

## **Defects in the Law on the Protection of Children with Special Circumstances in Vietnam - Implications For Some Content That Needs to Be Added**

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### **Abstract**

Every nation's future depends on its children, thus they must develop into responsible adults in a secure social setting with legal protections. Vietnam has thus far steadily developed and refined both the general legal system and the laws pertaining to the upbringing and protection of children in particular. This is the legal foundation that guarantees children's rights are implemented well. But in a time of intense integration with the quick and varied growth of social interactions in the sphere of child protection, Vietnamese legal rules on child protection demonstrate that they are exposing more and more flaws. This study focuses on assessing several fundamental flaws in Vietnamese legislation regarding the care and protection of children in exceptional situations, with the goal of providing solutions to examine, analyse, and supplement to meet the country's current conditions.

**Keywords:** Care, Child Protection, Special Circumstances, Law

Received: June 2, 2024

Revised: June 20, 2024

Accepted: July 15, 2024

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### **Introduction**

According to Vietnam's Children's Law (2016), children in unusual circumstances include: children who are orphans of both parents; abandoned children; homeless children; children with disabilities; children infected with HIV/AIDS; minors breaking the law; and children addicted to drugs. Children who must drop out of school to make ends meet have not finished universal lower secondary education; children suffer substantial bodily and mental injury as a result of violence; children are exploited; children are sexually assaulted; children are trafficked; Children with significant diseases or illnesses that require long-term treatment in low-income or near-poor homes; migrant children, displaced children, and asylum seekers whose parents have not been found or who have no caretakers. Vietnam has seen major economic and social transformations during the last three decades, and the Vietnamese people's standard of living has increased dramatically. However, economic growth and development in Vietnam are unequal, with a sizable portion of the population still not benefiting from this industrialized economy. Disparities in living conditions during the shift to a market economy, increasing urbanization, family disintegration, and the degradation of traditional values have resulted in an increase in kid population. The number of abandoned, neglected, mistreated, and exploited individuals is growing by the day. Many youngsters in exceptional situations are fighting to make a livelihood; some are compelled to live and labour on the streets, while others must live in social protection institutions. To address these issues, the Vietnamese government has pushed the creation of social welfare plans and programs, as well as the establishment of legislative and policy frameworks for poverty reduction and social policies. There have been several legal papers created and published to handle various elements of child protection. The core concepts, functions, and obligations of the child protection system are also outlined in the

Law on Child Protection, Care, and Education, passed by the National Assembly of Vietnam in 2004 (Child's Law 2016) (Spence, 2021). Vietnam has also showed its commitment to tackling these concerns by developing legislative papers, international programs, and measures to ensure children's safety. Protective and secure school. In addition to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, Vietnam has ratified other major international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the CRC on child trafficking and child prostitution (Buck, 2008). Children and child pornography; Optional Protocol to the CRC on the participation of children in the armed forces; Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in the Field of International Adoption; Convention No. 182 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour; The United Nations Convention on Combating Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Annex, 2000).

As can be seen, despite the fact that many legislative papers, programs, and initiatives have been developed to address various elements of child safety, Vietnam still has many holes to close. Ensure the systematic identification, assistance, and monitoring of children with special needs and at risk. This study focuses on analysing some major shortcomings of Vietnamese law in the care and protection of children in special circumstances, making recommendations that need to be addressed, based on the listing and evaluation of laws, by-law documents, child protection policies and programs, and an actual survey of existing child support services.

### **Research history**

Child sexual abuse is a major concern for governments and the worldwide community. Sexual abuse causes long-term physical, emotional, and psychological suffering in children. The study "Some approaches to studying child sexual abuse through foreign research" by author Nhung (2012) has generalized a number of approaches to researching child sexual abuse in a number of countries around the world, from which many lessons have been drawn in preventing sexual abuse in Vietnam. This is experience that can be used to address a topic that many people in Vietnam still regard as sensitive. Furthermore, it is possible to mention a number of international and Vietnamese documents and documents related to the protection of children's rights, such as: Law on Education, Law No. 38/2005/QH11 dated June 14, 2005 of National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; Education Law No. 44/2009/QH12 amends and supplements a number of articles of Education Law No. 38/2005/QH11 dated November 25, 2009; Labor Law, Law No. 10/2012/QH13 dated June 18, 2012 of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; Law on Marriage and Family, Law No. 52/2014/QH13 dated June 19, 2014 of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; Penal Code, Law No. 100/2015/QH13 dated November 27, 2015 of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; Law on Children, Law No. 102/2016/QH13 dated April 5, 2016 of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In recent years, as incidences of abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, have been identified and addressed, schools and families have begun to prioritize preventive education. This also piques the interest of researchers in law, psychology, and education.

However, the majority of these studies are theses and dissertations by graduate students or graduate students, and there are rarely scientific research projects at all levels on the basis of which a model of laboratory education for combating child sexual abuse is proposed, such as analytical studies on laws related to sexual abuse in general or child sexual abuse (Think, 2016). Prevention and prevention education, in particular, have received little attention from an educational standpoint, despite the fact that this is a human and educational concern.

## Results and Discussion

### Positive aspects of the law protecting children in special circumstances in Vietnam

The Party and State of Vietnam have gradually built and perfected the legal system to ensure unity, synchronization, and harmony with international law, as well as to respond quickly to new social relationships. as firmly integrated into international legal standards. This is seen as the cornerstone for children's protection, care, and education, laying the groundwork for their whole development. The preceding law papers demonstrate that Vietnam is attempting to develop a system for building a child protection network with the goal of extensively spreading duties across agencies and groups. Specifically:

The Population, Family, and Children Committee oversees state management of children's concerns, including the development of child-related legislation and regulations, as well as the organization and implementation of protection and care programs. Taking care of disadvantaged children, coordinating educational and awareness activities on child protection, managing child support facilities with many different sectors (Munro, 2011), collecting and analysing data on child protection, and promulgating standards, principles, and instructions on child protection and child support facilities. As a result, the Population, Family, and Children Committee is primarily responsible for initiatives that reduce juvenile criminality and assist street children. According to the National Program to Prevent Trafficking in Women and Children for the period 2006-2010, the Committee for Population, Family, and Children is primarily responsible for preventing child trafficking and sexual exploitation for commercial purposes.

The Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs is responsible for promulgating mechanisms and policies for disabled children, disabled children, orphans, and street children, and state management of facilities. Social protection, drug treatment facilities, vocational training facilities, promulgate laws on child labour and inspect the implementation of these laws (Von Richthofen, 2002). Under this program, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs is primarily responsible for plans to prevent and address child sexual abuse and the use of child labour to do heavy work in poor conditions. heavy, toxic, dangerous. The Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs is also responsible for organizing vocational education, employment support, and community reintegration for women and children who have been trafficked across the border and have now returned.

The Ministry of Public Security is responsible for applying measures to prevent and combat acts that violate children's rights, educate and reform minors who violate the law; coordinate the implementation of the National Action Program on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children and the Program on fighting and preventing prostitution.

The Ministry of Justice provides legal support for disadvantaged children, manages adoptions (domestic and foreign), increases awareness and education about the Children's Law. International adoption is also managed by the Ministry of Justice according to the provisions of Decree No. 158/2005/ND – CP.

The Ministry of Health is responsible for improving the quality of medical treatment for children, especially children in special circumstances.

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for developing awareness raising and education programs on child protection, implementing policies on tuition exemption and reduction, and applying appropriate measures to integrate returning children. return to school, coordinate with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs to determine

educational programs for schools with disabled children, determine educational programs in reform schools.

The Ministry of Planning and Investment develops a child protection plan, incorporates the plan's content into socio-economic development plans, mobilizes domestic and international resources for child protection;

The Ministry of Finance guides ministries, branches and People's Committees at all levels in making annual and long-term budget estimates for child protection activities, and proposing policies to mobilize financial resources for public use. child protection.

In general, responsibility for child protection has been assigned to many separate programs and action plans, dealing with different groups within the overall population of children in special circumstances.

### **Limitations of the law protecting children in special circumstances in Vietnam**

The Committee for Population, Family and Children was previously appointed as the lead agency with the function of being the focal point for coordinating the implementation of the CRC, with a systematic inspection and supervision mechanism for the implementation of the CRC through the collection, analysis, evaluation and dissemination of data related to children. Currently, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs is the agency taking over this role. However, Vietnam still does not have an independent national institution on children's rights to manage the implementation of children's rights.

Poverty reduction is also one of the focuses of the Vietnamese Government, many efforts have been made to ensure that each child is provided with adequate living conditions (Kozel, 2014). Although the state budget and other resources have made a special investment in child protection, care and education, Vietnam still does not have a separate and clear budget for child protection. children, integrated into the socio-economic development plan.

Children's right to education is guaranteed in the Law on Universalization of Primary Education in 1991, the Law on Education of Vietnam amended in 2009, and the Law on Children 2016. According to the National Program on Universalization of Primary Education, all children are required to attend school through primary school, a comprehensive program has also been developed to identify and assist drop-out children to return to school, possibly through the education system together or through love classes. Up to now, 100% of provinces and cities in the country have succeeded in universalizing primary education and eliminating illiteracy; 96.8% of children attended school according to their age in the 2002-2003 school year. However, the enrolment rate in remote and remote areas and ethnic minority areas is still low. Ethnic children, disabled children, handicapped children, HIV/AIDS infected children (UNICEF, 2005), and children from families migrating to urban centres are the most disadvantaged groups in terms of access to primary education. Access to a quality and child-friendly education system, access to secondary education and vocational training remains a challenge for many children.

Along with communication and education activities, the Government has also strengthened movements to build cultural villages and healthy residential areas, ensuring that children in these areas do not have phenomena such as addiction. smoking and prostitution. However, children are still not involved in the design and implementation of awareness raising campaigns and programs (Sanders & Kirby, 2012). Furthermore, educational awareness campaigns often focus on specific issues and individual groups of children without addressing the larger issue of creating a safe environment for children.

Vietnam now has a mechanism to provide financial and other support to poor families. In addition, a system of consulting centres has also been established in major cities to advise, consult, and mediate family conflicts. Many support clubs and love groups have been established by mass organizations for wives and mothers, to support and encourage these mothers. However, currently there is no system and mechanism to ensure that vulnerable families are identified, professionally assessed, and provided with the necessary support to prevent children from falling into special circumstances (Peek, 2008). Special.

According to current Vietnamese law, there is no separate complaint procedure for reporting issues about children requiring special protection. Therefore, complaints about child abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment are made according to general complaint and denunciation procedures, in accordance with the Law on Complaints and Denunciations or the Criminal Procedure Code. The Law on Complaints and Denunciations does not limit the legal capacity of complainants and therefore, in principle, children can also be whistleblowers. However, because there are no special provisions regulating how to make complaints or procedures for receiving complaints from children, in reality, it is difficult for children to exercise their right to denounce. Therefore, reported or suspected cases of children in special circumstances are handled according to the provisions of the law on handling administrative violations or the Criminal Procedure Code. There are many agencies with the authority to receive and handle denunciations related to children such as the old Committee for Population, Family and Children, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, etc. Therefore, applying handling measures or asking other agencies to intervene often falls into a state of duplication, overlap, and excess responsibility for each other. That's why in Vietnam today there is a situation where a child is protected by 15 agencies and organizations, but when a child is abused or raped, they don't know who to call.

Although the former Committee for Population, Family and Children and the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs are now Government agencies responsible for inspecting, examining and resolving complaints and denunciations regarding illegal acts against children, but the law has not yet stipulated specific powers for these agencies to fulfil their functions. When receiving denunciations related to children, the former Committee for Population, Family and Children and the current Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs only have the right to clarify certain cases and make requests. the police take necessary measures to prevent violations or take action to protect children.

Vietnam has so far built many psychological and physical rehabilitation centres to support victims of sexual abuse in big cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. In addition, some provinces have also built counselling centres to provide child victims with legal, psychological and psychosocial counselling services as well as help them reintegrate into society. The Vietnam Women's Union is very active across the country in the field of consulting and helping child victims and helping put them into charity classes or vocational education programs. However, in reality, up to now there has not been a professional system to ensure that victims of sexual abuse are systematically counted by a qualified social worker, and referred to support services to promote recovery and reintegration for children, which causes the majority of children to continue to suffer psychological trauma.

Currently, Vietnam has over 50 medical treatment and social labour education centres managed by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (centre 05/06) spread evenly throughout localities. When a child is released from the June 5 centre, the centre will contact the commune government where the child lives, then this agency will coordinate with the

Women's Union, Youth Union, etc. to reintegrate. children return to the community. In some localities, the Women's Union also has "after care" clubs. However, an assessment of prostitution prevention programs in Vietnam has shown that the quality of education and treatment for The number of prostitutes is limited, only very few of these subjects receive vocational training and job creation, their education is not appropriate and lacks depth and the rate of successful community reintegration is still very low.

The Law on Children 2016 specifically stipulates child protection measures from prevention, support to intervention along with the implementation responsibilities of agencies, organizations, families and individuals to ensure children are protected. safe, receive support and timely intervention when at risk or being abused. However again There is no specific and systematic mechanism to early identify children and families who are vulnerable or at risk of abuse, neglect, mistreatment, prostitution, drug addiction or exploitation. labour exploitation. Early detection and intervention measures to support children with special circumstances are also limited. Health workers, teachers, police, local authorities, and community leaders are not guided and equipped with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to identify and respond to at-risk children. including early detection of children with disabilities, neglect and abuse.

Article 34 of the Law on Children 2016 stipulates that children have the right to express their opinions and wishes on issues related to children; to freely assemble according to the provisions of law appropriate to the age, maturity level and development of children; have agencies, organizations, educational institutions, families, and individuals listen to, absorb, and respond to legitimate opinions and aspirations. However, the roles and responsibilities of different agencies and organizations in supporting children's parents have not been specifically defined, and there is no clear mechanism to help families find and receive information. receive appropriate support services.

Articles 79 - 95 of the 2016 Children's Law also stipulate the responsibilities of Government agencies, Union Fronts, communities, social organizations and family members in supporting adoptive parents. teach children. However, programs and services to improve parenting skills as well as educate parents on parenting skills are still limited. In child protection programs or action plans, solutions to improve parenting skills for parents are still not properly recognized as a prevention strategy.

### **Implications of recommendations to improve the legal system to protect children in special circumstances in Vietnam**

An appropriate and scientific legal framework and strategic plan will maximize the support of organizations, individuals, families and society in caring for and protecting children in special circumstances:

#### **For children who have lost both parents**

It is necessary to improve new and existing orphan care facilities in the direction of building family varieties and downsizing and investing in implementing alternative care strategies. Strengthen community commitment to the care of orphans in family settings. Mechanisms should be put in place to improve monitoring and periodic review of the situation of orphaned children in all existing alternative care models (foster care, guardianship, adoption and care in centralized facilities, etc.)

There should be a legal document that clearly stipulates the principles and criteria in evaluating guardians, godparents, or adoptive parents for orphans to determine the appropriate type of care. appropriate and in the best interest of the child, conduct a detailed family assessment of

potential foster and adoptive parents. This legal document should also clearly state that the best welfare of the child must be the primary consideration when making decisions about alternative care for the child, and that important research and considerations should be made. children's scores.

It is necessary to amend and supplement legal documents on domestic and foreign adoption, requiring that biological parents, before making a decision to adopt a child, must be fully consulted.

It is necessary to strengthen access to the 1993 Hague Convention on Inter-State Adoption Cooperation.

### **For children who have been sexually abused**

Should increase the prison sentence for violators if the victim is a child from 6 years old to under 13 years old; Sentenced to life in prison, if the victim is a child under 6 years old; Sentenced to life imprisonment or death penalty regardless of whether the victim is a child 6 years old or older, if there are more than 2 aggravating circumstances or circumstances that determine the penalty frame.

Amend and supplement the Penal Code to more specifically stipulate the crime of child prostitution in the spirit of the Additional Protocol to the CRC, including all acts of providing, buying and selling children for prostitution activities. Because the nature and severity of child prostitution and adult prostitution are different, any act of organizing, brokering, sponsoring, or providing underage prostitutes is considered a crime. serious criminal violations and criminal sanctions.

Need to further promote international cooperation to better share information, find sources of economic and technical support to fight against child trafficking, child prostitution, and sex tourism related to trafficking. child pornography. The Criminal Procedure Code also needs to be amended to allow the extradition of Vietnamese citizens who commit acts of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of children in foreign countries.

There should be a referral system to ensure that all cases of child rape and other forms of sexual abuse are investigated by the police and referred to responsible agencies so that children can be evaluated. price and send to appropriate support services;

It is necessary to build a team of professional, well-trained counselors who can provide special consultation to victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, support them to recover both physically and mentally.

### **For abandoned children and helpless children**

Should we review the current sanctions for arresting and detaining street children? Instead, it is necessary to shift to a social welfare approach to the management of street children, in which social workers will identify and gather street children, playing the role of management officers. case management, helping to reduce psychological trauma for children.

Improve community-based support models and services for street children who do not want to reunite with their families. It is necessary to expand the network of social workers and teachers for street children, strengthen their skills so they can help street children integrate into society, not violate the law and learn independence.

Improve the quality of alternative and part-time education programs for street children. Flexible educational programs located in schools are considered a good model and can be implemented

at the secondary school level. Street children can go to school at times that are convenient for them, helping them feel they are treated equally as other children;

Develop a mechanism to recruit volunteers to work with street children, enhance training and fostering for this team. Increase children's participation and the strategies you help your friends and peer groups, for example, former street children will become propagandists or youth officers, helping children other streets.

Improve support and services for disadvantaged and difficult families, in high-risk communities, prevent children from moving from rural areas to urban areas to make a living,...

### **For exploited children**

Minor workers must be considered healthy enough to work, and must have a certificate from a district medical facility or general hospital. A written commitment or agreement on supervision by parents or guardians is required for minor workers. A curriculum vitae is required for minor workers and must be authenticated by local authorities.

The working environment must not have negative effects on children's health and psychological development, and must not deviate from the hygiene and environmental standards prescribed by the Ministry of Health.

Strengthen the labor inspection system by developing regulations on the organization and operation of labor inspection in labor issues related to minors, and educational and training activities for minors. labor inspection. Promulgate legal documents to manage the hiring of minor workers in the agricultural sector and informal sectors. Ensure strict enforcement of the minimum age to work in industries according to the provisions of labor law, adding regulations on informal industries and hiring workers to do housework.

Review and supplement the list of jobs that are prohibited from employing underage workers, helping legal regulations keep up with developments in new jobs on the market, and comply more strictly with Convention No. 138 and 182 of the International Labor Organization that the Government has approved.

There needs to be a clear coordination mechanism to ensure that children removed from harmful and exploitative work are supported with rehabilitation and reintegration. In particular, in parallel with children leaving unsuitable jobs, there need to be measures to support them in continuing their education, vocational training, and support in increasing family income to reduce poverty. The family depends on the income the child earns,...

### **For children infected with HIV/AIDS**

There needs to be special attention to the issue of the rights of children affected by HIV/AIDS, including a clear concept of "children affected by HIV/AIDS" in accordance with international standards.

Standard legal documents on the implementation of the Children's Law need to ensure a comprehensive system of care and support for orphans, abandoned children or children at risk of harm. injured by HIV/AIDS. However, care should also be taken to ensure that these programs do not segregate children affected or infected with HIV/AIDS from other vulnerable children as this will increase stigma, making them further separation from other children and increased discrimination against themselves and their families.

The new law on HIV/AIDS does not provide specific provisions on education and information aimed at groups of children and adolescents, but only focuses mainly on measures for children at school, not paying attention to to the number of young people who do not go to school. There

is a need for a new legal document regulating education and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS with a separate section addressing issues of propaganda and education to change children's behavior. Education and awareness-raising need to be focused on both school-going and out-of-school children as well as children in centralized care facilities (centers 05, 06, reformatories, etc.). Children need to be actively involved in the design and transmission of this information and awareness.

### **For children addicted to drugs**

Continue to promote education and raise awareness about preventing drug abuse. Ensure children have the right to actively participate in the development and implementation of drug use prevention campaigns. Develop documents and special information campaigns for high-risk groups, especially out-of-school children and street children.

Diversify types and methods of voluntary detoxification and support other target groups that can help minors in local or public detoxification facilities. Promote the development of community-based non-punitive rehabilitation programs specifically for juveniles. Intervention programs must offer a variety of addiction treatment and relapse prevention options such as physical therapy, vocational training, and job creation.

Limit the use of concentrated detoxification for children under 18 years old, and ensure that children in detoxification camps are always separated from adults. There are detailed procedures and standards for accepting children to participate in voluntary drug treatment from their families to ensure that drug treatment is only a last resort.

Promote support for children after completing intensive drug treatment programs to help them successfully reintegrate into the community and prevent relapse, etc.

### **For children violating the law**

Although the 2015 Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that investigation agencies, procuratorates and courts conducting criminal procedures related to minors must have necessary knowledge of psychology and education. minors, but in reality these specialized training courses are not many. Therefore, it is necessary to select police, prosecutors, lawyers, courts and social activists to establish specialized groups on juveniles. These juvenile experts must be trained and equipped with skills to resolve juvenile cases.

Improve conditions for juveniles serving sentences in reformatories and prisons to meet the basic requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Guidelines. At the same time, new programs are needed to help juveniles in prisons and reform schools to build social capacity and begin to address their criminal behavior.

In criminal proceedings, the Criminal Procedure Code needs to be amended to give the police, prosecutors and courts more authority to redirect cases of juveniles violating the law with punishment. mediation or some other informal, friendly means instead of criminal proceedings. In order to encourage diversionary treatment and reduce the application of prison sentences to juveniles, should the Penal Code be amended to apply judicial measures as well as suspend sentencing? for minors. It is necessary to give the Court more freedom in applying the most appropriate form of punishment for each minor who violates the law.

### **For disabled children**

It is necessary to regularly conduct nationwide surveys on people with disabilities, focusing on children. Develop a data system and methods for collecting data on children with disabilities. Statistical documents of communes and wards must provide accurate and continuous data on

the number of children with disabilities. Statistical data of state management agencies and local governments must be consistent with each other to be able to provide appropriate support measures for children with disabilities.

Improve early detection and intervention activities. Organize training courses and provide agencies at commune and ward levels with guidance on necessary skills for disease detection, early intervention, community-based rehabilitation, inclusive education and preparedness. Report accurately and on time. Strengthen cooperation between relevant agencies, especially between the health and education sectors.

Raise public and societal awareness of disability issues, including the rights of children and people with disabilities and the need to use human rights-based targeting in the field of disability rather than Dharma based on pity.

Establish support groups and extended care programs for parents caring for children with disabilities. Improve the understanding of parents of children with disabilities about their obligations to raise their children. Create conditions and facilities for groups of parents of children with disabilities to exchange information and help each other.

### Conclusion

It is evident that Vietnam has worked hard recently to develop and update its child protection legislation framework. Numerous laws, policies, and projects have addressed various facets of child safety with an emphasis on children in unique situations. Vietnam still lacks a thorough, integrated system, meanwhile, to guarantee the methodical identification, assistance, and monitoring of children at risk and those with specific circumstances. Instead of being founded on human rights, social welfare policy in general and methods of child protection in particular are still viewed as "charitable" activities. Instead of paying and educating professional personnel, social support for vulnerable populations is mostly dependent on volunteer help initiatives and nonprofit organizations. Vietnam is expected to continue in the near future to finish the legislative framework for child protection and particularly to encourage high-quality care and support services for children in exceptional circumstances. Building a system and creating policies concerning children in depth and breadth, including rules, regulations, and by-law documents in a scientific and reasonable way, always closely following the reality of the situation of the country's children and in compliance with international law, is still receiving more attention.

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