

Minority Communities "Trapped" in Migration Waves in Vietnam: A Comparative Analysis within the Southeast Asian Context

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Introduction: Vietnam's ethnic minorities face significant challenges regarding climate change and poverty, prompting a demographic shift where youth migrate to urban centers for employment while the elderly remain as caregivers. However, migration is often hindered by limited labor skills, illiteracy, or strong cultural ties, particularly among the country's 14 smallest ethnic groups—such as the Si La, Pu Peo, and O Du—which have populations under 10,000. These vulnerable communities, totaling only 74,359 people or 0.08% of the national population, are concentrated in remote mountainous and border provinces like Ha Giang and Lao Cai. Isolated from resources and public services, those unable to migrate endure poor health and poverty rates two to four times higher than dominant groups, effectively trapping them in the country's core regions of economic hardship.

Methodology: This policy-descriptive study involved the assessment of national data about minority migration following the conclusion of the Covid-19 outbreak in Vietnam. This study is based on statistics on internal migrant workers from the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs of Vietnam, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center) of the Philippines since the Covid-19 pandemic. Minority groups "trapped" after migration are studied in terms of gender, age, labor skills as well as factors related to cultural differences. These national surveys were administered using a highly representative sample encompassing gender, age, and ethnic minorities across all parts of the country, which provide comprehensive and reliable national representation of the country's ethnic minorities.

Results: The survey data show large differences in poverty levels among these ethnic groups: Cor, Xinh Mun, La Hu, Chut, Mang, Pa. For example, nearly 70% of households are considered "poor or near poor". More specifically, the Chut ethnic group experienced nearly total impoverishment (89.3%). That means that out of every 10 households, there are up to 9 poor or 1 near-poor households. Additionally, we will discuss the variable rates of poor health, lack of health care, and utter lack of occupational skills to participate in any labor force.

Conclusion: The national data results bear policy implications for the execution of the existing National Target Program in Vietnam.

Practical Value: The research findings identified numerous parallels between the marginalized minority communities in Vietnam and the Philippines within the Southeast Asian environment. This amplifies the strain on the efficacy of poverty alleviation initiatives in these two nations. We will discuss the comparative similarities and differences between the two countries.

Direction for Future Research: Due to their multicultural nature, both Vietnam and the Philippines need to take a deeper look at the differences between ethnic groups and geographical regions in the two countries. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all policy for all ethnic groups across the country. Especially in the context of the current digital economic transformation, the increasingly deep differentiation in labor quality, and the factors of ethnicity, gender, and cultural beliefs need to be further studied in the next phase. When policies are designed and implemented to address the needs of internal migrants, they must address the historical and recurring inequities impacting the ethnic minorities in the migration patterns.

Keywords: migration, ethnic minorities, poverty alleviation, comparative

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