

Negative Impacts of Free Migration in the Mountainous Provinces of Northern Vietnam

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Abstract

Free migration plays a significant role in socio-economic development, leading to population changes and labour redistribution across different territories. The redistribution of labour, particularly in relation to natural resources and the environment, is crucial for social development. However, free migration can also impede national defence and security efforts. In the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam, the free migration of ethnic minorities has adversely affected socio-economic development and national defence security. For many years, this phenomenon has posed significant challenges. This article aims to propose solutions to mitigate the negative impacts of free migration and

address both theoretical and practical issues. By employing qualitative and quantitative Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, the study investigates the detrimental effects of ethnic minority free migration on immigration, emigration, and the migrants themselves in the northern mountainous provinces. Conducted in three provinces using a multi-stage sampling technique, the research involved 300 survey participants, including 150 management personnel and 150 citizens. The findings of this study lead to policy recommendations for local governments, aiming to minimize the negative impacts of free migration and promote sustainable development. By elucidating the drawbacks of free migration in Vietnam, this article contributes to the global discourse on free migration and offers valuable insights into potential solutions.

Keywords: Free Migration, Ethnic Minority, Northern Mountains of Vietnam, National Policy, Border Area.

Introduction

Migration has long been a topic of significant interest among scientists and policymakers ([Hagen-Zanker, 2008](#)). The issue of cross-border free migration of ethnic minorities presents a complex challenge in managing population dynamics in contemporary border regions. Recent studies by Chinese scholars ([Liang, 2001](#); [Luo, 2012](#)) have further examined this intricate issue, highlighting its multifaceted nature.

"Migration" reflects the common understanding of a person moving away from their usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons ([International Organization for Migration, 2022](#)). Migration encompasses any type of human movement, regardless of duration, composition, or cause; it includes refugees, economic migrants, and those migrating for other purposes, such as family reunification ([International Organization for Migration, 2011a](#)). In Vietnam, migration is defined as the movement of people within the country – either from rural to urban areas, vice versa, or from one region to another – as well as movement from one country to another ([International Organization for Migration, 2011b](#); [Nguyễn et al., 1995](#)).

Different approaches exist in the study of migration theory. One of the foundational figures in the construction of the sociological theory of migration is Ravenstein E. G. ([Ravenstein, 1885](#); [Ravenstein, 1889](#)). In 1885 he published *The Laws of Migration* in which he stated the laws of migration as follows: (1) Regarding the dynamics of migration: The primary catalyst for migration is economic factors. Within a country,

individuals from urban backgrounds tend to exhibit lower mobility compared to those residing in rural areas; (2) In terms of scale: Migration exhibits a proportionate relationship to the initial population of the emigrating area. Counter flows exist for each migration stream to balance the movement. The migration from remote and less accessible regions to urban centres typically occurs gradually and in successive stages; (3) Regarding migration distance: Migration typically occurs over shorter distances due to its convenience. On average, women tend to migrate shorter distances than men. Everett S. Lee's work on migration theory, titled "A Theory of Migration" (Lee, 1966), identifies four primary factors influencing migration. These factors include economic, cultural, and social conditions related to both places of origin and destinations, factors that act as barriers to or resistance against population movement, personal characteristics of migrants, and factors influencing both the origin and destination of migration. Lee's theory particularly emphasizes the concepts of attraction and repulsion. Repulsion occurs due to adverse living conditions in the place of origin, while attraction is driven by the prospect of more favourable living conditions at the destination (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

Organized migration refers to a form of migration facilitated within the framework of state programs, where migrants receive support from the government to stabilize their lives. This support includes assistance with residential orientation, accommodation, job placements, and other resources. Organized migration aims not only to alleviate challenges for immigrants but also to augment labour resources for the localities they settle in. Additionally, organized migration helps in the exploitation of natural resources that may have been underutilized, while also mitigating the indiscriminate exploitation that can lead to adverse environmental and ecological impacts.

According to Circular No. 05/NN/ĐCDC-KTM dated March 26, 1996, issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 1996), "free migrants" refer to compatriots who relocate outside the state's annual migration plan for families.

Based on the conceptions of organized migration and free migration as specified in the State's legal documents, the authors synthesize the concept of free migration and illegal free migration as follows:

Free migration refers to the movement of individuals, families, or groups to a new

place of residence that is not part of any government migration program. In this type of migration, individuals make the decision to relocate independently, without external influence or intervention from the government. Free migration involves individuals choosing a new place of residence and organizing their relocation, financing it themselves, and establishing new livelihoods in the new area. It typically entails fulfilling declaration procedures with the local government of the destination area (place of immigration).

Illegal free migration, a form of migration that necessitates stringent control and enforcement, involves individuals moving to a new place of residence (migration place) similarly to free migration. However, in illegal free migration, migrants circumvent or ignore the local government's controls and procedures for declaring temporary or permanent residence in the new location. This unauthorized form of migration frequently results in adverse impacts on socio-economic conditions, security, defence, and the environment in both the destination area (migration place) and the place of departure (origin residence).

The findings of the article are expected to profoundly influence the perspectives and behaviours of government officials at all levels. They will also contribute to the refinement of policies and systems within the Vietnamese Party and State, as well as the establishment of a comprehensive database system for foundational research across various related scientific disciplines globally. To achieve these objectives, the authors will conduct a thorough examination of both theoretical and practical aspects of free migration in Vietnam's northern mountainous provinces. They will analyse and evaluate the impact of free migration on socio-economic development, the environment, and national defence and security in these regions. Furthermore, the article will propose perspectives and solutions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of free migration in the northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam in the present-day context.

Literature Review

The examination of the adverse effects stemming from the free migration of ethnic minorities in Vietnam's northern mountainous regions, along with proposed solutions to mitigate these impacts, presents both theoretical and practical challenges. The free cross-border migration of ethnic minorities poses a multifaceted issue in

contemporary population management within border areas, as highlighted in studies by (Gang, 2013; Luo, 2012; Vũ, 2016; Wei, 2014). These studies have critically quoted and analysed the core issues surrounding the free migration of ethnic minorities. However, comprehensive research addressing the specific negative impacts of free migration in the mountainous provinces of northern Vietnam, with all its unique characteristics, remains scarce.

Research underscores the imperative of global governance through international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the International Labour Organization (ILO). These global bodies play a pivotal role in establishing agreements and organizational frameworks to guide countries in their treatment of migrant workers. Their objectives include preventing discrimination, safeguarding human rights and labour rights according to host country laws, and ensuring compliance with international obligations regarding migrant workers' rights.

Moreover, these studies emphasize the importance of inter-country collaboration in effectively managing emigration and immigration, especially in combating transnational trafficking of women. They also highlight the critical role of international institutions in this context. Policy responses to immigration issues are shaped by criteria that reflect a government's capacity to govern society (Abella, 2004; International Organization for Migration, 2015). Furthermore, ongoing research emphasizes the need for policy interventions that include training individuals with specialized skills in their home country to facilitate labour migration. Additionally, it is essential to implement measures that address the impacts of migration, such as developing appropriate policies focusing on education, health, marriage, and the transformation of migration culture (Lian, Rahman, & bin Alas, 2016; Vertovec, 2002). These studies provide indispensable scientific research references for Vietnam's examination and formulation of policies related to migration issues.

Materials and Methods

Research Process and Methods

This study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to

construct instruments for assessing and analysing the current status, as well as validating the framework, of adverse consequences stemming from free migration efforts. Figure 1 illustrates the flow chart of the research process.

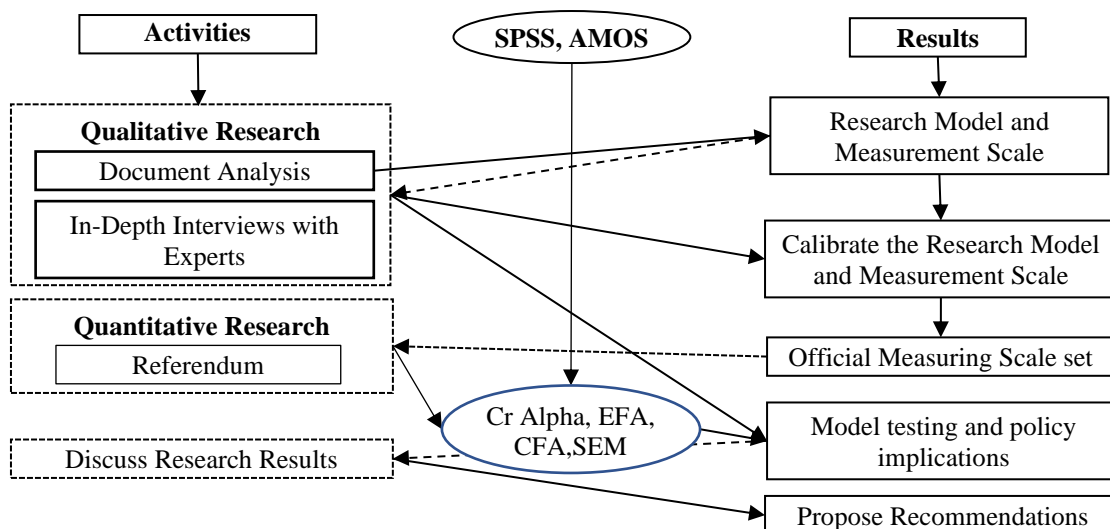


Figure 1: Research Process Flow Chart.

This study obtained ethical approval from VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, ensuring adherence to ethical principles governing social research. The researchers also obtained permissions from governmental authorities at all levels, as well as consent from village elders and heads, prior to collecting data from participants. Additionally, all study participants were informed about the research and provided their consent to participate.

The questionnaire was administered by facilitators who are members of the ethnic minority community. Researchers conducted in-depth interviews after scheduling appointments with relevant organizations and individuals at mutually convenient times and locations. Interviews were recorded using tape recorders to document responses.

Data from the distributed and collected questionnaires were coded and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed for data analysis using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software, implementing this method to explore relationships among variables.

Research Sample Structure

The research sample consists of 300 individuals from three provinces in the

northern mountainous region of Vietnam, comprising 150 managers and 150 free migrants (refer to [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Demographic Structure of the Study Sample.

Criteria	Observe	Manager		Residential Household	
		N	%	N	%
Sex	Male	97	66.4	102	66.2
	Female	49	33.6	52	33.8
Age	20-30	1	0.7	17	11.0
	31-40	51	34.9	86	55.8
	41-50	91	62.3	49	31.8
	Over 50 years old	3	2.1	2	1.3
Education	High school	3	2.1	84	54.5
	Undergraduate	104	71.2	58	37.7
	Graduate	39	26.7	12	7.8
Total		150	100.0	150	100.0

Variables and Scales

The independent variables encompass six factors: Family and sociocultural factors contributing to Social Services (SS) (FAM_SC), Environmental conditions and facilities (EVM), and Anti-State Activities (AS) contribute to the causes. The APD (Access to Job Difficulty) represents the challenges migrants encounter in securing employment in new locations. Conversely, the DPD (Desirable Process of Migration) denotes a favourable or beneficial migration process.

1. SS Factor: Developed from the research of ... With 03 observed variables
2. Factor FAM_SC: With 05 observed variables
3. EVM Factor: With 02 observed variables
4. AS Factor: With 02 observed variables
5. APD factor: With 02 observed variables
6. DPD factor: With 03 observed variables

The dependent variables comprise three factors: Negative impact on the place of origin (NIPO), Negative impact on immigration (NIPD), and Negative impact on the economic difficulties faced by migrant households (DHL).

1. NIPD with 04 observed variables
2. DHL with 06 observed variables
3. NIPO with 06 observed variables

Table 2:

Symbol	Observation	Source
SS1	Relocating to a different place of residence in order to have access to electricity.	
SS2	Relocation to a different place of living in order to have access to water.	
SS3	Relocation to a different place of residence in order to have access to healthcare services.	
FAM1	The primary factors driving marriage and family groups to engage in free migration, both outgoing and incoming, in the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam are urgent.	
FAM4	Families often migrate to new locations to establish ownership, inherit property, or separate households.	
FAM5	Relocating to a new residence in order to complete the process of household registration.	
FAM6	Relocating to a new location in order to finalize the purchase of a house or car.	
SC1	Urgently discuss the primary socio-cultural factors that contribute to free migration (both outgoing and incoming) in the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam.	
EVM1	The presence of improved infrastructure encourages families to relocate to new areas for residence.	
EVM2	Improved infrastructure encourages families to relocate to new areas for residence.	
AS1	The primary catalyst for the proliferation of illicit heretical propaganda organizations resulted in the increase of both emigration and immigration in the mountainous regions of Northern Vietnam.	
AS2	The primary catalyst for the group of antagonistic entities opposing and exerting control resulted in unrestricted migration (both emigration and immigration) in the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam.	
APD1	High level of proficiency in facilitating job placement for migrants relocating to new areas of residence.	
APD2	High employability and potential for increased income for migrants in new places of residence.	
APD3	High employability and potential for increased income for migrants in new places of residence.	
DPD1	The level of challenge in locating a suitable employment opportunity for individuals who have migrated to a new place of residence.	
DPD2	The level of challenge in securing a job with a higher income for individuals who have migrated to a new place of residence.	
DPD3	The degree of impediment that local authorities impose on migrants seeking to relocate to a different place of residence.	
NIPO1	Negative impact on economic development.	
NIPO2	Negative impact on ethnic culture and society.	
NIPO3	Negative impact on ecological environment.	
NIPO4	Negative impact on relations and national solidarity.	
NIPO5	Negative impact on population and employment issues.	
NIPO6	Negative impact on foreign relations.	
NIPO7	Negative impact on political stability, national defence and security.	
NIPD1	Negative impact on the economic development of immigration.	
NIPD2	Negative impact on the ethnic culture-society of the immigration.	
NIPD3	Negative impact on the ecological environment of the immigration.	
NIPD4	Negative impact on the relations and national unity of the immigration.	
DHL1	Negative impact on family economic stability of migrants.	
DHL2	Negative impact on cultural changes and customs of migrants.	
DHL3	Negative impact on the living environment of migrants.	
DHL4	Negative impact on relations and ethnic solidarity of migrants.	
DHL5	Negative impact on employment and income of migrants.	
DHL6	Negative impact on migrants' access to social services.	
APD1	Ability to find suitable jobs.	
APD2	Ability to search for higher income jobs.	
APD3	Local authorities cause difficulties.	
APD4	Administrative procedures in the locality/workplace.	

The researchers employed a 3-point Likert scale to evaluate the educational achievements of individuals living in the mountainous regions of Northern Vietnam (Jacoby & Matell, 1971; Nunnally, 1994; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). Similar approaches using 3-point scales have been utilized in specific studies on Vietnam's ethnic minorities (Thao, Loan, & Ha, 2023).

The study adjusted the scale according to a predetermined set of three response categories and levels, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: 3-Point Likert Scale (Rabou et al., 2023).

Low Applicable (1)	Medium Applicable (2)	Highly Applicable (3)
From 1-1.66	Price 1.67 - 2.33	From 2.34 - 3

Analytical Techniques

The survey data were analysed using SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 23.0 software. Data extraction procedures involved descriptive statistics and calculation of the correlation coefficient (r) . The reliability of the factor scales in the model was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, adhering to established criteria: each observed variable should exhibit a variable-total correlation coefficient of at least 0.3, and the Alpha reliability coefficient should exceed 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978, 1994; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995).

Subsequently, the factors underwent exploratory factor analysis (EFA) based on specific criteria: a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of at least 0.5, a statistically significant Bartlett's Test with a p-value below 0.05, Eigenvalues greater than 1, cumulative variance explained of at least 50%, and factor loadings of at least 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Variables meeting these conditions proceeded to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM).

The criteria for model acceptance included $CMIN/df \leq 5$, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) ≥ 0.8 , Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) ≥ 0.8 , and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ≤ 0.08 (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Doll, Xia, & Torkzadeh, 1994).

Overview of Ethnic Minority Groups in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

The Northern Midlands and Mountainous Provinces constitute the largest economic zone in Vietnam. The combined area of these provinces totals 109,255 km²,

which accounts for 33% of the country's total area. This region encompasses 14 provinces: Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Lang Son, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Bac Giang, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, and Hoa Binh (OpenDevelopment Vietnam, 2019).

The northern mountainous provinces exhibit sparse population density, with approximately 40 ethnic groups residing unevenly across the area, of which 63% are ethnic minorities. Predominant ethnic groups include the Tay, Nung, Dao, Thai, and Muong. Population density averages between 50 to 100 people/Km² in the mountainous regions. Currently, socio-economic conditions in these provinces present significant challenges.

According to the poverty rankings for the period 2016-2020 issued by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs of Vietnam, and specified in Decision No. 1095/QĐ-LĐTBXH dated August 22, 2016, nine out of the top ten provinces with the highest poverty rates are in the northern mountainous region. These provinces include Dien Bien, Son La, Lai Chau, Cao Bang, Bac Kan, Ha Giang, Yen Bai, Bac Giang, and Tuyen Quang. Dien Bien province ranks highest nationwide with 48.14% of households living below the poverty line, followed by Ha Giang at 43.65% (Nguyễn, 2016).

Impacts of Free Migration on the Place of Origin, Destination and Migrants

Negative Effects of Free Migration on Places of Origin

Firstly, free migration from rural and mountainous areas often leads to labour shortages in these regions during crucial periods such as harvest time.

Secondly, free migration in rural and mountainous areas impacts sectors like policy banking, as households borrow credit but fail to repay their debts before migrating to other locations, posing significant challenges for loan recovery by banks.

The Negative Impact of Free Migration on Immigration

Firstly, the process of free migration from rural and mountainous areas to urban centres (places of immigration) not only provides migrants with opportunities

to interact with diverse populations and acquire new knowledge but also gives rise to complex social issues in urban settings. This includes challenges such as assimilation into urban society and the adaptation to new social norms and dynamics.

Secondly, free migration places significant strain on the provision of social services in cities (places of immigration), driven by the rapid influx of migrants. This population growth often outpaces the development of social infrastructure, leading to inadequate services, particularly for those migrating freely from mountainous provinces to urban areas and major cities.

Negative Effects of Free Migration on Migrants

Free migration places heightened pressure on authorities at all levels to manage social order, particularly concerning laborers moving freely into cities, especially seasonal migrants seeking work during leisure periods. Many of these migrants often fail to register for temporary residence, complicating demographic management in urban areas and major cities. The resulting disorder and compromised social safety present significant challenges, particularly for managing social order and ensuring security for urban authorities at various levels.

Research Results

Assessing the Negative Impacts of Free Migration on Socio-Economic Development, Environment, National Defence, and Security

The Place of Destination

Table 4: Assessment of the Negative Impact of Free Migration in the Northern Mountainous Provinces of Vietnam on Immigration.

No	Impact Content	Evaluate (%)				Medium Score
		Impact Little	Very Impact	High Impact a lot of	Total	
1	Negative impact on economic development	32.6	53.8	13.6	100.0	1.81
2	Negative impact on ethnic culture and society	34.4	54.0	11.6	100.0	1.77
3	Negative impact on ecological environment	27.8	54.8	17.4	100.0	1.90
4	Negative impact on relationships and national solidarity	40.8	46.7	12.5	100.0	1.72

Source: Survey data in 2018

According to the survey findings, free migration in the Northern mountainous provinces significantly impacts immigration negatively. Surveyed officials and residents identify the ecological environment as the most affected aspect, with an average score of 1.90 points. This is followed by its impact on economic development, ethnic relations, and finally, social solidarity (refer to [Table 4](#)).

Surveys conducted in localities receiving free migrants indicate numerous negative impacts on local social life, including:

Negative Impacts of Free Migration on the Ecological Environment in Places of Destination

The survey revealed that many free migrants lack access to productive land, prompting them to resort to deforestation for agricultural purposes, thereby causing significant adverse effects on the ecological environment. For instance, in Mu Ca Commune, Muong Te District, Lai Chau Province, from 2009 to 2012, nearly 70 households from other provinces migrated freely to the core zone of the Da River upstream protection forest. In their quest for land suitable for upland cultivation, these households destroyed hundreds of hectares of primary forests. Similarly, in Muong Nhe District, Dien Bien Province, migrants, primarily from Hmong communities in Son La, Lao Cai, Yen Bai, and Lai Chau provinces, have illegally settled in protection forests, special-use forests, buffer zones, and even core areas of the Muong Nhe Nature Reserve since 2005. Over the past decade alone, these migrants have contributed to the destruction of thousands of hectares of forests, including hundreds of hectares of primary forests in the area.

Another study indicated that on average, each household cleared 1.5 hectares of forest for shifting cultivation. From 1996 to 2004, approximately 9,000 households migrated, leading to the deforestation of 13.5 thousand hectares. From 2004 to 2008, an additional 9,644 households migrated freely, resulting in the destruction of 1.4 million hectares of forest. Over the entire period from 1996 to 2008, nearly 15,000 hectares of forest were cleared due to migration activities, not accounting for areas exploited for timber ([Nguyễn, 2011](#)).

The severe degradation of the ecological environment has emerged as a critical

factor contributing to adverse natural phenomena such as droughts, floods, flash floods, and landslides. These events have resulted in significant loss of life and property in various localities across the mountainous provinces of the North, Central Highlands, and Central Coast in recent years.

The Negative Impact of Free Migration on the Economic Development of Places of Destination

Ethnic minority migrants predominantly come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with high poverty rates. Currently, only a minority of new destination areas offer favourable conditions for economic development, enabling improved living standards for migrants, while a significant portion remains mired in poverty and hardship.

Free-to-come migration not only imposes burdens on localities in terms of socio-economic development and the maintenance of social order and security but also disrupts population planning, settlement arrangements, and local economic development plans. For instance, in the Central Highlands region, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's report, a substantial number of households in need of stable settlement are scattered in peripheral areas, protection forests, and special-use forest areas. Although efforts have been made with 37 approved projects totalling VND 1,930 billion aimed at stabilizing 13,968 households, challenges persist. Approximately 9,600 households among the 23,566 identified lack stability arrangements, with 7,600 facing issues such as insufficient residential and production land, and delays in land allocation procedures.

Among migrants from the Northwest to the Central Highlands, only a minority have been able to secure residential and production land, with proper civil status and household registration. The majority face shortages of residential and production land, relying on unstable labour arrangements, contributing to high poverty rates and precarious living conditions ([Viết Tôn, 2014](#)).

According to Mr. Pham Duc Luyen, Vice Chairman of the People's Committee of Dak Nong Province, free migration has adversely impacted the National Target Program on Poverty Reduction. Dak Nong Province manages to reduce poverty by only 2-3% annually, as households moving freely into the locality offset the gains

made. This influx makes it challenging to decrease the number of poor households effectively. Additionally, the National Target Program on building new rural areas faces obstacles, with the province aiming for 20% of communes meeting criteria by 2015 but achieving only 12-13% upon review. The presence of over 10,000 scattered households in forested areas complicates efforts to develop new rural areas as planned ([The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014](#)).

Negative Impacts of Free Migration on the Sociocultural Aspects of Places of Destination

According to a recent study, free migration is associated with illegal evangelizing activities, where migrants, predominantly followers of Protestantism and various lesser-known religions, engage in proselytizing. This situation complicates political security, social order, and safety. Despite facing hunger, poverty, and hardship, individuals forsake productive labour on Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays to participate in religious practices aimed at prosperity, foregoing work yet expecting sustenance in terms of food and clothing ([People's Army Newspaper, 2011](#)).

In cultural terms, the free migration of religious adherents disrupts the traditional cultural identity of local communities. This includes abandonment of national musical instruments, ancestral altars, culturally significant folk practices, and ethnic jewellery. Moreover, the religious life of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces undergoes significant transformation due to free migration. Recent observations indicate that the prevalent influence of a major religion, particularly the Gospel, risks homogenizing the religious culture of ethnic minorities and potentially consolidating ethnic-religious identities.

In societal terms, free migrants disrupt the lives of residents, leading to land disputes and a variety of complex social issues such as drug addiction, illegal narcotics trade, property theft, and possession of illegal weapons. These problems are particularly pronounced in border areas adjacent to China and Laos.

Many free migrants delay or fail to register for temporary residence or household registration, complicating efforts by local authorities to monitor, manage, and address violations of the law effectively.

Negative Impacts of Free Migration on Political Stability, National Defence, and Security at Places of Destination

The study findings indicate that free migration significantly impacts political stability, national defence, and security in the northern mountainous provinces. A pressing concern is labour migration to China and Laos without legal documentation, leading to arrests, detentions, fines, and deportations of local workers by Chinese authorities. Moreover, there is an alarming trend of individuals exploiting labour for cross-border trafficking, particularly trafficking in women and children, which threatens security, order, and potentially diplomatic relations between Vietnam and neighbouring countries.

Due to limited awareness among some people, hostile forces exploit religious issues to propagate and recruit followers, inciting free migrants against the Party and the regime, leading to instability in border areas. In Dien Bien Province, armed forces addressed issues related to the establishment of the "H'Mong Kingdom," apprehended individuals involved in illegal activities in Laos, and verified cases related to national security in early 2017. Cross-border migration exacerbates challenges associated with separatist and autonomous movements, particularly those influenced by religious factors. This situation can heighten ethnic consciousness over national unity among ethnic minorities, potentially weakening Vietnam's national cohesion in the long term.

The study results reveal varying assessments among survey groups regarding the adverse effects of migration on destination areas (refer to [Figure 2](#)).

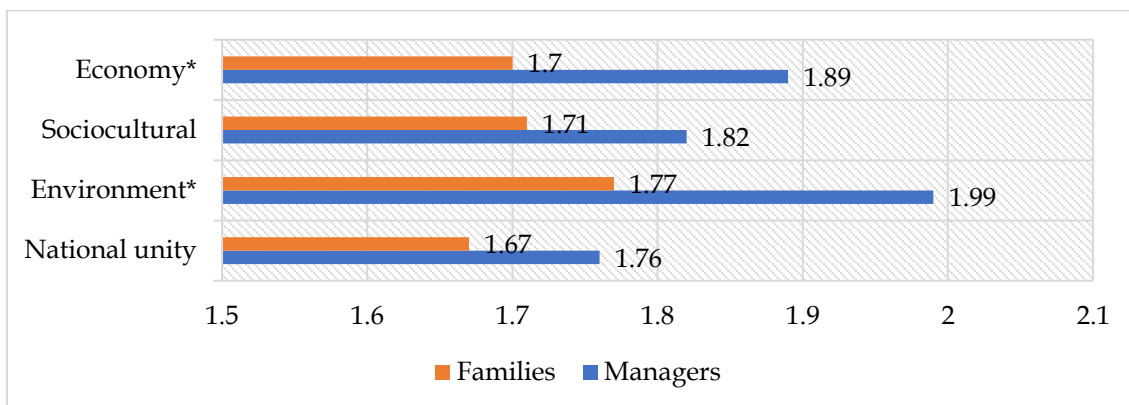


Figure 2: Differences Between the Group of Managers and Households in Assessing the Positive Impact of Migration on Immigration *p<0.05.

Source: Survey data in 2018

The data analysis results indicate differing assessments between households and managers regarding the negative impacts of migration on economic and environmental aspects at destination places. According to the managers' perspective, free migration processes significantly detriment the natural environment and disrupt the local economy.

Therefore, based on the analysis, it is evident that the free migration process has both positive and negative effects on destination places. However, the results indicate that the negative impact outweighs the positive effects of free migration on destination areas (refer to Figure 3).

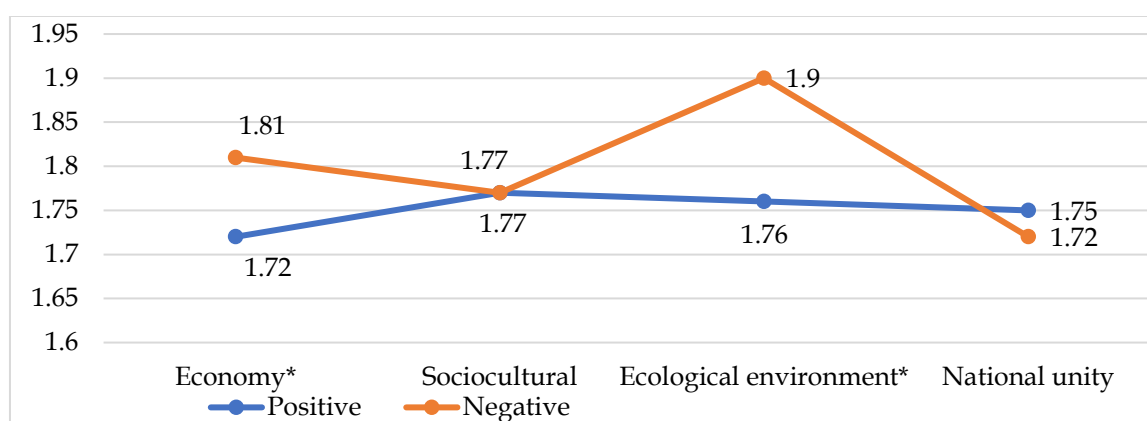


Figure 3: Comparison of Positive and Negative Impacts of Migration on the Place of Destination *p<0.05.

Source: Survey data of the project in 2018

The T-test analysis reveals that in the economic and environmental domains, the influence of free migrants on destination areas is predominantly negative rather than positive. This conclusion stems from the depletion of natural resources and disruption to the local economy associated with migration. Conversely, in the domains of culture and solidarity, the difference between positive and negative effects is minimal. This finding is attributed to the shared cultural heritage and strong ethnic solidarity among the predominantly ethnic minority migrant groups. Additionally, since migrants often originate from the same community, the social and cultural impacts are relatively limited.

The Place of Origin

Free migration exerts negative impacts on places of departure across various

dimensions including economic development, socio-cultural dynamics of ethnic groups, ecological environment, ethnic relations and solidarity, population dynamics, employment patterns, and foreign relations.

Free migration in the Northern Upland provinces negatively impacts the place of departure. Surveyed officials indicate that it most significantly affects political stability, national defence, and security (average score of 1.89/3 points), as well as population and employment (average of 1.85/3 points). Economic development, socio-cultural aspects, ecological environment, and external relations are also adversely affected, albeit to a moderate degree with lower average scores (see Table 5).

Table 5: Assessment of the Negative Impacts of Free Migration in the Northern Mountainous Provinces of Vietnam on the Place of Departure (NIPO).

No	Impact Content	Evaluate (%)			Medium Score	
		Very Little Impact	High Impact	Impact a lot of		Total
1	NIPO1 Negative impact on economic development	36.2	51.3	12.5	100.0	1.77
2	NIPO2 Negative impact on ethnic culture and society	38.3	49.2	12.5	100.0	1.74
3	NIPO3 Negative impact on ecological environment	36.7	52.8	10.5	100.0	1.74
4	NIPO4 Negative impact on relations and national solidarity	38.1	51.2	10.7	100.0	1.73
5	NIPO5 Negative impact on population and employment issues	26.0	62.6	11.4	100.0	1.85
6	NIPO6 Negative impact on foreign relations	40.7	49.8	9.5	100.0	1.69
7	NIPO7 Negative impact on political stability, national defence and security.	28.1	54.3	17.6	100.0	1.89

Source: Survey data in 2018

The survey conducted across various localities in the Northern mountainous provinces reveals that due to free migration, many households neglect procedures for crossing and relocating at border gates. Consequently, local authorities lack information about the migration destinations, purposes, and whether migrations are permanent or temporary. This situation complicates the management of population, civil status, household registration, as well as local security, social order, and safety.

Furthermore, numerous localities in the Northern Uplands currently confront significant challenges, prompting a substantial portion of the working-age population to migrate elsewhere in search of employment. Surveys indicate that many villages are predominantly occupied by elderly individuals and young children during free periods. This situation potentially facilitates the proliferation of trafficking activities, particularly

cross-border trafficking of children, which has become increasingly intricate in the northern mountainous provinces in recent years.

The comparative evaluation of the migration process highlights predominantly negative impacts rather than positive ones on the places of origin, as illustrated in Figure 4.

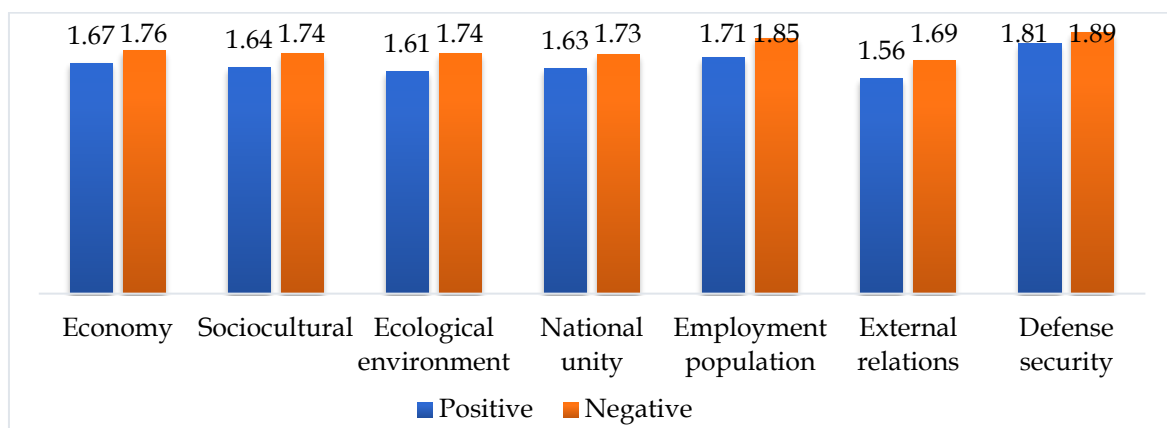


Figure 4: Comparison of Positive and Negative Impacts of Migration on the Place of Origin $p < 0.05$.

Source: Survey data of the project in 2018

The survey findings indicate that across all domains mentioned, migration has a more pronounced negative impact than positive on the place of origin. Consequently, free migration contributes to labour shortages in the departure areas, disrupts cultural ties and family structures, weakens social cohesion, and fosters individualism. Ethnic minorities experience a gradual erosion of solidarity, particularly affecting national defence, security, and demographic management, posing challenges in these areas. Moreover, ethnic minorities are vulnerable to exploitation for illicit activities. Based on these assessments, immediate measures and long-term strategies are imperative to stabilize the current migration dynamics.

The Place of Immigration

Free migration in the northern mountainous provinces adversely affects immigration. According to surveyed officials, it has the most significant negative impact on the ecological environment of immigrants (average score of 1.86/3 points) and also negatively impacts their economic development (average score of 1.79/3 points). Other areas such as culture-ethnic society, interpersonal relationships, and

ethnic solidarity among immigrants are also negatively affected, albeit to a moderate extent as indicated by lower mean scores (see [Table 6](#)).

Table 6: Assessment of the Negative Impact of Free Migration in the Northern Mountainous Provinces of Vietnam on Immigration (NIPD).

No	Impact Content	Evaluate (%)				Medium Score
		Very Little Impact	High Impact	Impact a lot of	Total	
1	NIPD1 Negative impact on the economic development of immigration	34.3	52.7	13.0	100.0	1.79
2	NIPD2 Negative impact on the ethnic culture-society of the immigration	37.3	51.7	11.0	100.0	1.74
3	NIPD3 Negative impact on the ecological environment of the immigration	30.3	53.3	16.3	100.0	1.86
4	NIPD4 Negative impact on the relations and national unity of the immigration	43.0	45.7	11.3	100.0	1.68

Migrants

Free migration exerts numerous adverse effects on migrants. According to survey responses from officials, the most severe negative impact is on migrants' access to social services, with an average score of 1.96/3 points. Similarly impactful are the effects on employment, income, and living environment, also scoring an average of 1.85/3 points. Additional negative impacts include changes in cultural practices and habits among migrants, issues related to economic stability within migrant families, and other consequential challenges (see [Table 7](#)).

Table 7: Assessment of the Negative Impact of Free Migration in the Northern Upland Provinces on Migrants (DHL).

No	Impact Content	Evaluate (%)				Medium Score
		Very Little Impact	High Impact	Impact a lot	Total	
1	DHL1 Negative impact on family economic stability of migrants	32.7	53.3	14.0	100.0	1.81
2	DHL2 Negative impact on cultural changes and customs of migrants	32.0	53.7	14.3	100.0	1.82
3	DHL3 Negative impact on the living environment of migrants	31.0	53.3	15.7	100.0	1.85
4	DHL4 Negative impact on relations and ethnic solidarity of migrants	35.3	51.3	13.3	100.0	1.78
5	DHL5 Negative impact on employment and income of migrants	29.7	55.3	15.0	100.0	1.85
6	DHL6 Negative impact on migrants' access to social services	25.0	53.7	21.3	100.0	1.96

Source: Survey data in 2018

Many families migrate freely in search of employment opportunities and aspire to enhance their quality of life at their destination. While some achieve this goal and express

satisfaction with their new lives compared to their previous circumstances, many migrants face challenges securing stable employment, income, and suitable living conditions. Addressing this concern, officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Ha Giang province noted that most migrant households eventually return to their places of origin due to difficulties such as lack of productive land, unstable employment, and insufficient income in their new locations.

Assessing the challenges migrants face in finding new places to settle, opinions from residents and surveyed officials indicate that the most daunting task is securing well-paying and suitable employment. Conversely, dealing with administrative procedures related to workplaces and local authorities is perceived as less challenging, as reflected in the data on difficulty levels shown in [Table 8](#).

Table 8: Assessment of the Difficulty Levels of Migrants in Finding New Jobs (APD).

No	Content	Evaluate (%)			Total	Medium Score
		Very Hard	Hard	Not Hard		
1	APD1 Ability to find suitable jobs	30.7	62.0	7.3	100.0	1.77
2	APD2 Ability to search for higher income jobs	31.7	57.7	10.7	100.0	1.79
3	APD3 Local authorities cause difficulties	27.7	57.0	15.3	100.0	1.88
4	APD4 Administrative procedures in the locality/workplace	29.0	60.3	10.7	100.0	1.82

Source: Survey data of the project in 2018

Representatives from the People's Committee of Dien Bien Provincial Party Committee expressed that the livelihoods of free migrants are notably challenging, marked by high poverty rates, insufficient arable land, inadequate access to clean drinking water, prevalent diseases, and rising concerns over security and crime. These difficulties persist among ethnic minorities who migrate to Dien Bien. Moreover, the absence of household registration or unregistered households poses obstacles to accessing state welfare policies and effective local governance. Additionally, in the Northern mountainous provinces, particularly in border areas, individuals engage in unauthorized cross-border migration to China for employment, exposing them to risks such as unpaid wages, harsh working conditions, mistreatment, physical abuse, forced labour, and the possibility of arrest or deportation¹.

¹ In-depth interviews with officials of the district party committee of Dong Van district, Yen Minh district party committee, Ha Giang province.

The survey findings indicate that many free migrants face challenges accessing social services due to their lack of registration. Although local authorities endeavour to facilitate registration processes in new locations, inadequate infrastructure often impedes permanent and temporary residence procedures. The primary reason for unresolved registrations among migrants is their settlement in unstable land areas, including forestry land, disputed land with state afforestation units, areas affected by deforestation, and zones outside residential planning. Consequently, these migrants do not qualify for legal residency status. This situation gives rise to various social welfare issues, such as children born without birth certificates, lack of access to health insurance cards, and inability to enrol in schools. Moreover, households of free migrants, predominantly impoverished, often do not benefit from state support policies.

Moreover, social stigma towards free migrants contributes to their isolation, as they are often perceived as unreliable and burdensome. This isolation can lead to children lacking confidence in social interactions in their new environment. Women, especially those raising children alone, encounter additional challenges due to the absence of familial and community networks that provided support in their homeland.

Therefore, while free migration offers opportunities for migrants to secure employment and enhance their incomes, it also introduces significant hardships to their lives.

The SEM Model Analyses the Negative Effects of free Migration to the Place of Destination, the Place of Origin, and Migrants

Following the analysis in earlier sections, the migration process invariably impacts both the destination and origin areas, as well as households. After assessing scale reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), items with a corrected item-total correlation < 0.3 were eliminated (Cristobal, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2007; Nunnally, 1994). In EFA, items with factor loadings < 0.5 were excluded (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Hair et al., 1998). In CFA, only items with standardized regression weights of 0.5 or higher were retained to ensure the model's coefficients are robust (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Doll et al., 1994; Hair et al., 2014; Hu & Bentler, 1999). This rigorous filtering process aims to exclude irrelevant variables and factors that do not significantly contribute to

the model's inclusion. The selected observed variables have been integrated into the SEM framework, and the outcomes are illustrated in Figure 5.

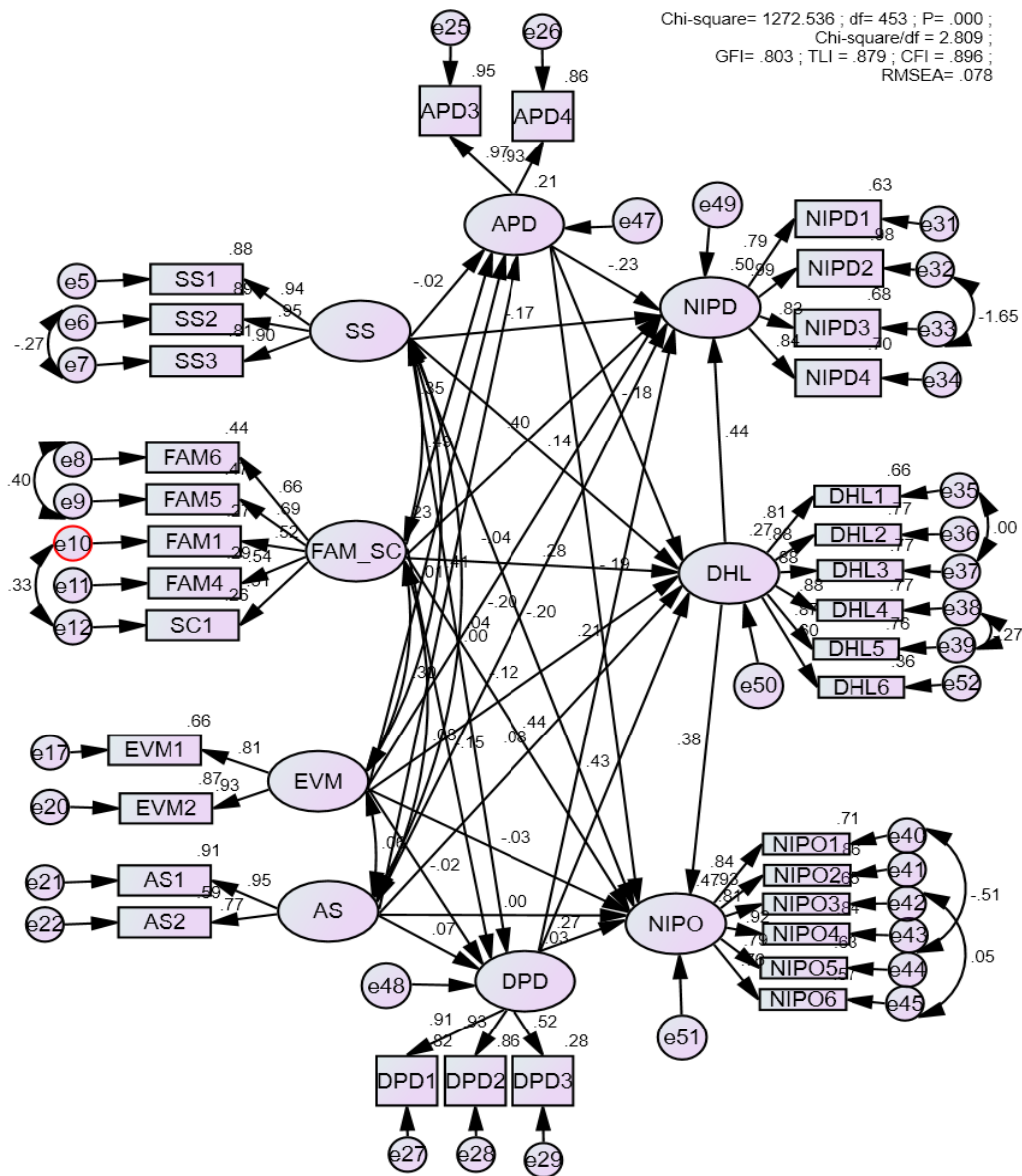


Figure 5: Negative Impacts of Free Migration.

Source: Authors' data processing.

Based on the results of the SEM model analysis, the indices obtained are as follows: Chi-square/df = 2.809, GFI = 0.803, TLI = 0.879, CFI = 0.896, and RMSEA = 0.078. These indices meet the testing requirements outlined in Baumgartner and Homburg (1996), Doll et al. (1994), Hair et al. (2014), and Hu and Bentler (1999). Specifically, the Chi-square/df ratio indicates an acceptable model fit, while the goodness-of-fit indices (GFI, TLI, CFI) and RMSEA suggest that the model fits the data

adequately. Additionally, the standardized regression weights (β) and their significance levels (P) support the model's consistency with the observed data. Thus, it can be confirmed that the SEM model is consistent with the empirical data.

The SEM analysis reveals the findings from testing the interrelationships among the influencing factors within the model, as depicted in [Table 9](#).

Table 9: Results Negative Impact of Free Migration.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>MH1 Advantages at Place of Destination APD</i>	<i>MH2 Difficulties at Place of Destination DPD</i>	<i>MH3 Difficulties in Household Life DHL</i>	<i>MH4 Negative Impacts on Place of Destination NIPD</i>	<i>MH5 Negative Impacts on Place of Origin NIPO</i>
FAM_SS	.354***	.154*	.279**	.401***	.440***
SS	-.025	-.005	.139**	-.166**	-.202**
AS	.010	-.071	.077	-.199***	.001
EVM	.226***	-.023	-.119*	-.043	-.027
APD			-.177**	-.235***	-.194**
DPD			.429***	.207***	.271***
DHL				.442***	.384***

Note: $p=0,000$, Chi-square/df=2.809; GFI=0.803; TLI= 0.879; CFI=0.896, RMSEA=0.078. * $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.001$

Source: Authors' data processing.

Table 10: Hypothetical Conclusion.

<i>Paradigm</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
MH1	The family-socio-cultural causes have a positive effect on the advantages of the migration process	With a significance level of $p<0,05$, the hypotheses are accepted
	The living environment has a opposite effect on the advantages of the migration process	
MH2	The family-socio-cultural cause creates difficulties in the process of migration	
	Family causes - socio-cultural causes increase difficulties in the household's living	
	Social services at the destination add to the difficulties in the life of the household	
MH3	Environmental conditions and facilities at the destination minimize difficulties in the life of households	
	The advantage of the migration process diminish the difficulties in the life of the household	
	Challenges from the conditions in the migration process increase the difficulties in the life of the household	
	Family factors - socio-cultural factors negatively influence the place of immigration	
	Social services at the destination lessen the negative impact of immigration	
MH4	Anti-State activities negatively impact immigration	
	The advantages of conditions during migration lessen the negative impact on the place of immigration	
	Challenges from conditions in the migration process increase pessimistic effects in the place of immigration	
	Difficulties in the life of the household increase the negative impact of the place of immigration	
	Increased family-sociocultural factors negatively influence the place of origin	
MH5	Social services at the destination lessen the negative impact of the place of departure	
	The advantages of the conditions in the migration process reduce the negatives to the place of origin	
	Challenges from conditions in the migration process increase the negative impact on the place of origin	
	Difficulties in the life of the household increase the negative impact in the place of origin	
MH1, MH2, MH3, MH4, MH5	The other hypotheses are not enough evidence to prove the hypothesis	

Based on the findings from the analysis model, the following conclusions can be drawn (refer to [Table 10](#)).

The SEM model reveals that migration exerts negative economic and social impacts on both the destination and origin locations, as outlined below:

The Negative Effects of Free Migration on the Place of Destination

Firstly, family-socio-cultural factors contribute negatively to the destination. Variations in family cultures can lead to clashes or competition among local inhabitants, exacerbating adverse effects at the destination.

Secondly, social services at the destination can mitigate negative impacts. Adequate infrastructure and essential services such as electricity, roads, schools, and healthcare facilities can alleviate adverse effects by meeting the increased demands resulting from migration. Efficient social service delivery helps to manage the impact of migration more effectively at the destination.

Thirdly, subversive activities pose a threat to the destination. Anti-state activities may incite migrants to form separatist enclaves, thereby undermining the stability and cohesion of the destination. Poorly planned migration lacks adequate preparation in terms of infrastructure, sustainable livelihood resources, ethnic cultural preservation, and community integration, leading to deficiencies in migrants' lives. Moreover, exploitation of temporary resources by hostile entities to sustain migrants' further strains destination resources, exacerbating negative impacts.

Fourth, benefits associated with migration conditions can also harm the destination. Legal migration cannot be prevented except in cases of illegal migration. Vietnamese citizens have the right to migrate to areas not prohibited by law, and local governments should facilitate, respect, and ensure their legitimate rights. Government policies and support mechanisms, along with career opportunities available to migrants, can contribute positively to their integration and success in new communities. However, these advantages can also strain local resources and infrastructure if not managed effectively.

Fifthly, challenges stemming from the conditions of the migration process detrimentally impact the destination. The immigration process introduces numerous

management issues that, if inadequately addressed, adversely affect the immigrant community. Challenges include employment opportunities, income stability for migrants, demographic management difficulties, ensuring social order, and national security concerns, posing significant challenges for authorities at all levels and residents alike. Consequently, the greater the challenges faced by the destination for migrants, the more difficult it becomes for that locality to foster development.

The Negative Effects of Free Migration on the Place of Origin

Firstly, the familial and socio-cultural factors adversely affect the place of departure. Everyone's homeland holds profound personal connections, encompassing relatives, friends, family lineage, and more. Migration disrupts these social bonds, stretching them economically and culturally. While some migrants maintain regular contact with their origins, others may find it challenging to reconnect, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of the migration process for the place of departure.

Secondly, enhanced social services at the destination mitigate the negative impact on the place of departure. Improved social services at the destination can act as a conduit between migrants and their places of origin, thereby lessening the adverse effects. Additionally, the advantageous conditions during migration adversely affect the place of origin.

Thirdly, free migration from rural mountainous regions to urban centres exacerbates labour shortages in the mountainous areas during peak agricultural seasons. This imbalance locally impacts agricultural production and other economic activities in Vietnam's Northern mountainous provinces.

Fourthly, alongside these effects, free migration from rural and mountainous areas also impacts sectors such as policy banking. Borrowers often migrate without settling their debts, posing significant challenges for banks in debt recovery. Moreover, households sometimes sell their land before migrating, only to return to find it sold, leaving them without residential or arable land to sustain themselves. This situation has widespread repercussions for the community and local authorities in the places of departure, reflecting a common scenario in many provinces today.

The Negative Effects of Free Migration on Migrants

Firstly, the voluntary migration of ethnic minorities from mountainous provinces to urban areas and industrial zones offers opportunities for migrants to integrate into urban society, acquire new knowledge, and experience personal growth. However, this migration also brings forth complex social issues. Separated from their families, migrants are less constrained and more susceptible to social vices such as drug addiction, prostitution, gambling, and theft.

Secondly, the migration from northern mountainous provinces to urban areas and the Central Highlands places significant pressure on these destinations. Many migrants cannot afford to buy homes and instead rent, often leading to the formation of slums characterized by disorder, insecurity, and environmental pollution. Moreover, this migration contributes to slash-and-burn agriculture practices in the Central Highlands, which destabilizes the region. Providing adequate access to healthcare, education, and social services for these migrants becomes a challenging task for urban areas and provinces in the Central Highlands. Furthermore, the influx of migrants strains urban transport infrastructure, resulting in traffic congestion, accidents, and environmental degradation in these areas.

Thirdly, the wave of migration from the Northern Upland provinces to the Central Highlands and urban areas burdens local authorities in maintaining public order and security. Many migrants, predominantly ethnic minorities with limited professional skills, find only precarious employment in manual labour roles such as construction, cleaning, and street vending. Consequently, stable job opportunities are scarce, leading to periods of unemployment and increased vulnerability to negative behaviours. Despite the positive aspects of migration, these challenges pose significant obstacles to the sustainable development of urban areas, major cities, and provinces in the Central Highlands.

Discussion - Some Notes for Ethnic Policy

1. The hypothesis testing model indicates that anti-state activities orchestrated by hostile forces have adverse effects on both the places of immigration and emigration. Similarly, challenges encountered during the migration process exert

negative impacts on both immigration and emigration locations.

Therefore, it is recommended that policies focus on understanding the political security, social order, and safety situation, particularly addressing activities by hostile forces against the Party and the State of Vietnam. These enemy forces are known to entice ethnic minorities to migrate freely within the northern mountainous provinces, leading to instability in both the places of origin and immigration.

2. The model further indicates that activities by hostile forces against the Party and State create obstacles in the migration process, including the propagation of illegal religions and opposition through manipulation tactics.

It is recommended to enhance security measures, intensify propaganda efforts, and comprehensively monitor information in ethnic minority areas to combat hostile forces, criminals, and illegal propaganda activities that disrupt security and order. Special emphasis should be placed on ideological work to discourage free migration within the region and toward the Central Highlands provinces, thereby ensuring peace and stability for the population.

Based on the findings derived from the SEM model analysis of the adverse effects of free migration in Vietnam's northern mountainous provinces, several policy recommendations can be delineated.

Enhance and Improve the Quality of Propaganda and Mobilization of People to Limit the Negative Impacts of Free Migration

1. Effectively disseminating information and mobilizing public awareness about the detrimental effects of free migration on livelihoods and rights is crucial. This entails educating and persuading individuals against engaging in free migration and shifting cultivation. The government should intensify legal advocacy efforts to enhance public understanding of their rights, with a particular emphasis on disseminating information in ethnic languages to ensure comprehension, implementation, and awareness of laws. It is also essential to diversify legal aid approaches tailored to local conditions and aligned with cultural norms, particularly among ethnic minority communities.

2. Centring efforts on propagating, educating, and heightening awareness among cadres and soldiers is crucial. This includes mobilizing the populace about the

Party's development strategies, objectives, and the national unity policy in the current context. Such initiatives aim to help residents in ethnic minority, mountainous, and socio-economically challenged regions recognize the schemes and ploys of hostile forces. These efforts aim to deter attempts to lure people into free migration, which could potentially undermine the nation's unity by fostering separatist ideologies and calls for national autonomy.

3. Promoting active participation in mass movements among ethnic minorities, mountainous, and economically challenged regions is crucial. This includes engaging in efforts to safeguard national security, territorial sovereignty, and border integrity, while combating crime. Such actions contribute significantly to the effective realization of the Party's directives and the State's policies concerning national affairs and socio-economic development within localities.

Continued Promotion of Training and Retraining of Ethnic Minority Cadres, Strengthening the Grassroots Political System, and Enhancing Management and Control of Free Migration in the Northern Mountainous Provinces

1. Enhancing the deployment of officials to grassroots levels is essential to assist localities in managing and mitigating the adverse impacts of free migration on both origin and destination areas. It is also crucial to leverage the role of armed forces in supporting community stabilization and economic development. Furthermore, there should be continuous efforts to implement and effectively realize Party directives, State policies on ethnic affairs, national defence, and security in ethnic minority, mountainous, and economically challenged regions.
2. Strengthening the political system involves cultivating a cadre corps at the grassroots level, particularly among ethnic minorities, known for their integrity, socio-economic management capabilities, and credibility with local communities. This effort includes actively fortifying the grassroots political structure in strategic regions such as the Northwest, Central Highlands, border areas, and revolutionary strongholds. Additionally, it entails bolstering the militia and self-defence forces in ethnically diverse, mountainous, and economically challenged regions, focusing on both quantity and quality. Integration of these forces with communal police and

- other units aims to uphold political security, social order, and safety at the grassroots level, thereby enhancing control and management of free migration.
3. Effectively managing registration records and combating misinformation campaigns aimed at distorting ethnic and religious policies, as well as provocative rhetoric aimed at sowing division by hostile forces within the nation, are crucial steps.
 4. Enhancing social order and security in the Northern mountainous provinces entails addressing urgent issues such as illegal evangelization, cross-border trafficking of goods, and the trafficking of women and children. It is crucial to promptly resolve land-related complaints and prevent illegal transfers or conversions of land.
 5. To strengthen the management of migration, it is essential to monitor population fluctuations in each area rigorously and implement measures to control and resolve issues arising from free migration promptly. Organizing effective grassroots-level intelligence gathering to understand the sentiments and concerns of ethnic minorities is crucial for advising competent authorities on handling emerging situations. This approach aims to prevent security and order disruptions, demonstrations, and unrest in ethnic minority, mountainous, extremely difficult socio-economic regions, and border areas. Additionally, addressing complexities related to new religious activities in these regions and eliminating sensitive factors are necessary steps to prevent enemies and reactionary forces from exploiting issues related to "the people," "religion," "democracy," and "human rights".
 6. Enhancing the role of esteemed individuals within ethnic minority communities.
 7. Establishing economic-defence zones in strategic and pivotal locations. Military units, including Border Guards, Military Hospitals, and Military Medical Academies, actively engage in the execution of education and healthcare policies.
 8. Enhancing close coordination among provinces hosting migrants, reinforcing collaborative efforts in transnational migration management with neighbouring countries, and progressively mitigating the impacts and ramifications of free migration. Moving forward, it is essential for regions receiving migrants to conduct surveys and categorize them, establishing a comprehensive database that includes details such as population numbers, ethnicities, and places of origin. Based on this information, concerted actions can be taken with migrant-receiving provinces to

- effectively address and resolve pertinent issues.
9. The government should expedite administrative procedure reforms, including citizen registration and identity reforms, and update the legal framework for managing migrant labour. These reforms should align with regional and international standards such as ASEAN, CPTPP, and WTO rules to ensure that migration supports socio-economic development positively.
 10. The government should prioritize state investments in hunger eradication, poverty reduction, and sustainable development programs in the Northern mountainous areas of Vietnam. This will enhance living standards, environmental quality, and overall conditions in these regions, fostering stable livelihoods and employment opportunities locally. Such efforts aim to discourage free migration that can disrupt political stability, social order, and safety in both Northern provinces and the Central Highlands region of Vietnam.
 11. The government should enhance its institutional framework, particularly for rigorously managing issues related to cross-border migration, including labour migration and cross-border marriages, to reduce illegal cross-border movements. This approach aims to effectively oversee and curb the trafficking of women and children across borders.
 12. The government should prioritize signing international agreements and fostering cooperation to address issues related to foreign labour, ensuring the protection of interests for Vietnamese citizens migrating abroad for living and work. Specifically, close coordination with neighbouring countries like China and Laos is essential to effectively manage and control illegal cross-border migration.
 13. The government should formulate policies that promote the diversity of regional cultures during economic development. These policies should create opportunities for free migrants to actively preserve the cultural identity of their ethnic groups amidst market economy development, industrialization, and urbanization. This approach will foster a culturally rich landscape that reflects Vietnam's national identity.

Conclusion

Free migration exerts significant negative impacts on both immigration and emigration places, as well as on the migrants themselves. In immigration places, these

effects include overpopulation leading to urban planning disruptions, depletion of natural resources, deforestation, environmental degradation, increased social vices, disruption of social order and safety, and implications for national defence and security. Similarly, in emigration places, free migration results in labour shortages, particularly affecting rural areas and hindering agricultural and forestry extension activities due to insufficient local labour resources. Moreover, free migrants themselves face numerous challenges such as difficulties in securing employment, settling in new areas, and accessing social services. To address these complex issues, it is imperative to implement comprehensive solutions aimed at stabilizing people's lives. These include enhancing the quality of propaganda and mobilization efforts, intensifying training and capacity building for ethnic minority cadres, bolstering the grassroots political system, and enhancing the management and regulation of free migration. These lessons hold significance not only for Vietnam but also provide insights applicable to many countries globally.

Migration intersects with standards and values tied to socio-economic development. To optimize its benefits and mitigate drawbacks, this study proposes several policy recommendations for economic, cultural, political, social welfare, and defence advancement in Vietnam's northern mountainous region:

Economic: Prioritize addressing sedentary farming issues among the Hmong ethnic community in northern mountainous provinces, focusing on achieving livelihood stability, enhancing productivity, and promoting socio-economic development.

Cultural and Societal Aspects: Preserve and elevate traditional ethnic cultures while ensuring comprehensive fulfilment of cultural and spiritual needs among all ethnic minorities.

Governmental: Strengthen the grassroots political system in ethnic minority areas, effectively utilizing village heads, family leaders, and esteemed individuals to manage and regulate free migration. Collaborate closely with border provinces of Laos and China to manage cross-border migration effectively.

National Security and Defence: Enhance state governance in security and defence to facilitate safe migration practices in Vietnam's northern mountainous provinces.

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations. Enhancing in-depth and specialized interviews is crucial to strengthen the analysis of quantitative models and

statistical data sourced from secondary documents. This approach will underpin the formulation of more practical recommendations and solutions. Therefore, a comprehensive review of international practices in managing free migration across different countries worldwide is essential. This review will provide a robust basis for developing policy suggestions not only for Vietnam but also for other developing nations facing challenges associated with free migration. Addressing the negative impacts of free migration is pivotal for promoting sustainable economic growth and improving the welfare of migrants.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

This study received ethical approval from VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi ensure that it complies with the ethical principles governing social research.

Informed Consent

The researchers also received a license from all levels of government, village elders, and village heads before collecting data from their subjects. In addition, all participants received the notice and consented to participate in the study.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available in the Nguyen, Anh Cuong (2024), "Negative Impacts of Free Migration in the Mountainous Provinces of Northern Vietnam", Mendeley Data, V1, doi: <https://doi.org/10.17632/3krjnck6bm.1>

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