

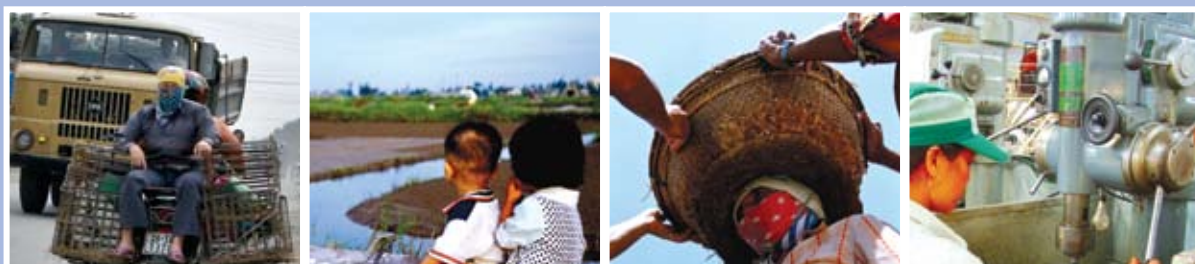


# Internal Migration

and Socio-economic Development in Viet Nam:  
A Call to Action







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# INTRODUCTION



This advocacy brief highlights five main ways in which internal migration affects and is affected by socio-economic development. As such, these are issues that deserve attention from policymakers and development partners in Viet Nam. The content of this document is drawn from the United Nations discussion paper *“Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-Economic Development in Viet Nam”*, which analyses the impact of internal migration through three lenses, namely the lens of the migrant themselves, the migrant-receiving communities and the migrant-sending communities.

Like many other countries that have undergone rapid economic and social development, Viet Nam has experienced an exponential increase in the movement of people both within and outside its borders over the past 20 years. There is growing recognition that these processes – development and migration – go hand in hand. Migration drives, as well as results from, a country’s social and economic development. In Viet Nam, the socio-economic development resulting from the *Doi Moi* reforms has certainly catalyzed increasing internal migration by making it possible for people to move away from their area of origin, and by providing the motivation

to do so as a result of growing regional disparities. Internal migration has in turn contributed to socio-economic development as migrant workers have moved to fill demand for labour created by industrial development and foreign direct investment. Not only does this migration contribute to migrants’ own wellbeing and security through higher and diversified incomes, but their households and home communities also benefit through the receipt of remittances.

Despite the complexity of the interrelationship between migration and development, one point is clear: migration should not be seen as an impediment to development. However, neither is it a panacea for poverty or income inequality. The movement of people is a natural and irrefutable part of human history. In recognizing this it is easier to appreciate that fact that migration offers both opportunities for development as well as challenges. Internal migration can contribute to economic growth, both on a national scale as well as at the household level, and can foster links between destination areas and areas of origin, decreasing regional disparities. Supporting migration involves supporting individuals’ and households’ decisions about their livelihoods, which contributes to migrants’ economic and social empowerment.

To enhance the potential of internal migration to contribute to equitable social and economic development, this paper provides a set of specific policy recommendations as outlined in the chapters below. The recommendations focus on the need for more and better data on internal migration to support evidence-based policymaking; reform of the household registration system; actions to ensure internal migration is safe and migrants are protected in their employment; use of migrant-sensitive planning for urban and industrial zones; and exploration of new ways to leverage internal migration for human development.



# 1. THE NEED FOR INTERNAL MIGRATION DATA TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING



The importance of a solid evidence base for successful social and economic development is well understood among policymakers in Viet Nam. However, there is a significant gap in data on internal migration, which carries widespread implications for understanding and measuring the parallel processes of migration and development, as well as for exploring how migration can be used to enhance

Viet Nam's socio-economic development. This gap needs to be addressed so that effective, evidence-based policies can be designed which adequately address the unmet needs of migrants. These policies would also allow Viet Nam to reap the full development benefits provided by internal migration.

Information on internal migration in Viet Nam is available from national census data, as well as a range of other large-scale surveys, including one specialized migration survey from 2004. While these large-scale surveys seek to be representative of the entire population, it is important to acknowledge that some types of migration, including movements by arguably the most vulnerable internal migrants in Viet Nam, are not being captured. This includes data on short-term, seasonal and return migration. These movements are left out of statistical records mainly as a result of the definition of migration used in

these surveys as well as the under-sampling of mobile people.

One important illustration of this is the decennial Population and Housing Census, conducted most recently in 2009, which is the most representative demographic snapshot of internal migration flows in Viet Nam. Unfortunately, the census defines a migrant as someone who has a different place of residence at the time of the survey as compared to five years prior. As a result, those who migrated and returned within those five years are not recorded as migrants, as they would in fact have resided in the same place on the two dates at the beginning and end of the five-year period. Other seasonal and short-term migrants are also underrepresented in census data because only individuals classified as "usual residents" are interviewed during data collection). This same limitation also applies to data from the Viet Nam (Household) Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) conducted every two years and to the 2004 Viet Nam Migration Survey (VMS), which have either used the same sampling as the census or also include only "usual residents". The VHLSS also excludes worker dormitories from sampling, which are predominantly made up of migrants.

An illustration of the limited sampling of the VHLSS is evident in a comparison with the 2004 Intercensal Survey of Ho Chi Minh City. The intercensal survey found that 20% of residents in Ho Chi Minh City held KT3 or KT4 registration status, while the VHLSS of the same year counted a mere 3.8% from this same group. One estimate of the number of migrants left "uncounted" by the census is 12 to 16 million people. This figure is calculated based on a ratio of *unregistered*

migrants to *registered* migrants of four to one, based on estimates of unregistered migrants in China, where a similar system of household registration is used.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the sampling of the VHLSS does exclude many temporary and unregistered migrants, the survey has in recent years included questions which allow for the identification of seasonal migrants amongst those who are sampled. This is because since 2004 the household surveys have recorded the number of months each household member has resided in the house for the past 12 months, as well as where each household member is temporarily or permanently registered. This information could be used to better understand internal migration flows in Viet Nam as no representative numbers of seasonal migrants are currently available. Unfortunately, to date little attempt has been made to analyze this data or to make it publicly available.

The limitations of available data on internal migration reflect the understandable difficulties of capturing a (by definition) mobile segment of the population. Nevertheless, it is crucial that greater efforts are made to include this population in national data because there is evidence to suggest that for internal economic migrants in Viet Nam, those likely to be excluded by census and survey data are those vulnerable, most marginalized from social protection programs and the considered in

Government planning. Other implications of the under-sampling of migrants in large-scale surveys include the underinvestment in urban planning (see Part 5) and the underestimated extent of urban poverty in Viet Nam due to only counting the local registered poor and not the migrant poor.

### CALL TO ACTION

- Revise the questionnaires and sampling frames of national surveys to capture and identify all types of migration (including seasonal, short-term and unregistered migrants).
- Carry out specialized surveys to better understand the different types of migration patterns and their relative contributions to development.
- Improve data analysis and dissemination to allow for the integration of comprehensive, quality, relevant and adequate internal migration data in socio-economic planning and policymaking.

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1 Le Bach Duong, et al. (2005) *Social Protection for the Most Needy in Viet Nam*. Le Bach Duong et. al. base this figure on Chinese population estimates provided in Ping, Huang and Pieke Frank (2003) China migration country study, Paper presented at the Regional Conference on *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, Dhaka on 22–24 June; and based on calculations in Guest, Philip (2003) Bridging the Gap: Internal Migration in Asia, Population Council Thailand. Paper prepared for *Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective*, Johannesburg on 4–7 June.

## 2. REFORM OF THE HOUSEHOLD REGISTRATION SYSTEM: REMOVAL OF INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO MIGRANTS' ACCESS



Viet Nam's household registration system presents a systemic institutional barrier for internal migrants in accessing both basic and specialized Government services, contrary to the rights provided to them and all other citizens under the Constitution of Viet Nam. Reform of this system is needed so that the registration status of citizens is decoupled from their access to social services, giving equal

access to everyone and thus fulfilling the rights provided by the Constitution and other international agreements.

The household registration system has a long history in Viet Nam and comprises four categories of registration status: migrants typically possess KT2, KT3 or KT4 registration status, in contrast to those permanently registered in the district in which they reside (KT1). These first three groups of residents are limited to receiving health, schooling and other social services within their district of residence. In addition, those with KT4 registration status are registered as individuals without a family (in contrast to the other three categories), and can only hold a three-month extendable residence permit and cannot own land titles.

The administrative system for re-registering in another location is burdensome, and not uniformly implemented across the country. This was reflected in the 2004 VMS, which revealed that 42% of those surveyed experienced difficulties as a result of their non-permanent residential status. Of those migrants who did

not re-register their temporary status in their destination area, 48% believed that they did not have permission to re-register, while 22% thought it was not necessary to register and 9% did not know how. Significant numbers of internal migrants do not register their movements at all and remain on the household lists in their home communes and wards, despite actually living in another district or province. Others initially register as temporary residents but then fail to re-register after its expiry. The total number of these unregistered migrants remains unknown due to the very fact that they are unregistered and unrecorded.

Whilst initially intended as a mechanism for population management, the registration system has evolved into a device further increasing inequity, which is not in keeping with Viet Nam's current efforts to promote development for all and achievement of the Viet Nam Development Goals. Government-provided services, such as health (including reproductive health), schooling, HIV care and treatment and access to poverty reduction services, are tied to the registration system, which restricts or privileges access to those permanently registered at any given place. Even where migrants are not de jure restricted from accessing certain services, in reality they often are. For example, non-permanent resident children are allowed to attend schools in their district of residence, but only if there is space after permanent resident children have enrolled. In reality, because of the undersupply of schools in many urban districts in Viet Nam, there is evidence to suggest that some migrant children are in fact unable to access schooling.

Often, excluded migrants are especially in need of public services because of increased economic and social vulnerabilities linked to their internal migration. For example, many unregistered migrants work in the informal sector and live in unhygienic and unsafe housing, making them more susceptible to health risks.

Despite this vulnerability they have little income to pay for out-of-pocket health services. Migrants who are not registered are also not eligible for poverty reduction and welfare programmes at their destination area (such as loans). The unavailability of social support for urban migrants is especially alarming given the recent increase in urban living expenses, not matched by an equivalent increase in wages.

In recent years, certain aspects of the registration system have been reformed, most notably through the new Law on Residence, which took effect in 2007. These reforms have lessened the requirements for temporary residents applying for permanent registration in centrally-administered cities, and removed geographical restrictions for registration of births and any legal conditionality of employment for registration. These are commendable steps towards ensuring equity and equality of access to public services.

However, it has also been observed that the implementation of these reforms by local authorities is inconsistent across the country due to differing interpretations of the law. This inconsistency has created confusion regarding the registration procedures required in different places across Viet Nam, meaning that those who are entitled to permanent or temporary residency under the 2007 law may not be able to get it. In addition, many migrants may be deterred from applying in the first place because of uncertainty. In this context it is important to remember that the actual consequence of imposing more restrictions on movement is not a reduction of people migrating, but rather an increase in the vulnerability of these population groups.

the law and have equal rights in all fields – political, economic, cultural and social”.. This includes freedom of movement and residence, the right to access health services, the right to access education, the right to work, the right to access socio-economic services in an equal manner and the right to be free from gender discrimination. These rights are also reaffirmed in many international human rights commitments that Viet Nam has made. It is necessary to remove the barriers preventing non-permanent residents from accessing basic services. This is an important step in ensuring that Viet Nam’s socio-economic development benefits all.

### CALL TO ACTION

- Decouple the registration status of citizens from their access to basic and specialised government services to ensure equitable access and non-discrimination for all Vietnamese people, regardless of permanent or temporary residence.
- Ensure that the Law on Residence is implemented uniformly across the country by building the capacity of local authorities and government officials.
- Empower internal migrants (and prospective migrants) to be informed of their registration rules and procedures.

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