

Study on internal labor migration in Vietnam (2015-2020)

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Abstract: To elucidate the issue of "Internal Labor Migration in Vietnam during the period of 2015-2020," utilizing data collected from Vietnamese national archives and national information portals, and through a historical approach, the research team employed synthesis, analysis, and comparative methods to clarify the factors influencing internal labor migration in Vietnam, as well as the status of internal labor migration from 2015 to 2020. Additionally, the team utilized a logical approach to provide certain exchanges and discussions on internal labor migration in Vietnam during this period. The research results of this study aim to contribute, albeit modestly, to the body of knowledge elucidating the process of internal labor migration in Vietnam during the period of 2015-2020. This material holds valuable data for those researching internal labor migration in Vietnam in the future.

Keywords: *Internal, Labor migration, Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

Historical evidence from Vietnam and other countries demonstrates that migration processes are intrinsically linked to the establishment and defense of nations [1] with labor migration being a primary component. Notably, internal migration in Vietnam predominantly involves young adults of working age moving to urban centers, industrial parks, and export processing zones in pursuit of employment opportunities, increased income, and improved living standards for themselves and their families [2] thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of both the destination areas and the nation. In Vietnam, the ongoing industrialization and urbanization have transformed urban centers and their peripheries into attractive destinations for unemployed and low-income workers from rural and remote areas [3]. Consequently, internal labor migration from rural to urban areas in Vietnam has become an objective and increasingly prevalent phenomenon.

In Vietnam, internal labor migration is a significant and extensively researched issue. The General Statistics Office of Vietnam, through its labor and employment surveys in 2015 and 2020, has provided an overview of the trends, scale, and characteristics of this labor force. The statistical data presented in these surveys serve as a crucial source of information for researchers and policymakers.

Research conducted by international organizations, such as the "National Internal Migration Survey 2015 - UNFPA Vietnam" or organizations like UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), has also extensively explored internal labor migration in Vietnam, focusing on issues such as gender, labor rights, and the impact of migration on socio-economic development.

Notable works include "Housing and Infrastructure Responsiveness in Areas with High Immigrant Concentration" by Nguyen Thi Bao Ha; "Internal Migration of Ethnic Minorities - Viewing from the Theory of Authenticity - the Pushing Power to Ethnic Policy" by Nguyen Thu Trang; "Factors Affecting Independent Internal Labor Migration" by Nguyen Thi Hong Cam and Nguyen Thu Hong;

"Legal Safeguards for the Rights of Internal Labor Migrants in Vietnam" by Pham Thi Thuy Nga; and "Factors Affecting Internal Labor Migration in Developing Countries: A Literature Review" by Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen and Bui Thi Minh Hang. These studies have provided valuable insights into internal labor migration in Vietnam, offering a multifaceted understanding of the current situation, trends, and socio-economic impacts of this issue in Vietnam.

2. Factors Influencing Labor Migration in Vietnam

Migration is defined as the change of residence from one territorial unit to another over a specific period [4]. Domestic free labor migrants are individuals of working age within a country who possess the ability to work and relocate their residence and employment within the national borders without adhering to government-planned and implemented programs or projects [5]. Domestic migration plays a crucial role in population dynamics, particularly in contexts of relatively stable birth and death rates, as observed in contemporary Vietnam. Migration serves as a positive driver for socio-economic development, contributing to population redistribution, economic restructuring, employment generation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development [6]. For the purpose of this study, the term "labor migrant" is defined as Vietnamese citizens of working age who relocate from one administrative unit to another within Vietnam for economic purposes and employment seeking.

In the context of industrialization and international economic integration, labor migration is an inevitable trend, prevalent in most countries, including Vietnam. Economic hardships or opportunities are considered direct drivers of labor migration. In Vietnam, labor migration is typically influenced by two sets of factors [7]:

Push factors: These include adverse natural, socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions at the place of origin, such as unfavorable living conditions, unemployment, and overpopulation [8]. Current research indicates that the rapid development of economic centers, export processing zones, and industrial parks in Vietnam has generated a substantial demand for labor [9]. Furthermore, the vigorous process of rural urbanization has led to the expansion of urban areas into suburban agricultural lands, incorporating numerous long-standing agricultural, handicraft, and traditional craft villages. This has resulted in a significant portion of rural farmers experiencing reduced arable land, increased idle time, and unemployment, compelling them to migrate to urban areas in search of employment [8].

The uneven development between urban and rural areas has exacerbated income and living standard disparities. The livelihoods of many people, particularly those in purely agricultural households and regions with unfavorable natural conditions, have become increasingly precarious. The widening gap in living standards between rural and urban areas has strongly incentivized labor migration from rural to urban centers, economic hubs, industrial parks, and export processing zones [8]. This pattern is evident in the labor migration flows from rural areas to major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Da Nang, and other key economic regions nationwide. While cities and industrial parks offer numerous employment opportunities and higher incomes, the integration of labor migrants into the urban economy is challenging. Nonetheless, the expectation of better employment and income prospects motivates rural labor migrants to accept the associated risks and challenges [8].

Pull factors: These encompass favorable natural, economic, political, and cultural conditions, as well as the allure of employment opportunities, higher incomes, improved living standards, and social security at the destination.

The urbanization and rapid expansion of industrial parks and export processing zones, while reducing agricultural land, have generated a substantial number of non-agricultural jobs, thereby promoting increased and widespread labor mobility across regions and localities. This has driven labor migration from densely populated provinces in the delta regions to urban centers and industrial parks [10].

Additional factors motivating labor migration include the desire for improved working environments, enhanced material and spiritual well-being for themselves and their families, opportunities for higher income and welfare, and access to learning, skill development, and career advancement.

3. Migrant Labor in Vietnam from 2015 to 2020

The 2020 Labor and Employment Survey revealed that the national average labor force was 54.84 million individuals. This labor force comprised 53.6 million employed persons and over 1.2 million unemployed persons. Females accounted for a smaller proportion (47.4%) than males (52.6%). Despite an increase in the proportion of the urban labor force in recent years, 66.9% of Vietnam's labor force remains concentrated in rural areas [11].

According to the 2020 Labor and Employment Survey, the number of migrant workers in Vietnam aged 15 and over was 877.8 thousand, with a significant majority migrating to urban areas, representing 69.0% of the national total [11]. Notably, the distribution of these migrant workers varied across the country's key economic regions. The Southeast region had the highest number of migrant workers, with 419.9 thousand individuals, accounting for 47.8% of the total migrants aged 15 and over. Following this was the Red River Delta, with 205.3 thousand individuals, representing 23.4% of the total migrants aged 15 and over. The region with the lowest number of migrant workers was the Central Highlands, with 16.3 thousand individuals, accounting for 1.9% of the total migrants aged 15 and over [11]. Provinces and cities such as Binh Duong, Bac Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, and Da Nang, among others, are among the most dynamic economic centers in the country. Consequently, these areas have attracted a substantial influx of workers from other provinces and cities seeking employment opportunities, higher incomes, and improved living standards.

Statistical data indicates that Binh Duong province has the highest immigration rate in the country, with migrant workers accounting for 26.3% of the workforce. The proportion of migrant workers employed in the primary sector (Sector I) is only 0.6%. The majority of migrant workers in Binh Duong are employed in the secondary sector (Sector II), accounting for 82.3%, followed by those in the service sector (Sector III), accounting for 17.1% [12]. Bac Ninh province has the second highest immigration rate, with migrant workers making up 15.8% of the workforce. The proportion of migrant workers employed in Sector I in Bac Ninh is lower than in Binh Duong, at only 0.4%. The majority of migrant workers in Bac Ninh are employed in Sector II (88.7%), with 10.8% working in Sector III [12]. Ho Chi Minh City has the third highest immigration rate, with migrant workers accounting for 11.5% of the workforce. The proportion of migrant workers employed in Sector I is only 0.6%. The number of migrant workers employed in Sector II in Ho Chi Minh City is 49.8%, while the number employed in Sector III is slightly lower at 49.6%. Dong Nai province has the fourth highest immigration rate, with migrant workers accounting for 9.2% of the workforce. The proportion of migrant workers employed in Sector I is 2.5%. The majority of migrant workers in Dong Nai are employed in Sector II (80.1%), with 17.2% working in Sector III [12]. Da Nang City has the fifth highest immigration rate, with migrant workers accounting for 8.6% of the workforce. The proportion of migrant workers employed in Sector I is slightly higher than in Bac Ninh, at 0.5%. Unlike the previous four provinces and cities, the majority of migrant workers in Da Nang City are employed in Sector III (66.2%), with only 33.3% working in Sector II [12].

During the period from 2015 to 2020, the highest number of rural-to-urban migrant workers fell within the 25-54 age group, followed by the 15-24 age group. The 55-59 age group had the lowest number of migrants.

Table 1.

Number of Migrant Workers by Age Group, 2015-2020 (Unit: thousands of people).

Age group	Year	
	2015	2020
15-24	589,0	371,9
25-54	594,2	464,7
55-59	22,6	14,6
60 years and older	39,0	26,7

Source: General Statistics Office over the years 2015 and 2020

Migrants participate in the labor force in major economic centers, industrial parks, and export processing zones. According to statistics, in 2020, 76.4% of migrants aged 15 and over were part of the labor force, equivalent to 670,600 individuals, which is higher than the labor force participation rate of the overall population by 2.0%. Notably, during the period of 2015-2020, the labor force participation rate of migrants exhibited a significant disparity between males and females and was unevenly distributed across the country's key economic regions. The highest rate was observed in the Northern Midlands and Mountains region, while the lowest rate was recorded in the Red River Delta region.

Table 2.

Migrant labor force participation rate in 2020 Unit: %

Feature	2015			2020		
	Shared	Male	Female	Shared	Male	Female
The whole country	78,4	85,6	73,1	76,4	82,3	71,6
Regions						
Northern midlands and mountains	80,8	82,8	79,9	78,1	84,5	72,2
Central Highlands	79,0	89,7	79,6	80,8	85,5	76,5
Red River Delta	69,4	69,0	69,6	71,1	72,8	69,7

Source: General Statistics Office over the years 2015 and 2020

Migrant workers in Vietnam predominantly engage in manual labor or occupations that require minimal technical expertise. A substantial 78.8% of migrants aged 15 and above lack technical qualifications, while those with primary-level skills constitute 4.3%, intermediate-level 3.9%, college-level 3.3%, and university-level 9.2% [13]. Furthermore, the unemployment rate among migrant workers in Vietnam surpasses that of non-migrants, standing at 2.53% compared to 2.01%. Notably, female migrants experience a higher unemployment rate than their male counterparts, with figures of 2.82% and 2.20%, respectively [13]. Among the unemployed migrant population, over two-thirds (69.7%) have migrated to urban areas, while only one-third have migrated to rural areas. This disparity significantly impacts the living standards of migrant workers, particularly concerning social security [13].

4. Discussion

Migrant labor in Vietnam transcends mere population movement or redistribution; it entails a reorganization of human living environments and engenders numerous social challenges [14]. Effective state intervention through appropriate management and support mechanisms can incentivize domestic migrant workers to pursue enhanced employment opportunities, alleviate poverty, and improve living standards, thereby contributing positively to the sustainable socio-economic development of communities and the nation. In the era of industrialization, modernization, and globalization, labor migration is an inevitable facet of economic development. While it stimulates economic growth, reduces unemployment, and augments gross domestic product [15] it also presents a myriad of pressing issues.

Urban residency and employment in industrial and export processing zones afford Vietnamese migrant workers access to advanced technologies. As technology advances and modern innovations proliferate, workers must swiftly adapt to new job demands to secure wage increments and improve

livelihoods. This necessitates continuous learning, dedicated effort, and skill enhancement to access technologically sophisticated employment opportunities, thereby facilitating rapid adaptation, skill development, and income augmentation.

In recent years, Vietnamese migrant workers have gravitated towards major urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, and Bac Ninh, driven by the Vietnamese government's macroeconomic policies aimed at fostering national economic development through accelerated industrialization and modernization. These policies have spurred industrialization and urbanization, generating substantial labor demand and attracting migrant workers to urban areas [16]. Additional policies, including those promoting domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI), land policies, incentives for small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development, rural industry promotion, credit and tax incentives, and human resource development through education and vocational training, have stimulated economic growth, job creation, and non-agricultural labor demand, thereby driving urban migration.

Research indicates a substantial influx of rural-to-urban migrant workers in Vietnam between 2015 and 2020. Hundreds of thousands have secured employment in state-owned and private enterprises, while numerous self-employed individuals have found diverse opportunities in urban areas, including scrap collection, small-scale trading, domestic services, transportation, construction, and factory work. This influx has significantly augmented the labor force in urban industrial and service sectors, contributing to urban socio-economic development. The majority of rural-to-urban migrants during this period have achieved their objectives of securing employment, augmenting income, and providing financial support to their families [17] thereby improving living standards and investing in production. Consequently, they have alleviated rural labor surplus, addressed general employment challenges, and contributed to poverty reduction in their home regions. Favorable living and working conditions have enabled young migrant workers to acquire valuable skills, broaden their knowledge, and enhance their professional expertise, facilitating their potential for future career success.

Migration from rural to urban areas, urban to urban areas, urban to rural areas, and to economic hubs, industrial zones, and export processing zones is an inevitable trend [18] that plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of the nation. Despite their substantial contributions, migrant workers continue to encounter several unresolved challenges.

Primarily, while access to social services such as education, information, sports, science, employment, community services, and social assistance is generally unrestricted, barriers persist, particularly in employment services, which are of paramount concern to migrant workers [19]. The predominantly young and low-skilled migrant workforce necessitates targeted employment policies.

Furthermore, the majority of rural-to-urban migrant workers possess limited technical expertise [11] resulting in unstable and precarious incomes due to their engagement in manual, seasonal, and hazardous occupations [20]. They often secure short-term or no employment contracts and lack social and health insurance coverage. Health insurance coverage in the informal sector, where most migrant workers are employed, is contingent on employment contracts. Migrant workers also face difficulties in purchasing health insurance due to requirements for temporary residence registration and landlord consent. They can only purchase voluntary health insurance if their landlords do, and social assistance programs lack specific policies for short-term residents like migrant workers [20]. Consequently, migrant workers experience significant limitations in accessing healthcare benefits, occupational accident coverage, and maternity benefits.

Currently, migrant workers constitute approximately 70% of the labor force in major cities and industrial zones. Predominantly from rural areas, they are often impoverished, low-skilled, and lack industrial work ethics and legal knowledge, resulting in unstable employment. Upon migrating to urban or industrial areas, they face exorbitant rental costs [21] with utility expenses 2-3 times higher than those of urban residents. Their children may be left behind or accompany them without access to public education, resulting in significant disadvantages. Surveys indicate that migrant workers have smaller

living spaces than non-migrants, with over 40% living in spaces smaller than 10m² per capita, compared to 16% of non-migrants [22].

In the context of international integration, rural-to-urban migration and the concentration of migrant workers in industrial zones are inevitable trends for nations, including Vietnam. Migration is a social phenomenon intrinsically linked to human societal development [23] encompassing employment, healthcare, education, demographics, environment, social security, and economic development. Therefore, the government must prioritize migrant workers in national, regional, and local socio-economic development plans. Future policies and regulations should focus on enhancing employment opportunities, ensuring minimum income, and promoting sustainable poverty reduction through credit support, labor market information, and vocational training. Regular support for migrant workers in special circumstances and emergency assistance for unforeseen risks (epidemics, natural disasters, severe illnesses) should be provided through state-funded cash and in-kind assistance. Free job counseling, placement, and labor market information should be offered at local employment service centers. Migrant worker support programs and projects, such as the "Support for Rural-to-Urban Migrant Workers, Industrial Zone Workers, and Border Region Workers" component of the "Labor Market and Employment Development" project within the National Target Program on Vocational Education, Employment, and Occupational Safety (2016-2020), should be implemented.

To effectively implement these solutions, relevant political and social organizations should provide free information, particularly on employment and the labor market, disseminate legal information, provide legal assistance, and organize and enhance training and retraining programs for workers, particularly migrant workers, who often possess low technical expertise. High and intermediate-skilled migrant workers constitute only 5-7%, skilled workers 38-40%, and unskilled workers the remainder [24]. Special social insurance programs should be implemented to facilitate migrant workers' access to healthcare and social insurance services. These initiatives will enhance healthcare access for migrant workers in Vietnam by implementing appropriate policies and services. Furthermore, policies and regulations concerning migrant workers should be refined, ensuring consistency in labor and employment laws, reforming social housing policies, healthcare laws, and strengthening poverty reduction and social welfare programs.

5. Conclusion

In the context of international integration, rural-to-urban and industrial-zone-centered labor migration is an inevitable trend. Migration is a socio-economic issue, intrinsically linked to employment, education, healthcare, social security, demographic structure, environment, and economic development.

In the era of industrialization, modernization, and international integration, labor migration serves as a crucial factor and a positive driving force for socio-economic development. It contributes to the redistribution of population, the transformation of economic and labor structures, the solution of employment issues, poverty alleviation, and is an integral part of the sustainable socio-economic development strategy of national governments.

Economic growth, rapid urbanization, industrialization, economic restructuring, coupled with open-door and integration policies, have led to an increase in both internal and international migration. Therefore, migrant workers need to be guaranteed the following rights: social security rights (social insurance, health insurance, social assistance); freedom of employment and labor rights; livelihood and income security rights; residence, housing, and freedom of movement rights; educational rights; freedom of business rights; access to information and enjoyment of cultural values. In addition to impacting age and gender structure changes in regions and provinces/cities, labor migration also alters the urbanization process in our country. These demographic shifts necessitate appropriate policies and programs to facilitate stable living conditions for migrants, especially women. These policies should also address the level of access to social services and the socio-economic disparities between the origin and destination of migrants.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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