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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Overview of International Migration Data from Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – Data on Vietnamese internal migration are always available and are also validated and well confirmed by a large body of research. However, the same does not seem to hold true for data on international migration from Vietnam. This limitation impedes a proper understanding of Vietnamese migration patterns over time, thus limiting reliable predictions of future trends for policy-making processes.

Materials/methods – Through synthesis of information retrieved from multiple secondary sources, this article presents general data on popular forms of Vietnamese international migration which include labor export programs, family streams, human trafficking, transnational marriages, and studying abroad.

Results – This article identified at least five streams of international migration from Vietnam, presented with comprehensive and consistent data.

Conclusion – The purpose of this article is to provide a consistent overview of the inconsistent data scattered across various reporting agencies and to analyze and report on the migration trends, drivers, and challenges to migration policy regimes. The unified information in this paper is considered useful for future research on migration and migration policy planning from and within Asia.

Keywords – international migration data from Vietnam, labor migration, transnational marriage, family migration, skilled migration, international student mobility

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's current population size is 98,675,051, accounting for 1.24% of the world's population and standing as the 15th largest populated country (Vietnam's Population Office, 2022). There are 6.4 million domestic and international migrants in Vietnam aged over 5 years old, constituting 7.3% of the whole population; and 61.8% of the domestic migrants are aged between 20 and 39 years old. Provinces in the Central Highlands encounter the highest migrating influxes of 1.3 million laborers to the Red River Delta and the seven provinces in the Southeastern region, which incorporate large industrial zones. This exodus shows a link between domestic migration and urbanization. The United Nations Population Fund Vietnam (2020) estimated that Vietnam's population will increase to 104.5 million people by 2029, 110.8 million by 2039 (more than 15% will be older people), and 116.9 million by 2069. The yearly increase rate is expected to reach 0.93% by 2026, and Vietnam's population will then be classed as aging, with the number of people aged over 65 years old between 10.2% and 19.9% during the years 2026 to 2054, and from 20-29.9% from 2055 to 2069. These statistics (and many others) show that data on internal migration are readily available from numerous agencies. However, in contrast, there seems to be a lack of consistent data on international migration from Vietnam.

This paper takes on board the definition of international migration according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019) as the movement of people away from their usual residence across an international border over a 12-month period either temporarily or permanently for the purposes of seeking to study, work, or to resettle in another country. This type of migration includes labor, human trafficking, skilled and business, return, refuge and asylum seeking, forced labor, family reunion, and study migration (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). In Vietnam, there are principally two types of international migration that are recorded, temporary and permanent. These two migration types are defined according to the following purposes: labor export, tourist migration or prostitution, medical treatment or care for sick relatives, studying abroad, family-sponsored settlement, marriage, adoption, skilled settlement, illegal human trafficking, and illegal border crossings. It is notable that many people cross the border into the People's Republic of China, or enter the Ukraine, Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, or Poland through the export of licensed and unlicensed labor either spontaneously or under the manipulation of Vietnamese nationals already living in other countries. Some international students decide not to return to Vietnam due to marrying a foreign citizen. These examples reflect ambiguity when we separate the different forms of migration. However, in reality, migration patterns are often interrelated. Many people experience two-step migration patterns (traveling to and then staying illegally in the destination country, studying abroad followed by skilled migration), or three steps (tourism, illegal immigration, and then marriage to a foreign citizen). This may be attributed as one of the causes of inconsistencies when it comes to Vietnam's migration data among different publishing agencies.

Migration data from developing countries are also said to be inconsistent due to differences in the definitions of migration, data collection methods, and measurement approaches (de Beer et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2014). For example, information or statistics on international migration are very intermittent and limited on the National Web Portal on Immigration of Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security, while this division is primarily responsible for releasing information related to international emigration and immigration.

Other agencies such as the IOM or other countries' ministries or departments of foreign affairs publish data that do not always agree, or they collapse the data of Vietnamese migration into Asian trends (e.g., IOM, 2021, 2022). The lack of data or the inconsistencies and collapses in data that are available can result in certain limitations when it comes to validating the mechanisms and patterns of international Vietnamese migration (de Beer et al., 2010). The same issue also limits the reliability of future trend forecasts, e.g., Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA), a statistical method that uses consecutive datasets to forecast future trends.

These inconsistencies are understandable since most current statistics either rely upon datasets published by some Vietnamese media or authority, or use data produced by immigration departments. Some government agencies and departments in receiving countries maintain credible immigrant records based on numbers of visas granted and foreign arrivals that are classified in accordance with visa types. International organizations tend to use either these datasets or those provided by the sending countries. Data, in this sense, can be said to be both scattered and varied. Another issue of common concern with migration statistics and data is that they are simply numbers and figures, whereas data can only really speak when integrated with empirical research, hence there is a need to combine statistical evidence with academic analysis.

With quite an ambitious scope, the author of the current study attempts to address these gaps. Instead of trying to reach a balanced or precise dataset, this paper outlines the general migratory trends from Vietnam by using data readily available from reliable sources both from within Vietnam and from receiving countries, and to analyze the trends, drivers, and challenges to migration policy regimes. Providing consistent data for future research on major migration trends from Vietnam is therefore the primary objective of the current study. By reviewing international migration data from Vietnam, the study aims to sketch an overall picture of international outflows of Vietnamese people for study, work, human trafficking, and marriage purposes.

The paper begins with a general description of the entry and exit of Vietnamese citizens. The sections that follow analyze some of the main types of Vietnamese international migration, with some then elaborated upon so as to draw focus on analyzing the data retrieved from secondary sources and related literature. The study then closes with some general remarks and observations on Vietnamese migratory trends.

2. EXIT RATE FROM VIETNAM

Since the 2000s, the Vietnamese government has mobilized both domestic and foreign financial and diplomatic resources to send and encourage people to study and work abroad as well as to return back home. Their efforts in training human capacity through labor export programs, overseas study, and financial incentives for talented returning expatriates is seen as a means to enhance the country's competitive advantage in the global talent market that has emerged since the late 1990s. However, the returning rate of Vietnamese expatriates is relatively small, with around 500,000 among the estimated three million Vietnamese residing overseas coming back each year on a temporary basis (Chan & Tran, 2011). In essence, more Vietnamese leave than return. In 2020, the exit rate for Vietnam accounted for 4.72% of the population, which is higher than the global average of 3.6% (IOM, 2022). Most permanent migrants from Vietnam choose high-income countries for their residency, whilst Asian

economies like Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, South Korea, or Saudi Arabia tend to attract Vietnamese labor migrants (IOM, 2022).

Table 1. Entry and exit of Vietnamese citizens 2012-2016 (IOM, 2020)

Year	Exit	Reentry	Female exits (%)	Female reentry (%)
2012	1,639,219	1,549,427	49	49.2
2013	1,928,527	1,835,673	48.6	48.5
2014	2,503,812	2,204,628	49.1	49.2
2015	6,119,415	4,756,700	49.3	49.7
2016	4,379,463	3,888,042	-	-

The report by the Consular Department of Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Figure 1) shows the total number of Vietnamese citizens' entries and exits from 2012 to 2016, although it is noted that some data does not quite match that presented in Table 1.

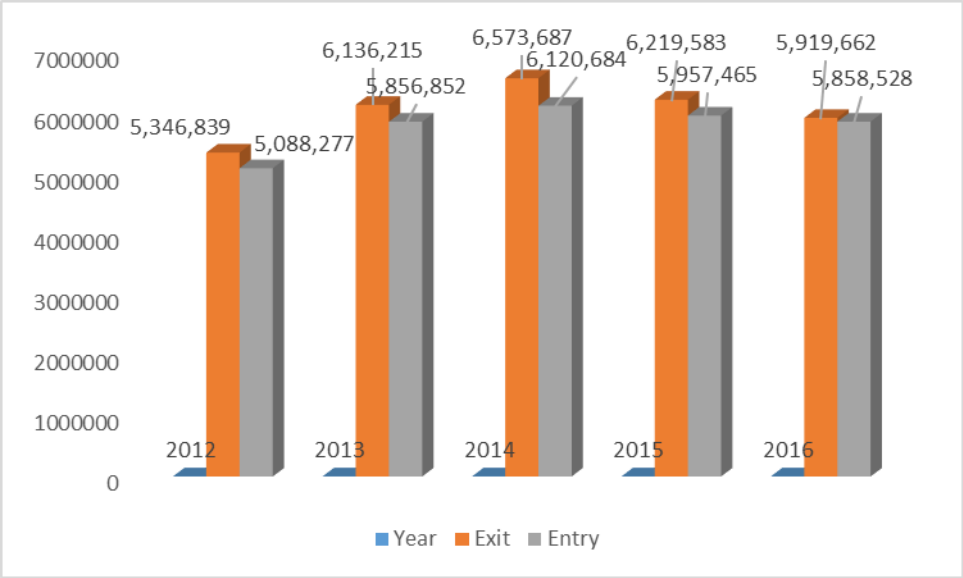


Figure 1. Entry and exit of Vietnamese citizens 2012-2016 (Consular Department – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

Figure 1 shows some inconsistencies with the data presented in Table 1. This difference may be explained in terms of the different data collection and measurement methods used, as well as variations in migrants' ways of migrating. However, overall, from 2012 to 2016, female exit and reentry rates for Vietnam accounted for nearly half of all migration flow compared to males. This female migration rate for Vietnam can be said to be in line with the general global trend of 48% on average. Females in the working-age group (aged 20 to 50 years old) constituted 49-51% of the whole migration rate, while females aged over 59 years old accounted for 53-55.4%.

3. LABOR EXPORT

Hong (2021) stated that the first international labor migration flow from Vietnam was recorded in the 19th century. In 1891, 791 Vietnamese (50 females and 41 on a 5-year contract) were reported to be working in chrome and nickel mines and plantations in New Caledonia. In 1940, 20,000 Vietnamese were sent to work in New Caledonia and Vanuatu. Increasingly, labor export programs have become a significant development strategy employed by the Vietnamese government. It is estimated that in 2013, there were 500,000 Vietnamese migrants working overseas under fixed-term contracts, generating a revenue of 8.2 billion USD for Vietnam in that year alone (Hong, 2021). This number has since increased, and by 2016, the number of Vietnamese work migrants reached 3.8 million (4.72% of the whole 2016 Vietnamese population of 92.7 million) (IOM, 2017). To work overseas is a dream shared by many unskilled or semiskilled Vietnamese workers, although there have been some significant tragedies associated with workplace accidents and debt. For instance, in October 2019, 39 Vietnamese died from suffocation in an airtight refrigerated trailer in the United Kingdom. They were believed to be either victims of human trafficking or were illegal migrants. Further, Hung (2022) cited at least 10 cases of workers from Ha Tinh Province who were killed by drowning at sea, fire in factories, or from fishing vessel accidents, and other work-related incidents in 2021.

According to Vietnam's Association of Manpower Supply (2021), in the first 11 months of 2019, the total number of Vietnamese workers on labor export programs was 132,802 (of which 45,340 were female). During the same period in 2020, this number increased by a further 54,307 (including 20,170 more females). The main problem that the Vietnamese government faces with sending its skilled workers to other countries lies in the weak skills and competencies that Vietnamese workers possess (e.g., limited foreign language and communication skills, technical knowledge, intercultural understanding, and adaptability to new living environments). Overall, 90% of migrant workers were reported to possess low-level skills and technical knowledge (Chieu, 2022).

Another issue relates to migrants who intentionally overstay without a valid work permit or visa; an issue that causes certain countries to hesitate or even cease labor export programs with Vietnam. Chieu (2022) estimated that the overstay rate amongst Vietnamese laborers was higher than for other countries in the region, such as 30-40% in Japan, 25-30% in South Korea, and 9% in Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China. These two problems point to the Vietnamese government having no long-term development strategy for labor export. The current strategies being deployed remain spontaneous, i.e., they are dependent upon the market demands rather than intergovernmental cooperation in creating market demands. Further, they also reflect a limitation in education that tends to teach students nation-bound knowledge and skills. The improper preparation for students to enter the international labor market narrows the chances for them (as graduates) to apply for jobs that require high-level skills and knowledge, and which impedes their integration into the receiving society. Migrant workers from Vietnam are also reported to suffer from high risks of forced labor, limited movement, and physical and mental abuse (Nguyen, 2019).

Table 2. Top 15 destinations for labor export from Vietnam 2012-2016 (IOM, 2017)

No.	Destination	Total
1	Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China	274,890
2	Japan	107,975
3	South Korea	36,417
4	Malaysia	31,534
5	Saudi Arabia	16,412
6	Laos	11,256
7	Cambodia	9,515
8	Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China	7,873
9	United Arab Emirates	5,539
10	Algeria	3,885
11	Libya	2,851
12	Qatar	2,318
13	Cyprus	1,975
14	Israel	1,353
15	Belarus	1,282
Total		**515,075**

More updated information on labor migration is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Labor exports during first 11 months of 2020 (Vietnam's Association of Manpower Supply, 2021)

No.	Destination	Total	No. of females
1	Japan	27,325	11,151
2	Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China	23,403	8,688
3	South Korea	1,077	44
4	Romania	481	89
5	People's Republic of China	464	0
6	Singapore	341	0
7	Uzbekistan	227	0

No.	Destination	Total	No. of females
8	Algeria	150	1
9	Malaysia	450	N/A
10	Other markets	839	197
Total		**54,757**	**20,620**

According to Nguyen (2014) and Chieu (2022), labor export programs were initiated in the 1980s, when the Vietnamese government signed agreements with the former communist block to train the technical knowledge and working skills of a certain section of the domestic workforce. These programs later generated large revenues for Vietnam (e.g., in excess of 3 million USD from 1980 to 1990). After the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the Vietnamese government redirected these programs towards the Asian market. Since then, Asia has remained the major labor export market for Vietnam, with Japan and Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China as the major destinations, accounting for approximately 90% of the Vietnamese migrant workforce.

Currently, Japan lists 76 occupations that attract foreign workers. The agricultural sector (e.g., fruit and vegetable planting and animal husbandry) does not require foreign workers to have experience or a technical degree, and its construction industry favors male labor. Japan's food processing and textile-garment industries are also an option for many workers from Vietnam. However, the exit costs are high, about 80-130 million VND for a 3-year contract (at the time of writing this paper, one USD is equivalent to 23,000 VND). Nguyen (2021) stated that the number of Vietnamese working and living in Japan has increased, with 58,471 holding a technical or professional work visa. In 2019 alone, 68,737 Vietnamese were reported to be working in Japan, although this number decreased in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite scant research on this issue, it can be surmised that Vietnamese migrant workers are offered a wider choice of destinations for work, depending on their financial circumstances and personal interests. It can also be further predicted that this number will continue to fall due to the tightening visa requirements imposed by Japan.

Singapore appears to be quite selective in its appetite for foreign workers. Most qualified workers must have at least an associate degree or higher, and they must be able to speak either Chinese or English to a high standard. Applicants must also pay a deposit of 1,000 SGD for their employment contract prior to taking a job-related exam. Vietnamese workers must also spend about 4,500-7,000 USD for work permits lasting 3 years, but the salaries they can obtain are attractive, at about 19-27 million VND/month. In contrast, the cost for labor export to Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China is cheaper than in Japan and Singapore. Jobs in Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China do not require workers to possess high-level skills or qualifications, with employment popular in factories, the electronics sector, product packaging, nursing home care, and maid services. Likewise, labor export costs to Malaysia are lower than in Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, at approximately 25-40 million VND with a minimum monthly basic salary of 6.5 million VND for a 3-year work contract in the mechanical or construction industries. This low fee therefore attracts a significant number of Vietnamese workers since they only need to have completed lower secondary education, suiting workers from remote areas. Other sectors such

as food processing, electronic component assembly, or apparel, require workers with only basic occupational skills. However, since 2020, the salary that Vietnamese migrant workers receive in Malaysia has dropped to around 150-200 USD/month, causing a large number to return home or move on to other countries in search of work contracts with higher levels of pay.

South Korea is currently an attractive market for semi-skilled Vietnamese workers, since they can usually receive a stable income of 25-30 million VND/month. Prospective workers looking to work in South Korea need to pass a 70-minute Employment Permit System TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) to a level of at least 80/200 points, i.e., 40%). In addition, they are required to pay a deposit of at least 100 million VND. Nguyen (2021) documented that in 1994, there were 20,493 Vietnamese in South Korea for internships, and the two countries signed a labor export agreement that facilitated visa processes and reduced exit costs for Vietnamese nationals applying for a visa to enter South Korea and an employment permit through the Employment Permit System (EPS). Following the effectiveness of the agreement, South Korea has since seen an increase in the number of Vietnamese workers entering the country (e.g., 43,326 in 2010). Nguyen (2021) reported that 87% of Vietnamese migrants employed in South Korea work in industry, agriculture, construction, and seafood processing sectors. However, 35% of Vietnamese workers in South Korea often switch or quit their jobs due to dissatisfaction with their employers or issues related to their personal circumstances. Some have been arrested for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, gambling, and prostitution and others have been reported for violating labor contracts and overstay. Decision 1684/LDTBXH-QLLDNN signed on May 4, 2019, by Vietnam's Ministry of Labor – Invalids and Social Affairs banned certain provinces (mostly in the Central Region and the Northern regions) from participating in the labor export program to South Korea. More than 60 people were found to have been illegally residing in South Korea and 30% of overstaying workers came from these now restricted regions (Nguyen, 2021).

Dubai and the United Arab Emirates have become emerging markets that attract many skilled and semi-skilled workers from Vietnam. These two countries are known to enjoy lavish and prosperous lifestyles. Commission and filing costs that Vietnamese workers must pay brokers fluctuate around the 50 million VND level, although they can receive some financial help from certain Vietnamese state banks. Their income, however, is not as high as that of migrant workers in Japan, but they can apply for a 2-year contract with 14-16 million VND/month salaries. Most Vietnamese migrant workers are employed in service sectors, health care, spa industries, shipbuilding, construction, and maid services.

At the cost of paying 57 million VND, Vietnamese workers can opt to work in Romania in occupations requiring a good level of general health such as construction, mechanics, or the food industry. They can receive salaries of 18-20 million VND/month on renewable 1-year contracts. As a former labor cooperation partner with Vietnam, Algeria still continues as a labor-receiving market from Vietnam. Exit costs range from 22 to 50 million VND, and broker companies can support workers to borrow up to 30 million VND. Salaries are around 13-24 million VND/month with a contract valid for 2 years. Most labor brokers in Algeria guarantee recruitment success, and successful workers are also covered with accommodation. The People's Republic of China is also a popular destination that seeks a low labor export cost. Many labor brokers boldly advertise a package price of about 8 million VND for unskilled jobs such as kitchen assistants or factory conveyors with a basic salary of 8-14 million VND/month on a 1-year contract.

The Mekong Delta provinces have observed the lowest share of labor export in Vietnam. By contrast, labor export for the Nghe An Province reached 3,547,000 in 2020, representing 1.77% of the provincial population, and earning the province more than 500 million USD in 2021. However, South Korea has warned other countries not to receive workers from this province due to high numbers of overstaying workers. Figure 2 shows the number of Vietnamese migrant workers sent abroad and the receiving countries/territories by year of exit for the 2012-2016 period. The number of receiving countries is seen to have decreased, but the number of migrants has increased.

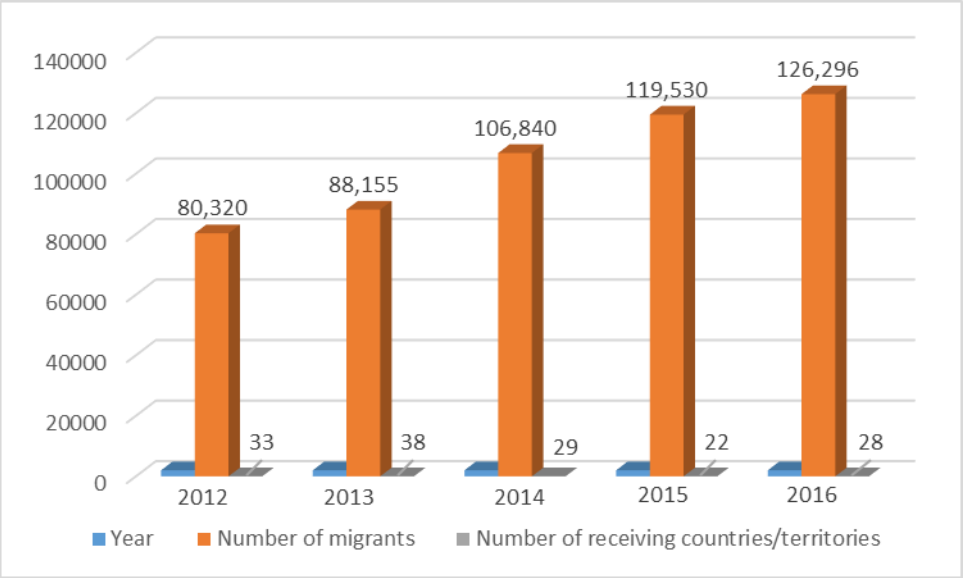


Figure 2. Vietnamese migrant workers (Consular Department – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

As previously mentioned, these figures are inconsistent across reporting agencies and lack sufficient data on skilled migration. This may be due to a management overlap between the Vietnamese Ministry of Labor – Invalids and Social Affairs (that manages labor export programs) and the Immigration Department (managing legal issues on workers' exit and entry). This statistic also does not show the number of self-initiated skilled migrants or non-returning students who initially migrated for international education and subsequently apply for permanent residency following their graduation. In this sense, skilled migration from Vietnam is said to be caused by two types of migration: labor export (through government programs or self-initiated) and student migration which causes a skills loss referred to as "brain drain."

4. FAMILY STREAMS

A possible link exists between family migration (family reunion, family formation, accompanying family members, and international adoption) and other types of migration such as labor or two-step migration (e.g., permanent migration following international study). It should be noted here that some of the data presented in this section may overlap with other types of migration.

The United States is one of the largest receiving countries for family reunion migrants from Vietnam. Some of their immigration programs for Vietnamese citizens are no longer in effect; one of which was the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) which dates back to 1979. This

program allowed Vietnamese refugees to migrate to the United States following the 1975 collapse of the American-backed regime in South Vietnam. It was later changed to the Humanitarian Resettlement Program which enabled former political prisoners who had been captured and interred in North Vietnamese reeducation camps and those who had worked for US companies and agencies to migrate to the United States. The program facilitated the departure of 623,509 Vietnamese to settle in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, the United States, the United Kingdom, as well as other countries. Under the program, the United States received 500,000 Vietnamese until it was abolished in 1994 (Nguyen, 2021). Although only 8% of migrants to the United States were Vietnamese-born, it was reported that 66% of them faced some sort of linguistic difficulty in their professional and social communication (Alperin & Batalova, 2018). Overall, 26% of Vietnamese-born residents in the United States have tertiary degrees, compared to 32% of Americans and 31% of other immigrant groups. The participation of Vietnamese-born migrants in the United States workforce is 66%, almost the same as that of other immigrant groups (66%) and higher than that of Americans (62%). The income of Vietnamese migrants in the United States is 63,200 USD/year, which is higher than that of Americans (60,800 USD) and other immigrant groups (56,700 USD). However, 11% of Vietnamese-born in the United States are found to live under the poverty line (12,760 USD/year). As of 2019, there were 1.4 million Vietnamese-born people living in the United States, accounting for 3% of the total US migrant population of 44.5 million (Harjanto & Batalova, 2021). As of November 2017, there were 249,821 approved applications for family-based visas to the United States (Kandel, 2018, p. 14), and 4,857 family-based visa applications were on the waiting list in 2020 (Department of State, 2020a).

Australia has observed a similar trend to that seen in the United States, but it does not limit the number or quota of spousal or prospective spousal immigrants like the United Kingdom. A spousal migration visa is a 2-year provisional visa before applicants may apply for permanent residence if they still live with their sponsors in Australia, and a prospective visa is valid for a period of 9 months (Khoo, 2008). According to Nguyen (2021), Vietnamese migration to Australia in 1975 was limited, with only 1,000 in total, of which 335 were Colombo Plan students and 130 were privately-funded students. After 1975, Australia received a large influx of Vietnamese boat refugees, beginning with 194 in 1976. However, this number rose significantly to 41,096 in 1981 and 50,000 in 1982, although many Australians disagreed with their government's refugee admission policy, arguing that the Vietnamese immigrants may unleash a "yellow peril" on Australian society (Viviani, 1984, p. 79). In 1982, the Orderly Departure Program was also deployed in Australia, which allowed 49,616 Vietnamese to migrate there on a permanent basis. Therefore, there may be a link between these refugee movements and the current family-based migration, although no statistical information is available at present – this could represent a rich area for academic research in the future. Prior to 2008, spousal migration from Vietnam accounted for 13% of all family sponsors in Australia (Khoo, 2008). In 2010, the number of Vietnamese-born in Australia was 203,850. In 2021, there were 4,749 family stream visas granted to Vietnamese nationals, making a total of 270,340 Vietnamese-born people living in Australia. The Vietnamese-born population in Australia is now the sixth largest migrant community in the country (Department of Home Affairs, 2022).

During the peak of the Vietnamese boat refugee crisis in 1981, Canada admitted 60,000 people from Southeast Asia, of which 7,700 were Vietnamese refugees (Hou, 2020). In 2001, there were a total of 150,000 Vietnamese-born living in Canada, making the

Vietnamese community the fifth largest non-European ethnic group in Canada (Lindsay, 2001). In 2016, this number rose to 240,615 (Joy, 2018). Although Canada reunited a total of 85,179 under the family-based immigration scheme (Mendicino, 2019, p. 19), statistics on this type of migration from Vietnam are not publicly available.

Vietnamese people also migrate permanently under family schemes to other places such as Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and countries in Europe (see Nguyen, 2021 for more elaboration on this issue). The general trends tend to increase over time and are possibly linked to other types of migration as previously mentioned. The main drivers of this type of migration reflect part of Vietnamese kinship connections, bonds, and relationships. As Khoo (2008) argued, the motivating factors of family-based migration may generally include the expectations of unmarried migrants to live a better life in developed countries and their sponsors' wishes to marry spouses of the same ethnic and cultural background.

5. TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES

According to Vietnam's Institute for Gender and Family Studies (2015), from 1995 to 2010, more than 257,555 Vietnamese people (80% were females) married spouses in more than 50 countries and territories outside of Vietnam. In 2016 alone, the number of Vietnamese transnational marriages totaled 16,233, of which 83% were female (IOM, 2017). Most of the spouses were from Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, South Korea, Germany, the United States, Canada, France, Australia, and Sweden. Transnational marriages were also reported to increasingly incur between Vietnamese females and Chinese males residing in the Vietnam border area with the People's Republic of China. Vietnam's Institute for Family and Gender Studies (2015) stated that most transnational marriages achieved their marriage goals, contributing to enhancing the bilateral relations between Vietnam and other countries. More Vietnamese females married males from Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China and South Korea than those from other countries. From 2000 to 2003, there were 11,358 Vietnamese females who married males from Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, with the majority of them from the Mekong Delta provinces of South Vietnam (Nguyen, 2021). This number consistently increased to 6,000 Vietnamese females marrying transnationally in 2006 in Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, accounting for 80% of all foreign spouses in the province. However, many of them have since reportedly divorced, due to pressures caused by debt and cultural differences, and from overstaying residency permits.

A similar trend is found in Vietnamese females marrying males from South Korea. For example, Nguyen (2021) reported that in 2009, Vietnamese females accounted for 47% of all foreign brides in South Korea, whilst in 2012, 40,000 Vietnamese females married South Korean males. Nevertheless, these Vietnamese brides are said to have confronted significant challenges in communication and cultural understanding, and that 30% felt unhappy with their marriages. Many have also faced instances of domestic violence and abuse, and some have reportedly committed suicide.

Many Vietnamese females marry foreign nationals through illegal brokers. Some are said to live in difficult circumstances, have been subjected to domestic abuse, and even trafficked for prostitution. Approximately 31% of Vietnamese brides have reportedly married males from Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China for economic gain and stability, whilst 15.6% wanted to marry someone from any foreign nation for the same reason. Circular 22/2013/TT-BTP, Clauses b and c of Article 4 stipulated that transnational spouses must be

certified by authorized centers for marriage counseling and support involving foreign affairs. Permission is withheld where there is a 20-year age gap (or more) between the two parties. The same block applies if the foreign spouse is to be married for the third time (or more), has ever divorced a Vietnamese citizen in the past, or the proposed couple do not appear to understand each other's circumstances, language, customs, culture, or laws of each respective country. This circular aimed to help reduce the risks associated with transnational marriages and to improve the dignity of Vietnamese citizens.

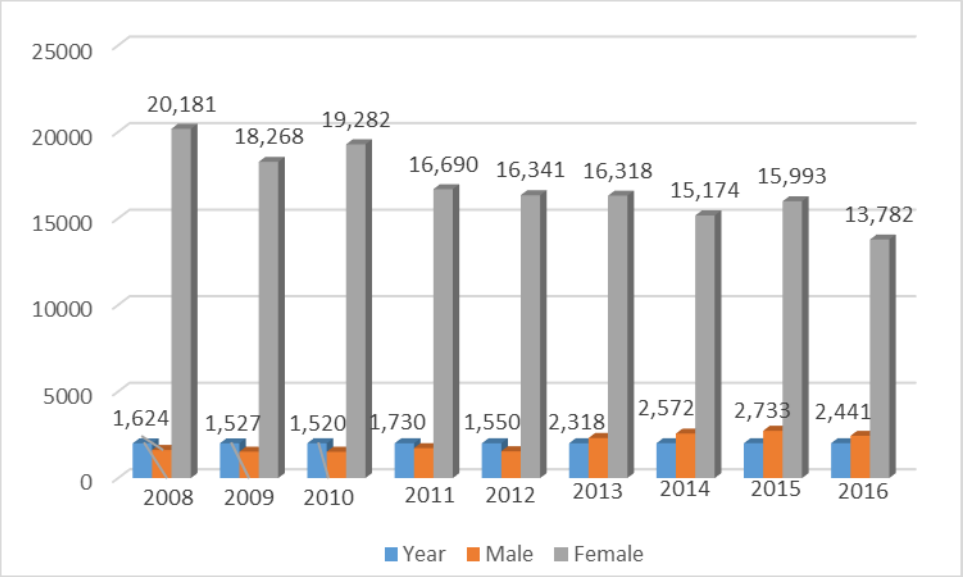


Figure 3. Vietnamese transnational marriages 2008-2016 (Consular Department – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

The number of transnational marriages have seen a decrease in recent years, but the proportion of males in transnational marriages has tended to increase. However, in general, the number of females marrying foreigners is higher than males.

Table 4. Vietnamese transnational marriages (Consular Department – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
People's Republic of China	222	206	257	210	270	55	39	555	94
Cambodia	10	26	17	22	15	-	-	-	-
Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China	4,055	3,252	3,139	3,019	2,579	2,950	3,208	3,840	4,344
South Korea	7,655	6,623	8,425	6,957	6,343	6,066	4,374	4,158	1,492
Malaysia	30	36	43	61	53	-	-	-	-
Europe	1,887	1,763	1,793	1,345	1,246	-	-	-	-
United States	4,472	4,569	4,198	3,925	4,136	5,105	4,786	5,119	4,516
Australia	874	901	905	698	771	-	-	-	-

Canada	-	-	-	-	-	737	33	599	557
Total	**21,805**	**19,795**	**20,802**	**18,420**	**17,891**	**18,636**	**17,746**	**18,726**	**16,223**

Within the total number of transnational marriages, a majority were from Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. This trend contrasts with the labor export rates (which were mainly from the Central Region and Northern provinces). During the French colonial period, females who married foreigners were often looked down upon in Vietnamese society, however, since the 1986 Doi Moi years, this prejudicial view has changed. These marriages are now generally respected and believed to secure financial support for their natal families and relatives. However, this trend seems to be decreasing. This may be explained according to two reasons. First, Vietnamese citizens can now more easily choose to migrate for other reasons and in different ways such as through labor export, studying abroad, or via family reunification. Second, the stereotype of being "overseas Vietnamese" seems to have started to decline in Vietnam when GDP per capita increased from 86 USD in 1986 to 188 USD in 1991, 1,260 USD in 2011, 2,050 USD in 2016, and 2,082 USD in 2019. The middle class (with a standard of living higher than 15 USD/person/day) now accounts for 13% of the population and is expected to grow to 26% by 2026. Vietnam has been rated by The Economist magazine as one of the 16 fast-growing economies in 2020.

6. HUMAN TRAFFICKING

According to a report by the IOM (2017, p. 49), from 2008 to 2016, there were 3,897 cases of human trafficking in Vietnam and 8,366 survivors. Assistance to those affected by human trafficking seems limited at both the international and intraregional levels. In 2021, the IOM were only able to assist 714 victims from the Asia-Pacific region (IOM, 2021). In the case of Vietnam, the majority of the survivors were females (96%) and 81.8% were single. Most victims came from Ho Chi Minh City and the provinces of Dien Bien, Ha Giang, Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Nghe An, Son La, Dong Thap, and Kien Giang, which are near-border localities. Approximately 90% of the cases happened through illegal migration from Vietnam to Laos, Cambodia, and the People's Republic of China, though other countries (e.g., Malaysia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom) have been recognized as emerging final destinations. Most of the cases were found to be related to sex work, forced labor, forced marriage, child kidnapping for organ removal, and other illicit purposes. Death, casualties, and physical and mental abuse have been constantly reported in the media. In 2022, a total of 42 Vietnamese males and females escaped from a Cambodian casino, with one victim having drowned when crossing a river trying to reach the Vietnamese border. Later, Vietnamese police identified at least four human trafficking rings in Cambodia which lured those seeking "easy money" through work in casinos, only to then be sold on to other "owners" after some time. The International Labor Organization (2019) estimated that in 2018, there were 12,448 illegal Vietnamese migrants working in countries such as Cambodia, Laos, the People's Republic of China, Thailand, and Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China. More than 60% of these victims were from ethnic minority groups living under socioeconomically poor conditions. Of these victims, 71% were Vietnamese females sold into marriages with Chinese males, with most of these "brides" having effectively became slaves (Blue Dragon, 2021). These migrants are said to live in squalid conditions and suffer from physical and mental abuse. Most live in isolated conditions and are subjected to torture by gangs (Nguyen, 2019). They are unable to quit their jobs due to the departure debt prior to their journeys, and most lack any legal residency status and must therefore remain hidden from the authorities.

Although Vietnam has been recorded on the United States' Watch List, the Vietnamese government has increased training in anti-human trafficking measures, and also enacted new laws in this area. For example, the 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control identifies human trafficking crimes including brokering services and activities. Decision No. 17/2007/QĐ-TTg instructs authorities in supporting the reintegration of human trafficking victims (Nguyen, 2019). Vietnam has also signed international agreements with Canada, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom, to name but a few. These agreements generally recognize international cooperation in identifying, preventing, and solving cases of human trafficking. However, there are still only limited regulations that actually protect the rights of illegal migrants from Vietnam working overseas, and this weakness in the bureaucratic system is exploited by human traffickers who continue to expand their business. However, overall, the number of human trafficking cases in Vietnam has decreased from 500 in 2017, to 276 in 2018, and to 175 in 2020 (Department of State, 2020b).

7. STUDYING ABROAD

Nguyen (2013) pointed out that the current surge in Vietnamese international mobility may be attributed to the Vietnamese government's attempt to expand their diplomatic approach to multilateralism and to fulfill their ambition to improve the quality of the workforce, further increase incomes, and to increase numbers of high school graduates reinforced by an expansion of the educational facilities and institutions. Vietnam has even moved to support students seeking to obtain international education by mobilizing both parents' self-financing for their children's study sojourns, state budget, and through international scholarships. In 2015, there were a total of 440 students who completed degree programs before returning to Vietnam to seek work, whilst 1,233 students were sent to study in 30 countries and territories under government and international scholarship schemes. In 2016, 5,519 Vietnamese students received scholarships to study in 44 countries, accounting for 4.2% of the total number of students studying abroad at that time (IOM, 2017). The host countries included the Russian Federation (662 students), France (65), the People's Republic of China (62), Hungary (53), Australia (52), Germany (52), and other countries such as New Zealand, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Japan, Laos, Cambodia, the Ukraine, Cuba, Poland, South Korea, Romania, and Canada.

According to BMI Global Education Group's estimate (BMI, 2019), between 2016 and 2017 Vietnamese families spent approximately 3-4 billion VND/year on their children's international education, accounting for 47% of their household expenditure. Nguyen (2021) reported that the number of Vietnamese students studying overseas increased from 125,000 in 2013 to 130,000 in 2016, and then to 170,000 in 2018. The top host countries in 2017 were the United States (22,172 students), Japan (19,152), Australia (15,298), France (4,400), and the United Kingdom (3,979). The majority of students were enrolled to undergraduate degree programs (43%), language courses (30%), master's degree programs (20%), college, professional and vocational training (50%), doctoral degree programs (3%), and other studies (24%).

Table 5. Top 10 study countries chosen by Vietnamese students in 2013 (International Consultants for Education and Fairs, 2014)

No.	Country	No. of students
1	Australia	26,015
2	United States	19,591
3	Japan	13,328
4	People's Republic of China	13,000
5	Singapore	10,000
6	France	6,700
7	Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China	6,000
8	United Kingdom	5,118
9	Russian Federation	5,000
10	Germany	4,600

The remainder of this section further analyzes the updated data presented in Table 5. Many students choose English-speaking countries to study the English language either for academic purposes, vocational training, or for work purposes. In 2017, the countries that attracted English language students from Vietnam were Australia (159,479 students), the United States (51,030), the United Kingdom (7,595), the Republic of Ireland (1,336), Malta (480), and South Africa (69).

Dorais (2004) argued that Vietnamese international student mobility to Canada is based on a long history that is also linked to family reunification. In 1974, 1,500 Vietnamese migrants were reported to reside permanently in Canada, and this number increased to 7,800 following the collapse of the American-backed regime in Sai Gon. Chou (2020) estimated that 75,000 Vietnamese refugees came to live in Canada. This historical exodus may create certain links with international education in which relatives may want to take advantage of their relationships to sponsor or support their descendants from Vietnam to seek studies in Canada, although there has been very little research published on this issue. From 2016 to 2018, Canada continued to expand the Canada Express Study (CES) program, which made the conditions to study in Canada and the necessary financial impact considerably easier. Student applicants must first attain an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 5.0, with no sub-band score below 4.5, before being eligible to seek admittance to one of the 55 educational institutions open to them. They also need to purchase an investment certificate from Scotiabank at a value of 10,000 Canadian dollars to cover their first study year's living expenses. In 2018, the CES was replaced by the Study Direct Stream (SDS), which applied to students from the People's Republic of China, India, the Philippines, and also Vietnam, as emerging markets in Asia. Most of the SDS program's requirements remained unchanged from the CES, except for an increased minimum IELTS score of 6.0 and with no band score lower than 6.0.

In 2018, South Korea hosted 15,000 Vietnamese international students, a three-fold increase from 2015 (Nguyen, 2021). Approximately 19,260 Vietnamese students also chose to study non-degree Korean language programs in the same year (Quy, 2018). Since 2019, international students are required to deposit 10,000 USD in a South Korean commercial bank through a Vietnamese branch for their affidavit, representing a 10% increase over the 9,000 USD previously required (BMI, 2019).

The United States has always been one of the top destinations for Vietnamese students due to the internationally recognized degrees conferred by its educational institutions, it being an English-speaking environment, the kinship and familial connections with Vietnamese-born American citizens, and the generally high standard of modern working and living conditions (Nguyen, 2013). As a result, the number of Vietnamese students in the United States has increased consecutively over a 17 year period. In 2017, the inflow of 24,325 Vietnamese students generated 881 million USD for the United States economy. Nguyen (2021) reported that 69.6% of Vietnamese students undertake undergraduate degree programs, 15.2% pursue postgraduate courses, 8.6% follow internships, and 6.6% study non-university programs.

Malaysia has become an emerging destination for Vietnamese students, boasting 20 state universities, 36 colleges, 94 community colleges, 467 vocational training institutions, and 10 foreign university campuses. International students also have a wider choice of study programs they can select from, and generally they can pursue whichever they choose. The proliferation of educational institutions in Malaysia reflects the country's 2007 National Higher Education Strategic Plan, which aimed to increase its international education revenue streams through being competitive with neighboring countries such as Singapore and Thailand. This plan was revised in 2015 with an expectation to lure 250,000 international students to study in Malaysia by 2025 (Luo, 2017). It was also expected to expand international cooperation in technical and knowledge transfers between Malaysia and other countries. Vietnamese students studying at certain Vietnamese universities that have cooperation agreements with some Malaysian universities can enroll in twin study programs, meaning that they can study for 2 years in Vietnam and then 2 years at a Malaysian university. This option helps to reduce the financial impact whilst providing international study experience for Vietnamese students. Some foreign well-ranking universities such as The University of Nottingham in Malaysia, Monash University, and Curtin University have established campuses in Malaysia, attracting Southeast Asian students to study abroad without having to venture far from their home country. Nguyen (2013) revealed that in 2005, there were 449 Vietnamese students in Malaysia, some of whom had received Vietnamese state scholarships or Malaysian university studentships. Currently, this number has increased to 1,000 students (*Vietnam News,* 2022).

Developed countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand explicitly link their international education to skilled migration targets. This migration scheme contributes to one of the main drivers for international students coming from Southeast Asia (Nguyen, 2014). Take Australia as an example. In 1998, Australia began to internationalize its education by offering a 21 million Australian dollar package to Australian Education International (AEI) to organize marketing campaigns that advertised Australian education in Europe, the United States, India, and the People's Republic of China. In 1999, the Australian government also introduced the skilled migration program that focused on recruiting Australian university graduates by giving 5 bonus points in their visa assessment. This

scheme's aim was two-fold: to increase national revenue and to address a skills shortage that the country faced due to its aging population (Nguyen, 2013). In 2005, a revised version of this scheme increased the pool score from 110 to 120 points, with applicants required to complete at least 2 years of study in Australia in order to halt the inflation of permanent residency applications and meet requirements from state sponsorship. However, an increasing number of international students have arrived in Australia, seeking to apply for this skills migration program upon completion of their studies. In 2010, nearly 16,440 Vietnamese students studied in Australia, which increased to 19,708 students in 2017, and by 2019 it was 24,000, accounting for 4.1% of the overall number of international students in Australia (Statista Research Department, 2020).

8. CONCLUSION

The exit rate in Vietnam (4.72%) is higher than the global average of 3.5%. The migration rate of females is lower than that of males, and females of working and retirement age account for more than 50% of all female migrants. Migration from Vietnam is contributed to by increases in the national income level as well as expansion of migration policies of both Vietnam and the host countries. As a trend, labor export and studying abroad have increased, whilst marriages to a foreign spouse have decreased. Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia have become the most popular destinations for labor export programs, and mostly for unskilled workers. However, many unskilled workers (primarily females) violate labor contracts and illegally reside in South Korea and Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China. South Korea has constantly tightened its rules for temporary entry (studying abroad and unskilled labor) and settlement (marriages) from Vietnam. Human trafficking has seen an increase with the improvements in the detection of cases through improved international cooperation. However, although Vietnam has signed international agreements in the ongoing fight against this criminal trade and its related illicit activities, the rights of those caught up in this as illegal migrants have yet to be fully addressed.

The Northern, Central Highlands, and Central provinces of Vietnam have experienced higher levels of labor export than other regions. Some localities in these areas have been banned from participating in labor export programs to South Korea due to excessive visa violations by some Vietnamese migrant workers. The rate of participation in labor export programs from the Mekong Delta provinces is shown to be lower than that of other regions. Still, a larger number of people from the Mekong Delta provinces and Ho Chi Minh City tend to marry a foreign spouse than from other areas, and the percentage of females marrying foreign nationals is higher than that of Vietnamese males.

Family-based migration from Vietnam to other countries probably has links to other forms of migration, an issue that can be traced back to the significant boat refugee movements from Vietnam after 1975. Future studies could examine familial and kinship connections and ties to offer a better understanding of the influence of cultural and economic factors as drivers for this type of migration.

In 2018, around 170,000 Vietnamese students were studying abroad in 44 countries, of which 4.2% had received some form of scholarship. The majority of students were enrolled to undergraduate, language, and master's degree programs, with only 3% studying abroad in doctoral programs. Australia, the United States, Japan, the People's Republic of China, and Singapore have become popular study destinations for Vietnamese students. Talent attraction

programs designed to offset aging populations and to enhance competitive advantage in these host countries have enabled many Vietnamese students to then migrate upon graduation, utilizing international education as a means to achieving their life goals.

9. SUGGESTIONS

This article outlined the five main international migration streams from Vietnam, providing relevant data and commentary on each type. It is recommended that further studies employ these same sets of data in order to examine the interrelatedness among these migration streams. Another suggestion for policymakers is to maintain updated information on the outflow of Vietnamese citizens on the basis of these datasets in combination with other governmental sources. As previously mentioned, migration data for Vietnam is often ambiguous and inconsistent, and some data presented in this paper may also fall into this category.

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