

8 Facts About Clean Water Access and Poverty in Vietnam

[Vietnam](#)'s poverty rate fell from around 60% in the 1990s to under 5% by 2022, thanks to rapid economic growth. Yet nearly half the population still lacks safe drinking water, a crisis fueling cycles of poverty.

Despite Vietnam's overall progress, clean water access remains a critical challenge, especially in remote areas. Unsafe water and poor sanitation lead to disease, missed education, and economic losses among the poor. Here are eight facts about the link between clean water access and poverty in Vietnam:

1. **Water access has improved greatly, but gaps remain** – In rural areas, access to clean water jumped from only 17% of the population in 1993 to about [51% in 2020](#). Yet by 2022 only 58% of the population had safely managed drinking water.
2. **Over 40% of Vietnamese lack safely managed drinking water** – While most households have *some* access to an improved water source, many do not have water that is safe, readily available, and on-premises. As of 2022, only about 58% of Vietnam's population uses safely [managed drinking water](#) – water that is protected from contamination and available when needed. This means roughly 42% people, mostly in poorer rural areas, still rely on wells, rainwater, or other sources that may be unsafe. Drinking from contaminated sources or spending hours to collect water keeps these households vulnerable to illness and economic hardship.

3. **Rural communities suffer the worst water shortages** – There is a big difference between urban-rural divide in clean water access. Piped water systems and municipal supplies cover most cities, but in the countryside such infrastructure is limited. In fact, only about 44% of rural people in Vietnam get water from [centralized supply systems](#), while most rely on local household or small-scale sources. The rest of rural residents often depend on unprotected wells, river water, or rainfall. This disparity means that poverty is concentrated in rural areas where families must cope with unreliable or unsafe water. Lacking clean water nearby, rural villagers, often the poor and ethnic minorities, are at higher risk of water-borne diseases and spend more time and money securing water, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.
4. **Water-borne diseases take a heavy toll** – Contaminated water and poor sanitation lead to widespread illness, which hits the poor hardest. Each year in Vietnam, about 9,000 people die and 250,000 are hospitalized due to [unsafe water](#) and sanitation-related illnesses. Diseases like cholera, dysentery, and diarrhea are more common in communities without clean water or toilets, contributing to child malnutrition and stunting. According to Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, nearly 80% of all diseases in Vietnam are caused by [polluted water](#). Treating these preventable illnesses drains household incomes and healthcare resources. For impoverished families, the loss of income when a worker in the family is sick or dies, it can push them deeper into poverty.
5. **Children's health and education are impacted** – Lack of clean water disproportionately affects children, undermining their development and future opportunities. Water-borne diseases like diarrhea are a leading cause of illness in

Vietnamese children, keeping them out of school. Moreover, many schools themselves lack safe water and sanitation. An estimated 7.7 million children in [Vietnam](#) attend schools without running water or proper toilets, exposing them to disease and poor hygiene. In rural areas, [children](#), especially girls, often spend hours walking to collect water from rivers or wells instead of studying. This daily burden and the frequent sickness from dirty water led to missed education and carry the cycle of poverty into the next generation.

6. **Women and girls carry the water burden** – In Vietnam’s traditional rural communities, collecting water is often the responsibility of women and girls. This [unpaid labor](#) can consume several hours each day, as they haul heavy buckets from distant wells or streams. For example, a [rural Vietnamese family](#) without a nearby water source might have to carry six or seven buckets of water from a neighbor’s well every day just to meet basic needs. The time and physical effort required for water collection mean girls may be late or absent from school and women have less time for income-generating work. By robbing women and girls of opportunities and exposing them to health risks, the water crisis reinforces gender inequalities and keeps many families in poverty.
7. **Poor sanitation compounds water poverty** – Many Vietnamese households, especially in rural areas, still lack hygienic toilets and waste disposal, which leads to environmental contamination of water sources. Roughly [30% of rural families](#) do not have access to basic sanitation facilities that meet minimum hygiene standards. In some villages, people rely on makeshift [latrines](#) or “hanging” toilets that discharge waste directly into rivers and ponds. Without proper sanitation, water sources stay polluted and disease outbreaks further strain poor communities.

8. **High economic cost**– A World Bank study estimated that Vietnam loses about \$780 million per year (around [1.3% of GDP](#)) due to poor sanitation and hygiene. These preventable losses stem from medical bills, lost productivity, and premature deaths. For poor families, a single illness can wipe out savings and push them deeper into poverty.

Recognizing the importance of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) to combat poverty, the Vietnamese government and international partners have launched major initiatives to expand clean water. Innovative solutions like easy-to-use [water purifiers](#) are being distributed to schools and remote villages, providing safe drinking water to millions of children. Thanks to these efforts, more Vietnamese enjoy clean water today than ever before, and awareness of hygiene has improved. Continued investment in water infrastructure and climate resilience will be vital to ensure that every community can break out of water-related poverty.

Sources

- [Helvetas – WASH and Water Governance](#)
- [SDG 6 Data – Viet Nam Snapshot](#)
- [UNICEF Vietnam – We Have Clean Water at School](#)
- [VietNamNet – Vietnam Loses 1.3% of GDP to Poor Hygiene](#)
- [World Bank – Private Capital Brings Clean Drinking Water to Schools and Communities in Vietnam](#)
- [World Bank – Vietnam Country Profile](#)
- [The Water Project – Water Crisis in Vietnam](#)