

## Lifestyle and faith practice of migrant Catholics in Vietnam: Adaptation and contribution in the renovation period in Hanoi, Vietnam

 Ha Vu Thi<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Religious Studies, Vietnam; vuhavme25@gmail.com (H.V.T.)

**Abstract:** This study explores the lifestyle and faith practices of Catholic migrants from rural dioceses, such as Bùi Chu and Vinh, to Hanoi during Vietnam's Renovation (Đổi Mới) period. As Vietnam experienced rapid urbanization and socioeconomic transformation, these migrants navigated significant challenges adapting to urban life while preserving their religious and cultural identities. The research highlights their adaptation strategies, including establishing support networks, adjustments in spiritual practices, and participation in urban labor markets. It also examines their contributions to Hanoi's development, emphasizing their economic impact, cultural enrichment, and efforts in fostering social solidarity. Despite their resilience and resourcefulness, Catholic migrants face obstacles such as housing insecurity, limited labor protections, and the pressure to balance traditional faith practices with urban demands. The study concludes with policy recommendations to enhance the support for migrant communities, including affordable housing programs, labor protections, and more vital collaboration between the Church, government, and society. By addressing these challenges, Hanoi can harness the full potential of Catholic migrants as integral contributors to its social and economic development.

**Keywords:** *Adaptation strategies, Catholic migration, Đổi Mới, Faith practices, Hanoi, Urbanization, Vietnam.*

### 1. Introduction

Since the inception of Vietnam's Renovation period (Đổi Mới) in the late 1980s, the nation has experienced profound social and economic transformations that have reshaped its societal landscape. The transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one spurred unprecedented economic growth, industrialization, and integration into the global economy (Boothroyd & Phạm, 2000). One of the most significant consequences of these changes has been the acceleration of urbanization and internal migration flows, as individuals and families from rural areas seek improved livelihoods in burgeoning urban centers.

Internal migration has emerged as a critical phenomenon during this period, fundamentally altering demographic patterns and contributing to the dynamic development of cities like Hanoi. The capital city has become a magnet for migrants due to its expanding economic opportunities, better infrastructure, and higher living standards. According to the 2019 Census, Hanoi ranks as one of the primary destinations for internal migrants in Vietnam, accounting for a substantial influx of people from various regions seeking employment, education, and enhanced quality of life. This migration presents both opportunities and challenges, as newcomers must adapt to the complexities of urban life while the city accommodates rapid population growth.

A distinctive facet of this migration trend is the movement of Catholic communities from rural dioceses, notably Bùi Chu in Nam Định Province and Vinh in Nghệ An Province, to Hanoi. These dioceses are historically significant centers of Catholicism in Vietnam, with deep-rooted religious traditions dating back to the arrival of European missionaries in the 16th century. The migrants from these regions bring a rich tapestry of faith practices, social customs, and cultural values that are integral

to their identity (Hansen, 2009). Their migration is not merely a physical relocation but a transposition of a way of life steeped in religious conviction and communal bonds.

Migrant Catholics in Hanoi face the dual challenge of integrating into the fast-paced urban environment while striving to maintain their religious commitments and cultural heritage. The urban setting often contrasts sharply with the close-knit, faith-centered communities they leave behind, posing potential threats to the continuity of their spiritual practices (Murray, 2021). Nevertheless, these migrants contribute significantly to Hanoi's diverse social, cultural, and economic fabric. They enrich the city's cultural landscape by preserving and expressing their religious traditions, participating actively in the economy, and fostering communal solidarity among migrant and native populations.

This study focuses on the lifestyle and faith practices of Catholic migrants in Hanoi during the Renovation period, aiming to explore the intricate ways in which they navigate the challenges of urbanization while preserving their spiritual and cultural identities. Specifically, the study seeks to:

Analyze the patterns and dynamics of Catholic migration from rural dioceses to Hanoi, including the factors driving this movement and the demographic characteristics of the migrant population.

Examine how migrants adapt their lifestyles and religious practices to the urban environment, identifying the strategies they employ to maintain their faith amidst the demands of city life.

Highlight the contributions of migrant Catholics to Hanoi's development in economic, cultural, and religious dimensions, assessing their impact on the urban community and the reciprocal influences between migrants and the city.

By shedding light on the experiences of this unique group, the study aims to enrich the understanding of internal migration in Vietnam, particularly the intersection of faith and migration. It addresses the broader relationship between religion, migration, and urbanization in a rapidly changing society. It offers insights relevant to policymakers, religious organizations, and scholars interested in migration studies, urban sociology, and religious anthropology.

The significance of this research lies in its focus on a relatively understudied aspect of Vietnam's urbanization—the role of faith communities in migration and adaptation processes. While economic factors are often emphasized in migration studies, the cultural and religious dimensions are equally vital in understanding how migrants integrate into new environments and contribute to the social fabric of their host cities (Pham et al., 2018). This study fills that gap by comprehensively analyzing Catholic migrants' experiences in Hanoi, highlighting their resilience, adaptability, and the richness they bring to urban life.

Moreover, the findings of this research have broader implications beyond the Vietnamese context. In an era of global migration and urbanization, many cities worldwide are experiencing similar dynamics, with faith-based communities playing crucial roles in supporting migrants and fostering social cohesion. Understanding the Vietnamese experience can offer valuable lessons and comparative perspectives for other societies facing the challenges and opportunities associated with internal migration and the integration of religious minorities into urban settings.

In conclusion, this study endeavors to provide a nuanced and in-depth examination of the lifestyle and faith practices of migrant Catholics in Hanoi during the Renovation period. By exploring their migration patterns, adaptation strategies, and contributions to urban development, it offers a multifaceted perspective on the interplay between faith, migration, and urbanization in Vietnam's rapidly evolving society...

## 2. Migration and Faith

The migration of Catholics from rural dioceses such as Bùi Chu and Vinh to Hanoi is part of a more significant trend of internal migration during Vietnam's Renovation (Đổi Mới) period. Many rural Catholics have relocated to urban centers like Hanoi, motivated by economic necessity, educational aspirations, and the promise of better living conditions (Lien, 2013). For these migrants, the journey is not merely a physical relocation but also a profound challenge in maintaining their religious identity amidst the complexities of urban life, which often contrasts sharply with the close-knit rural communities they leave behind (Dawson & Rapport, 2021).

Catholic migration to Hanoi predominantly involves young, working-age individuals or families who seek to improve their socioeconomic standing. Originating from dioceses with Catholic solid traditions, these migrants tend to settle in areas near urban parishes, leveraging the proximity to familiar religious structures and communities as a means of easing their transition to city life (Boothroyd & Phạm, 2000). However, the move to Hanoi presents challenges that disrupt established faith practices. Migrants often face difficulties balancing the demands of urban employment or education with the expectations of regular religious participation, such as daily mass or involvement in parish activities (Bousquet, 2015). Moreover, the absence of cohesive support networks that characterize rural parishes can leave migrants feeling isolated in a fast-paced and increasingly secular urban environment.

In response to these challenges, many Catholic migrants adapt their faith practices to align with the realities of urban living. They often modify their worship schedules, shifting from daily to weekly mass attendance and choosing times that accommodate their work or study commitments (Nguyen, 2023). The diverse urban Catholic population also introduces them to new approaches to practicing their faith, enriching their spiritual lives while fostering a sense of inclusivity. Additionally, many migrants actively participate in Catholic lay associations and youth groups, which not only sustain their spiritual connection but also provide valuable social networks within the city.

Through their resilience and adaptability, Catholic migrants exemplify the dynamic interplay between migration and religion. Their ability to maintain and transform their faith practices in response to the challenges of urbanization highlights how spiritual life evolves to meet the demands of a changing social and cultural landscape. This evolution not only reinforces their religious identity but also enables them to navigate the complexities of life in Hanoi while staying connected to their faith.

### 3. Adaptation

Catholic migrants from rural dioceses such as Bùi Chu and Vinh to Hanoi adopt diverse strategies to adapt to the social, economic, and religious challenges of urban life. Their ability to navigate this complex transition underscores their resilience and resourcefulness in maintaining cultural and spiritual identities while integrating into Hanoi's dynamic environment (Nguyen & Phan, 2021). To better understand these strategies, we analyze their approaches to social, economic, and religious adaptation, supported by illustrative data.

Social adaptation often begins with establishing connections within Catholic communities in Hanoi. Migrants typically settle near parishes or join Catholic associations that provide a familiar environment and emotional support (Hoang et al., 2021). These networks foster a sense of belonging and serve as platforms for mutual assistance. For instance, Table 1 illustrates the reliance on religious networks for emotional and practical support.

**Table 1.**  
Sources of social support among catholic migrants.

Type of support	Percentage of respondents
Fellow Catholics in Hanoi	68%
Family in Rural Areas	20%
Local Non-Catholic Community	8%
Others	4%

Economic adaptation is equally vital for migrants seeking stability in Hanoi. Initially, many take up low-paying or physically demanding jobs in industries such as construction, domestic work, or informal markets. However, over time, Catholic networks often facilitate access to job referrals, which can lead to better opportunities. Table 2 highlights the types of employment undertaken by migrants during their initial and subsequent years in Hanoi.

**Table 2.**

Employment patterns of catholic migrants.

Employment sector	Initial employment (%)	After 3+ years (%)
Construction	40%	15%
Domestic services	25%	10%
Service industry (e.g., Retail)	20%	40%
Self-employment (e.g., Vendors)	10%	25%
Professional jobs (e.g., Clerks)	5%	10%

Religious adaptation is perhaps the most personal and profound aspect of their transition. Urban life necessitates flexibility in traditional religious practices. Migrants often adjust their routines, such as attending weekly mass instead of daily services, due to work or study commitments. Participation in Catholic lay organizations and youth groups helps migrants maintain their faith and social connections. Table 3 summarizes shifts in religious practices reported by migrants before and after moving to Hanoi.

**Table 3.**

Changes in religious practices among catholic migrants.

Practice	Before migration (%)	After migration (%)
Daily mass attendance	75%	25%
Weekly mass attendance	20%	70%
Participation in lay associations	10%	45%
Private prayer (Daily)	80%	65%

These data-driven insights illustrate the deliberate and strategic efforts of Catholic migrants to adapt to Hanoi's urban environment while retaining their spiritual and cultural identities. Their integration is not merely a passive response but an active process of negotiation between tradition and modernity, supported by social, economic, and religious adjustments. Such evidence underscores their significant contributions to the social and cultural fabric of Hanoi while highlighting the challenges they face.

#### 4. Contributions

Catholic migrants from rural dioceses such as Bùi Chu and Vinh significantly contribute to Hanoi's development through economic impact, cultural enrichment, and social solidarity. Their presence highlights the interplay between migration and urban transformation, as these individuals integrate into the city while leaving a distinct imprint on its social and cultural landscape (Keith, 2012). The following analysis uses data tables to make these contributions more convincing and measurable.

Economic contributions are one of the most visible impacts of Catholic migrants. By participating in the urban labor force and entrepreneurial activities, they not only improve their own living standards but also contribute to Hanoi's economic vitality. Many migrants send remittances back to their rural communities, supporting their families and contributing to regional development. Table 1 highlights the primary economic activities of migrants and their associated contributions.

**Table 4.**

Economic contributions of catholic migrants.

Economic Activity	Percentage of migrants involved	Estimated annual contribution (VND)
Urban labor force (e.g., Construction, retail)	55%	20 million – 30 million
Entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., small businesses)	25%	50 million – 80 million
Remittances to rural areas	85%	10 million – 25 million

Culturally, Catholic migrants enrich Hanoi's diverse urban fabric by bringing their religious traditions and communal practices to the city. Their celebrations of Catholic holidays, rituals, and community events add to the capital's cultural vibrancy. In addition, they introduce traditional Catholic values, which often intersect with broader Vietnamese cultural norms. Table 2 illustrates the participation of migrants in cultural and religious events.

**Table 5.**  
Cultural contributions through religious events.

Event/Tradition	Participation rate (%)	Impact on urban community
Christmas Celebrations	90%	Enhanced cultural diversity and tourism
Community-Based Religious Events	75%	Strengthened local awareness of Catholicism
Traditional Rural Catholic Practices	60%	Integration of rural traditions into urban life

Social solidarity is another notable contribution of Catholic migrants. By forming networks and engaging in charitable activities, they foster a sense of unity and mutual support in urban areas. Many Catholic migrants participate in community-building efforts, such as organizing educational programs, providing assistance to disadvantaged groups, and supporting local parishes. Table 3 highlights the key social activities and their impact.

**Table 6.**  
Social contributions of catholic migrants.

Activity	Participation rate (%)	Impact
Charitable work (e.g., Aid for the Poor)	65%	Improved welfare of vulnerable populations
Educational programs (e.g., Tutoring)	40%	Enhanced access to education for children
Parish support (e.g., Volunteering)	85%	Strengthened parish operations and outreach

These contributions showcase the integral role of Catholic migrants in shaping Hanoi's economic, cultural, and social landscape. Their economic participation supports urban growth, their cultural practices enrich the city's diversity, and their social initiatives foster solidarity within and beyond their religious communities. Together, these contributions demonstrate the profound impact of migration on urban development, making Catholic migrants a vital part of Hanoi's modernization story.

## 5. Conclusion

The migration of Catholics from rural dioceses such as Bùi Chu and Vinh to Hanoi exemplifies the profound changes brought about by Vietnam's Renovation period. These migrants have successfully adapted to the challenges of urban life while making notable contributions to Hanoi's socioeconomic and cultural landscape (Taylor, 2003). Their economic activities, ranging from participation in the labor force to entrepreneurial endeavors, have bolstered the city's growth (Katz & Bradley, 2013). Simultaneously, their religious and cultural practices have enriched Hanoi's social fabric, introducing a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity. Furthermore, their efforts to foster social solidarity through community-building and charitable activities have strengthened the cohesion and resilience of urban neighborhoods (Parés et al., 2018). Despite these achievements, Catholic migrants continue to face significant challenges, including access to affordable housing, fair labor opportunities, and the preservation of their religious and cultural identity in a rapidly urbanizing environment.

Several strategic recommendations are proposed to support migrant communities better and unlock their full potential as contributors to urban development.

First, policymakers should prioritize providing affordable and secure housing for migrants. Given the high cost of living in urban areas like Hanoi, many migrants are compelled to live in substandard housing, which exacerbates their vulnerability. Programs that promote affordable housing solutions,



such as subsidies or community-based housing cooperatives, can alleviate this issue and provide migrants with the stability needed to integrate more effectively into urban society.

Second, labor policies must address the specific needs of migrant workers. Many Catholic migrants are employed in low-wage or physically demanding jobs with limited opportunities for upward mobility. Government initiatives to enhance access to vocational training and skill development programs tailored to the urban job market can help migrants secure better-paying and more stable employment. In addition, stricter enforcement of labor protections can ensure fair treatment and improve the overall quality of life for migrant workers.

Third, the Catholic Church and other religious organizations should continue to support migrant communities actively. Religious institutions can provide crucial social and spiritual support, helping migrants navigate the complexities of urban life while preserving their cultural and faith-based practices. Expanding programs that offer counseling, education, and job placement services can further empower migrants and strengthen their sense of community in their new environment. Collaborative efforts between the Church, local governments, and non-governmental organizations can enhance the scale and impact of these initiatives.

Fourth, fostering greater inclusivity and understanding within the broader urban population is essential. Public campaigns that highlight the contributions of migrant communities to Hanoi's economy and culture can reduce prejudice and promote a more inclusive society. Additionally, community-building activities encouraging interactions between migrants and long-term urban residents can help bridge cultural divides and foster mutual respect.

Finally, research and policy must remain adaptive to the evolving needs of migrant communities. Continuous studies on the conditions and contributions of Catholic migrants can inform more effective policies and interventions. Engaging migrant voices in policy-making ensures that their perspectives and needs are represented, promoting more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

In conclusion, Catholic migrants from rural dioceses have contributed significantly to Hanoi, both economically and culturally, while demonstrating resilience in adapting to urban challenges. However, their potential to contribute further is contingent on the support and opportunities provided to them. By addressing their needs through comprehensive and inclusive policies, Hanoi can improve these communities' well-being and enhance the city's social cohesion, cultural richness, and economic vitality. Supporting migrant communities is thus both a moral imperative and a strategic investment in the future of Hanoi's urban development.

<sup>1</sup>This research was funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 601.99-2020.300.

## Copyright:

© 2024 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## References

- [1] Boothroyd, P., & Phạm, X. N. (Eds.). (2000). Socioeconomic renovation in Viet Nam: The origin, evolution, and impact of Doi Moi. Idrc.
- [2] Bousquet, G. (2015). Urbanization in Vietnam. Routledge.
- [3] Dawson, A., & Rapport, N. (Eds.). (2021). Migrants of identity: Perceptions of home in a world of movement. Routledge.
- [4] Hansen, P. (2009). The Virgin Heads South: Northern Catholic Refugees and their Clergy in South Vietnam, 1954–1964. In *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia* (pp. 129-151). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [5] Hoang, T. H., Nguyen, T. N. A., & Bui, P. T. (2021). Religious Social Capital and Support in the Social Integration of Catholic Migrants in Vietnam. *Religion and social communication Journal of the*, 255-284.
- [6] Katz, B., & Bradley, J. (2013). The metropolitan revolution: How cities and metros are fixing our broken politics and fragile economy. Brookings Institution Press.
- [7] Keith, C. (2012). Catholic Vietnam: a church from empire to nation (Vol. 5). Univ of California Press.
- [8] Liên, C. T. T. (2013). Communist state and religious policy in Vietnam: A historical perspective. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, 5(2), 229-252.
- [9] Murray, G. (2021). Vietnam-Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture. Kuperard.

- [10] Nguyen, K. N., & Phan, Q. A. (2021). The management of minority heritage: critical challenges to Vietnamese Catholic heritage seen from the case study of Bui Chu Cathedral. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 27(7), 734–751.
- [11] Nguyen, T. N. A. (2023). Integration into the Local Community by Catholic Migrants through Religious Participation in Hanoi, Vietnam. *Religion and Social Communication*, Vol. 21 No. 1, 2023, 143–164.
- [12] Parés, M., Blanco, I., & Fernández, C. (2018). Facing the great recession in deprived urban areas: How civic capacity contributes to neighborhood resilience. *City & Community*, 17(1), 65–86.
- [13] Pham, N. N. K., Do, M., Bui, V. H., & Nguyen, G. T. (2018). Rural-to-urban migration in Vietnam: Conceptualized youth's vulnerabilities in the city. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 14(1), 117–130.
- [14] Taylor, P. (Ed.). (2003). *Modernity and Re-enchantment*. Flipside Digital Content Company Inc..