Overview of Internal Migration in Viet Nam
Viet Nam’s total population, as recorded by UNESCAP in 2016, stands at over 94 million.

Viet Nam has one of the lowest annual population growth rates (1.0%) of Southeast Asia, and a total fertility rate of 2.0 (UNESCAP 2016).

Just over 34% of the Vietnamese population live in urban areas (ibid.), while the great majority of Viet Nam’s poor live in rural areas. This creates deep rural-urban disparities, with the average income of urban dwellers being nearly double that of inhabitants of rural Viet Nam (UN Viet Nam 2010).

Internal migrants in Viet Nam constitute a substantial population. The 2015 National Internal Migration Survey shows that 13.6% of the Vietnamese population are internal migrants. This proportion is higher for the urban population (19.7%) than the rural population (13.4%) with the Southeast having the greatest proportion of migrants, at 29.3% (General Statistics Office 2016). This significantly outstrips international migration in the country, with total inflows and outflows of international migrants amounting to only 2.9% of the population (UNDESA 2017).

1 The 2015 National Internal Migration Study defines internal migrants as persons who have moved from one district to another in the five years prior to the survey and who meet one of the following conditions: have lived in their current place of residence for at least one month; have lived in their current place of residence for less than one month but intend to stay for at least another month; have lived in their current place of residence for less than one month but within the past year have migrated from their usual place of residence to another district with the accumulated period of time of a minimum of one month. The survey focuses on migrants and non-migrants aged 15-59 and includes three migration types - in-migration, return migration, and intermittent migration.
• For the period 2009-2014, just under three-tenths of internal migration in Viet Nam was rural-urban, and an identical percentage was rural-rural. From 2010-2015 36.2% of migration was rural-urban, 31.6% urban-urban, 19.6% rural-rural, and 12.6% urban-rural (General Statistics Office 2016). Rural-urban migration has fuelled rapid urbanization, with the urban population growing by 3.4% per year in comparison to 0.4% in rural Viet Nam (General Statistics Office 2009).

• The Southeast and Central Highlands regions are the main migration destinations, and the North and South Central Coast and the Mekong River Delta the main migration suppliers. Ho Chi Minh City has the highest in-migration rate, and Ha Noi is predicted to be the fastest growing city in the world (Anderson et al. 2017).

• Internal migration in Viet Nam is mostly intra-regional, with only Southeast having more migrants from another region (the Mekong Delta, which supplies 33.9% of the region’s migrants, compared to 30.4% migrants who moved within the Southeast) (General Statistics Office 2016).

• The Hồ Khâu\(^2\) registration system is less strictly enforced now than in preceding years, as household registration has been delinked from access to essential services (World Bank Group and Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences 2016). However, migrants still face barriers to accessing legally permissible as well as affordable services, such as public insurance and education for children, reduced electricity rates, and programs for poverty reduction. (Anderson et al. 2017; De Luca 2017; World Bank Group and Viet Nam Academy for Social Sciences 2016; Oxfam in Viet Nam 2015).

• Viet Nam is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. According to a World Bank study (Dasgupta et al. 2007), given a 1-meter sea-level rise, Viet Nam would be the most affected developing country in terms of population (10.8%), GDP (a 10% reduction), and wetlands inundated (28%). Almost half of the country’s agricultural area would face inundation with a 2-meter rise in sea level (Warner et al. 2009). Such risks of sea-level rise and flooding may stimulate large-scale population displacement across the region (Dun 2009). Climate change also exacerbates soil degradation and waterlogging, water pollution, and overfishing, further pushing people to urban centres (Chinvanno 2003).

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\(^2\) The Hồ Khâu registration system records and restricts changes in people’s residency by classifying households into different categories.
Migrants’ Characteristics

• The proportion of female migrants has risen over time (Schelling et al. 2012). Women now represent 52.4% of all migrants aged 15-59 (General Statistics Office 2016).

• Migrants are young: 85% are aged 15-39, with an average age of 29.2, though females tend to move at slightly younger ages. They are also less likely to be married than non-migrants (ibid.).

• Kinh and Hoa people migrate more than other ethnic groups. Most ethnic minorities live in remote and mountainous areas far from urban settings, which limits their migration opportunities due to a lack of information and high migration costs (World Bank Group 2015).

• Most migrants (79.1%) are born in rural areas, and individuals from larger households with more working members tend to migrate more (General Statistics Office 2016).

• Migrants, especially rural-urban migrants, tend to be better qualified and educated than those staying behind. Nearly a third have professional or technical qualifications, compared to 24.5% of non-migrants, and just under a quarter are college/university level educated, compared to 17.4% of non-migrants (ibid.).

• Migrants mainly move alone (61.7%), while 31.4% move with family members (ibid.). Their social networks are the primary source of assistance and information: 46.7% learn about their migration destination from family/friends. Very few receive information from official sources, such as job introduction centres or employers (ibid.).

• Both male and female migrants consider employment-related purposes the main reason for migration (34.7%), followed by family-related reasons (25.5%) and education (23.4%) (General Statistics Office 2016; World Bank Group 2015). Men are more likely to migrate for work purposes and women for non-work purposes, such as family or study (General Statistics Office 2016).

Working and Living Conditions in the New Setting

• Most migrants (74.8%) aged 15-59 are employed. The majority of those who are unemployed moved for education purposes (General Statistics Office 2016).

• Female migrants dominantly work in the garment sector or as domestic workers, and male migrants in the production and construction sectors or as taxi/motorbike taxi drivers. Among both male and female migrants the proportion employed in leadership positions is low (2.3% and 0.4% respectively) (ibid.).
• Only 30.9% of migrant workers have a formal written labour contract, compared to over 50% for non-migrants. 21% have verbal agreements and nearly 10% have no labour contract at all (ibid.). This exposes migrant workers to risk of exploitation and abuse.

• Most migrants think they have better or much better employment (54%) or income (52%) at their destination; just over 10% consider themselves worse off. About half consider their living conditions and healthcare services to have improved after migration, while almost 15% are dissatisfied (ibid.)

• Despite a rise in migrants’ average incomes after migration, they remain lower than those of non-migrants. Male migrants earn more than female migrants, and migrants to Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City earn the highest mean income (ibid.).

• Migrant households are poorer on average than non-migrant households and spend less per capita. Migrants also have fewer savings than non-migrants, except for migrants to Ha Noi or Ho Chi Minh City, and are less likely than non-migrants to take out loans (ibid.).

• Migrants consider housing the main cause of dissatisfaction. About 30% consider that they live in worse or far worse housing conditions than they did before migration. This is mainly caused by high rent, and water and electricity charges higher than what non-migrants pay. Migrants also reside in areas with poor access to infrastructure, electricity, and state-provided services such as public transport. Over 50% live in temporary housing or at work sites in unsafe, cramped and unhygienic conditions. 18.4% have an average living space of less than six square meters (ibid.).

• The proportion of migrants living in households equipped with a motorbike (88.4%), television (72.6%), refrigerator (58.5%) and washing machine (37.7%) is lower than non-migrants (96.1%, 97.2%, 82.3% and 61.1%, respectively) (ibid.).

• Approximately 30% of migrants have found themselves facing difficulties in their new place of residence. This percentage is highest for female migrants and migrants to rural areas. The issues include housing problems (experienced by 42%), receiving no income (38.9%), being unable to find a job (34.3%), and being unable to adapt to a new environment (22.7%). Migrants to the Central Highlands also report problems in relation to the unavailability of land grants (26.6%), and difficulties in access to information and water (23.9%; 14.9%). To cope with these problems, most migrants rely on their friends (40.5%) and family (32.6%) for assistance. Only a limited number of migrants seek assistance from organisations and unions at their workplace (ibid.).
• Nearly 80% of those facing difficulties were aware of the problems they would face before they moved, and 71.3% of the few that were not aware of them would still have moved if they had been aware of these difficulties (ibid.).

• Migrants’ social isolation makes it difficult for them to make new friends and exposes female migrants to further risk of violence and with sexual abuse (Anderson et al. 2017). Migrants are less likely than non-migrants to participate in social and community activities due to the effort of familiarizing themselves with the new environment or the need to work night shifts (General Statistics Office 2016). Loneliness and social exclusion can drive migrants, especially younger ones, to drinking gambling, petty crime, and sex work (Anderson et al. 2017).

• Over 70% of migrants have health insurance, a stark increase from 2004, when only 36.4% had it. This percentage rises up to 80% in the Northern Central and Mountains Areas region, and decreases to 50% in the Southeast. Most migrants without health insurance consider it unnecessary (50%) or too costly (25%) (General Statistics Office 2016).

• When sick, the majority of migrants attend state hospital/clinics. About 63% pay for their treatment themselves and only 50% use health insurance to cover their costs (ibid.).

• Nearly 90% of migrants are aware of unsafe sex as a cause of sexually transmitted infections. This percentage is much lower in the Southeast. Nonetheless, fewer female migrants than non-migrants use contraceptives (37.7% versus 58.6%) (ibid.).

• Of the school-aged children who migrate with their parents, a significant proportion (13.4%) do not attend school (ibid.).

The Impact of Internal Migration on Those Who Stay Behind

• Most migrants remit. Over 30% of migrants sent remittances within the 12 months prior to the 2015 National Internal Migration Survey. The mean remittance amount was US$1200, and the median amount is US$530 per annum (General Statistics Office 2016).

• Remittances are disproportionately sent to households headed by those aged over 50, with those aged 70 and over receiving the most (Pfau and Long 2010). Female migrants tend to remit more, more often and in larger shares of their salaries than males. Nonetheless, the total quantity of remittances sent by male migrants is higher (General Statistics Office 2016).

• The Southeast, the Red River Delta and Ho Chi Minh City have the highest rates of migrants remitting. These regions also have the highest percentages who are working (ibid.).
• Remittances are mainly used to meet daily expenses, such as food, health care and children’s education costs, rather than production or business expansion (ibid.).

• An overwhelming majority of migrant-sending households (96%) consider migration to have had a positive impact on household income (World Bank 2005).

• Parental migration might have a negative impact on the health and school performance of children left behind, especially due to a lack of supervision. The elderly and children left behind also have to undertake more agricultural work in peak periods to compensate for the loss of rural labour (General Statistics Office 2016; UN Viet Nam 2010).

• A small-scale study has suggested that internal migration modifies household structure, reversing division of labour and gender roles. Left-behind wives gain more control over the household’s assets and productive work, while left-behind husbands take more domestic tasks. Nonetheless traditional roles are reassigned as soon as the migrants return (Resurreccion and Van Khanh 2007).

• Results from the 2011 Viet Nam Aging Survey indicate that 4.8% of those aged 60 and above are grandparents living in “skip-generation households” with just their grandchildren, with 2.2% living with a child aged below 10; 74.1% of grandparents in “skip-generation households” find childcare at least a small physical burden; 25.9% say it is not a burden at all, and 13% consider it a considerable physical burden (Knodel and Nguyen 2015).

• Return migration results in both positive and negative transfers of knowledge and behaviour, including spousal transmission of HIV from returning migrants (UN Viet Nam 2010).

References


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This brief is part of a series of Policy Briefs on Internal Migration in Southeast Asia jointly produced by UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat. These briefs are part of an initiative aimed at researching and responding to internal migration in the region. The full set of briefs can be found at http://bangkok.unesco.org/content/policy-briefs-internal-migration-southeast-asia