation and feedback from the advisory committee

Consultation with Vietnamese policymakers and stakeholders within the advisory committee members was conducted to present preliminary research findings, obtain the members' perspectives on key findings, and discuss policy recommendations from the members.

Youth validation discussion groups (n=2)

Two additional FGDs were conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to present and verify the preliminary findings found from the quantitative and qualitative phases. The session engaged with the previously engaged participants in FGDs in the qualitative phase, with the exception of one participant in each province. The discussion groups captured the youth's perception of the key findings, policies in place by the government focusing on young people, and their own recommendation of the current policies and challenges faced by their generation.

In-depth interviews with young entrepreneurs (n=4)

Findings from preliminary stages show thriving entrepreneurial spirit among Vietnamese youth, regardless of their profiles. In order to gain comprehensive insights into entrepreneurship among Vietnamese youth, four in-depth interviews were conducted with young Vietnamese entrepreneurs, both from 'street-level' entrepreneurs and highly successful young entrepreneurs.

Preliminary findings were presented to verify the findings. Insights around their experiences as an entrepreneur were also obtained from this stage to contextualise the highly entrepreneurial interests of the next generation and provide inputs specific to the group.

> **Appendix 2:**
Quantitative questionnaire

What follows is the survey summary of questions in English. A full version including response options, skip logic, and translated questions can be provided on request. Please see the introduction page of this report for a contact email address.

Question number	Question
Section 1: Demographics	
D1	What is your age in years/in what year were you born?
D2	What is your gender?
D3	In which province were you born?
D4	What is your relationship status?
D5	Do you have any children?
D6	Would you consider anyone in your household as having a long-term physical disability or mental health problem?
D6.1	If yes, please can you say which of the following physical disability or mental health problem they have experienced long term?
D6.2	If yes, using the following scale, how much would you say their disability or mental health problem affects their day-to-day life?
D7	What is your personal monthly income?
D8	What is your household monthly income?
D9	From the list below, which religion do you actively practice?
D10	What is your ethnicity?
D11	How would you rate your English language skills on the following?
D12	Besides Vietnamese and English, which other languages do you have at least a basic knowledge of (e.g. basic speaking, understanding, reading, and/or writing)?
Section 2: Education and employment	
1	What best describes your current employment status?
2	What is your highest educational attainment up to now?
3	What made you choose your field of study?
Employed/retired/unemployed path	
4A	What is the type of organisation at which you currently work or most recently worked?
5A	In which sector are you currently or were most recently employed?
6A	Do you have any plans to start your own business?
6A.1	If yes, which industry would you like to set it up in?
6A.2	If you are interested in entrepreneurship, how prepared do you feel in terms of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge?
7A	Was your first job in your field of study?
8A	How would you rate your overall job satisfaction of your current or most recent job?

Student path	
4B	What is the type of organisation at which you wish to work?
5B	In which sector do you wish to be employed?
6B	Would you be interested in starting your own business?
6B.1	If yes, which industry would you like to set it up in?
6B.2	If you are interested in entrepreneurship, how prepared do you feel in terms of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge?
Ask all	
9	In which sector are/were your parents or guardians employed?
10	How would you rate the availability of employment opportunities that fit your education and financial needs for you?
11	To what extent do you agree or disagree on the following about education and employment?
12	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?
13	What general skills do you think are most important when it comes to employment?
14	In your opinion, what are some of the main steps that can help address any mismatch between your aspirations and job market realities?
15	Over the last 5 years, job opportunities for young people in Vietnam have
16	In the future, to what extent are you interested in working in…
Section 3: Political and community engagement	
17	Which of the following clubs/organisations are you involved with, if any?
18	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
19	To what extent would you say you are engaged in politics and government?
20	Have you ever done any of the following?
21	Which of the following, if any, would make the biggest difference in increasing your participation in politics…?
22	Through which of the following are you likely or unlikely to see yourself contributing the most to the future of Vietnam?

Section 4: Priorities and future	
23	For the following priorities, please select the top five (5) that you feel are most important to you.
23.1	Please rank the five choices from most important (1) to least important (5)
24	For the following priorities, please select the top five (5) that you feel are most important to the government.
24.1	Please rank the five choices from most important to the government (1) to least important (5)
25	Looking into your future, how concerned or unconcerned are you with the following
26	How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the following future expectations
27	What would you say are the main challenges you face in life?
28	To what extent are you concerned with environmental issues in Vietnam?
29	To what extent are you concerned about the availability of economic opportunities for ethnic minorities in Vietnam?
30	In 15 years from now, Vietnam...
Section 5: General interests and attitudes	
31	What factor influences you/your personality in making you as of today?
32	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:
33	Which of the following do you use as your main source of information on the following topics?
34	How attractive or unattractive do you find the following countries?
35	Different countries are well known for different reasons. On each of these aspects which of these countries have a good reputation?

‘**Next Generation Vietnam made me believe that young people will lead positive growth across the country.**’

Associate Professor Dr Tran Xuan Bach, Vice-Chairman, Vietnam Youth Federation and Secretary, Global Vietnamese Young Scholars Forum

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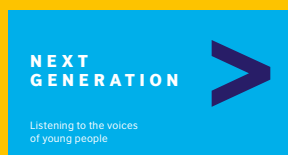
The Next Generation series is part of the British Council's commitment to exploring youth voice and choice. It aims to understand youth attitudes and aspirations, amplify youth voice and support better youth policymaking. The reports focus on young people in countries experiencing a period of significant change, to ensure that young people's voices are heard and their interests represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives.

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