



Migration Profile

VIETNAM

A. Executive Summary

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was founded in 1976, three years after the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the subsequent takeover of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese Communist forces. A century of conflicts and political persecutions produced a sizeable diaspora of refugees and economic migrants, especially in Australia and the United States. This created a vast community of Vietnamese living abroad, beckoning new emigrant flows. About 100,000 Vietnamese leave the country every year to work and study abroad.

Implementation of *Doi Moi* economic reforms in 1986 fostered urbanisation and created wealth disparities between the rich coastal flatlands and the poor rural highlands, encouraging migration. Internal migrants represent more than 7% of the entire Vietnamese population, mostly concentrated in Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon), Hanoi, Da Nang, and their outskirts. Growing urbanization is straining the cities' welfare and giving policymakers and international organizations new challenges. Access to adequate housing, public schools, and healthcare for migrants is often hampered by bureaucratic, economic, and social barriers. Rural-to-urban flows are, however, decreasing in favour of urban-to-urban routes. Recurring natural disasters are causing frequent internal displacement. Furthermore, climate change and natural calamities affecting farming areas are boosting internal rural-to-rural flows.

The large vulnerable population, many of whom are migrant women and children and ethnic minorities, is fertile ground for the proliferation of human trafficking and exploitation. Women and girls are considered more susceptible to trafficking than men due to unequal gender relations and socio-economic disparities, though both are at risk for different forms of exploitation.

Vietnam has developed a range of national laws and policies improving healthcare access for migrants and has endorsed several international and regional frameworks that support migration and health. However, many gaps in the legal framework need to be filled, and more effort must be made to address these issues.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Located on the easternmost edge of the Indochinese Peninsula, Vietnam borders China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, and faces the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea to

the southwest and east, respectively. Its roughly S-shaped territory is divided into the highlands and the Red River Delta in the north, where the capital, Hanoi, is located; the Annamite Mountains and the coastal lowlands in the centre, being only about 50 km wide at their narrowest point; and the Mekong Delta in the south, where Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon) is located. Hanoi is the most populous city while Ho Chi Minh is the second most populous and the economic core of the country. The north and central highlands, along with the Annamite mountains, are the poorest and least accessible areas and are populated by many ethnic minorities.

Vietnam has an estimated population of 96,208,984, with the majority living in rural areas on the two river deltas and along the coastline. It is one of the youngest populations in the world, with 40% under 25 years old. The government of Vietnam recognizes a total of 54 ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Kinh (or Viet) (87.5%), followed by the Tay (1.9%), the Thai (1.8%), the Muong (1.5%), the Khmer (1.5%), the Mong (1.2%), the Nung (1.1%), the Hoa (1%), and others (4.3%). According to the General Statistic Office of Vietnam, 86% of Vietnamese do not follow any organised religion, though a vast majority of them may observe some form of Vietnamese folk religion. Catholicism is practiced by at least 6.1% of the population, followed by Buddhism (4.7%), Hoahaoism (1%), and Protestantism (1%). The U.S. Department of State does, however, estimate that 15% of Vietnamese practice Buddhism, though many of them do so without being members of any organization recognised by the government. Moreover, Confucianism still plays an important cultural role in Vietnamese society.

After the unification of the North and South into a single Communist state and the ratification of the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the country experienced international isolation and economic stagnation until 1986 when the Communist Party promoted a series of economic and political reforms (Đổi Mới) to facilitate private sector development, attract foreign investment, and expand markets. This led to an major improvement in life conditions for the population but also to a rise in urbanisation and rural-to-urban migration

The unemployment rate was 4.6% in 2019. Despite the Covid 19 crisis, in 2020 Vietnam succeeded in containing the virus and achieved significant economic growth of 2.91%.

II. International and Internal Migrants

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), international migrants account for less than 0.08% of the Vietnamese population, with only 76,767 registered migrants in 2020, 58% of whom were male. Their main countries of origin were Thailand (15.6%), Myanmar (15.4%), Bangladesh (10.8%), Indonesia (10.8%), and Lao PDR. However, these numbers may not account for all illegal entries, for which there is no firm data. The Ministry of Labour, cited by official state-run news agencies, reported 93,720 foreign workers in the country, mainly from China, Japan, and South Korea, employed as managers, managing directors or experts, and around 22% as technical workers. According to the General Statistic Office's census of 2019, up to 230,000 people now living in Vietnam were residing abroad over the previous five years. Moreover, the media still frequently reports on inbound migrants illegally entering the country, especially from China.

Internal migrants constitute a more substantial part of the population (7.3%), with 6.7 million aged 5 or older as of 2019. Internal migration flows have been growing since the implementation of the

Đổi Mới (lit. “Renovation”) reforms in 1986, which created deep rural-urban disparities of wealth and opportunity. Though 2019 volumes show a decreasing trend overall, movements toward the Red River Delta and southeast regions (Ho Chi Min and surrounding provinces) remain significant, with urban-to-urban flow becoming the most relevant. According to the General Statistic Office, as of 2020 the south-east region remained the destination of choice for approximately two thirds of all interregional migrants. Most of them came from the nearby Mekong Delta region which accounts for 37% of all outbound internal migration. The Red River Delta region is the second main destination, with 60% of the migrants coming from the northern midlands and mountainous area.

Vietnam’s female population is, on average, younger than the males and has a higher unemployment rate (2.82%). It accounts for 55.5% of the migrant population, although the proportion of males is increasing. The median age is also increasing, with about 62% aged 20-39. Overall about one third of migrants move to start or find a new job, and another third migrates for purposes of family relocation. Other relevant reasons for migration are marriage and study. In the southeast region job opportunities account for more than 50% of internal migration. Up to 91.4% of employed migrants work in the service, industrial, and construction sectors, and 37% have a technical qualification level, almost double that of non-migrants. The Red River Delta has the highest proportion of qualified migrants (58%), while the more rural Mekong Delta area has the lowest (24%).

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), internal migrants face more difficulties than the local population in accessing welfare, housing, and health services. This is due mainly to financial and bureaucratic barriers, such as the household registration system (*ho khau*) and the lack of work contracts. Even if reforms have been implemented, with the progressive abolition of the *ho khau* system and the institution of an identity card system in 2017, many migrants remain unregistered and, therefore, excluded from social housing, access to public health and public school systems. In fact, only 55% of inter-provincial migrant children (aged 11-18) attend school. Social isolation is another issue, especially for women and children and ethnic minorities, who become more at risk of exploitation and abuse. Housing conditions for migrants in urban areas are often inferior. Temporary and unregistered migrants face job insecurity; and jobs rarely provide health insurance, unemployment benefits, sick leave, or maternity leave. Migration of a family member also impacts those left behind, including the elderly and many middle-aged women who may have to look after the children of absent parent migrants and work the fields. The COVID-19 crisis has also impacted migrant households in terms of income and unemployment.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

With an average net migration rate of -0.8% in the last five years, Vietnam is primarily an exporter of laborers. According to UNDESA, 3.2 million Vietnamese live abroad; 47% of them are in North America, mainly in the U.S., 15% in Europe, 10% in Japan, 9% in China, 8% in Australia, and 5% in South Korea. Females tend to be predominant in western countries, Australia, and Hongkong.

According to the IOM, 100,000 workers on average leave the country each year. In 2019 the top destinations were Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Macau, and Malaysia. These numbers do not, however, account for illegal emigration. The United Nations Economic and

Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) reports an average of 18,000 Vietnamese illegally reaching Europe every year, and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) reported approximately 150,000 irregular migrants from Vietnam entering Europe in 2017.

The government encourages the migration of skilled workers and promotes study mobility programs, as migrants often remain connected to the motherland, thereby creating channels and opportunities for its economy and development. As of 2020 about 190,000 Vietnamese were studying abroad, mainly in North America, Europe, Australia, Japan, and South Korea. As families increase their household income and look to send their children abroad to ensure them the best education opportunities, the number of students abroad continues to grow.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers, and refugees)

Climate-related displacements are a significant phenomenon in Vietnam. There are very frequent floods and typhoons in the Mekong Delta flatlands and storms and landslides in the highlands and mountains of the hinterland. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 89,000 new displacements were registered in 2019 and up to 857,000 in the previous three years. Over 70% of the population live in flood-prone areas exposed to tropical storms and typhoons. According to Vietnam's central statistics office, around 17,000 people, or 1 in 100 residents, left Kiên Giang province during and after the drought of 2016, while in 2017 ten consecutive disasters caused around 633,000 displacements. The destruction of houses and farms encourages working-age members of affected families to look for work in provincial capitals and megacities such as Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh. Exact numbers are hard to come by, but population movements following disasters appear to be significant.

Statelessness is another significant issue. The government of Vietnam reports that at the end of 2018 the number of registered stateless persons and persons of undetermined nationality had increased to 34,110 from 11,000 at the end of 2016. This increase is partially due to activities undertaken by the government to address statelessness, including the identification of stateless persons. These include refugees from Cambodia; and women who renounced their Vietnamese nationality upon marrying foreign men and acquired the husband's nationality, but then returned to Vietnam following failed marriages. Some of these women were sold by their own families through illegal marriage agencies, especially in Taiwan and South Korea. Because of language and cultural barriers, Vietnamese brides often have difficulty integrating into the society of their husband's nation. Additionally, the incidence of domestic violence towards foreign female spouses has been increasing in both South Korea and Taiwan where authorities are working to build programs to assist victims.

Poor and often outdated information is available about asylum seekers leaving and entering Vietnam. In 2017 the government indicated to the UN Human Rights Committee that there had not been any asylum applications in Vietnam since 2002. On the other hand, data from the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) indicates that in 2019 3,535 Vietnamese applied for asylum in EU countries, including up to 625 minors. Of these, 45% requested asylum in the UK. Dozens of members of ethnic-religious minorities, such as Christian Montagnards (*Degar*), have also been reported fleeing Vietnam in recent years, especially toward Cambodia, the UK, and North America.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

The tragic death of 39 Vietnamese found in a refrigerated container truck in the UK in October 2019 has drawn attention to what for a long time has been a plague in Vietnam as well as other surrounding South Asian countries: human trafficking.

Vietnam is predominantly a source country for the trafficking of persons for the purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation. It has been reported that men, often from ethnic minority communities, are being trafficked into situations of forced labour in construction, fishing, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Taiwan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Laos, Japan, and, to a lesser extent, parts of Europe and the UK. Commonly used coercive methods include debt bondage, passport confiscation, and threats of deportation, while luring happens via false advertising, especially on the internet through gaming sites, social media, and messaging applications. Within the country Vietnamese of all sexes and ages are subjected to forced labour, including street children and people with disabilities, although little information is available on these cases. Children are subjected to forced street selling and begging in major urban centres. Some children are subjected to forced and bonded labour in informal garment and brick factories, urban family homes, and privately-run rural mines.

Due to discriminatory gender relations and socio-economic disparity, women and girls are more susceptible to the risks of trafficking and exploitation. Traffickers increasingly exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, trapping them through the traditional practice of bride kidnapping and forcing them into sex work or domestic labour. Vietnamese women who move abroad for internationally brokered marriages or to work in restaurants, massage parlours or karaoke bars are sometimes subjected to forced labour in domestic service or sex trafficking. Often misled by fraudulent labour opportunities, Vietnamese women and children are sold to brothels on the borders of Cambodia, China, and Laos, and sometimes transported to countries such as Thailand and Malaysia, where they are forced into prostitution. Child sex trafficking is more common among children from impoverished rural areas, but there is a rising number of victims from middle class and urban settings. Child sex tourists are reported to come mainly from other Asian countries, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

The Vietnamese migrate overseas for work informally or through state-owned or state-regulated labour recruitment enterprises, some of which are unresponsive to workers' requests for assistance in situations of exploitation. Some also charge excessive fees that trap workers in debt bondage. Vietnamese labour export companies and unlicensed intermediary brokers have been known to operate illegally, exploiting vulnerable and desperate migrants.

Traffickers come from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from recruitment agency staff to parents, family members, or small-scale networks. Organized crime groups are involved in trafficking further overseas, such as in the forced labour of Vietnamese children on cannabis farms in the UK. The internet and social networks have increasingly been used as channels to lure victims. Corruption and connivance, including at border crossings and checkpoints, make such crimes easier to commit.

According to the United Nations, despite progress in recent years, many counter-trafficking challenges remain to be addressed in the country. Attempts at prevention are rare. When it occurs, the focus is more on raising awareness than concrete behavioural change. Overall efforts to regulate recruitment companies and marriage brokers remain inadequate, and the definition of trafficking in Vietnam's legislation, which does not fully correspond with international definitions, can conflate smuggling and human trafficking. In addition, though various bilateral agreements have been signed, they have not yet been fully implemented.

VI. National Legal Framework

International migrations are regulated by the Vietnamese Law on Entry, Exit, Transit, and Residence of Foreigners in Vietnam which grants a Temporary Residence Card (TRC) to foreigners who possess either a work permit issued by the Department of Labour or a work permit exemption certificate. The TRC is also issued to those who work for specific international organizations or possess selected visa types.

According to the IOM, Vietnam has developed a range of national laws and policies and endorsed several international and regional frameworks that support healthcare for migrants. Despite these steps forward, access to healthcare for internal and outbound migrants can still be impeded by laws on residence and health insurance. Moreover, further International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions await ratification in the wake of earlier approvals. All Vietnamese citizens have equal rights under the constitution; however, the country's household registration system, which determines who can access social services, utilities, land, and housing, creates barriers for non-residents, including migrants and IDPs. In November 2020 the 14th National Assembly (NA) adopted the amended Law on Residence which aims to abolish household registration and temporary residence books. This law took effect on 1 July 2021 and will be valid until the end of 2022. No new household registration books or new temporary residence books will be issued or reissued now that the law is in effect. When people holding household registration or temporary residence books need to change their residency information, competent agencies will update the changes in the national database on residence without renewing the books.

Vietnam's Law on Disaster Prevention and Control establishes the government's responsibility for providing shelter following a disaster and allocating funding for the restoration of damaged homes. However, according to the Global Protection Cluster, disaster-risk management laws do not directly address internal displacement.

According to the UNHCR, the 2008 Law on Vietnamese Nationality does not provide sufficient protection against the risk of statelessness, particularly among children. Protection gaps arise from the fact that this law does not recognize dual nationality. Furthermore, though Article 22 provides an opportunity for stateless persons who do not have adequate personal identification papers to naturalize, they need to have been permanently residing in Vietnam for 20 years.

Article 150 of the penal code criminalized the labour and sex trafficking of adults while Article 151 criminalized the labour and sex trafficking of children under the age of 16. Inconsistent with international law, children aged between 16 and 17 are treated as adults under Article 150. This means that they are required to demonstrate that they have been victims of force, fraud, or

coercion to prove the commission of a sex trafficking offense. The Vietnamese government started addressing the issue through the 2016-2020 National Action Plan and the Programme on the Prevention and Reduction of Child Labour for 2016-20. Vietnam has bilateral anti-trafficking agreements signed with Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, China, and the UK.

VII. Main Actors

The State and International organizations

The Vietnamese government, with its Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), collaborates with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and several UN Agencies, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), to address internal migrant issues. Other important actors are the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Women's Union of Viet Nam. The latter, along with the MPS, are the main institutional actors combating sexual trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. The IOM delegation in Vietnam, which started operations in 1987 as part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to focus on safe migration and mobility, has a head office in Hanoi and a branch office in Ho Chi Minh City.

The ILO in Vietnam seeks primarily to promote rights at work, encourage fair employment opportunities, improve social protection, and reinforce dialogue on work-related issues. It is now assisting Vietnam to implement the 2017-21 Decent Work Country Programme, which aims to reduce poverty and unacceptable forms of work by extending social protection to all, especially the most vulnerable.

The Vietnam Red Cross Society (VNRC) is a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Vietnamese Fatherland Front. Its headquarters are in Hanoi. The VNRC works closely as an auxiliary to the humanitarian activities of the state authorities in Vietnam. In recent years it has attained a key position in the national disaster response system.

Other organisations

To operate in Vietnam, International NGOs need to apply for permission and comply with regulations of the Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs (COMINGO). The activities of international NGOs in Vietnam and their administration by the government of Vietnam are managed under Government Decree No. 12/2012/ND-CP.

Known international organizations operating in Vietnam are the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), Save the Children, Australian Aid, Habitat for Humanity Vietnam, Church World Service Vietnam, and several others. The Asia Foundation supports Vietnam with programs in critical areas such as women's economic empowerment, environmental resilience, girls' education, inclusive economic growth, migrant-worker rights, and regional and international integration.

There are many organizations that focus on children from impoverished families, orphans, runaways, and street children. The Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, founded in Hanoi in 2003, helps kids in crisis throughout Vietnam, providing practical solutions to the daily problems that come with living in poverty. Besides street kids and runaways, they assist victims of human trafficking, children with disabilities, young rural-urban migrants, kids affected by drugs and HIV/AIDS, homeless families, child prisoners, and the rural poor. Saigon Children's Charity was

founded in 1992 to help disadvantaged children across Vietnam get an education and a fairer start in life. ChildFund Vietnam works to overcome barriers to education for children, including poverty, geography, knowledge, and disability. Their projects focus on child rights and protection, education, health, and well-being. Habitat for Humanity Vietnam started operating as a branch office in 2001 in Da Nang city in the central coastal region. As of June 2019, it has enabled more than 16,000 low-income Vietnamese families to improve their living conditions through decent homes, clean water, and safe sanitation, as well as through post-disaster reconstruction and repairs.

Several NGOs in Vietnam are committed to providing micro-credit services, housing improvement, and child education, especially in rural areas. One such group is Mekong Plus, which operates in rural areas of southern Vietnam and Cambodia supporting the rural population through training and microcredit, offering education and healthcare, and helping the people find proper housing. Maison Chance aims at the improvement of health and living conditions and the support and reintegration into society of the most vulnerable. They offer access to appropriate education and vocational training, especially for children and the disabled, and develop housing and hospitality programs for those with disadvantages in urban areas. Among anti-trafficking NGOs, Hagar International supports women and children who have fled from severe domestic violence and human trafficking rings. There are also a number of NGOs that are trying to supply health services to people that can't afford them, such as Project Vietnam, Children's Hope in Action (CHIA) and Operation Smile.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, with headquarters in Ho Chi Minh, promotes several initiatives through its 27 dioceses, particularly aimed at the socially marginalized, migrants or ethnic minorities, the homeless, and people with disabilities. Priests, nuns, and seminarians from various congregations, such as the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, develop programs to aid unemployed and marginalized people and run daycare centres, charity schools, orphanages, and shelters for the disadvantaged. An example is Mai Tam House of Hope in Ho Chi Minh City, an initiative supported by the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam and ICMC. The house is a shelter for HIV-positive women and children, many of whom are survivors of sex trafficking.

Caritas Vietnam provides relief to people displaced by natural calamities. Founded in south Vietnam in 1965, it was ordered to cease operations in 1976 and hand over all possessions to the government. The moratorium lasted for 22 years until the agency was re-established in June 2008. Today, Caritas Vietnam focuses on capacity building at the national level for the 26 diocesan Caritas groups. Its programmes aim to promote integral human development and to deliver emergency assistance. It organises workshops on preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Caritas Vietnam's social service activities include campaigns to help dioceses boost education and life skills for young people, water projects to improve the health of leprosy patients, and support to people living with disabilities. It runs a scholarship programme for poor students. The main office in Ho Chi Minh City employs 14 staff and consists of 4 departments: education and training, communication, life services, and finance. The agency guides and coordinates the work of the 26 Caritas diocesan offices. Caritas Vietnam is a member of Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Asia

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Vietnam works with many partners to meet emerging needs and ensure that all citizens benefit from Vietnam's recent economic growth and development. Much of

CRS' work centres around education, especially for those with disabilities, strengthening civil society for social inclusion of persons with disabilities, landmine risk education, assistance to landmine survivors, and disaster recovery and risk reduction. Furthermore the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) runs a welcoming centre in Ho Chi Minh City serving 6,000 migrants every year.

VIII. Other important issues

The Mekong Delta is one of the most populous and, from an agricultural perspective, one of the most important areas in Vietnam. More than 50% of the national rice production happens there. Being an average of 3 meters above sea level, it is subject to frequent flooding and saline intrusion. A rise in water level of only 1 meter will affect more than 10% of the Vietnamese population. Additionally, the water of the Mekong River, a fundamental resource for farming in the area, is not entirely under Vietnam's control, as the river passes through several other countries, including Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, most of which are under the influence of China and are planning to build dams which may reduce water flow. This could be a severe threat for Vietnamese agriculture and generate additional migration. Furthermore, addressing a growing need for energy supply, the government has plans to build dams and power plants on other Vietnamese rivers. This may lead to resettlements of ethnic communities living next to these waterways.

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