

## INTERNAL MIGRATION IN VIET NAM: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2009 CENSUS

This factsheet presents key highlights of the current situation, trends and characteristics of internal migration in Viet Nam, based on the most recent Population and Housing Census (2009). It also summarizes policy implications and includes recommendations for appropriate internal migration related policies in Viet Nam.

### ISSUE

Internal migration and its impact on urbanization have been essential parts of the rapid economic growth in Viet Nam since the 'doi moi' economic reforms. Internal migration in Viet Nam has increased at an unprecedented rate over the last two decades, with substantive impacts on the country's economic development. Internal migration, which is mainly fuelled by the desire for employment and a better life, is part and parcel of Viet Nam's economic boom but also creates a number of challenges that need to be addressed if Viet Nam is to continue on its journey of economic and human development.

This factsheet is based on the census data, there are some limitations should be noted at the outset. Firstly, international migration is not well captured in census questionnaires because Vietnamese emigrants and foreign immigrants were excluded. This factsheet focuses only internal migration. Secondly, the vast heterogeneity of the internal migrant population in Viet Nam cannot be captured in the census. For example, as the census only includes migrants who have migrated for at least five years, temporary, seasonal and circular migrants are excluded or not identified. Similarly, all migrant children under age 5 are also not captured by the census.

### MAIN FINDINGS

#### **1. The migrant population, especially inter-provincial migrants, increased in both absolute and relative terms and accelerated faster during the last decade than in the decade before**

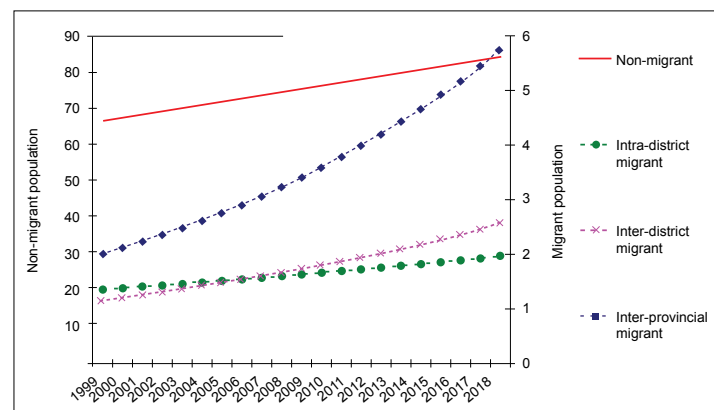
The inter-provincial migrant population, namely those migrants who moved from one province to another increased from 1.3 million in 1989 to 2 million in 1999, and to 3.4 million in 2009. This group's share of the overall population increased from 2.5% in 1989 to 2.9% in 1999 and to 4.3% in 2009. While the annual population growth rate of non-migrants declined from 2.4% to 1.1% from the 1989-1999 period to the 1999-2009 period, the rate of inter-district migrants substantially increased from 0.6% to 4.2%, and the rate of inter-provincial migrants increased from 4.0% to 5.4% over the same period. A simple projection based on current trends is that all migration flows in Viet Nam will increase, particularly the inter-provincial migrant population, with the total number of migrants rising to almost six million people and accounting for 6.4% of the total population by 2019 (Graph 1).

### FACT AND FIGURES

- The inter-provincial migrant population increased from 1.3 million in 1989, to 2 million in 1999, and to 3.4 million in 2009.
- Females accounted for at least half of the migrant population for almost all types of migration.
- The majority of migrants, especially inter-provincial migrants, are between 15 to 29 years old.
- The likelihood of migrant children attending primary and secondary schools was much lower than for non-migrant children.

## 2. There is clear evidence of increased 'feminization of migration'

The 2009 census data shows that females accounted for at least half of the migrant population for almost all types of migration. Interestingly, the proportion of the female population among the migrant population has increased, while the proportion of females has decreased among the non-migrant population over the last three decades. Females have a tendency to migrate between lower levels of administrative boundaries (e.g. between communes rather than provinces).



Graph 1: Migrant and non-migrant population, 1999-2009 and projection to 2019

## 3. Migration contributes significantly to urban population growth and urbanization

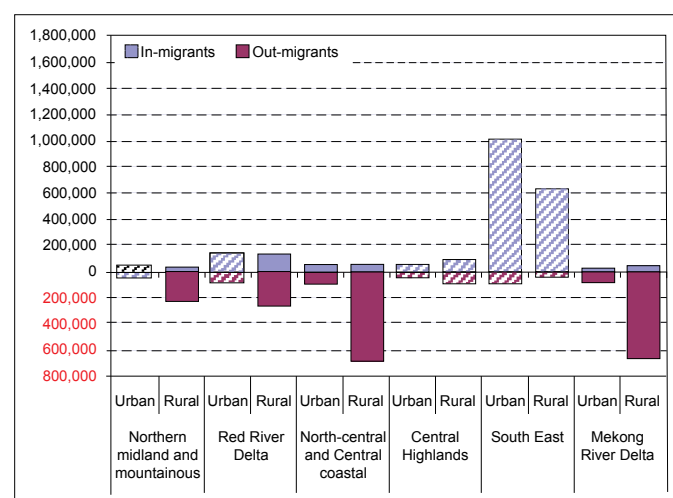
The census data reveals that the larger the urban population of a region, the higher its share of migrants. With the exception of some provinces that had a high density of industrial parks, provinces that had a high proportion of migrants also had a high proportion of urban inhabitants, and vice versa. Furthermore, the data illustrates that the more urbanized an area is, the larger its share of the migrant population. Special urban areas, such as central cities and provinces, had the largest shares of the migrant population.

## 4. The migrant population, especially the female migrants, is young

From the census data it is clear that the majority of migrants, especially inter-provincial migrants, were young between 15 to 29 years old. Inter-provincial migrants were the youngest, with a median age of 24 years; inter-district and intra-district migrants were just a bit older with a median age of 25 and 26 years, respectively. In contrast, the non-migrant population had a median age of 30 years. Comparisons of the age structure of migrant and non-migrant populations over the three censuses show that migrants, especially female migrants, have become younger while non-migrants have become older. This is also illustrated through the reduction in the median age of female migrants – from 25 in 1989 to 24 in 1999 and 23 years in 2009. At the same time, the median age of female non-migrants increased sharply from 25 in 1989 to 28 in 1999 and 31 in 2009.

## 5. Migration flows vary by region and province

The South East region was a major destination during 1994-1999, and migration to this region accelerated even faster during 2004-2009. In contrast, the North Central and Central Coastal regions and the Mekong River Delta region were major places of origin for migrants during 1994-1999 – and out-migration from these two regions accelerated during 2004-2009 (Graph 2).



Graph 2: Inter-provincial in-migrant and out-migrant populations over the five years preceding 2009, by urban/rural place of residence and region

The 2009 census data shows that the migrant population represented more than 10% of the total population in some provinces; particularly in Binh Duong province the migrant population represented more than a third of the total population. The net population gain through migration was almost one million people in Ho Chi Minh City and half a million people in Binh Duong. In contrast, in many other provinces the migrant population accounted for less than 1% of the total population, and some provinces experienced net out-migration.

## 6. The migrants captured in the census tend to exhibit higher levels of qualifications and enjoy better living conditions than the non-migrant population

Compared to non-migrants, migrants of working age have a higher likelihood of being more educated and trained, of having higher living standards (as measured by assets and housing), and of having access to safe water (for cooking and drinking) and to hygienic toilet facilities.

## 7. Rural-urban migrants contribute to an increasing gap between rural and urban areas

The census data shows that among the non-migrant population, urban residents had significantly more advantages than rural residents: urban non-migrants exhibited a larger share of trained workers, higher living standards, a larger proportion of adults who had completed primary education, greater use of safe water, and greater use of hygienic toilet facilities. The data also indicates that rural-to-urban migrants had more advantages than rural non-migrants and even more advantages than urban non-migrants for several indicators. On the one hand, the results of the 2009 census show improved living conditions for rural-to-urban migrants after migration as a result of greater availability of better living conditions in urban areas. On the other hand, these results were affected by the selectivity of migrants: rural-to-urban migrants include people who were richer and higher levels of education and technical qualifications than non-migrants in their place of origin. This selectivity of migrants resulted in the larger gap between rural and urban areas through migration.

## 8. Migration has negative impacts on the education of school-age migrant children

The census data revealed that the likelihood of migrant children attending primary and secondary schools was much lower than for non-migrant children. The largest negative educational impact of migration was found on children of inter-provincial migrants.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Because the migrant population has increased rapidly and accounts for a significant share of the total population, migrants deserve greater attention from the government and local authorities in national and sub-national socio-economic development plans and policies. Given the increase in the migrant population, strategies to promote their wellbeing and human development need to be mainstreamed into all sectoral policies and related budgets.

A clear trend evident in the census towards increased 'feminization of migration', in addition to the need for more migrant-sensitive policies, they should also be gender sensitive.

In order to reduce the gap in living conditions between migrant sending and receiving areas, national and regional development policies should maximize the advantages gained from this process, while mitigating the disadvantages, particularly those faced in migrant sending areas. Research elsewhere<sup>1</sup> shows that migrants certainly provide some compensation to their places of origin through remittances, but the evidence suggests that remittances are used mainly for consumption by migrant households rather than for economic development.

A skewed aging pattern is evident in migrant and non-migrant receiving areas: the former gain young workers through migration while the sending areas have to face an ageing population and associated impacts such as an increase in the dependency rate and an increase in social security and health care provision for the elderly. As a result, the allocation of resources to provinces by the national government should take account of these impacts and seek to address the increasing gap between rural and urban areas, and between sending and receiving areas.

A revision of policies on access to the education system should be considered to create equal education opportunities for migrant and non-migrant children. Similarly, policies on access to other social services should be revised to remove all formal and informal barriers to social services in the major places of destination.

The exclusion of temporary migrants from the census data implies that the analysis of the census data is inherently biased toward permanent migrants. Temporary, seasonal and circular migrants may face different and/or additional vulnerabilities, and therefore require different policy responses. There is thus of clear need for more information on the temporary migrant population in Viet Nam.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Viet Nam (2010) *Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-economic Development in Viet Nam*.

## MAIN REFERENCES

1. GSO & UNFPA 2011, *Viet Nam Population and Housing Census: Migration and Urbanization: Patterns, Trends and Variations Ha Noi*.
2. United Nations Viet Nam 2010, *Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-economic Development in Viet Nam*.