

# Community Participation and Disparity in Education:

The Current State of and Challenges for the Socialization of  
Education in Vietnam

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the current state of and future challenges for the “socialization of education” as one aspect of the move toward community participation in education (mainly primary education) in Vietnam. The socialization of education is a notion concerning the shifting of responsibility for providing education from the government alone to society as a whole and refers to the totality of policies and activities that are based on that notion. The concrete forms of the socialization of education include the following: (1) the diversification of financial resources for education, (2) the diversification of the forms of school establishment, and (3) projects by nongovernment actors—such as community organizations and enterprises—to encourage educational activities. According to the results of a survey targeting all provinces of Vietnam, activities for the socialization of education were already being carried out prior to this institutionalization by the central government, and it is thought that local communities and parents should play an important role in the support of education. The main activities include the construction of school buildings, campaigns to encourage school attendance, and so on, but many provinces are currently experiencing difficulties in carrying these out. This paper describes the current state of the situation in the provision of private finances for education, as well as the status of preschool education and teacher training as specific developments in the socialization of education. Finally, methods for alleviating the problem of disparity that is thought to arise as a result of the socialization of education are explored.

**Key words:** Primary education, community participation, educational finance, preschool education, teacher training

## Introduction

This paper takes up the issue of the socialization of education as one example of a move toward community participation in education. Socialization of education is a notion concerning the shifting of the responsibility for education from the government alone to society as a whole, and refers to the totality of policies and activities that are based on that notion. It therefore indicates educational activities carried out through a partnership between the “public” and “private” spheres in terms of educational investments by the government, the payment of educational expenses by household budgets, educational contributions by local societies, and participation by enterprises and community organizations, as seen at all educational levels from preschool to higher education. This paper introduces the actual situation concerning the socialization of education based on field research carried out by the author in Vietnam in the period 2004 to 2005, with a focus on primary education (including preschool education). In addition, the challenges faced in alleviating the problem of regional

disparity brought about as a result of the socialization of education are also explored.

## 1. The Policy of the Socialization of Education

### (1) What is the “Socialization of Education?”

The socialization of education is a concept that is currently being advanced in Vietnam. In the sense of the support of education by society as a whole, it includes the provision of financial resources by actors other than the central government. The socialization of education is clearly set out in the Education Law of 1998.

Article 11-Socialization of Education-of the Education Law of Vietnam states, “All organizations, families, and citizens have the responsibility to care for educational work, to support the movement of learning and a sound educational environment, and to coordinate with the school in achieving the goals of education. The State holds the key role in the development of education; it carries out diversification of the types of schools and the forms of education, and it encourages, mobilizes, and creates conditions under which organizations

and individuals can take part in the development of education.”

It is thought that the socialization of education is not necessarily a system that causes an increase in the individual burden on parents. Throughout Vietnam, community organizations known as “Study Encouragement Associations,” which work to raise funds not only from the local community and parents but also from local enterprises, have been set up to raise educational funds from local societies. This is considered to be an attempt to request financial resources from a wide range of sources besides parents and to make it clear that this movement is not simply a shift of the financial burden of education onto the individual. The Study Encouragement Associations carry out various kinds of work for educational development-such as the encouragement of school attendance, the construction and repair of educational facilities, and the establishment of local education centers-at the village, county, and provincial levels using the funds raised. It is thought that the work of these kinds of community organizations plays an important role in the success of the socialization of education.

**(2) Three Forms of the Socialization of Education**

The following can be considered concrete forms of the socialization of education: (i) The diversification of financial resources for education, (ii) the diversification of the forms of school establishment, and (iii) projects by non-government actors, such as mass organizations, community organizations, and enterprises, to encourage educational activities (MOET 2001).

(i) The diversification of financial resources for education

The diversification of financial resources for education means the bearing of educational expenses by organizations and individuals rather than by the government. Specifically, this refers to the bearing of educational expenses by parents, local societies, and enterprises, along with educational aid from international aid agencies and so on. From the point of view of parents, the socialization of education repre-

sents a trend towards an increase in the burden they must bear. Parents are expected to make contributions not only to the school building construction fund, but also to pay membership dues to the parents’ association.

(ii) The diversification of the forms of school establishment

In Vietnam, there are four forms of school establishment: public, semi-public, people-founded, and private. A semi-public school means a form of school management whereby the government provides the school buildings and equipment, and the remaining costs are provided for by community organizations, enterprises, and so on. A people-founded school is a school that is established by a community group with support from an organization or agency. “Semi-public” and “people-founded” schools are intermediate forms of “public” and “private,” the “semi-public” form being closer to the “public” form, and the “people-founded” form being closer to the “private” form. Furthermore, “private” refers to schools established by various kinds of associations or by single individuals. The Vietnamese government currently encourages the establishment of these “non-public” schools, and their number is increasing (IIEP 2001).

Table 2 shows the proportion of enrollments in non-public schools to the total enrollment. According to the data, although the non-public enrollment proportions are high in kindergartens and high schools, almost all primary and middle schools are public schools, and the proportion of enrollments in non-private schools is small at these levels. The Vietnamese government is promoting an increase in non-public schools, but with respect to primary and middle schools, school establishment forms other than public establishment are currently extremely rare.

(iii) Projects by mass organizations, community organizations, and enterprises that encourage educational activities

The socialization of education is not necessarily a system that only increases the personal burden of parents

**Table 1.** School Establishment Forms in Vietnam

	Central or Regional Government	Enterprises, Associations, Organizations	Individuals	
			Plural	Singular
Public	○			
Semi-public	○	○		
People-founded		○	○	
Private		○		○

Source: Prepared from data in the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (2002)

**Table 2.** Proportion of School Enrollments in Non-Public Schools (2000)

	Total Enrollment	Non-Public School Enrollment	Proportion of Non-Public School Enrollment (%)
Kindergarten	2,136,389	1,067,319	50.0
Primary School	9,751,431	27,490	0.3
Middle School	5,918,153	186,336	3.1
High School	2,199,814	755,438	34.3

Source: Prepared from MOET (2002 b)

(Nguyen Cong Giap 2004). Throughout Vietnam, community organizations known as “Study Encouragement Associations,” which work to raise funds not only from the local community and parents but also from local enterprises, have been set up to raise educational funds from local societies. This is considered to be an attempt to request financial resources from a wide range of sources besides parents, and make it clear that this process is not simply a shifting of the financial burden onto the individual. The Study Encouragement Associations carry out various kinds of work for educational development—such as the encouragement of school attendance, the construction and maintenance of educational facilities, the establishment of local education centers—at the village, county, and provincial levels using the funds raised. It is thought that the work of these kinds of community organizations plays an important role in the success of the socialization of education.

### (3) Indicators of the Socialization of Education

The Vietnamese government has formulated government standards for primary education and is strongly requesting provincial Departments of Education and Training (DOETs) to achieve these standards. The government standards consist of five main items, one of which is the socialization of education. The standard sets out the kind of indicators that can be used to evaluate progress towards the socialization of primary education (MOET and JICA 2002). The contents of these are as follows.

(i) Coordination with local societies: “Is each local society holding meetings concerning education with communities on a timely basis?” “Are the parents and the school cooperating to carry out educational work?”

(ii) Work intended to produce a good educational environment: “Is public relations work being done to deepen the understanding of local societies concerning the objectives of primary education (educational content, methodology, pupil ranking, primary educational planning, and so on) and is it being carried out systematically?” “Is the educational and learning environment for children being developed in cooperation with parents?” “Are specific educational activities on such

matters as moral improvement, lifestyle improvement, law, culture, art, and sports being organized appropriately?”

(iii) Contributions from families and local societies for school facility construction and maintenance: “Are contributions being received from organizations, individuals, parents, etc., either in the form of labor or money, for school construction, purchase of teaching materials, commendation of teachers and pupils, support for the children of poor families, and so on?”

## 2. The Actuality of the Socialization of Education: Results of the Questionnaire Survey

We look here at the results of a questionnaire survey on the socialization of education targeted at provincial DOETs, concerning when the socialization of education began, who they believe are the important stakeholders, what the main kinds of work are, how the state of implementation is evaluated, and what challenges are to be overcome.

### (1) When did the socialization of education begin?

At the Eighth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1996, it was decided to aim for qualitative material and mental improvements in the daily lives of the people through socialization in the fields of culture, communications, medical treatment, population and family planning, and so on, and this is thought to include the socialization of education. Does this mean that the socialization of education in Vietnam began following this Vietnamese Communist Party Congress, or had it begun before that?

The results of the survey sent to all provinces of Vietnam show that only very few provinces initiated the socialization of education following the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party. Of the data obtained from the provinces that replied to the questionnaire survey (valid replies received from 29 provinces), eight provinces began the socialization of education following the Eighth Party Congress, showing that many provinces had begun the socialization of education prior to the Congress.

**(2) Who bears responsibility for the socialization of education?**

Who do the provinces believe are the important stakeholders in the implementation of the socialization of education policy? The results of the survey show that it is believed that “local society” and “parents” are the important stakeholders. Half of the provinces took “local society” to be the most important stakeholder, while 42% of provinces considered “parents” to be the most important stakeholder. The next most important stakeholder was thought to be the Study Encouragement Associations. In contrast to these stakeholders which were thought to be important, relatively few provinces considered “enterprises” or “NGOs” to be significant.

**(3) Important activities in the socialization of education**

Specifically, what kinds of activities are considered to be important for the socialization of education? The questionnaire survey asked respondents to rank the following items in order of priority: “Parent and community participation in school management,” “Support for children who have difficulty in attending school,” “Study encouragement campaigns,” “Campaigns to encourage attendance and prevent drop-outs,” “Supplementary pay for teachers,” “School equipment and teaching materials,” and “School construction and repair.” The most highly ranked items were “School construction and repair” and “Campaigns to encourage attendance and prevent drop-outs.” Of the provinces, 51.5% ranked “School construction and repair” as their top priority, and 42% of provinces ranked “Campaigns to encourage attendance and prevent drop-outs” as their number one priority. Currently, in primary education in Vietnam, complete national coverage of and the end of double-shift schooling in primary education are considered to be urgent priorities for the improvement of the quality of education under the Education for All movement. The important factor for ending double-shift schooling is an increase in the number of classrooms through the increased school construction; the ending of double-shift schooling will be indispensable for the implementation of the new curriculum, which is being introduced in Vietnam now. Because of this, the focus of the socialization of education on the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of education is also in line with the areas thought to be most important in educational policy in Vietnam.

**(4) Provincial evaluation of the implementation of the socialization of education policy**

When asked how the provinces were evaluating the state of implementation of the socialization of education

policy, of the valid responses received from 35 provinces, four provinces replied “successful implementation” and 31 provinces replied “difficulties in implementation.” In other words, up to this point many provinces were experiencing difficulties in the implementation of socialization, suggesting that joint public and private managing of schools in Vietnam is not an easy task to carry out.

**(5) Difficulties experienced in the implementation of the socialization of education**

What kinds of difficulties, therefore, have been experienced in the socialization of education? Concerning these difficulties, respondents were asked to rank the following items in order of importance: “A lack of clear thinking, vision, and will,” “A lack of know-how and management ability,” “A lack of need,” “A lack of participation by the community, parents, and so on,” and “Other.” Firstly, 45% of provinces ranked “A lack of clear thinking, vision, and will,” as their foremost difficulty. Indeed, in order for the socialization of education to be effective, clear thinking and will are indispensable for the carrying out of education by society as a whole; if they are lacking, great difficulties will be encountered during implementation. Secondly, 42% of provinces cited “A lack of participation by the community, parents, and so on,” as their greatest difficulty. In addition, one-third of the provinces cited other difficulties by selecting the “Other” item, with the kinds of difficulties stated in this case being as follows: “Local income levels are low and contributions cannot be expected,” “There are no strong enterprises in the area that can make donations to education,” “School attendance is difficult due to geographical difficulties in mountainous areas,” “Awareness of school attendance is low among parents.”

**3. The Current State of Individual Payment for Education**

In looking at Vietnam’s educational finances, whether it be current expenditures or capital expenditures, we find that funds from the central government are simply not sufficient to cover the actual necessary outlays, and it is because of this that local governments and communities are obliged to bear some of the costs themselves. Educational expenditures in Vietnam can be roughly divided into “government expenditures” and “non-government expenditures.” Government expenditures include Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds, which are added to the government’s public expenditures mentioned thus far. In contrast, non-government expenditures include school fees, contributions from parents and local societies, private funds, and so on. As mentioned above, when

government expenditures are insufficient, the role of contributions from parents and local societies-non-government expenditures-becomes significant.

The system of payments by beneficiaries in education was introduced in Vietnam in September 1989, when it became necessary for school fees, textbooks, and so on to be paid for by their beneficiaries (World Bank, 1996 1997). The “Law on the Universalization of Primary Education” was established in 1991, making school fees for primary education free in principle. Nevertheless, there is a custom of giving presents to teachers at the end of school terms, on Teacher’s Day, and at Tet (the Vietnamese New Year), so parental burdens do in fact exist. The movement towards the socialization of education in Vietnam has become much more vigorous since the late 1990 s.

Table 3 shows public expenditures and direct parental payments within total educational expenditures. This data has been calculated based on the World Bank’s household survey data. In the 1998 survey, roughly 60% of the total costs for primary education were defrayed from the public purse, and the remaining approximately 40% was provided by payments from household budgets. The burden on household budgets fell to 27% in 2002, showing a trend towards reduction of the burden on household budgets, but this was still high when compared with other Asian countries (Rose, 2002). For example, the burden on household budgets is estimated to be around 20% in the Philippines and 5% in Indonesia. Naturally there are some differences between countries in the items that are included as educational payments in the household budget. For example, some countries include the cost of transport to the school in the calculation, while others do not. It is therefore necessary to be cautious when making international comparisons; however, it is believed that the proportion of educational expenses borne by households is relatively high in Vietnam and Cambodia (Bray, 2002). Even though the proportion of the burden on parents may be high, it can be said that the salient feature of Vietnam is its achievement of an extremely high level of school attendance.

Contributions collected from parents are frequently levied under the pretext of costs for school construction or repairs and maintenance. In better-off regions, however, the school or the Parents’ Association solicits further contributions and encourages extra voluntary contributions from the parents in the name of a “special event fund” for the school. In the better-off regions, these can then be used for the purchase of items of a routine expenditure nature, such as teaching materials and teaching equipment. Further, with the introduction of the new curriculum, the changeover from double-shift schooling to full-day schooling is currently an urgent priority in Vietnam, and double-shift schooling has already been terminated in the better-off regions. This is because parents in the better-off regions have been paying a supplementary fee for afternoon schooling. In other words, in the better-off regions parents have also taken on the burden of payments for the current expenditures of schools.

The structure of the burden for primary education costs in Vietnam, as far as can be ascertained from available materials and interview surveys, is summarized in Table 4. It can be seen that the item with the strongest compulsory nature and also the highest monetary value is school construction and repairs costs. According to a 1998 household survey, the annual amounts paid to schools by parents for school construction and repairs were, for more than half of schools, in the range of 10,000 to 30,000 VND. (Many responses of 30,000 to 40,000 VND were given in an interview survey carried out by the author in 2002.) A very small number of schools were found to levy no payments at all. The school that levies the most collects 100,000 VND. Among these schools, 36% stated that they “do not solicit” contributions for the parents’ association and of the schools that did levy contributions, the amounts were smaller than those for school construction contributions.

At administrative levels from the county downwards, efforts are being made to diversify sources of finance, and funds are being gathered for capital expenditures from a variety of sources. The county can implement

**Table 3.** Funding Sources of Education Expenditures (%)

		1993	1998	2002
Primary Education	Public subsidy	45%	55%	73%
	Contributions and direct expenditures by parents	55%	45%	27%
Lower Secondary Education	Public subsidy	34%	62%	59%
	Contributions and direct expenditures by parents	66%	38%	41%
	Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Edited from World Bank (2005)

**Table 4.** Burden Structure for Primary Education Costs in Vietnam

Item	Burden Structure
Teaching Staff Salaries	The central government bears the costs, but the amounts provided are very small and insufficient. Supplementary payments are made only in the case that the local government, parents, and local society have the ability to pay.
School Construction and Maintenance Costs	Basically provided for by parents and local society. Monthly payments are made by parents to school. Subsidies are in some cases granted by the central and local governments, but this is not widespread. Especially in the case of primary education, in almost all cases costs for school buildings are borne by parents; however, there are also cases where costs for school construction and repair are provided through support from international agencies and NGOs.
Textbooks, Teaching Materials, Stationery Materials, and Equipment	Costs borne by parents
Parents' Association, Study Encouragement Association	Contributions from parents, but these are not necessarily compulsory

fundraising for construction projects of one billion VND or less without permission from a higher level, and so are moving ahead with school construction based on donations from enterprises and mass organizations. According to a survey by Brooke et al. (1999), in one county, of 84 new classrooms constructed, a mere 14 were built with budget from the province and the remainder were built with donations from NGOs and from other provinces, or with contributions from individuals and agencies inside or outside the province.

Nevertheless, the current situation is that almost all counties depend on support from parents in the form of contributions to the school building construction fund or provision of labor. Amounts contributed to the school building construction fund vary from area to area, but even the poorest segments of society are expected to pay a certain amount. According to a 2002 household survey, an annual average of approximately 270,000 VND per household (roughly 2% of household income) was paid for primary education. Furthermore, in terms of household educational payments by income strata (income quintiles), contributions (for school building construction, parents' association, and so on) were almost the same from the least well-off stratum to the most well-off stratum. The proportion of expenditures for primary education in the household budgets also showed almost no difference from the least well-off stratum to the most well-off stratum. In contrast, there were great differences between strata in payments for school fees and expenditures for extra classes, with the most well-off strata making the largest payments. This suggests that schools attended by many children from well-off families have already made the changeover to full-day schooling and that these children are also taking supplementary classes at private cram schools outside of regular school hours.

There is in Vietnam a system of exemption or reduction of school payments for people who are socially disadvantaged or from the least well-off stratum. Nationwide, 16.2% of children were receiving some kind of exemption for school payments in 1998, and this figure was little changed in 2002 at 16.7%. Nevertheless, in 1998, full exemptions amounted to 5.8%, a figure that increased greatly in four years, reaching 15.2% in 2002. If we examine payment exemptions or reductions by income strata, we see that the percentage of exemptions or reductions in the relatively well-off strata of the income quintiles fell between 1998 and 2002, while those in the less well-off strata rose. In 2002, the percentage of full exemptions from school payments was 24.2% in the least well-off strata, indicating that approximately one out of four children in this stratum was receiving a full exemption from school payments. From this we can see that the rough trend is for the target of school payment exemptions and reductions to be the less well-off strata. Yet, it is important to note that most children, even those in the least well-off stratum, are not receiving exemptions or reductions of school payments, and that approximately 8% of children in the most well-off stratum are the beneficiaries of the exemption or reduction system. This means that the criteria for exemptions or reductions are not limited to income alone.

#### 4. Community Participation in Preschool Education

In recent years, there has been much discussion in the international community about the effectiveness of Early Childhood Development (ECD) for qualitative improvements in primary school education and the expansion of female education (MOET 2002 a). Here, I would like to touch on community participation in

preschool education in Vietnam.

The current Vietnamese preschool education policy is set out in the Decision No.161/2002/QĐ-TTg of November 2002. Firstly, Article 1 (Tasks of preschool education development till 2010) of Decision No.161 states, "The Government shall continue increasing investment in preschool education development and at the same time boost the preschool education socialization, expand the system of creches and kindergartens in all population areas; give priority to the investment in the development of preschool education in communes meeting with socio-economic difficulties as well as in high-mountain and island communes." What should be noted here is that the current preschool education policy in Vietnam places a high priority on the diffusion of preschool education to regions with socio-economic difficulties, mountainous regions, and islands. Furthermore, the "communes meeting with socio-economic difficulties" mentioned in Article 1 are the 2380 communes that are the target areas for "Program 135," a poverty reduction program currently being implemented in Vietnam, under which the government is carrying out intensive financial allocations to these areas.

In Article 2 (Orientations for the development of forms of preschool education establishment till 2010), after defining public, semi-public, people-founded, and private schools, as mentioned above, it is stated that public preschool education will be limited mainly to areas (included in the lists prescribed by the Prime Minister) facing exceptional socioeconomic difficulties, and that semi-public preschool education establishments shall be built mainly in rural areas, other than those facing socioeconomic difficulties and in the areas with low living standards in cities, provincial towns, or rural areas. The article further declares that the establishment of people-founded and private preschool facilities will be encouraged in the cities and in economically developed areas, and that public creches and kindergartens in cities and economically developed areas will be transformed into non-public facilities.

One item that should be noted in Decision No.161 is Article 4 (Development of the contingent of preschool teachers). In this Article, it is stated that government allocations for teacher salaries will be made mainly for communes facing exceptional socio-economic difficulties (the percentage of preschool teachers on the government payroll being defined according to the characteristics of the areas involved). Furthermore, in economically developed areas, teachers will be recruited by kindergartens to work under labor contracts, not on the government payroll. (In this paper, we refer to these teachers as "contractual teachers," and use the term "government-employed teachers" for those whose salary is provided by the government.) Since the

contractual teachers' salaries are not provided by the government, they are paid mainly from funds collected from parents in the form of fees and contributions; however, it is stated in the Article that a certain level of social security as well as employment stability and professional training should be provided for both contractual and government-employed teachers. The Article also states that for semi-public preschool education establishments, if the abovementioned revenue sources from contributions and so on are insufficient to pay salaries, subsidies may be requested from the government to bring the salaries for contractual teachers up to the level of the minimum wage.

From the above, it can be seen that the current preschool education policy in Vietnam, at least as far as the letter of the law is concerned, has adopted a policy of preferential treatment for poorer areas, with a focus on public establishments and government-employed teachers in poorer areas, and a focus on non-public establishments and contractual teachers in the economically advanced areas. It is worth noting that, although a policy of preferential treatment for poorer areas-the Program 135 targets-is also being carried out, a clearer and more specific preferential treatment policy has been formulated for preschool education.

## 5. Support for Professional Training for Teachers

It is now necessary to mention teacher training, which was one of the aspects of the socialization of education that arose from the interview survey carried out in the field. Vietnam is currently in the process of introducing a new primary education curriculum, for which teacher training is indispensable for effective implementation. This is being carried out on an intramural basis, with each school carrying out activities, such as model classes by teacher volunteers, meetings for the exchange of opinions, and so on. Some schools carry this out on a regular basis, while some schools engage in these activities irregularly. In some cases, the community pays the cost of teaching material development in order to support in-service training for teachers. Commendations (awards for excellent teachers) are also carried out through Study Encouragement Associations in order to raise teacher incentives.

## 6. Challenges for Disparity Reduction

There is a danger that disparities between well-off areas and poor areas will widen as socialization advances. This may occur because, in areas with higher morale and better financial resources, a higher standard of education will be achieved, whereas in less advantaged areas it will be impossible to raise the

qualitative levels of education. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government, while on the one hand pursuing a policy (socialization) that will lead to a widening of disparities, is on the other hand attempting to apply a uniform government standard for the quality of education. The introduction of the new curriculum and the adoption of the government standards for primary education are being carried out uniformly over the whole country. Under the former curricular system, it was possible to select one of three types of curriculum, depending on the suitability for the actual conditions in the area; however, the new curriculum is required to be implemented uniformly nationwide, and there is scant consideration for regional characteristics.

Disparities exist not only among provinces, but also within provinces, and finding a way to deal with these intra-provincial disparities is becoming an important challenge. In an interview survey at the provincial DOETs, it was stated that, "Within the province, we will shift to full-day schooling, beginning from where that is feasible," showing that in some localities there is no particular government policy for the reduction of disparities. Yet, a number of provinces have taken the following measures to reduce disparities: 1) Measures for the exemption of contribution payments and so on for the poorer strata, 2) A pooling system for contributions (the sharing of contributions collected by a number of schools), 3) Provincial subsidies for the purpose of remedying disparities, 4) Free distribution of textbooks and other materials, 5) Activities by enterprises and mass organizations (mass organizations provide boats to make it possible for floating village children to attend school), the implementation of activities for awarding scholarships to children of poorer strata, and so on. There are also examples of private enterprises supporting the construction of school buildings, scholarships, partial reductions of fees, and so on.

These activities differ in content from province to province. The actual state of such activities cannot be sufficiently grasped at present, and apparently information is not being shared. In the future, based on analyses of the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs, it is thought that policies for the elimination of intra-provincial disparities will become important at both the central level and the regional government level. In all kinds of policy documents in Vietnam, there is currently little reference to concrete policy measures on this point, and this area will be an important challenge for the future.

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