

Review

## Evaluating the social welfare model of Vietnam: An introductory overview

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**Abstract:** The focus of this article is on the social welfare model of Vietnam in an evaluative manner, with the aim of introducing this system to researchers and academics. It is argued that the right to social welfare is a fundamental human right as prescribed by the United Nations and Article 34 of the Constitution of Vietnam. Against this backdrop, this article first provides an overview of the current social welfare model in Vietnam, with a particular focus on domestic legislation. Fundamentally, it is noted that this system is based on four pillars: employment, income, and poverty reduction; social insurance; social assistance for individuals in exceptionally difficult situations; and guaranteeing a minimum level of access to certain basic social services. Secondly, the article evaluates the ways in which the government plans to improve this system based on their outlook for 2021–2030. This is fashioned on five pillars, namely: 1) the labor market, employment and income, supply and demand, infrastructure and projections for the labor market, labor market data, and employment services; 2) social insurance, encompassing mandatory, supplemental, and elective plans; 3) social assistance, encompassing emergency and ongoing help as well as social care; 4) a social welfare floor with a “basket” of necessities; and 5) expert social work for social welfare. Finally, the article underlines the way forward for Vietnam to materialise the aim of ameliorating their social welfare system through human rights and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Vietnam; social welfare; human rights; development; legislations; human rights-based approach

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## 1. Introduction

One of the fundamental human rights, included in the category of economic, social, and cultural rights, is the right to social welfare. The national rules that form the social welfare system are enforced by public authorities. Viet Nam has developed and improved its social welfare law system in accordance with a philosophy based on human rights and sustainable development because it is fully aware of the significance of these rights to national stability and growth.

According to the 1948 United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, “everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social welfare and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of the economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality” (Article 22). This is one of the most fundamental human rights. Applying standards as the foundation for evaluating anticipated outcomes and embracing principles as the prerequisites and structure for the path of action toward the outcomes characterizes the human rights-based approach to social welfare [1]. This approach is different from the conventional one in that it emphasizes the methods used to attain the desired goals in addition to the results themselves [2]. In addition, it is assessed using the framework of a social welfare system.

A number of human rights principles have been introduced and implemented by the UN to protect people's rights to social welfare [3]. These principles include: 1) the concept of comprehensiveness and universality; 2) the principle of no hierarchical partiality in the protection of human rights; 3) the concept of interdependence and correlation; 4) the principle of equality and nondiscrimination in the protection of human rights; 5) the principle of participation and integration in the protection of social rights; and 6) the principle of responsibility and the rule of law in the protection of social welfare.

In many nations, the human rights-based approach to sustainable development has gained popularity. Creating a flexible, multifaceted social welfare system in tandem that can assist individuals in avoiding, minimising, and overcoming hazards in their lives [4]. The UN-designed system is comprised of four parts: 1) social assistance (such as social assistance for disadvantaged groups, public health services, retirement pensions, and health insurance); 2) social insurance (such as short-term social insurance, unemployment benefits, and health insurance); 3) general social assistance (such as family allowances, public health services, and old age pensions); 4) private social assistance. The minimal standard of living is the cornerstone of social welfare policy, ensuring that everyone living below it is entitled to social welfare policies and programs.

To emphasize the importance of social welfare in fostering human development as well as economic growth and sustainable development, it is suggested that investing in social welfare is one of the fundamental elements of a successful market economy [5]. Building a social welfare system with a long-term vision that aligns with national development plans and places equal emphasis on sharing prosperity, sustainable development, and human development is also crucial.

As stated in the original Vietnamese Constitution of 1946, social welfare is thought to be the best aspect of socialism in Vietnam. The Constitution recognised the entitlement of public employees and officials to social insurance as well as the care that should be given to deserving individuals, the elderly, the disabled, and orphans. Through many community initiatives, the custom of "the whole leaves protect the torn leaves", which emphasises compassion and giving, has been highlighted. Since the establishment of the centralised, planned economy, social welfare protection has gained prominence. It has developed into one of the key tenets of the nation's social policy framework, which the Party and the State have worked hard to put in place. The goal of the social welfare model is to assist in resource release and social asset redistribution within the populace [6].

The development and implementation of social welfare policies during the course of 30 years of reform have produced a number of noteworthy outcomes, including the creation of jobs, the maintenance of minimum income levels for the populace, the elimination of hunger and poverty at a rate of progress recognised globally, the efficient provision of regular assistance to the impoverished and those in particularly difficult circumstances, the provision of emergency aid to those facing particular risks, and the creation of the conditions necessary for them to have access to basic social services. As a result, the number of people participating in and receiving benefits from social insurance policies has expanded, and the rate of poverty has drastically decreased. At the same time, people's ability to avoid,

reduce, and manage risks, as well as to stabilise their lives and integrate into communities, has greatly improved.

The 11th National Party Congress Document in Vietnam declares that citizenship, human rights, and other prerequisites must be met in order to achieve full human development. The Party Platform on nation-building during the socialist transition period (updated and developed in 2011) emphasizes the following points: “People are the center of development strategies as well as the subject of development; the socialist society that our people have been building is “a prosperous people and a strong, democratic, equitable, and civilized country”.

Human rights are valued, upheld, and linked to national security and popular sovereignty (1). The Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s (2013) Constitution originally stated in Article 34 that “Citizens have the right to social welfare”. This is a novel approach that recognizes the right to social welfare as an objective and indispensable human need, a national development objective, and a development that is consistent with global development.

## **2. Defining Vietnam’s present social welfare model**

The Fifth Conference of the XI Party Central Committee adopted Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW on 10 June 2012, “Regarding some issues of social policy in the period 2012–2020”, which states that the system of social welfare must be comprehensive, diverse, and shared among the people, the State, and population groups both within and between generations. Guaranteeing sustainability, equity, and social welfare is a common and significant task for the Party, the State, the political system in its entirety, and society [7].

The resolution also lays out the basic framework of the social welfare system, which is made up of four pillars: employment, income, and poverty reduction; social insurance; social assistance for individuals in exceptionally difficult situations; and guaranteeing a minimum level of access to certain basic social services (housing, health, education, clean water, and information). The basis for institutionalising social welfare into state laws, policies, and mechanisms is awareness that is in line with Vietnam’s current stage of socioeconomic development. It has crept into existence thanks to people’s acceptance and encouragement [8].

The State plays a crucial role in ensuring social welfare in accordance with Party standards. This can be shown in the following ways:

First, establishing laws and policies that are in line with the principles and standards of each pillar of the social welfare system; gradually internalising international treaties and obligations; and creating social welfare programs in order to establish a workable and efficient legal framework. In order to ensure that social welfare programs effectively reach the targeted population, the second step is to enforce social welfare policies, laws, and programs inside the state administrative structure while also promoting the involvement of social partners in order to meet targets. Solving pressing social welfare concerns in particular, like minimal education, job stability, emergency help for individuals in case of unforeseen catastrophes, healthcare, and lasting poverty reduction [9].

Thirdly, creating an independent, non-profit system that offers social welfare services to the general public and guarantees that everyone has access to them; broadening the scope of social welfare offerings by pooling resources; and elevating the status of social work as a profession. Fourth, keep a close eye on, assess, and re-examine how social welfare laws and programs are being implemented. putting in place an information system that reports and provides social welfare statistics according to the requirements of pertinent people. implementing information technology in the administration and execution of social welfare laws and programs, implementing administrative changes, and establishing beneficiary-friendly environments.

There are notable outcomes from the application of social welfare laws and programs. Over 1.6 million jobs were produced annually between 2011 and 2019 as a result of the change; the unemployment rate is consistently low, averaging only 2.2% to 2%. The percentage of low-income households fell to barely 4% in 2019, and 15,185 million workers—roughly 31% of the labor force—enrolled in social insurance. Ninety percent of people have health insurance. 3,041,731 participants benefited from standard social assistance programs [10].

Nevertheless, there are still issues and restrictions with the current social welfare model: First off, while understanding of the social welfare model in the context of international integration and the socialist-oriented market economy has grown, it is still far from universal. In actuality, the current social welfare system has been largely shaped, but it has not yet been formalised into thorough and timely rules and legislation, nor has it been properly comprehended or contextualised in strategic planning. The sustainable development trend related to human rights has not been completely stopped by its structure. Despite numerous promulgations, supplements, and revisions, the laws pertaining to social welfare remain inadequate, erratic, and unable to keep up with rapidly evolving realities [11].

Second, there is still room for improvement in the institutions that guarantee social fairness in terms of social welfare policies and programs as the socialist-oriented market economy develops. They mostly rely on the state budget and have not closely integrated the market's active participation with the State's leadership in allocating resources for social welfare investments. Additionally, a portion of the population may find it difficult to access certain social welfare programs due to their tendency to be commercialized. Alternatively, people become dependent on the State and suffer negative effects as a result of being subsidized through the ask-give cycle [12].

Thirdly, the human-rights approach to sustainable development has greater potential the more developed society gets. However, a number of other elements, such as the effects of ongoing institutional reforms, integration, the aging of the population quickly, and global climate change, also have an impact on and provide challenges to the strategy. The needs to protect social wellbeing are higher and more varied the more social dangers that occur. Meanwhile, current social welfare policies' coverage of standard support levels is constrained and hasn't grown to ensure that recipients have a minimal quality of living. As a result, people's ability to tolerate risk is low and falls short of sustainability; self-welfare has not received much attention.

Fourthly, notwithstanding its steady advancement, the social welfare career system is oriented toward the establishment of public career organizations. There is a lack of robust and varied community and societal participation. The system has not yet shifted to provide public services; instead, it has mostly focused on community-based social welfare objectives. In social welfare, there hasn't been much encouragement for professional social work, and no staff team with the necessary qualifications has been assembled yet.

Fifthly, the state's approach to managing social welfare is still ineffective when it comes to creating and implementing new laws, policies, and programs. Numerous ministries and departments still have it overlapping and dispersed; administrative reforms on social welfare, particularly with regard to administrative procedures and the use of advanced technology and digitalization, have not satisfied practical needs. People still have trouble receiving social welfare; the social welfare database system is not updated or enhanced.

Regarding the impact of the social welfare system on the Vietnamese population, first off, there have been a lot of successes in implementing policies aimed at reducing poverty, increasing income, and creating jobs. A significant portion of the high percentage of jobs created for individuals 15 years of age and older (over 77%) and long-term poverty reduction can be attributed to policies to support job creation through the National Job Creation Fund, the Fund "For the Poor," preferential credit policies, vocational training, career guidance, etc. Vietnam is one of the nations with the lowest unemployment rates in the world, having consistently maintained a low rate between 2% and 3% for the previous ten years. Between 2013 and 2018, employees' average yearly pay increased by 8.7%, indicating a positive trend [13].

Second, by giving individuals more possibilities to participate and benefit from insurance, the updated social and health insurance policies have strengthened the financial stability of insurance funds. According to three main policy groups—compulsory, voluntary, and unemployment insurance—social insurance has been expanded to all employees. From 21.8% in 2011 to 32% in 2019, the percentage of the labour force in the age bracket eligible for social insurance has increased. Specifically, optional social insurance only drew about 270 thousand participants over the entire 2008–2018 period, but by the end of 2019, that number had risen to 545 thousand. Between 2011 and 2019, the percentage of the labour force in the age group enrolled in unemployment insurance rose from 17.1% to over 27%. In 2019, the number of people in the country with health insurance was 85.39 million, which accounted for 90% of the total population [14].

As a vital safety net for social welfare, social and health insurance helps people deal with illness, disease-causing accidents at work, pregnancy, unemployment, and other challenges. Over 3.1 million people nationwide currently receive a monthly pension and social insurance allowance; the Social Insurance Fund provides benefits to 6–10 million people each year who are unwell, have accidents, or become pregnant; as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 500,000 people only received unemployment insurance for the first half of 2020. Health insurance promotes fairness in health care, particularly for the most vulnerable members of society, by lowering the direct cost of healthcare services from household income. In 2019, 186

million people covered by health insurance had their medical examination and treatment costs covered by the Health Insurance Fund (92.1 million people in 2009). The Health Insurance Fund reimburses a number of instances for medical examinations and treatments up to billions of VND annually.

Thirdly, human rights-based and human-centered approaches have gradually replaced traditional methods in the practice of social assistance for those living in exceptionally challenging circumstances. The amount of social allowance and the number of beneficiaries of social insurance have grown, which has helped to stabilise the lives of those who are more vulnerable. From about 1.7 million in 2011 (or 1.9% of the population) to over 2.9 million in 2019 (or 3% of the population), more people were getting monthly social stipends in cash. Unscheduled social assistance programmes help those who are vulnerable because of natural catastrophes and other legitimate reasons in a timely manner. Between 2012 and 2019, the Vietnamese government provided more than 343 thousand tonnes of rice (famine relief during the intercrop period and on Lunar New Year's Eve) to approximately 18.4 million people who were facing food insecurity. Additionally, the government provided more than 3700 billion VND to help communities recover from natural disasters [15].

The Vietnamese government, in particular, issued Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP on April 9, 2020, titled “Measures to support people facing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic”, and the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 15/2020/QĐ-TTg on 24 April 2020, titled “Regulations on implementing policies to support people facing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic”, which included a 62 trillion VND support package for those facing difficulties as a result of the pandemic. The international community and the people of Vietnam fully support the government's prompt responses to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Despite the relative success of the current Vietnamese social welfare system, there is still room for improvement, similar to any political-economic system around the world. The next section focuses on ways to improve the social welfare system in Vietnam.

### **3. Improving social welfare model**

The authorised course of action involves creating the social welfare system within the broader socioeconomic development strategies, in accordance with Vietnam's economic outlook for 2021–2030; this involves balancing economic expansion with the maintenance of social welfare, upholding social equity, and supporting sustainable national development.

This is also marked by an ongoing enhancement of the multi-layered, adaptable life-cycle social welfare system, with a 5-pillar framework that guarantees minimum living conditions for all and aims for universal coverage: 1) the labor market, employment and income, supply and demand, infrastructure and projections for the labor market, labor market data, and employment services; 2) social insurance, encompassing mandatory, supplemental, and elective plans; 3) social assistance, encompassing emergency and ongoing help as well as social care; 4) a social welfare floor with a “basket” of necessities; 5) expert social work for social welfare.

Furthermore, it is imperative to enhance the social welfare system in accordance with national standards, progressively implement regional and worldwide norms, and promote regional and global collaboration in the social welfare domain. It is also planned to develop a long-term social welfare system with well-planned routes that serves the entire community. Prioritizing vulnerable groups in the short term, particularly children in extremely tough situations, the elderly, the disabled, the destitute, and ethnic communities, Ultimately, it is confirmed that the proper course of action is to guarantee the right to social welfare based on the responsibilities of the democratic system and every citizen. The government is crucial, particularly when it comes to funding social welfare, promoting the involvement of businesses, communities, and social partners simultaneously, and utilizing assistance programs to enhance individuals' self-welfare in order to facilitate their integration into the community.

#### **4. The way forward**

It is essential to encourage broad diffusion in order to increase awareness among the populace and within the political system through targeted initiatives that are implemented using a variety of cutting-edge techniques. Using cutting-edge communication technologies to obtain a clear understanding of the nature, substance, and recommendations for enhancing the social welfare model would increase the sense of accountability in its execution. Second, in order to evaluate the execution of Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW, it is necessary to conduct research and develop strategic orientations for social welfare that adhere to the new model for the years 2021–2030. The Central Committee's conclusion about continuing to enforce Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW, which is supplemented in terms of content, views, and strategic directions to form specific social welfare policies and programs, or the creation of an alternative resolution for the 2021–2030 period, is based on this [16].

It has been suggested that establishing a number of new laws on social assistance and social work for the formation of laws on social welfare will be crucial to institutionalizing the new model of social welfare on the basis of amending and supplementing current laws related to the four pillars of the system (Employment Law, Social Insurance Law, Elder Law, and Disability Law).

In particular, it's critical to concentrate on the following when it comes to the labor market, jobs, and income: 1) keeping the labor force free to utilize people's potential and resources for economic progress, resulting in the creation of numerous long-term jobs; 2) creating a synchronized labor market across the country to connect the supply and demand for labor; establishing peaceful, stable, and progressive labor relations; implementing equity in the salary and income distribution process, which is linked to productivity; guaranteeing hygienic and safe working conditions; and encouraging a positive corporate culture; 3) a growing market for highly skilled workers; 4) constructing a coordinated labor market infrastructure, such as employment services, databases, and labor market forecasts.

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Regarding social assistance, it is necessary to continue implementing Decision No. 488/QĐ-TTg, dated 14 April 2017, by the Prime Minister in the project on innovation and development of social assistance for the period 2017–2025 with a vision to 2030. This project aims to legislate for social assistance, institutionalize a holistic social assistance system that is diverse, multifaceted, advanced, appropriate for the human life cycle in an interconnected manner (three stages: pregnant mother and children/adolescents and people of working age as well as elderly), and share among the government, society, and people; specify standard social subsidy policies for all target populations with the allowance standard that is in line with minimum standards of living; and add norms on unanticipated allowance [17].

Regarding the social welfare floor, the following measures should be taken: 1) guaranteeing an income ceiling that is close to the minimum and multifaceted standards of living; 2) minimum health care, particularly primary health care, community health, and adolescent reproductive health; 3) developing a regulatory framework for creating a social welfare floor in accordance with Viet Nam's socioeconomic conditions and Convention 102 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on minimum social welfare standards. Three: a minimum level of education; four: safe housing; five: sanitary household water; and six: preschool, primary, and secondary education.

Concerning social work in the profession: constructing legislation pertaining to professional social work as the foundation for a legal framework. defining, in the context of socialization, the organizational structure of social work service providers (centers, offices, social work sites, etc.). In particular, defining the legitimacy of social work service providers with expertise in education, vocational education, health, orthopedics, and rehabilitation... Fourth, creating and implementing the national goal program on social welfare for the years 2021–2030 in order to implement a new social welfare model for a number of social groups that require extra help.

This entire program is made up of five complete, multifaceted (in terms of processes, policies, resources, organizational structure, and coordination of implementation) fundamental components: 1) providing work and reducing sustainable poverty for laborers and low-income households (outside of areas inhabited by ethnic minorities); 2) caring for children in unique situations; 3) caring for individuals with severe disabilities; 4) caring for the elderly in challenging circumstances; 5) promoting careers in social work.

Finding solutions to issues with finance, organizational management, and investment in a new social welfare paradigm. putting the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs in charge of the consistent restructuring of the duties and responsibilities of ministries concerned with social welfare. securing funding

allocations for the new model's social welfare policies and initiatives. giving towns the strong authority they need to manage their communities holistically and carry out social welfare policies and initiatives in a proactive and efficient manner.

It is also important for the Vietnamese authorities to partner with international organisations in order to make the social welfare system more effective and all-inclusive. With the goal of ensuring Vietnam is inclusive and successful in addressing its own development issues, USAID and Vietnam have growingly collaborative and comprehensive development cooperation. While stakeholders work to improve economic competitiveness, modernise higher education, combat infectious disease, address issues related to the legacy of the war, conserve forests and biodiversity, and promote renewable energy, USAID also strengthens local leadership by engaging all Vietnamese citizens, including vulnerable populations, and through strategic partnerships with the Government of Vietnam, the private sector, and civil society. Such kinds of international partnerships and collaboration are and will remain critical to the success of the Vietnamese social welfare system.

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