



Migration profile

Vietnam

A. Executive Summary

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was founded in 1976, three years after the withdrawal of the U.S. forces and the subsequent overrun of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese communist forces, marking the end of the second Indochina War (Vietnam War) in 1975, with the reunification of North and South Vietnam under the communist regime.ⁱ

Vietnam's geography, geopolitics, and history play a major role in influencing migration flows. There are many irregular migrants arriving from China, Japan, South Korea, and other neighbouring countries like Cambodia and Laos. The government has recognised the impact of foreign workers on behalf of the Vietnamese economy and society.ⁱⁱ In 2020, the number of recorded migrants was 76,767 (0.08% of the population). They mainly came from Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Lao PDR.ⁱⁱⁱ The country, instead, receives only a small number of people requesting international protection. It is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and lacks a system to protect refugees in the country.^{iv} Forced climate displacements are another important phenomenon in Vietnam. There were 1.3 million internally displaced persons in 2020 and 779,700 in 2021, caused by storms and floods.^v Furthermore, in 2019, UNHCR reported 30,581 stateless people in Vietnam.^{vi} They were mostly Cambodians who were in exile in the country and lost their documentation.^{vii} Regarding emigration, in 2019, there were 2,857,438 emigrants recorded abroad. Their leading destination countries were the United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, and France.^{viii}

Vietnam has been a development success story. Economic reforms since 1986, coupled with beneficial global trends, helped propel Vietnam from being one of the world's poorest nations to a middle-income economy in just about one generation. The agriculture sector has supported economic growth and ensured food security (it contributed 14% of GDP and 38% of employment in 2020).^{ix} Alongside its economic growth, Vietnam is also beset by high levels of corruption, political censorship, and a poor record on human rights.^x Its population is rapidly ageing, and global trade is declining. Furthermore, the Covid-19 crisis has severely impacted its economy, and the country has been facing other major concerns like environmental degradation and climate crisis.^{xi} In 2021, Vietnam's GDP amounted to US\$ 366,137,590,600, experiencing an annual growth rate of 2.6% compared to the previous year. The inflation rate on consumer prices was 1.8% of its GDP, and its foreign direct investment accounted for 4.3% of Vietnam's GDP.^{xii}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Vietnam covers most of the eastern part of the Indochina peninsula, bordering China to the north, and Laos and Cambodia to the west. It is also limited by the East Sea and South China.^{xiii} Vietnam has mountainous terrain, with several coastal plains and deltas. There are four different geographical regions: the north-western (Chinese Yunnan Plateau), the eastern (Red River Delta), the central (the Annam Mountains), and the southern area (the Mekong River Delta).^{xiv}

It has a surface of 331,690 sq. km,^{xv} and a population of 98,710,099.^{xvi} Its capital city is Hanoi.^{xvii} The official language is Vietnamese. Minority languages include Tày, Muong, Hmong Daw, Khmer, Nung, and Chinese, among others.^{xviii} Concerning religion, roughly 80% of the population does not belong to any faith-group. People practising a religion are Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, CaoDaim, and Muslim.^{xix} Regarding the ethnic composition, there are about 54 groups living in Vietnam.^{xx} The Viet (Kinh) represents 87% of the population. Other major ethnic groups are Tay, Thai, Muong, Hoa, Khmer, and Nung.^{xxi}

II. International and Internal Migration

According to UN DESA's International Migrant Stock estimates, as of mid-2020, immigrants accounted for less than 0.08% of Vietnam's population, with only 76,767 registered migrants, and 58% of them were male. Their number grew significantly in the first half of the decade of the 1990s (from 28,000 foreigners in 1990 to 51,000 in 1995); but subsequently its trend increased at a slower pace (57,000 in 2005, 62,000 in 2010, 73,000 in 2015). As of 2020, their main countries of origin were Thailand (12,192 people, 15.6% of the stock), Myanmar (11,796 people, 15.4% of the stock), Bangladesh (8,325 people, 10.8% of the stock), Indonesia (8,228 people, 10.8% of the stock), and Lao PDR (7,334 people, 9.6% of the stock).^{xxii}

However, these numbers do not take into account all of the irregular entries for which there are no reliable sources. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, cited by officials from governmental news agencies, reported 93,720 foreign workers in the country, mainly from China, Japan, and South Korea. They were mostly managers, managing directors or experts, and around 22% were employed as technical workers.^{xxiii} The country's public authorities have responded to the growingly undeniable contribution of foreign workers in Vietnamese economy and society by improving their regulation of labour migration and issuing permits in a way that makes access easier and more flexible for them.^{xxiv}

According to official reports, the flow of irregular migrants from neighbouring countries into the Vietnamese territory has dramatically increased because of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs claimed that, in spite of national and local authorities' efforts to control irregular border crossing, many bordering municipalities witnessed sharp increases in the share of non-registered foreigners they host.^{xxv} Irregular entries of Chinese citizens seem to be occurring especially through the Sino-Vietnamese border. Many individuals go across using side roads and paths to go unnoticed and come mostly from the Chinese provinces of Guangxi and Yunnan.^{xxvi}

Regarding internal migration, it seems to happen only in certain Vietnamese regions. According to official reports, as of 2021, only the South East and the Red River Delta areas

were net receivers of migrants arriving from other parts of the country. Conversely, most areas lost population in that year, including the Mekong River Delta, the Central Highlands, the North Central and Central coastal areas, and the Northern midlands and mountain areas. One of the regions where most local migrants moved to was the South East (1.79% of its inhabitants that year being internal migrants), with the province of Binh Dương and the city of Hồ Chí Minh being especially affected (3.56% and 2.54% of new internal migrants, respectively). The area losing more population in 2021 was the Mekong River Delta, with 1.38% of its residents heading out to other parts of Vietnam. Within this area, the provinces of An Giang, Đồng Tháp, Sóc Trăng, and Cà Mau were the ones most affected by internal migration, with over 2% of their population relocating to other regions. In addition, official statistics confirm that the internal migration flows from sending and receiving areas and provinces have remained the same since at least 2015.^{xxvii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to the Vietnamese government, a national database on migration is being developed in order to serve policy-making, support legislation, and implement the global agreement on legal, safe and orderly migration with the UN.^{xxviii} In 2013, the leading destination countries for Vietnamese emigrants were the United States, Australia, Canada, France, and the Republic of Korea. In all, there were 2,037,711 emigrants recorded abroad.^{xxix} Emigration trends have increased since then. According to the United Nations, in 2019, 2,857,438 emigrants were recorded abroad. Their major destinations were the United States (1,368,746 emigrants), Australia (265,018), Japan (209,731), Canada (180,258), and France (138,552).^{xxx} In 2020, the main sending provinces in Vietnam were Hau Giang, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, An Giang, and Can Tho.^{xxxi} Smuggling networks from Vietnam are also active, with approximately 18,000 smuggled persons to Europe every year.^{xxxii}

The arrival of 125,000 Vietnamese refugees in the United States in 1975 was among the most dramatic evacuations undertaken by the U.S. government. The 1.4 million immigrants living in the country are one of the largest foreign-born groups in the U.S., accounting for about 3% of the immigrant population. They mostly live in California and Texas, and 75% of them are between 18 and 64. They are usually employed in the service sector, as well as management, business, science, and arts occupations.^{xxxiii} Likewise, in 1976, thousands of Vietnamese arrived in Australia as asylum seekers. Migration has continued to this day, due to Vietnam-born people seeking education or employment opportunities in Australia, creating a very strong community there.^{xxxiv} In 2021, 334,785 Australians self-identified as having Vietnamese ancestry.^{xxxv}

Global remittances to Vietnam have more than doubled in the past decade, reaching \$18.06 billion in 2021.^{xxxvi} Vietnam is one of the three biggest recipients in Asia-Pacific and among the top 10 globally in terms of remittances.^{xxxvii}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

Vietnam receives only a small number of people seeking international protection per year. The country is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, and there is no framework for identifying international protection needs or refugee protection in Vietnam.^{xxxviii} According to the World Bank Database, the number of refugees in Vietnam is 990, and the last data available was from 2011.^{xxxix}

Climate-related displacements are, instead, a significant phenomenon in Vietnam. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 1.3 million displacements were recorded in 2020 and 779,700 in 2021.^{xi} These internal movements are mostly related to natural disasters triggered by storm and flood events. Floods and typhoons are quite frequent in the Mekong Delta flatlands, as well as storms and landslides in the highlands and mountains of the hinterland. The most significant event that caused massive displacements was the tropical storm Conson in September 2021, which affected more than 728,000 IDPs across 11 provinces.^{xli}

Statelessness is also another significant issue in Vietnam. After being forcibly displaced during the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s, many Cambodians who were in exile in Vietnam have lost their documentation or any proof of having lived in Cambodia. This problem greatly affected the recognition of their nationality. While some have since regained Cambodian citizenship, others still remain stateless in Vietnam.^{xlii} Due to lack of legal identification, they are often denied access to education, health care, and job opportunities, or are unable to register births, marriages, and deaths. In 2019, UNHCR reported 30,581 stateless people living in Vietnam.^{xliii} In 2020, Vietnam promulgated the Prime Minister's Decision on the Implementation Plan of the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, manifesting a firm commitment to address statelessness. The project includes acceding to the Statelessness Conventions by 2025, establishing a statelessness determination procedure, strengthening access to civil registration, improving the identification and reduction of statelessness, and protecting the rights of stateless persons. Since 2020, UNHCR has also supported implementing the "Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons in Vietnam" project through the Department of Civil Registration, Nationality and Authentication, and the Ministry of Justice.^{xliv}

In 2017, the government indicated to the UN Human Rights Committee that since 2002 there have not been any asylum applications in Vietnam. Likewise, data provided by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) indicated that in 2019 3,535 Vietnamese applied for asylum in EU countries, including up to 625 minors. 45% of them 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.^{xlv}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Vietnam is Tier 3 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, since it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to national workers' assistance in situations of exploitation abroad, and some others charge excessive fees that make workers vulnerable to forced labour through debt bondage. Traffickers subject victims to forced labour in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, South Korea, Laos, Japan, and some parts of the Middle East, Europe, and the UK. They are also subjected to restricted freedom of movement, identity document confiscation, threats of physical violence, fraudulent recruitment and punitive deportation at PRC national-owned factories in the Balkan region. Pandemic-related travel restrictions incremented these vulnerabilities for many Vietnamese migrant workers overseas. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to brothel operators on the

borders of the PRC, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. It is estimated that within the country, around 80% of the victims are members of ethnic minority communities. There are reports indicating that prisoners have been forced to work in agriculture, manufacturing and hazardous industries. Traffickers increasingly use the internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. Sometimes, traffickers are family members themselves, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese nationals in forced labour.^{xlvi}

In 2021, the government investigated 149 suspected traffickers in 77 cases. It prosecuted 98 cases involving 177 alleged traffickers. From those, it finally initiated proceedings in 49 cases involving 94 defendants. The court system convicted all of them under Articles 150 and 151 of the Criminal Code. During 2021, courts were intermittently shut down due to the pandemic. In January 2022, trials were allowed to be conducted online in order to ensure that all criminal cases were adjudicated in a timely manner. In 2021, the government reported identifying 126 victims (114 females and 12 males, and 45 of them were children). However, it did not report the number of victims who were provided with protection services. Authorities did record and grant 111 total requests for victim support in the form of medical and psychological care, essential needs, travel expenses, legal aid, lodging, vocational training, and loans. Furthermore, 34 victims were granted legal aid. The government continued to train officials in various agencies on victim identification and protection. It operated a 24-hour hotline for victims of various crimes, which received 35 calls involving 39 victims in 2021. 19 of those were referred to the local police for recovery and investigations, 16 to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for further assistance, two to an NGO, and one to a Vietnam Women's Union shelter. In 2023, the government increased international law enforcement cooperation. However, some reports highlight issues like lack of victims' identification and officials' complicity, who allegedly facilitated trafficking or exploited victims by accepting bribes from traffickers.^{xlvi}

VI. National Legal Framework

Articles 103 and 106 of the 1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, amended and supplemented under Resolution No. 51/2001/QH10 of the Xth National Assembly, the 10th session and the 2008 Law on Nationality by the 12th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at its 4th session regulate Vietnamese citizenship.^{xlvi} The 2008 Law on Vietnamese Nationality does not provide sufficient protection against the risk of statelessness, especially affecting children.^{xlvi} Law No. 47/2014/QH13, 2014 of the National Assembly on entry, exit, transit, and residence of foreigners in Vietnam outlines the procedures applicable to foreigners who enter, exit, transit and/or reside in Vietnam.¹

Article 150 of the Penal Code criminalises labour and sex trafficking of adults, while Article 151 criminalises labour and sex trafficking of children under 16 years old. The Vietnamese government issued a Decision approving the Program on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat for the 2021-2025 period and orientation to 2030. Vietnam has bilateral anti-trafficking agreements signed with Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, China, and the UK.^{li} Furthermore, it signed and ratified the 1999 ILO Convention Worst Forms of Child Labour, the 1930 Forced Labour Convention, and the 1957 Abolition of Forced Labour Convention.^{lii} Vietnam ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention

against Transnational Organized Crime Preamble, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.^{liii}

Vietnam is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.^{liv} The country receives only a small number of cases involving claims for international protection per year. Furthermore, in the country there is no framework for identifying international protection needs or refugee protection.^{lv}

Vietnam is not a party to either the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.^{lvi} It has ratified several international human rights agreements to offer special protection to refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons. Vietnam signed and ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.^{lvii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Vietnamese Immigration Department, under the Ministry of Public Security, is responsible for issuing visas, temporary residence documents for foreigners, and passports for Vietnamese nationals.^{lviii} The role of this department is to allow and supervise immigration and emigration of Vietnamese and foreigners to and out of Vietnam. For instance, before issuing a Vietnam visa, any embassy or consulate will have to run a check with the Immigration Department for any previous records of the applicants.^{lix}

The Ministry of Public Security is the main institutional actor combating sex trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a coordinating regulation on protecting and supporting human trafficking victims. It is an important document attesting to Vietnam's determination to combat human trafficking, protect victims' legitimate rights and interests, and resolve arising problems. The Ministry of Public Security investigates human trafficking cases, rescues and supports victims, and arrests human traffickers.

The Ministry of National Defence provides patrols and oversees borders, border gates, and sea areas to detect illegal cross-border immigration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates with domestic and foreign agencies to rescue, protect, and repatriate victims.^{lx} The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice 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.^{lxi}

International Organisations

IOM delegation in Vietnam, which started its 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. IOM Vietnam assists with visa application, travel aid, fingerprint services, and migrant integration.^{lxii} Migration health

is also a core activity of this organisation, focusing on health assessments of prospective migrants, pre-departure treatment, HIV counselling and health education, immunisation, re-embarkation medical checks, and emergency movements-associated health assessments during air transportation of migrants in need of care.^{lxiii}

The UNHCR Thailand Multi-Country Office based in Bangkok is responsible for operations in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Since 2020, UNHCR has implemented the “Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons in Vietnam” project through the Department of Civil Registration, Nationality and Authentication, Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA).^{lxiv}

In addition, ILO is aiming to reach the goal of offering decent jobs for all in Vietnam, focusing on labour market governance, employment and sustainable enterprise development, social protection and social security. ILO is also engaged to address the situation of vulnerable workers by giving support for preventing and eliminating trafficking and child labour.^{lxv}

UNICEF strengthens the national child protection system, particularly in the areas of social work, access to justice, and protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation. UNHCR, instead, focuses more on children’s protection as they remain vulnerable to serious exploitation forms like trafficking for sex, pornography, forced labour, servitude, or removal of organs.^{lxvi}

The International Committee of the Red Cross works closely with the Vietnamese Red Cross Society, providing emergency assistance in humanitarian relief and healthcare for internally displaced persons, and reuniting families separated by war and disasters.^{lxvii}

NGOs and Other Organisations

The Network of Action for Migrant Workers (M-Net) is an organisation established by the coalition of several local Vietnamese NGOs supporting migrant workers in the country. They primarily focus on helping them to negotiate their economic rights and to gain equal access to social protection. M-Net operates through evidence-based policy advocacy, capacity building for member organisations, partners, and target groups, multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration, and direct intervention through pilot models of social institutions working for and by migrant workers.^{lxviii}

Oxfam is an international NGO whose activities in Vietnam include supporting internal migrant workers, with a special focus on women belonging to this specific group. Their work is aimed at achieving three main overall objectives: 1- strengthening the different existing migrant workers’ organisations and the capacity of these organisations to represent workers and successfully defend their rights; 2- promoting and generating connections and fruitful cooperations between civil society organisations and stakeholders already concerned by the situation of internal migrant workers (local NGOs, think tanks, grassroots groups, etc.); and 3- working with Vietnamese public authorities and civil society groups for transforming and expanding social protection policies, by ensuring the coverage of internal migrant workers.^{lxix}

Different organisations are working with Vietnamese migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the USA. One example is the Vietnamese American Civic Association (VACA). It is a civil society organisation founded in 1984 by Vietnamese refugees, to help other Vietnamese immigrants achieve economic stability and thriving social integration in the USA. They offer

services such as health education and outreach, English language courses, and youth development programs.^{lxx}

The Catholic Church

The Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, based in Ho Chi Minh City, is structured in different programmatic committees. It promotes various initiatives focusing on the socially marginalised population, migrants, ethnic minorities, homeless and disabled people, and the Migration Committee.^{lxxi lxxii} In addition, the Vietnamese Catholic Church has been providing pastoral care to internal migrants, people 'without roots' who are often victims of discrimination and migration.^{lxxiii} For this purpose, from the presidency of the Episcopal Commission for the pastoral care of migrants, emphasis has been placed on improving coordination at the diocesan level to promote "pastoral programmes for the laity and youth", which should include a more efficient network of priests and nuns.^{lxxiv}

In 2022, the Vietnamese Bishops held the National Conference on Migration, highlighting that the Church is called to support people on the move and the need to update the guidelines for the pastoral care of migrants in use by dioceses since 2017.^{lxxv}

The Bishops' Conference of Vietnam is part of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), and together they fight against human trafficking in all its forms.^{lxxvi} It has also launched the MAO Tam House of Hope initiative that is a centre hosting children, many survivors of trafficking, widows, and mothers with HIV/AIDS. It provides shelter, medication, health care, education, and referrals to its residents and to the many walk-in patients who need help.^{lxxvii}

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd carry out various activities, such as making and selling fruit drinks and other products to support their school nutrition programme for children. Most of the children they help come from migrant families who have moved from rural areas into the city and cannot afford to send their children to public school.^{lxxviii} The sisters also have development centres in Ho Chi Minh City, Vinhlong in the Delta Area, and Camau in the South.^{lxxix} Other projects they run in Vietnam are charity schools for underprivileged children; sewing centres to provide skills training to promote employment opportunities; shelter for single mothers (home for young pregnant women without social support); parish work; youth camps to teach catechism; scholarships for needy students; vegetable garden to teach children the values of sustainability, environmental care, and agricultural skills.^{lxxx}

Caritas is also present in Vietnam, and its programmes focus on providing social and charitable activities to promote integral human development. Moreover, it offers support to people affected by natural disasters and epidemic diseases such as floods and typhoons. In addition, Caritas Vietnam organises workshops on HIV/AIDS to prevent and control the epidemic. Workshops include training and orientation to improve the ability of volunteers to prevent the spread of the disease in the communities.^{lxxxi} 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 for disabled people by providing wheelchairs. They also have a scholarship programme for poor students.^{lxxxii}

Over the last twenty years, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Vietnam has directly promoted the inclusion of children and people with disabilities through various projects. Its work has focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education sector, using a holistic approach through health, inclusive education, vocational training, and employment interventions.^{lxxxiii}

Regarding the rehabilitation and health sectors, CRS has been involved in home-based care, community-based rehabilitation, provision of support-devices, and capacity building for rehabilitation health workers. All of these efforts have empowered thousands of children and adults, gaining confidence and increasing their participation in social activities.^{lxxxiv}

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