

## Viet Nam

**Capital:** Hanoi

**Area:** 329,314 sq km

**Ethnic groups:** Kinh (Viet) 86.2%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.7%, Muong 1.5%, Khome 1.4%, Hoa 1.1%, Nung 1.1%, Hmong 1%, others 4.1% (1999 census)

**Languages:** Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favoured as a second language), some French, Chinese and Khmer, mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)

**Administrative divisions:** 59 provinces and 5 municipalities

**System of government:** Communist Party-dominated constitutional republic

**Currency:** Vietnamese dong

VIET NAM IN FIGURES	
Human Development Index (2003)	0.704 <sup>94</sup>
<b>Demography</b>	
Population (2005)	84.2 million <sup>95</sup>
Population under 15 ( as % of total) (2003)	31.1% <sup>96</sup>
<b>Economy</b>	
GDP (2004)	US\$ 45.2 billion <sup>97</sup>
GNI (per capita) (2004)	US\$ 540 <sup>98</sup>
Unemployment (as % of total labour force) (2005 est.)	5.5% <sup>99</sup>
Inflation rate (2004)	7.9% <sup>100</sup>
Population living below the national poverty line (1990-2002)	50.9% <sup>101</sup>
<b>Health and education</b>	
Life expectancy at birth	71.3 years <sup>102</sup>
Adult literacy rate (15 years and above) (2004)	90.3% <sup>103</sup>
Gross primary enrolment ratio (2003)	100% <sup>104</sup>
Survival rate to Grade 5 (2001-2002)	87.1% <sup>105</sup>
Gross secondary enrolment ratio (2003)	73.5% <sup>106</sup>
Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	-
Public expenditure on health (as % of GDP) (2003)	1.5% <sup>107</sup>

<sup>94</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2005

<sup>95</sup> UNFPA, State of World Population 2005

<sup>96</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2005

<sup>97</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006

<sup>98</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006

<sup>99</sup> CIA World Factbook

<sup>100</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006

<sup>101</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2005

<sup>102</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006

<sup>103</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006. Figure according to UNESCO, Statistics in Brief – Education in Vietnam, June 2006, 90.4%

<sup>104</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006. 2004 figure according to UNESCO, Statistics in Brief – Education in Vietnam, June 2006, 98%

<sup>105</sup> UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2006

<sup>106</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, April 2006

<sup>107</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2005

## Background

Viet Nam is located in South-East Asia, bordered by the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea to the east, China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west and the Gulf of Thailand to the south.

Viet Nam's population is growing at a rate of about 1.2 per cent a year. The average population density was 246 people per sq km, one of the highest levels in the world. The highest concentration of people is in the Red River Delta in the north-east, where Hanoi is located, and the lowest concentration is in the north-west. The population, which traditionally has been primarily rural, has become increasingly urbanized since 1986, when the Doi Moi economic renewal programme began to boost income and employment opportunities in the cities. In addition, a steady stream of migrants continues to move from the north to the south.

## Economy and development

Viet Nam has made significant progress in raising the living standards of its people, manifested in recent dramatic economic growth and poverty reduction. In 15 years from 1990 to 2004, GDP tripled, with an average annual growth rate of 7.5 per cent; the incidence of poverty dropped from 58 per cent in 1993 to 24 per cent in 2004. The real economy doubled in size during the decade, savings rates rose sixfold to around 25 per cent of GDP, exports rose by an average of 25 per cent a year and Viet Nam moved from a food deficit nation to become the second largest exporter of rice.

Economic growth in the 1990s generated marked improvements in living standards. The

incidence of poverty was halved from 70 per cent to around 35 per cent, and the proportion of the population living in severe poverty fell to 15 per cent. Across a broad front, there were widespread and visible improvements in the lives of Vietnamese citizens.<sup>108</sup>

## Education

In 2003, Viet Nam's literacy rate was 94 per cent (95.8 per cent for men and 92.3 per cent for women). However, educational attainment is less impressive. Although five years of primary school education are compulsory and 92 per cent of eligible children were enrolled in primary school in 2000, only two-thirds completed the fifth grade.

The cost of tuition, books and uniforms and the need to supplement family income are the two main reasons for children dropping out of school. A huge disparity exists in primary school enrolment between the cities and rural parts of Viet Nam. In some rural areas, only 10–15 per cent of the children progress beyond third grade, whereas almost 96 per cent of pupils in Ho Chi Minh City complete fifth grade. In 2000, enrolment in secondary school was only 62.5 per cent, much lower than in primary school. One of the government's goals is to expand access to secondary education.

## Child labour situation

While there has been no national survey specifically on child labour in Viet Nam, the country's periodic surveys on living standards indicate that there has been a decrease in the percentage of children taking part in economic activities: from 41.1 per cent in 1993 to 29.3 per cent in 1998 and 18 per cent in 2003.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> World Bank 1999.

<sup>109</sup> Source: GSO, *Surveys on Living standards in 1992–1993, 1997–1998, 2002–2003*.

The surveys also reflect the following characteristics of child labour:

- Children taking part in economic activities can be classified into four groups: employed labour; family business; working for both family and outside employers; and self-employed. Between 1992 and 1998, the percentage of self-employed children increased. The following years, 1998 to 2003, witnessed a reversal, with the numbers decreasing. Meanwhile, the percentage of children working in family businesses, the category where most children are employed, fell steadily between 1992 and 1998 but rose again between 1998 and 2003. During this same period, the percentage of employed children aged 6 to 10 years dropped significantly but increased among children aged 11 to 14 and 15 to 17.
- In general, there are more economically active children in rural areas than in urban areas. The number is higher among girls and higher in poor areas/households. The number of those economically active also increases with the age of the child.
- Despite a downward trend in the number of economically active children, labour intensity has tended to increase. In particular, working hours are longer, especially those from 15 to 17 years old. The percentage of children in this age group working overtime rose from 1.6 per cent to 9.1 per cent between 1998 and 2003 and that of children employed in family businesses and the household economy rose from 4.8 per cent to 73.6 per cent.

- The percentage of economically active children decreases as the percentage of children going to school increases, underlining the importance of education and the government's policy of universalization of primary education in efforts to reduce child labour. Nonetheless, the percentage of drop-outs remains high (38 per cent among children aged 15 to 17 in 2003) and is reflected in the labour force participation of this age group.

These achievements notwithstanding, recent studies have drawn attention to diverse forms of child labour in Viet Nam, which include: working children under the minimum working age; children in domestic service; child victims of human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation; and drug trafficking.

There are several reasons for the existence of child labour in Viet Nam. In addition to the inability of the education system, and in particular lower secondary education, to reach all children, direct causes include poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Indirectly identifiable causes vary from a poor knowledge of the adverse impacts of child labour, ignorance of the law against child labour, low levels of trade union penetration and representation in the emerging domestic private sector, the lack of systematic information collection and management systems for child labour, and the lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework on the prevention of child labour in the informal economy.