Situation and Trends of Vietnamese Labor Export

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Introduction

Asia is a region with high levels of labour migration. Between 2000 and 2006, ASEAN's labour force increased by 35.8 million. While most immigrants live and work legally, undocumented migration is a growing phenomenon. A large group of workers are now of irregular status and therefore vulnerable to exploitation. (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2006, p.3; Hugo, 2006, p.1; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2007, p.13, 57) Another significant trend of migration in South and South-east Asia is the increase in numbers of female migrants. Over the last decade, more and more women have been going abroad independently as domestic work is one of the largest sectors driving international female labour migration. (ADB, 2006, p.3; ESCAP, 2005, p.50; UNFPA, 2006, p.25) In 2005, Asian women represented 44.7% of the total migrants in the region, particularly in the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka where there are more female than male migrants. (Asia fidh, 2007, p.2) Experts point to remittances from international migration as an important factor for poverty reduction. The World Bank estimates that in 2005 formally transferred remittances totaled about US\$232 billion, of which developing countries received US\$167. (Hugo, 2006, p.1-2; ILO, 2007, p.57; United Nations Population Fund [UNFDA], 2006, p.12)

Vietnam is a country in the Mekong Sub-region and Vietnamese overseas workers currently head for similar destination countries as overseas workers from other countries in the region. There are many vulnerable migrants, both male and female. Exchanging experience and knowledge among countries in the region is essential to learn, prevent, and protect the migrant victims in the future.

Objectives

This study examines the situation and trends of international labour migration in Vietnam, focused on overseas workers, updating pre-departure processing, labour markets in destination countries, type of work, quality of Vietnamese workers, problems, and the social impact of migration.

Methodology

This study relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources come from a review of the literature including research reports, books, publications, news, and data from the internet. The primary sources came from interviews with returned Vietnamese international labor migrants and their families from areas that exported high numbers of laborers in Vietnam. In addition, we interviewed key informants who were experts on international labour migration such as government officials, academics, and international and local NGO officers.

The collection of data was done by a small research team of two Vietnamese researchers, a Vietnamese coordinator, and an interpreter. Before fieldwork, we provided training and designed interview guidelines to help the interviewers gather data. The research was conducted between October 2006 to July 2007, a study period of 9 months. The study area included two villages: the first, Hanh Thien Village in the north of Vietnam in Nam Dinh Province, Xuan Truong District, and was completed between the 16th -19th of January 2007 and the second, Cuong Gian, in the Central region of Vietnam in Ha Tinh Province, Nghi Xuan District, and was completed on the 17th -20th of March 2007. In each village we conducted 20 in-depth interviews with migrants who returned from abroad less than 3 years before, families of the migrants who were working abroad, and returnees who were working outside the village. In addition, we completed two focus group discussions with the commune authorities, returnees, and families of migrants. In total we conducted 4 focus group discussions and 40 in-depth interviews (with 26 returnees and 14 migrant's families.)

Number of Respondents

	Nam Dinh	Ha Tinh	total
In-depth interviews			40
- returnees	9	17	
- migrant families	11	3	
Focus Group Discussions	2	2	4

Situation of Vietnamese Labour Export

Despite Vietnam's economic recovery and continued growth, the majority of Vietnamese remain poor. Poverty, unemployment, limited access to education, and a desire among people to improve their lifestyles are all strong push factors for Vietnamese working abroad. Labour export is identified as one of the major solutions for reducing the unemployment rate in Vietnam. (Asian Migrant Center [AMC], 2003, p. 286-287; Asia/Africa Intelligence Wire, 2002; Waddington, Clare. 2003, p.1; Investment & Trade Promotion Centre [ITPC], 2007) In more recent years, the pattern of the migration movement in Vietnam has become more complicated. The opening of borders between Vietnam and Cambodia, Laos, and China is linked to the growing problem of human trafficking in the region. In some instances, those intended as voluntary workers or marriage migrants end up as prostitutes or in other forms of sex exploitation. (UNFPA, 2006).

International labor migration in Vietnam has rapidly increased since the early 1980s when the Vietnamese government opened up the country mainly to the member countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries such as the former East Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Bulgaria. Since 1992, Vietnam has found new markets in many developed countries and territories such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Libya, the Middle East and Laos. (PANO - Economy, 2007)

In 2006, the population of Vietnam was 84 million (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2006), with more than 400,000 Vietnamese workers working abroad in 50 countries and territories sent through 150 manpower companies (ILO, 2007, p.55; Vietnam News, 2007; Vietnam News Agency, 2006). Vietnam sent 78,855 workers abroad in 2006, exceeding the annual goal. Of the traditional markets in Asia, Malaysia ranked first among the destination countries with 37,941, followed by Taiwan with 14,127, South Korea with 10,977, and Japan with 5,360. Vietnamese workers mainly go to work in manufacturing, construction, textiles, as domestic helpers, nurses, sailors, or fishermen. Most Vietnamese overseas workers are documented. They generally come from different areas of Vietnam such as Nghe An, Hai Phong, Ha Tinh, Thanh Hoa, Bac Giang, Phu Tho, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City. (MOLISA, 2006, 1) Their remittances totaled around US\$1.6 Billion in 2006.

Female migrants are vulnerable to risks of labor export. From 1992 to 2006, 147,262 female migrants worked abroad. Female migrants rapidly increased from 2002 to 2004. In 2006, Vietnam exported 27,023 female workers (34 %) and 51,832 male workers (66%) (The World Bank, 2006; MOLISA, 2006; Table 1). Women typically work as domestic helpers and in garment or electronics factories.

Channel & recruitment processing:

Vietnamese labour export moves via 3 channels:² (1) through Vietnamese enterprises licensed to provide labor services according to contracts signed with foreign partners; (2) through Vietnamese enterprises which have contracts or make investment overseas or (3) under labor contracts signed by individual workers directly with employers overseas. In 2005, South Korea used the new recruitment system, Employment Permit System (EPS)³.

In pre-departure training, before signing their contracts, overseas workers need to pass vocational skills and language training and pass medical check ups. All documented migrants are assumed to have been trained and educated by the recruitment agencies in Vietnam. The information from the interview respondents showed that during the training of three months, they spent around US\$100 in training fees without a guarantee to work abroad. The workers need to pass the examination and training before being able to sign contracts.

Under the law, workers who apply through manpower companies in Vietnam have to pay a maximum of 1 month basic salary per year as a recruitment fee to these companies for their service. This charge covers the administration fee of companies, fees for managing workers overseas, and other profits for manpower companies (DOLAB, 2006, see Table 2). But most workers pay a higher recruitment fee than what is lawful to the recruitment agencies, except those who apply to work in Korea as they are using the new recruitment system (Employment Permit System or EPS). During the time working abroad, the Vietnamese government does not tax overseas workers.

Strength & weakness of Vietnamese overseas workers:

Employers prefer Vietnamese workers as they are hard-working, active, intelligent, open and skilful and are always ready to do extra work. The weaknesses of Vietnamese workers include the fact that most of them are from rural areas and are not yet used to industrialized working practices. In addition, most Vietnamese guest workers' foreign language skills are poor, particularly in English, resulting in failure to penetrate foreign markets offering them high salaries. Moreover, their certificates or degrees have not yet been recognized internationally so they only can engage in non-professional work when abroad. (Vietnam News, 2007; PANO - Economy, 2007)

Difficulties faced & social impact of overseas workers:

Difficulties faced: (1) Limited information before departure, little awareness of migrant rights, how to protect and solve problems, little understanding of traditions and culture during work abroad in host country, particularly in the new US and European markets. (2) Communication problems particularly in English. (3) Poor working conditions, especially in Malaysia. (4) In recent years, they are more vulnerable to be trafficked through illegitimate labor export companies. Little information of undocumented workers was reported by the government even as many exploitation cases have been presented by the media. (5) High cost of recruitment fees as workers mostly borrow from relatives or from non-banking sources at a much higher interest rate. They do so, however, as working abroad will enable them to earn much higher salaries than working in Vietnam. (Glantz & Nguyen, 2006). (6) The workers have been terminating their contracts and working illegally. Recently, the manpower companies are facing a tough challenge in Taiwan, S. Korea and Japan, as workers are independently moving to higher paying jobs or residing there illegally. Among the reasons for this are high pre-departure expenditures, large amounts of debt, earning a much higher income, and little opportunity to work abroad again after returning to Vietnam. The labour export companies worry about this issue in new markets such as the United States as it may cause them to stop receiving Vietnamese workers. Therefore, the solution to prevent workers from escaping from labour export contracts is to have the workers pay a deposit⁵ to the companies returned only when they complete the contract and return to Vietnam.

Social impact: (1) Currently, it is a common phenomenon in many rural households for husbands to seek jobs far away from home (including working abroad), leaving their children to be looked after by their parents and wives. In addition, women themselves are also leaving home to work abroad or seek work in urban areas and send money back to their rural families while their husbands take over the duties of caring for children and looking after the house. (Tien & Ngoc, 2001, p.12) (2) Most of returned migrants can not use the skills and experience from abroad after they return. In many cases, respondents remained working as rubbish collectors.

However, in terms of labour export policy, the national authority is more concerned with the targets in terms of quantity. As a result, quality has become an urgent issue as importing manpower countries are raising standards on imported labour. Moreover, the policy

on labour export does little to settle the problems that increase during the time working abroad and when workers return. (Vietnam Economy, 2007)

Trends of Labour Export

As planned, during 2006-2010, Vietnam will keep the number of overseas workers at 70-80,000 per year, with the overall number at 500,000 workers abroad. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs is striving to increase the number of guest workers by exporting 100,000 workers a year from 2010. It set the target of having a total of one million nationals working abroad every year starting in 2015 and transforming them from manual to skilled and qualified workers. (PANO-Economy, 2007) The traditional markets are still Japan, S.Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia. In addition, the Middle East countries in the Gulf area will be the biggest and have the most potential for Vietnam in the near future. For the new markets, Vietnam hopes to export workers to the US, Canada, Italy, Australia, and North Africa. By 2010, Vietnam hopes to gain US\$2 billion a year from labour export. (Vietnam Trade–Vietnam Market, 2006) Vietnam will face many challenges in labour export policy including increasing the competitiveness, work opportunities for the nationals, protection of migrant workers' rights, and improving their welfare.

Conclusion

Vietnamese labour export has rapidly increased since the 1980s when the Vietnamese government opened up the country. Since 1992, Vietnam has found new markets, such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Libya, the Middle East and Laos. In 2006, more than 400,000 Vietnamese were working abroad in 50 countries and territories, mostly documented workers and unskilled workers. The workers send home around US\$1.6 billion in remittances during 2006.

Problems and difficulties of Vietnamese overseas workers before departing were high recruitment fees, little useful information on the destination country, spending money on training at the manpower companies but being unable to work abroad, and currently being more vulnerable to be trafficked through illegitimate labor export companies. Difficulties while working abroad include communication problems, poor working conditions, low incomes, and some terminating their contracts and working illegally. Difficulties after returning are the scarcity of good jobs and the inability to use their skills & experience acquired abroad.

Vietnam's planned focus to increase the number of labour export, total number of workers abroad and remittances from 2006 to 2010 will keep the number of overseas workers at 70-80,000 per year, and increase in 2010 to100,000 workers a year, with the 2015 target of having 1 million regular working abroad every year. Vietnam hopes to gain US\$2 billion a year from labour export. In addition, the Middle East countries in the Gulf area will have more potential for Vietnam in the coming years and new markets like the US, Canada. Italy, Australia, and North Africa are also being explored.

The pattern of migration movement in Vietnam is more complicated and there are growing problems of human trafficking. As for labour export policy, Vietnam is concerned more with the quantity target than with improving the quality of guest workers. As a result, the quality has become an urgent issue as importing countries are raising standards on imported labour. Vietnam faces many challenges to it's labour export policy including increasing the competitiveness, work opportunities for the workforce, protecting migrant workers' rights, and improving their welfare.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are for the government (national & local governments), academics, and Non Government Organizations (NGOs):

- 1. Improve the database & information system such as age, education, original province, sex, occupation of pre & post migration, destination, type of work, remittance, etc. through the registers of all departing workers. Include newly hired workers, those who go back to work abroad the 2nd or the 3rd time and follow them when they return. The information should be easily and widely accessible.
- 2. Raise public awareness of both positive & negative information, the risks of working abroad, problems, difficulties particularly to rural/village areas, targeting local government and schools in areas of high numbers of migrant workers and their families.
- 3. Promote documented workers, reduce irregular migration, improve the quality together with quantity of overseas workers, and particularly increase the number of technically skilled workers.
- 4. The pre-departure training is very important for overseas workers especially on arrival and working at the new place. Therefore, the training should focus more on increasing the efficiency of language skills, vocational training, and providing information relating to protections such as labour laws, organizations and people to contact when they face difficulties or problems, contact information of the Vietnamese Embassy, and general information of the destination country such as culture, lifestyle etc. Good understanding along with good information would be useful for them to protect their migrant rights.
- 5. Support the workers by decreasing the cost of recruitment fees, increasing income, ensuring good working conditions and good environments. Develop and support services for Vietnamese overseas workers in the receiving countries through the embassies and recruitment agencies are also vital.
- 6. Protect migrant workers' rights, especially female workers, as recently there is an increasing number of female migrants, with one third of workers being women. They must learn how to protect their rights and improve their welfare particularly those working as domestic helpers.
- 7.In addition, in order to deal with returning and reintegration, they should set up policies for the reintegration of returned workers including entrepreneurship promotion, training and education programmes to assist returning migrants efficiency in financial management of remittances, investment decisions, and good relations with their family while working abroad and when they return.
- 8. Capacity building of government officials including local government, to share experience among sending and receiving countries in the region, particularly those

countries that have the same labour markets and are facing the same problems such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. In addition, have good cooperation with networks in destination countries, governments, manpower agencies and NGOS, and have good regional cooperation among countries in order to manage the flows, reduce the transaction costs of migration, and protect the rights of overseas workers.

Suggestions for further study

- 1. Study the working conditions, problems and quality of life of workers while working abroad and how they differ in different jobs, destinations, genders and income levels, as well as comparing the same jobs in different destinations.
- 2. Impact of international labour migration, to study the benefits & loses from migration of migrant workers, particularly the impact of migration on their children and families who are left behind. The difference between pre-departure status, working abroad, and after having returned. How the workers and their family spend remittances.
- 3. In dealing with return and reintegration, one could look at problems and difficulties after returning from working abroad, comparing the migrants that returned less than 2 years and those who returned longer than 3 years ago. Look at "reintegration programmes", specifically which training programs the government should provide for returnees in order to support them and benefit from their skills learned abroad.
- 4. Study & compare the Labour Law of destination countries, in terms of strengths and weaknesses, implementation, problems of the workers while working abroad. Particularly, look at the main destination countries and new markets working conditions, quality of life, social welfare, and problems. Then pass the information and knowledge on so workers will be aware
- 5. Follow up on the difficulties or problems migrant workers face, while analyzing the significant problems for prevention and protection in the future.
- 6. Study Vietnamese irregular migration, including channels of movement, problems, working conditions and quality of life. Target groups of the study could include males, females and children.
- 7. Study and update the law on labour export, monitoring the law via the decree, compare the law with implementation.

Table 1 Labour Export by Gender & Destination Country Year 1992-2006

Year	Male	Female	Total	Destination Country				
			-	Taiwan	Japan	S.Korea	Malaysia	other
1992	710	100	810	0	0	210	0	600
1993	3,296	664	3,960	0	164	3,318	0	478
1994	8,587	1,563	10,150	0	382	4,781	0	4,987
1995	6,839	348	7,187	0	286	5,270	0	1,631
1996	11,697	1,262	12,959	0	1,046	7,826	0	4,087
1997	14,175	4,295	18,470	191	2,227	4,880	0	11,172
1998	10,309	1,931	12,240	1,697	1,896	1,500	7	7,140

1999	19,523	2,287	21,810	558	1,856	4,518	1	14,877
2000	22,435	9,065	31,500	8,099	1,497	7,316	239	14,349
2001	28,464	7,704	36,168	7,782	3,249	3,910	23	21,204
2002	35,566	10,556	46,122	13,191	2,202	1,190	19,965	9,574
2003	56,882	18,118	75,000	29,069	2,256	4,336	38,227	1,112
2004	29,706	37,741	67,447	37,144	2,752	4,779	14,567	8,205
2005	45,989	24,605	70,594	22,784	2,955	12,102	24,605	8,148
2006	51,832	27,023	78,855	14,127	5,360	10,577	37,941	10,850*
Total	346,010	147,262	493,272	134,642	28,128	76,513	135,575	118,414

Source: The Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), MOLISA, 2006

Note: *other destination countries in 2006 are as follows: Lao 5,731, Qatar 2,621, UAE 1,743, Libya 88, Brunei 178, Saudi Arabia 205, other 284

Table 2 Guide on Maximum Recruitment Fees for Export Labor to some markets by MOLISA

Markets	Type of works	Maximum recruitment fee	Average	Remark
		(US\$)	Income per	
			month (US\$)*	
Taiwan	Manufactory workers,	1,500 /person/ 2 year contract	300-500	
	construction workers	& 1 year renewal		
	Domestic helpers	1,000 /person/ 2 year contract		
	Boat workers/sailors	None		
Malaysia	Male workers	350 /person/ 3 year contract	150-200	- Electronic workers*
	Female workers	300 /person/ 3 year contract		- Garment workers*
		-		- Construction workers*
				- Service*
Saudi	Un-skill workers	400 /person/ 2 year contract	160-300	- Construction workers*
Arabia	Skill workers	500 /person/ 2 year contract		
	Domestic helpers	None	> 1,000	- Engineer*
- Qatar, Oman,	Un-skill workers	400 /person/ 2 year contract	400-1,000	- Electronic workers*
Bahrain,	Skill workers	550 /person/ 2 year contract		- Construction workers*
- United Arab		,		- Service, restaurant,
Emirates (UAE)				hotel staff*
Macau	Construction workers	2.500 /person/ 2 year contract		
		- The labor contribute 2,000 US\$		
		- Agencies contribute 500 US\$		
	Domestic helpers	750 /person/ 2 year contract		
		- Labors contribute: 600 US\$		
		- Agencies contribute: 150 US\$		
	Security service,	900 /person/ 2 year contract		
	Cleaning service	- Labors contribute: 750 US\$		
		- Agencies contribute: 150 US\$		
	Restaurant and hotel	1,000 /person/ 2 year contract		
	service	_		
Japan		1,500 /person/ 2 year contract		
Australia		5,000 /person/ 4 year contract		

Brunei	Manufactory workers, Agriculture workers	250 /person/ 3 year contract		
	Construction workers	350 /person/ 3 year contract		
Czech	Construction workers	1,500 /person/ 2 year contract		
Republic of			450-1,000	old system*
Korea(S. Korea)		-		new system (ESP)
United States			1,250-1,600	Farmer*
United			1,300-2,500	Hotel chamber, maid*
Kingdom				

Source: The Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), MOLISA, 2006 and

Endnotes

^{*} Dang Nguyen Anh, 2007, p. 6.

¹ The Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), MOLISA

² Decree No. 81/2003/ND-CP of July 17, 2003 of Decree of the Government on detailed stipulation and guidance for the implementation of the Labor Code of Vietnamese labor to work overseas.

³ Businesses in Korea are now able to hire foreign workers legally if they are unable to recruit suitable Korean workers after at least one month search. They are able to review the list of foreign job seekers after obtaining the necessary documentation confirming the shortage of workers from an employment security center. The Ministry of labour has an EPS website (www.eps.go.kr) that provides all the information available on the employment of foreign workers. Employers can find personal information on foreign job seekers and track the process for workers they have signed contracts with, effective since August 17, 2004.

⁴ The minimum wage in foreign-owned factories in Vietnam, monthly minimum earnings are US\$55 in two largest cities, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi; US\$50 per month in mid-size cities, and US\$45 per month in the rest of the country. (effective on April 1, 2006) (Glantz & Nguyen, 2006)

⁵ The high deposits (if required) to guarantee agreement with the enterprises to ensure the performance of the contracts for working overseas, to work in Taiwan, S.Korea, Japan and the US, Some companies adopted some methods to cope with the violations, such as they have offices in those countries and so if anything happens, they will be responsible for resolving them. Besides, some countries jail for such violations for six months to one year.

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Statistics

- Table 1 Labour Export by Gender & Destination Country Year 1992-2006.

 Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB),

 Ministry of Labour Invalids and SocialAffairs (MOLISA) (2006). Hanoi.
- Table 2 The Number of Vietnamese Overseas Workers by Year and by Province 2006.
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