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**FREE RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION
OF WOMEN IN VIETNAM:
CURRENT SITUATION AND RAISED ISSUES**

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Abstract. Migration is an inevitable consequence in the development of each nation. For a country that is accelerating the process of industrialization like Vietnam, increasing the speed of urbanization, the flow of migration from rural to urban areas is an inevitable trend. Based on the recent Results of the Census of Population and Housing (2019) and other research papers, the author wants to study in depth the current situation of free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam and identify issues needed to be addressed in order to promote the positive effects, limit the negative sides of this process and ensure the rights of women migrants.

Key words: women, urbanization, free migration, rural-urban migration, Vietnam

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СВОБОДНАЯ МИГРАЦИЯ ЖЕНЩИН ИЗ СЕЛЬСКОЙ МЕСТНОСТИ В ГОРОДА ВО ВЬЕТНАМЕ: ТЕКУЩАЯ СИТУАЦИЯ И ПОДНЯТЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию процесса миграции вьетнамских женщин из сельской местности в города. Отмечается, что до последнего времени в государстве Вьетнам не проводилась конкретная и последовательная политика регулирования процесса свободной миграции в целом и миграции женщин в частности, хотя число мигрантов составляет значительную долю от общей численности населения. Эта тема является относительно новой для исследования, она имеет теоретическую и практическую значимость. При изучении процесса миграции женщин из сельской местности в города автора интересовало изменение образа жизни мигранток. С «гендерной» точки зрения трудящиеся женщины-мигрантки больше страдают от неблагоприятного положения, чем мужчины, поскольку имеют более низкую заработную плату, более «нестандартную» работу, более трудные условия жизни в городах. Женщинам приходится также сталкиваться с более предвзятым общественным мнением. В настоящее время в стране формируется соответствующая миграционная политика для женщин, которая не только отвечает требованиям развития страны, но и способствует защите прав женщин, преодолению трудностей, с которыми они сталкиваются при миграции в города. Поскольку женщины, свободно мигрирующие в городские районы, не отвечают требованиям высококлассного сегмента рынка труда, они часто участвуют в следующих видах работ:

- уличная торговля;
- неквалифицированный труд в строительной сфере;
- работа в должности прислуги в семьях, ресторанах, гостиницах, магазинах;
- обработка товаров на рынках;
- работа на фабриках и производствах, а также переработка морепродуктов.

Из-за непонимания трудового законодательства большинство женщин-мигранток не имеют трудового договора. Во многих случаях работодатели не подписывают трудовой договор, предоставляя только 3 месяца испытательного срока, а затем увольняют женщин, чтобы избежать оплаты социального и медицинского страхования сотрудников. Участвуя в спонтанном рынке труда без государственного контроля и с небольшой способностью защитить себя, трудящиеся женщины-мигрантки часто сталкиваются с большим риском, чем мужчины. Многим женщинам среднего возраста приходится выполнять тяжелую и напряженную работу. Что касается доходов трудящихся женщин-мигранток, то, за исключением работниц на фабриках с четко установленной заработной платой, их реальные доходы остаются загадкой, поскольку они выполняют разные работы на основании разных договоренностей и обычно держат свои доходы в секрете. Однако можно предположить, что их доходы выше, чем в сельской местности. Благодаря бережливости и упорному труду они также накапливают больше финансовых средств,

чем мужчины-мигранты. Предотвращение миграции женщин из сельских районов в городские невозможно как с экономической точки зрения, так и с точки зрения прав человека. Трудящиеся женщины-мигрантки сталкиваются со многими трудностями и препятствиями. В настоящее время на основе практического анализа ситуации государство Вьетнам должно выработать соответствующую миграционную политику, с тем чтобы женщины-мигрантки могли в полной мере пользоваться своими правами и обязанностями согласно Конституции и закону, вносить свой вклад в развитие страны. Автор приходит к выводу о необходимости свободной миграции женщин из сельской местности в города — в аспекте прав человека вообще и феминизма в частности. Однако свободная миграция женщин из сельских районов в города ставит ряд вопросов, которые необходимо решать. С помощью введения законодательных и политических норм права этой группы населения Вьетнама должны быть гарантированы.

Ключевые слова: женщины, урбанизация, свободная миграция, миграция из сельской местности в города, Вьетнам

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Introduction

Vietnam started the *Doi Moi* process in 1986 and got out of the socio-economic crisis after 10 years. Since then, a new period has opened up in the development of the country: the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) — the leading force in Vietnam has clearly defined the path of industrialization and modernization in our country needs to and can be shortened [Communist Party of Vietnam, 2001]. Implementing that policy, the urbanization process in Vietnam has been taking place rapidly with many large industrial zones in some cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, etc. Great demand for labor in urban areas with higher income levels than that in rural areas has created a “pull force” and led to the process of free migration from rural to urban areas, in which women migrants make up a relatively large proportion. According to the latest *Results of the Census of Population and Housing* (on April 1, 2019), women account for 55.5 % of the total migrant population, higher than the rate of 50.1 % of the non-migrant population [Central Steering Committee, 2019]. The issue of “gender”, the phenomenon of “feminization of migration” needs to be carefully considered because it relates to feminist issues. More notably, Vietnamese women are often very attached to their families and homeland, value stability, hesitate to go far; taking care of children and parents-in-law as their responsibility. So what prompted them to leave their families to migrate to the cities? How does their departure affect the lives of their families and children? What difficulties did women living in urban areas face? Are their rights guaranteed in a temporary place of residence? These questions need to be carefully studied in order to have appropriate policies to promote the phenomenon of women migrants becoming a factor of development and to limit the negative aspects and consequences in the implementation of women’s rights in Vietnam.

The urgency of this topic also stems from the following reason: Vietnam has industrialized for 25 years but has not achieved the target of becoming a modern-oriented industrial country by 2020. Although the average GDP growth rate during the Doi Moi period has been quite high, in the period 2016—2020 alone, it is about 6 % year in average, but many other important indicators, including the urbanization rate, have not reach the plan. According to the Prime Minister's Decision no. 445-TTg (signed on April 7, 2009), *On the master plan for development of Vietnam's urban system to 2025 and a vision to 2050*, the urban population in Vietnam must reach 45 % by 2020. However, the Results of the Census of Population and Housing (April 2019) shows that, it only was 34.4 % — a relatively low level compared to other countries in Southeast Asia [ibid.]. The Thirteenth National Congress of the CPV has defined the goal of Vietnam to become a modernity-oriented industrialized developing country and graduate from the lower-middle income group, to become a developed and a high-income country by 2045. That means, urbanization will continue to take place even more intensely; rural-to-urban migration are not only the issue of today but also will be a matter of the future. In that objective trend, it is not possible to suppress it; researching its current state to find scientific solutions for the future is an urgent requirement.

The urgency of studying the current situation of free migration from rural to urban areas of woman in Vietnam also stems from the following reasons: Up to now, the state of Vietnam has not had specific and consistent policies to regulate the free migration process in general and women's migration in particular, although the number of migrants accounts for a significant proportion of the total population. Specifically, the Results of the Census of Population and Housing (April 2019) shows that among the 88.4 million people aged from 5 and over, the number of migrants is 6.5 million, accounting for 7.3 % [ibid.]. That is not to mention the number of short-term, seasonal migrants that has not been updated in national data. Therefore, in fact, the number of rural-to-urban migrants in Vietnam, a large part of which are women, is even greater than the statistical figure. From a "gender" perspective, women migrant workers suffer more disadvantages than men ones, such as lower wages, more "precarious" work, more difficult living conditions in the cities, and they also have to face more prejudiced than men migrant workers. At this time, the establishment of the appropriate migration policy for women not only meets the development requirements of the country but also contributes to the protection of women's rights, overcoming injustices and difficulties faced by the rural women labors when migrating to the cities.

With the above reasons, studying the current situation of free migration from rural to urban areas of women in Vietnam is really an objective requirement, an activity with profound theoretical and practical significance.

Literature review

Free migration from rural to urban areas is a trend that has taken place quite strongly in Vietnam for many years, so this issue has attracted the attention of many domestic and foreign researchers. However, free migration of women is a relatively new issue that has not received adequate attention, even though the phenomenon of "feminization of migration" has taken place for a long time. With different

research angles, the following works have mentioned the status of free rural-urban migration of women.

The article “Some theoretical perspectives on migration and women migrants” by Nguyen Thanh Tam [Nguyen Thanh Tam, 2003] introduced some theories of foreign scholars when studying on migration and women migrants, and the author commented: while men migrants have received considerable attention from many researchers, women migrants are not the independent subject of these studies, despite the fact that women accounts for half of the people in the urban-rural and international migration flows. Policy makers and experts often only see women as passive migrants, just following men ones. From that fact, the author believes that approaching migration from a “gender” perspective is an important analytical tool to understand the reality of migration from rural to urban areas in Vietnam.

Dang Nguyen Anh’s book titled “Internal Migration: Opportunities and Challenges for Innovation and Development in Vietnam” analyzed in-depth the relationship between migration and Vietnam’s development in the Doi Moi period and came to the conclusion: migration is both a cause and a consequence of the development process. The author paid special attention to migration of women. On the basis of analyzing the reasons why women migrate and their lives in the cities, the author drew the following conclusion: “Migration still occurs as an opportunity to help women improve their economic conditions, even though their life in the cities is full of uncertainties and risks” [Dang Nguyen Anh, 2005: 23].

The author Dang Thi Thanh Nhan in the article “Free rural-urban migration in recent years” [Dang Thi Thanh Nhan, 2008] analyzed the causes of migration, the characteristics of rural-urban migrants and the socio-economic impacts of the migration process, she also referred to the “gender” aspect of migration. The author believed that women migrants are the most vulnerable group to human rights abuse because they are both migrants and women. When the human rights of women migrants need to be protected, their voices need to be heard, the study of migration from the perspective of “gender” is an interesting and necessary direction.

The book “Gender and Migration — an Asian Vision” edited by Nguyen Thi Hong Xoan gathered 8 articles in an international conference held in May 2012, co-hosted by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Foundation (Germany) and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (National University of Ho Chi Minh City). The articles showed a multi-dimensional view of migration from the perspective of “gender” based on the reality of Asian countries, including Vietnam. The authors explained why the proportion of female migrants exceeds that of male ones and argued that a “gender-based approach” will provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the migration situation of female workers [Nguyen Thi Hong Xoan, 2013].

The most direct and systematic study on this topic is the book of Ha Thi Phuong Tien, Ha Quang Ngoc with the title “Free Rural-Urban Migration of Female Workers” [Ha Thi Phuong Tien, Ha Quang Ngoc, 2008]. By studying female migrant workers in the three largest cities of the country: Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang, the authors provided us with a fairly comprehensive picture of the causes of migration, the life of female workers who freely migrate from rural to urban areas and the impact of this process on the destination and departure and their families in rural areas.

The research results also allowed the authors to identify the development trend of the phenomenon of “feminization migration” and solutions, especially in terms of policies and laws to ensure urban order and security and help women migrants not being “on the sidelines” of society as they are today. It can be affirmed that up to now, this is the most elaborate research on free rural-urban migration of women. However, this research had been completed since the year of 2000; after more than two decades, the data and picture of women migrants has changed a lot.

In addition to the direct research on women migrants, other studies such as the book “Social Policy for Rural-Urban Migrants in Vietnam Today” by the author Mai Ngoc Cuong [Mai Ngoc Cuong, 2013] and the book “From the Countryside to the City. Socio-Economic Impacts of Migration in Vietnam” by authors Le Bach Duong and Nguyen Thanh Liem [Le Bach Duong, Nguyen Thanh Liem, 2011] also provided an overview of free migration in general, therefore, studying women’s free migration would be more complete and profound.

With the undeniable achievements of the Doi Moi process in Vietnam, the urbanization and migration that took place during the Doi Moi period have attracted the attention of many international researchers.

Russian scholar V. P. Larin stated that the speed of urbanization in Vietnam has appeared since the early 1990s and is related to the appearance of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Vietnam [Ларин, 2017].

A team of authors (including Russian and Vietnamese ones) has studied in depth the effects of climate change on migration in Vietnam and stated that Vietnam is one of the most densely populated countries and most affected by climate change in the world. Therefore, in the future, Vietnam will face the need to resettle millions of people from dangerous places, mainly from coastal areas [Лукьянец и др., 2015]. Also discussing migration due to the effects of climate change, another group of authors looked deeply at the attitudes of urban residents towards environmental migrants and conclude: although residents in receiving areas view short-term climate events and long-term climate conditions as legitimate reasons to migrate, they do not see environmental migrants as more deserving than economic migrants. These findings have implications for how practitioners address population movements due to climatic changes, and how scholars study people’s attitudes towards environmental migrants [Spilker et al., 2020]. Therefore, the reintegration of migrants into the community in the new place of residence is also not easy.

Also discussing migration from rural to urban areas, but some other authors were interested in the ability to integrate into the society and the change of lifestyle of migrants when moving from rural to urban areas. They argued that migration to the city and assimilation into city life also changed young migrants’ views on lifestyles and behaviors often considered misconducts in their rural hometowns, such as premarital sex. Female migrants faced higher stigmatization compared to male migrants, often described by fellow migrants as becoming “loose” in the new city [Nhu Ngoc K. Pham et al., 2018].

In short, free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam is a relatively new topic; so far, the number of direct studies on this issue is not much. This is also one of the reasons for us to choose this topic as a research object on the basis of inheriting the achievements of predecessors.

Materials and methods

To achieve definite research goals, we use the following materials and methods:

— the analysis in this article is mainly based on the quantitative data of the *Results of the Census of Population and Housing* (April 2019), although it is not a really completed and specific one. The author also uses a number of documents and comments in other authors' research on this issue to explain and prove her point of view;

— the author approaches the issue of free rural-urban migration of women from the perspective of human rights in general, and feminism in particular. On the basis of the provisions of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on citizenship and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, we believe that free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam is posing a number of issues to be solved; the rights of this group of people must be better guaranteed, first of all from policies and laws of Vietnam.

Research results

Causes of free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam

As defined by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, migration is the change in the permanent residence of a person from one territorial (administrative) unit to another one in a certain period of time [General Statistics Office, 2010]. Women who migrate freely from rural to urban areas are a group of people of working age who migrate spontaneously, voluntarily, not organized by the government in order to find jobs with higher incomes and better living opportunities in urban areas. Regarding the causes of free rural-urban migration of women, it can be identified as economic and non-economic reasons.

The economic reason for this process is reflected in the intersection of “attraction” from destination and “repulsion” from departure. After Vietnam started the Doi Moi process, the labor market was established and recognized by the State. The establishment of industrial and export processing zones has led to a large demand for workers with higher income levels in rural areas. In the labor market, there has been “pull factors” towards the cities. In particular, the strong development of public service industries such as restaurants, hotels, commerce and light industries such as textiles, footwear, agro-fishery-seafood processing, etc., has led to the need for a lot of female workers. Meanwhile, “push factors” appeared in rural areas due to a number of main reasons as follows: to implement the Resolution 10-NQ/TW of Politburo of CPV (April 1988) on agricultural contracting, the State has allocated long-term production land to farmers. However, the area of arable land divided among farmers has been decreasing because the area of agricultural land remains unchanged, even reduced by the process of urbanization, while the population increased. The mechanization of agricultural production (using plows, seeders, threshers, etc.) has also reduced the required time and labor in agriculture production. Meanwhile, in rural areas, hand-craft and craft villages has gradually disappeared due to difficulties in product consumption. Because of the above reasons, the leisure time of rural women has been increasing, the number of redundant women labors in rural areas has been growing. More importantly, with the limited consumption network and the lack of modern agricultural product processing process, the value of the agricultural sector in Vietnam is

quite low, Vietnamese agricultural products often fall into the situation of “bumper crop — price fall, poor crop — price increase”. Rural families do not have enough income to cover their basic needs and children’s education. In addition, risks due to climate change such as droughts and floods in the North, coastal erosion and saline alum in the South, pests in cultivation and diseases in livestock also makes the (already low) income of rural women become unstable. In fact, in the years of natural disasters and major crop failures, the flow of free migrants into cities often increases suddenly. In general, although the living standard in rural Vietnam has been somewhat improved, the movement to build “*Nông thôn mới*” (“New Rural Area”) in recent years has also created positive changes in rural Vietnam, but income disparity is at 5—7 times between urban and rural areas [Ha Thi Phuong Tien, Ha Quang Ngoc, 2008] has motivated a part of women to voluntarily leave their homeland and move to urban areas to find jobs with higher incomes. Due to the situation of having little arable land, low income and no side jobs, free rural-urban migration of women has become the solution and “strategy” for economic development of many families in rural areas in Vietnam.

Free rural-urban migration of women also stems from “non-economic” reasons. The expansion and democratization of society during the Doi Moi period is also an important driving force and condition affecting the free migration of workers in general and of women in particular. In the new social conditions, each individual has the right to freely move his/her residence and change his/her job; surplus labor force in the countryside has the right to look for better job in the cities. Therefore, a part of women, mainly young people, decides to move to urban areas — where there is better technical infrastructure, richer cultural and spiritual life, more modern media, better education and health facilities, and more convenient services, etc., to study, live and start a career. Going to the city to find a job to have more money to support her children to attend university or to follow her husband to look for a job and reunite the family, etc., are also the reasons leading to the free migration to the city of a certain group of women.

In general, free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam is not a special and unusual phenomenon, it is completely in accordance with the law of economic development and human instinct, that is always looking for a place with more favorable conditions to live.

Number and characteristics of free rural-urban migration of women in Vietnam

Although the *Results of the Census of Population and Housing* (April 2019) did not give specific numbers on women migrants, it showed that the total number of migrants is 6.4 million (accounting for 7.3 % of the population) and women migrants account for 55.5 %, higher than the rate of non-migrant population (accounting for 50.1 % of the population). From this data, we can estimate that the current number of women migrants in Vietnam is 3 552 000. Some of their outstanding characteristics are listed below.

In terms of age, although the woman migrants are quite diverse, they are still mainly people of working age. *The Results of the Census of Population and Housing* in 2019 showed that 61.8 % of migrants is in the age group of 20—39 [Central Steering Committee, 2019]. As a result, the cities have been supplemented with labor

resources at the most energetic age. However, as assessed by some researchers, despite a higher income in the city, young migrants often suffer from physical and mental health strains that decrease their overall well-being, caused by the factors such as barriers to assimilation to new lifestyles, continued attachment to origin hometowns, financial pressures, and poor living conditions [Nhu Ngoc K. Pham et al, 2018]. This is an issue that needs to be overcome because young people are the key workforce of industrial zones and the quality of this human resources will determine the effectiveness of the country's economic development strategy.

In terms of time of residence, in addition to the number of permanent women migrants, there is also a large proportion of seasonal women migrants who go to the urban areas to find temporary jobs in their leisure time. However, due to the short period of residence, unstable jobs and no declaration of residence, the number of seasonal women migrants has not currently listed in the research of scientists as well as in the survey data of the Vietnam's state bodies.

In terms of cultural qualifications and skills, data from the Census in 2019 showed that 64.9 % of rural-urban migrants do not have any professional or technical qualification [Central Steering Committee, 2019]. The women migrants are no exception. Therefore, if young women (who already have a high school or university degree) often work as workers in industrial zones, middle-aged and older women without a degree are often self-employed, working as domestic helpers or participating in spontaneous labor markets.

In terms of migration mode, free women migrants rarely seek the help from formal organizations, but mainly rely on their own social relations such as family, relatives, and compatriots, friends. Informal social network helps migrants have information before moving, then it helps newcomers find jobs and accommodation, impart experiences of working and living in the new area. In fact, free women migrants often live in groups from the same hometown or profession to protect each other and save living costs.

Job and life of women free migration workers

Due to pre-departure information and the help of other people, the majority of women free migration workers quickly find a job in the city. Because they do not meet the requirements of the high-end labor market segment, women who migrate freely to urban areas often participate in the following five types of work: (1) sidewalk trading, street hawking, buying and selling scrap, picking up trash; (2) domestic helpers in families, restaurants, hotels, commercial shops; (3) simple labor for construction sector (mason, transportation of construction materials); (4) handling goods at residential markets and bus stations; (5) workers in industrial parks, factories and production units (producing garment, footwear, plastic products or processing agro-aquatic-seafood products, etc.) Due to a lack of understanding of labor laws, most women migrants do not have a labor contract or have their labor contract violated. According to Luu Bich Ngoc's survey, "the proportion of people having social insurance in the group of migrants is low (43 % for permanent and 37 % for temporary migrants)" [Luu Bich Ngoc, 2016: 50]. In many cases, employers do not sign a labor contract but only give 3 months of probation and then fire them to avoid paying social and health insurance for the employees. Participating in the spontaneous labor market,

without state's control and with little ability to defend themselves, women migrant workers often face more risks than men ones. Some young, beautiful women workers with little life experience have been lured and deceived into prostitution; many middle-aged women have to do heavy and strenuous jobs such as porters, garbage collectors, street vendors, those are easily bullied by local "gangsters".

Regarding the income of women migrant workers, besides the number of workers in factories and industrial parks with a clear salary regime, the real income of others is still a "mystery" because they do different jobs, with different arrangements and they usually keep their earnings secret. One thing is for sure, their income is higher than that in rural areas. Thanks to their thrift and hard work, they also accumulate more money than men migrant workers.

Besides employment and income, the living conditions of women workers in cities is also a matter of concern because it affects the women migrants and the social life of the cities. Accommodation for women migrants is the most difficult issue. It is difficult for women migrants to buy houses because they do not have enough financial resources while the price of houses in urban areas are often very high. Since the Vietnam's law does not have any regulations that require employers to provide accommodation for workers, it only offers a number of incentives and encouragements for implementation, so most of employers do not pay attention to this issue. As a result, the majority of workers have to rent private houses. According to Mai Ngoc Cuong, only about 20 % of workers in industrial zones can rent houses from the state or enterprises; the remaining 80 % of workers have to rent temporary private houses [Mai Ngoc Cuong, 2013]. For women migrants entering the informal labor market, of course they have to take care of their own accommodation. Only women working as domestic helpers have suitable accommodation; the rest have to live in spaces that are not built according to prescribed standards, often are cramped and makeshift. In order to secure their own lives and have money to send home to support their families, the majority of free women migrants devote themselves to work to earn money, so they do not often participate in recreational activities. They also rarely participate in social activities because they do not have a household registration in the city. They are also very limited in communication with urban people, but mainly communicate with people from the same hometown, living in the same accommodation or working together. Because they are not registered for health insurance in the city, women migrants do not receive medical care, especially regarding reproductive health. Reality shows reproductive health care projects and programs often ignore migrant workers due to their unofficial legal status in the destination area. The rate of abortion in industry zones, where female labor is concentrated, is often very high [Dang Nguyen Anh, 2005].

The impact of free rural-urban woman migration on destination and departure

Like other social phenomena, free rural-urban migration of women has both positive and negative impacts on the socio-economic development of the country in general and their own lives in particular.

The positive effects of free women migration appear quite diverse. From the economic perspective, migration brings many benefits. On the national scale, migration can be considered as an effective measure to redistribute labors between regions,

contributing to solve underemployment in rural areas and labor shortage in urban areas. Women workforce moving to urban areas not only ensures labor supply for industrial zones but also undertake most of the jobs which are considered difficult, dusty and cheap that urban residents do not want to take. It is worth mentioning that, when using this workforce, the cities do not have to pay training costs. Moreover, the majority of women migrants are agile, energetic, brave, hardworking, good at endurance; therefore, they also contribute to creating a dynamic and flexible urban culture.

Not only contributing to the destination, the income generated by hard work and savings of women migrants also contributes to increase the income of the departure, helps their children go to school, reduces the gap in living standards between urban and rural areas, contributing to “hunger eradication and poverty alleviation” for their own families and their homeland.

In addition to economic benefits, when women migrants return home after working in the cities, they also bring with them new knowledge, new job skills to be able to start a career in their homeland. With the capital accumulated after working hard in the cities, they often start their own businesses in their homeland and create jobs for other people. Especially, after living in urban areas, women migrants become more aware of feminism issues, the need to start a career and assert their abilities. They also somewhat change the inappropriate views in the countryside such as gender-based discrimination to well implement the policy of family planning and create favorable conditions for girls to go to school.

However, the current status of spontaneous (lacking the control and orientation of the government) migration, has brought many *negative impacts* on both destination and departure. With the destination, the rapid increase in the number of people entering the urban areas has caused complicated issues for the local government and residents, such as traffic jams, encroaching on sidewalks (for trading), increasing environmental pollution and crime. The development of infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, etc., has not kept up with the increase in the number of migrants coming to the cities.

For rural areas — places of departure, there are also some consequences from women’s free migration. The free rural-urban migration of women, mostly young people, also caused a decrease in the number of healthy young workers in the locality. Female students, after studying in the city, are also less likely to want to return to their homeland. This also partly causes difficulties for the strategy of agricultural and rural industrialization. Most notably, the departure of the women led to a reversal in the lives of those who remained in the countryside. Elderly parents lack caregivers; children lack the mother’s education; husbands who stay at home, have to suffer emotional disadvantages and have to do housework (instead of women). Many people can’t stand being away from their spouse, it can lead to marriage breakdown. It is the “price” that many women have to pay when deciding to leave the rural areas to go to the cities.

Issues raised in the process of free migration of women in Vietnam nowadays

Urbanization is an indispensable process for a country in the period of industrialization. However, the free migration of women from rural to urban areas in Vietnam is facing some of the following difficulties and obstacles.

First, *the government's attention to the free migrants, including women ones, is still not satisfactory*. The free migration is recognized as a socioeconomic phenomenon, but free migrants have not received effective encouragement or support from the government. Although the 2013 Constitution of Vietnam has stipulated that Vietnamese citizens have the right to freedom of residence and equal rights in all aspects of politics, economy, culture and society, until now, the policy of the government has not fully demonstrated the rights of free migrants. The evidence is, up to now, no ministry has been assigned specific responsibility in protecting this group of citizens. For example, the *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development* is only responsible for the migration organized under its mandate assigned by the government; the *Ministry of Public Security* is only responsible for household registration and ensuring social order; the *Ministry of Health* has not mentioned the right of free migrants to access medical services. Some social policies promulgated by the State's agencies also omit the group of free migrants. Specifically, the *Vietnam Population — Reproductive Health Strategy for the period 2011—2020* (issued in 2011) has not mentioned “the group of women migrants”; the decision to approve the *Vietnam Family Development Strategy to 2020, vision to 2030* (issued in 2012) has also not focused on migrant families or families with women migrants. In the *Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the period 2001—2010* and the *Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the period 2011—2020* of the CPV, the issue of internal migration was mentioned but for the purpose of “restricting the movement of farmers to cities” [Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011] rather than providing a legal framework to scientifically manage the migration process or protect the interests of migrants. At the destination of the spontaneous migration wave, the local government recognizes the phenomenon of free migration with concern and proposed solutions to limit the rapid migration into big cities. In summary, up to now, the interests and concerns of women migrants have not been fully reflected in Vietnam's national policies, although this trend of migration still tends to increase.

Second, *the current household registration policy has created barriers for women migrants to exercise their citizenship*. According to Vietnam's law, many official transactions require the household registration of related people; citizens must have a permanent residence register to enjoy public services on real estate trading, house construction, vehicle registration, bank loans, medical care, or get social incentives such as using electricity and water at preferential prices, etc. Besides, the distribution of local budgets and government services according to the household registration system also creates difficulties for local government in urban areas, because there is no funding to support migrants. The abuse of household registration in administrative activities and social policy has made migrants in general and women migrants in particular become “second class of urban citizens”. The difference in welfare benefits between local residents and migrants has countered Vietnam's goal of building a fair and equal society. On November 13, 2020, the Vietnam National Assembly passed a new *Law on Residence* to replace the *Law on Residence* of the 2006 and the *Law Amending and Supplementing a number of articles of the Law on Residence* of the 2013. The *Law on Residence* of the 2020 has issued some new regulations: Vietnam will officially remove the management household registration, the temporary residence on paper from December 31, 2022, the management of citizens' residence

will be based on individual identification numbers and national database; each citizen has only one permanent residence, one temporary residence and the data will be regularly updated; Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City will abolish their own conditions to register for household registration; the government agencies commit to reduce the time to process the permanent and temporary residence registration to only 7 days (compared to 15 days as before), etc. However, the new *Law on Residence* has not yet abolished the consideration of permanent residence as the basis for implementing public services and social policies. The 2013 Constitution of Vietnam stipulates that citizens have the right to be guaranteed social security (Article 34), the State protects the rights of mothers and children (Article 36), but in reality, women migrants have not yet fully enjoyed all their rights in their new place of residence; their children find it difficult to access affordable public education services.

Third, *the lack of specific data on the influx of free rural-urban migration of women makes it difficult to formulate policies of the government*. In order to have good governance, there must be accurate data. However, the data on free women migration in Vietnam has not kept up with actual developments. It is necessary to investigate the number of seasonal and climate change migrants, the reproductive health data and housing status of women migrants, the number of women migrants with social and health insurance, etc. These data should be regularly updated into the national data system to create a basis for analysis, evaluation, formulation of policy and allocation of budget according to actual population. Therefore, it is necessary to promote research activities on migration, including women's migration, considering it as one of the important contents of the state-level scientific research programs. Donors and international organizations also need to increase support for the collection, compilation and dissemination of women migration data as a basis for good analysis on this topic.

Discussion

Unlike the negative and concerned assessments many years ago about free rural-urban migration of women, up to now, most researchers have viewed the issue in both positive and negative angles. We think that perception is consistent with what is happening in reality. With this inevitable trend, the government must have a reasonable policy to both protect human rights and make this migration flow in a planned, organized way, benefit the development of the country.

We agree with the policy of the State of Vietnam on the transformation of the centralized strategy of industrialization and urbanization to a decentralized strategy to provinces, to grade 2 and 3 cities and “accelerating the process of industrialization and urbanization of rural areas, creating favorable conditions for rural people to become urban residents without leading to large-scale migration” [Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021: 167]. By forming a satellite urban system and industrializing the agricultural sector and rural areas, developing craft villages and sub-economics, Vietnam can both increase the urbanization index, the farmers do not have stop farming or leave the countryside, while avoiding the formation of “megacities” with its consequences. However, what we still wonder is that the interests of free migrants, most of whom are women, are not fully reflected in Vietnam's national policies. The Prime Minister's Decision 1679/QĐ-TTg on *Approval of the Vietnam Population Strategy*

to 2030 (issued in November 2019) has set a target to ensure that migrants have full and equitable access to basic social services, but up to now, specific solutions have not been identified. At this time, improving and implementing a system of social policies for women migrants such as building temporary settlements, effectively implementing policies on vocational training for women migrants, tightening requirements on labor contracts when employing female migrant workers, ensuring their health insurance, etc., are urgent tasks. The lack of attention to interests of this group of people will conflict with the government's policy of "no one is left behind", making all people enjoy the achievements of the Doi Moi process.

Conclusion

Free rural-urban migration of women labors is a socio-economic phenomenon. Industrialization in Vietnam is a catalyst for this process. As long as there is uneven development between regions, the migration wave will continue. Preventing the flow of women migration from the rural to the urban areas is not feasible both from an economic and human rights perspective. However, women migrant workers are also facing many difficulties and obstacles in their life. At present, on the basis of practical review, the State of Vietnam must work out an appropriate migration policy so that women migrants can fully enjoy their rights and responsibilities in accordance with the Constitution and the law, contribute to the development of the country. Improving the migration policy in general and women's migration in particular will contribute to building a fair, civilized, prosperous, and happy society as the goal set by the State of Vietnam.

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