

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ON

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

FROM THE FRED HOLLOWS FOUNDATION IN VIETNAM

The Fred Hollows Foundation in Vietnam (FHFVN) actively engaged in various equity-related initiatives throughout 2024, focusing on improving access to and quality eye care services for underserved and at-risk populations.

Key areas of equity-related work include:

Overall Focus on Equitable Access

- Improving equitable access to and utilisation of quality eye care services for underserved and at-risk populations was a primary strategic objective in 2024. This objective has been integrated into all projects.

Equity and Inclusion Training

- In 2024, the DECMUD project launched Vietnam's first Equity and Inclusion (E&I) training specifically for health staff.
- Titled "Training on Enhancing Access and Utilisation of Eye Care Services for Marginalised Communities," this training was delivered by UNDP experts to key health personnel from district health centres, provincial Departments of Health, and FHFVN staff.
- The training introduced essential concepts such as the four models of disability, disability etiquette, and the Washington Group Questions. Participants reported high satisfaction and committed to developing plans to support marginalised groups.
- Three project team members also participated in a three-day E&I training facilitated by trainers with disabilities, gaining a deep understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised people, especially those with disabilities, in accessing eye care.
- Primary eye care refresher training at the grassroots level, delivered to 1,991 commune and school health staff, village health workers, and social association heads, incorporated principles of equity and inclusion.

Reaching Marginalised Communities

- The District Eye Care Model for Underserved Districts (DECMUD) project specifically aimed to enhance equitable access to quality eye care for marginalised communities.
- The DECMUD project exceeded its outreach target in 2024, serving over 87,000 beneficiaries, with a strong focus on women (64%), ethnic minorities (34%), and people with disability (2.44%).
- This included involving local social groups like Women's Unions, Youth's Unions, and the Association of Older People to bring eye care services closer to their members.
- The project implemented the twin-track approach, combining mainstreaming and targeted activities, which proved effective in reaching hard-to-reach communities, especially those living with disabilities.
- In the coming year, the project plans to deepen collaborations with national institutes like Hanoi Medical University and Ho Chi Minh Eye Hospital to establish frameworks for skill and knowledge transfer, ensuring lasting impact in underserved communities.

Gender Equity

- The country office's programmes achieved significant milestones regarding gender equity, particularly in increased female engagement in eye care services and education.
- In 2024, of the 1,920,576 individuals reached, 55% were women.
- Specifically:
 - 83% of trained community health workers were women.
 - 70% of schoolgirls participated in health education sessions.
 - 60% of women received subsidies for cataract surgeries and other treatments.
 - 54% of trained doctors were female (14 out of 26).
- In the School Eye Health Expansion (SEHE) project, 48% of screened students were girls, 53% of students receiving eye exams were girls, and 52% of students receiving spectacles were girls. Additionally, 50% of students participating in outdoor

activities were girls, and 52% of students participating in the national online eye care contest were girls. 68% of parents engaged in health education events were female.

- In the Quality Enhancement of Refractive Error (RE) Services project, efforts were made to increase the participation of women in training. Women's participation rose from 36% at initial workshops to 50% in RE training for educators and 54% in short RE training courses for optical shops' personnel.
- Gender and other inclusion themes were introduced to project stakeholders during workshops and survey findings sharing sessions. Delegates from provincial Women's Unions attended these workshops and provided input.

Disability Inclusion

- Progress in 2024 reflected a stronger focus on disability inclusion.
- The eye care program significantly expanded its reach to people with disabilities, benefiting 5,567 individuals, a substantial increase from 1,806 in the previous year.
- This progress is attributed to initiatives such as sign language services for deaf children and the use of Washington Group Questions in community activities, which improved identification and support. The Washington Group Questions were introduced and applied in major events, although challenges arose in large-scale events, prompting plans to consult experts for feasible solutions. The project plans to apply the Washington Group Questions on Disability to collect information on participants with disabilities.
- Collaboration with the People with Disabilities Organization and other local associations proved effective in reaching vulnerable populations. Delegates from Organisations of People with Disabilities attended workshops and shared valuable ideas.
- Specific results include 1,060 students with disabilities (38% girls) receiving eye screening, exams, and health education through sign language videos. As a result, 200 students (58% girls) received free spectacles through the project.
- The DECMUD project reached 2.44% of people with disabilities in 2024, compared to less than 1% in the previous year.
- The first-ever equity and inclusion training in Vietnam included concepts like the four models of disability and disability etiquette.

- Initial RE care materials included a booklet to guide RE examinations for Deaf patients, designed and reviewed by eye doctors and Deaf individuals. The demo package on communication with Deaf patients will be reviewed for effectiveness before mass production.
- Crucial documentation related to disability was developed in 2024, including training materials on equity and inclusion and a GAPSED+ analysis tailored to Vietnam, providing guidance for addressing disability-related disparities.

Ethnic Minorities

- The DECMUD project specifically targeted remote and mountainous areas where ethnic minority populations reside.
- In 2024, ethnic minorities comprised 34% of the total beneficiaries (30,200 individuals), closely aligning with the general ethnic minority population rate of 35%.
- Key to reaching ethnic minorities was the contextualisation of services using local languages, respecting cultural traditions and traditional clothing, and involving local people in project activities. These tailored approaches overcame barriers to access and led to increased participation and improved outcomes.
- The SEHE project provided eye screening, medical eye exams, and education to 4,624 students from ethnic and remote communities (47% girls). Consequently, 342 free spectacles were distributed to these students (58% girls).
- MOET issued a decision to allocate funds for the development, training, and education on eye care in ethnic and disadvantaged districts and communities in Vietnam.

Other Equity Domains / Underserved Populations

- The DECMUD project focused on underserved districts. The completion of clinical and sub-clinical training ensured the establishment of qualified eye care teams across multiple districts, directly benefiting underserved populations.
- The resumption of cataract operations in Dak Nong province at the provincial general hospital addressed a long-standing backlog, contributing to a seamless referral process for patients from primary eye care levels.
- The opening of new optical shops in Dak Nong enhances local access to quality refraction services for locals.

- Refresher training incorporating equity and inclusion was delivered at the grassroots level to increase accessibility for underserved communities.
- The services established at 9 districts in remote areas of Hoa Binh, Ben Tre, and Dak Nong improved access for locals and reduced their out-of-pocket expenses.
- In the coming year, the Quality Enhancement for Refractive Error Service project plans to conduct more direct community activities to improve equitable access and quality RE services for underserved and at-risk populations. This will include providing services to organisations of people with disabilities, female factory workers, and school students.

Overall, The Foundation in Vietnam has a strong commitment to advancing equity and inclusion across the projects in 2024 and beyond, with significant efforts made in training, targeted outreach, collaboration with relevant organisations, and tailoring services to meet the needs of specific vulnerable groups.

End of report./.