



## The Vietnamese Diaspora in Germany

Structure and Potentials for Cooperation  
with a Focus on Berlin and Hesse

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## Foreword

In May 2006 the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH launched the sector project Migration and Development on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) at GTZ's headquarters in Eschborn. This project aims to devise and disseminate strategies and instruments to help relevant actors maximize the development potential and minimize the risks posed by migration.

The advisory project acts as an interface between the realms of research, politics and practice. Its core tasks include both providing specialised advisory services to BMZ and mainstreaming the approach within GTZ and other German implementing organisations. An in-depth exchange of experience and cooperation with European partners is also an important part of the intervention.

Cooperation with diaspora communities in Germany, which is an important aspect of project activities, aims first and foremost to acquire a better understanding of the ongoing activities of the various migrant organisations in their countries of origin. On this basis, the next step should be to identify possible avenues of cooperation that will culminate in designing and implementing joint projects in the countries of origin. To this end, GTZ published a study in 2006 entitled "Egyptian, Afghan and Serbian diaspora communities in Germany: How do they contribute to their country of origin?"

The 2006 study was followed up by this examination of the Vietnamese diaspora and two other studies, which look at the Senegalese and Moroccan migrant communities in Germany. They will help close a gap in current research since little is known at present about the contributions migrants make to their countries of origin. They will also provide a basis for cooperation with Vietnamese migrant associations within the scope of a GTZ pilot programme launched in May 2007, which will co-finance investment in social infrastructure.

*Dr Irina Kausch*

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## 1. Introduction and methodological approach

Most of the information contained in this study was taken from interviews, with the exception of a few consulted publications (see Bibliography, p. 19). The interviews were conducted in line with the guidelines used for the GTZ study “Egyptian, Afghan and Serbian Diaspora Communities in Germany: How Do They Contribute to Their Country of Origin?” One set of guidelines addresses key individuals and activists, while a second set is used for representatives of associations and other migrant organisations.

The relevant **facts and figures** were obtained from the Statistics Offices of the individual federal states, the Federal Statistical Office and the Federal Office of Administration. Facts and figures quoted by interview partners too have helped give as true a picture as possible of the Vietnamese diaspora. With statistics alone it is often not possible to identify all individuals whose background has involved migration from Vietnam (e.g. second-generation migrants).

Along with fliers, leaflets and other information materials, the websites of the various organisations were evaluated. No interviews were conducted by telephone. Individual contact was indispensable in order to establish a basis of trust and to get as much as possible out of the interview. Most interviews were conducted during two separate trips to Berlin and visits to various *Vereine*<sup>1</sup> (associations) in the greater Frankfurt am Main area.

The author was well served by his knowledge and understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese, acquired over the ten years he worked for GTZ as a project officer, responsible for all projects in Vietnam. This involved making several trips a year to Vietnam. The person-to-person relations established over this period also made it easier to obtain information.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: For the sake of simplicity, the German term *Verein* is translated by the English word “association”. The term *Verein* stems from the German word “*vereinen*” (unite) and depending on the context, may correspond to the concept of club, association, special interest group, charitable organisation, etc.. Nearly 600,000 *Vereine* were registered in Germany in 2007.

## 2. The Vietnamese in Germany

Until the reunification of North and South Vietnam in April 1975, only a few hundred Vietnamese lived in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Most of them came from the upper social strata of South and North Vietnam respectively and had come to study or train in one of the two German states. Most of the Vietnamese who studied in the GDR returned to Vietnam on completion of their degree, whereas Vietnamese students in the FRG were granted asylum and generally integrated successfully into West German society.

The two major groups of Vietnamese migrants who arrived in Germany after 1975 were the **boat or contingent refugees**,<sup>2</sup> who arrived in the FRG between 1975 and about 1986, on the one hand, and the **contract workers**,<sup>3</sup> who were employed in the GDR as of about 1980, on the other hand.

**Table 1: Distribution by federal state**

Bavaria	12,082
<b>Berlin</b>	<b>11,695</b>
Saxony	9,768
Lower Saxony	9,666
Baden-Württemberg	6,145
North-Rhine/Westphalia	5,987
Saxony-Anhalt	5,285
Brandenburg	5,125
Rhineland-Palatinate	4,274
<b>Hesse</b>	<b>4,024</b>
Thuringia	3,335
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	2,780
Hamburg	1,259
Schleswig-Holstein	932
Saarland	556
Bremen	533

Source: Federal Statistical Office and the State Statistics Offices in Berlin and Frankfurt

2 Also known as the “boat people”. Contingent refugees are refugees accepted within the context of humanitarian aid activities. Under the provisions of the law of 22 July 1982 they were granted a right of abode in the Federal Republic of Germany without first undergoing the standard procedure to be recognised as refugees. They have the legal status of refugees as laid out in the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Since 1991 they have been granted an unlimited residence permit; from 1979 to 1990 they were first granted a five-year residence authorisation; after this period they could apply for an unlimited residence authorisation (see Bethschneider 1995, p.157). See also [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boat\\_People](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boat_People).

3 The contract employees or contract workers came to the GDR on the basis of an agreement entered into by the government of the GDR and the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam relating to the temporary employment and training of Vietnamese workers in industrial enterprises in the GDR, dated 11 April 1980. See Nguyen van Huong, “Zuwanderung von Vietnamesen mit Zwischenstation als Gastarbeiter in der DDR” [Migration of Vietnamese citizens with a transitional period as guest workers in the GDR], Special publication from the *Erlanger Forschungen*, Series A, Volume 95 (“Neue Heimat Deutschland” – New Home Germany).

At the end of 2005 some 83,000 Vietnamese were living in the Federal Republic of Germany (precisely 83,446 according to the central register of foreign residents), 50% male and 50% female. Along with the 42,000 or so former Vietnamese citizens who have acquired German citizenship since 1981 (41,499), there are a total of about **125,000 individuals of Vietnamese origin** currently living in Germany.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include Vietnamese citizens living illegally in Germany or the children of Vietnamese people who obtained German citizenship. Table 1 gives a breakdown of these total figures by federal state.

The number of Vietnamese in every federal state amounts to less than 1% of the total population. Around 56,000 (56,464) or 67.5% of Vietnamese residents in Germany are aged between 20 and 55.

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<sup>4</sup> No figures are available for the number of Vietnamese citizens granted German citizenship prior to 1981, and figures from 1981 to 1990 refer only to the Federal Republic of Germany; the figures from 1997 to 1999 do not include the figures for Hamburg.

### 3. The boat people

About 38,000 **boat people** came to the Federal Republic of Germany after 1975, taking family reunifications into account. They fled from the political persecution of the Communist regime in South Vietnam and from the desperate economic situation. They left their home in small boats, many of which were not sea-worthy, and attempted to cross the South China Sea. Many lost their lives to the forces of nature and to pirates from neighbouring states, particularly Thailand. Only few of them were fortunate enough to be rescued by commercial vessels or ships such as the *Cap Anamur* sent by humanitarian aid organisations to rescue refugees. The boat people who survived the voyage were first brought to reception centres in neighbouring Asian states, and from there to third countries as part of a UNHCR aid programme (thus the term “contingent refugees”), including the Federal Republic of Germany, where they were then dispersed among the individual federal states.

#### **Integration in the Federal Republic of Germany, and ties to Vietnam**

Most boat people came to Germany with the intention of making it their **new home** and integrating into German society. In spite of difficulties learning the language, the older generation generally integrated smoothly into working life in Germany. The booming economy meant that jobs were plentiful. With very few exceptions they found employment in a wide spectrum of sectors. Some also started up their own successful businesses: Vietnamese restaurants, snack bars and food stores. The younger generation, which had fewer problems with the new language, completed schooling, went to university or undertook vocational training. They had German friends and some married Germans.

In terms of integration, the boat people were granted the same economic and social status as **applicants granted political asylum** (see footnote 2). This meant that

- they were granted residence and work permits;
- they were able to take a German language course free of charge;
- they received financial assistance to allow them to undertake basic and further vocational training or to retrain;
- they were eligible for student loans, and;
- social counselling and advisory services were available to them.

According to our interviewees, Vietnamese refugees were also politically active in the debate surrounding the Vietnam War, especially in their first few years in the Federal Republic of Germany. With time this commitment diminished, but their fundamental criticism of the political situation in Communist-ruled Vietnam persists. Vietnam is a one-party state where there is no freedom of the press, freedom of opinion or freedom of assembly and association. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index ranks Vietnam 145<sup>th</sup> of 167 nations listed.

**Contact** with family members and relations is maintained by letters and emails. Since Vietnam began to open to the outside world in 1986, migrants have also taken advantage of the opportunity to visit their country of origin, provided they have no reason to fear political persecution.

The diaspora obtains most of its information about political and public life in Vietnam from (pro-government) television and the Internet, where alongside the official websites (of ministries, newspapers, etc.), websites critical of the current regime can be found.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. [www.talawas.de](http://www.talawas.de) and [www.talawas.org](http://www.talawas.org), which are mainly in Vietnamese.



**In economic terms**, most of the former boat people are doing well in Germany, according to our interviewees, since the first generation made every effort to gain a foothold here and since they enjoyed the support of the authorities, civil society and many individuals. This is also true of the second generation that arrived in Germany as children (with or without their parents) and completed their education here. Education is generally considered extremely valuable by the Vietnamese, and parents do everything in their power to ensure that their children receive a good education.

The ties to Vietnam are weaker in the second generation, since these individuals were either very young when they came to Germany or when they were born here. Although most of them can still speak Vietnamese, they cannot necessarily read or write the language, which makes it much more difficult to maintain contact with their parents' country of origin. They are only superficially acquainted with the customs and traditions of Vietnam.

The former boat people are generally **"lone warriors"**, since they are not materially dependent on one another, with few exceptions. If they are involved in any sort of migrant group at all, they tend to be members of the *"Verein der Vietnamesischen Flüchtlinge e. V."* (Association of Vietnamese Refugees), which organises the annual Vietnamese New Year celebrations (*Tet-Fest*). Otherwise they meet once or twice a year for cultural or charitable events. There are also student, women's and church-affiliated associations, mainly Buddhist and Catholic.

Key individuals interviewed estimate that about EUR 1,000 per family per year are sent to Vietnam. The statistics of the *Deutsche Bundesbank* (German Federal Bank) indicate remittances totalling EUR 30 to 35 million per year. Frequently, however, people entrust money to individuals known to them, who take the money to Vietnam. Remittances are also sent to Vietnam via Western Union, the *Deutsche Post* and one of several Vietnamese organisations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Including MIVICO GmbH in Wolfsburg (Tel.: 05362-64708); ICC GmbH in Raunheim (Tel.: 06140-926495) and hoalefinanz in Stuttgart (Tel.: 0711-35 14 294 / -295).

## 4. The contract workers

The situation of the **contract workers** is completely different. Although many thousand Vietnamese citizens had studied **in the GDR** and had undertaken training there prior to 1980, the assignment of contract workers from Vietnam only started after the signing of the government agreement of 11 April 1980 mentioned in footnote 3. In that year, about 1,500 individuals came to the GDR. The number of contract workers in the GDR swelled to about 60,000 by 1989. Most of them (about 59,000) arrived in 1987 (20,448), 1988 (30,567) and 1989 (8,881). In 1990 only 48 new contract workers arrived. They were generally expected to stay in the GDR for five years.

There were **several reasons** for the GDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, reunified in 1975, to recruit Vietnamese workers this way. Like the Federal Republic of Germany, the GDR recruited citizens from friendly states to cover labour shortages and boost production in times of economic prosperity.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, for its part, began sending young people abroad as cheap labour in the 1980s. Most worked in industry or as agricultural labourers, but doctors and teachers were also sent abroad. Firstly, this helped generate the foreign exchange that the country needed so desperately to repay its national debt and, secondly, it was a way of alleviating the massive unemployment in Vietnam. To help counter the country's foreign exchange shortfall, 12% of the gross wages of contract workers was deducted at source by their employers and transferred directly to the Vietnamese government. This was regulated in the above-mentioned bilateral agreement, the contents of which were never divulged to the contract workers.

The contract workers themselves had several reasons for wanting to work in the GDR:

- to allow them to send money home to their families;
- to obtain further professional or vocational training;
- to legally escape the system in place in Vietnam;
- to escape the economic, social and political crises in Vietnam.

To ensure as far as possible that workers returned to Vietnam when their time was up, generally only one member of any family would be sent to the GDR, and that person would be somebody who already had a job in Vietnam. There was no guarantee of a job in Vietnam upon their return from the GDR. In spite of all the problems that a stay abroad entailed (e.g. the need to bribe the relevant officials with cash or in kind), it was considered an honour to work in the GDR.

There were **no adequate preparations** for employment for the workers in the GDR, neither in Vietnam nor in the GDR. Contract workers were entitled only to a course lasting no more than three months which served "to give them basic skills in the German language and their future work, as well as informing them in detail about health and occupational safety regulations and fire prevention regulations as well as other basic codes of conduct expected at work and during leisure time".<sup>7</sup>

Vietnamese workers were recruited irrespective of their actual qualifications and schooling. As a result they were often overqualified for the work they were expected to perform, with doctors, engineers, teachers, economists or skilled workers expected to perform low-level activities. One exception was those university

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<sup>7</sup> Extract from Article 9 of the agreement dated 11 April 1980 between the German Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

graduates appointed to act as group leaders or interpreters (referred to as “linguistic mediators”). There was **no targeted recruitment** of skilled workers for specific occupations and activities.

As of the early 1980s, ideological factors played an increasingly minor part in the selection of contract workers. As a result, the number of Vietnamese working in the GDR rapidly rose to 60,000. They worked mainly in the textile, construction and metal-working industries.

Neither the Vietnamese nor the GDR authorities made any provision for the **integration** of contract workers. They were housed in company-owned hostels and were subject to the monitoring and surveillance of the full-time privileged group leaders and linguistic mediators as well as the organisations run by the Vietnamese Communist party (trade unions, youth organisations, etc.). If they behaved inappropriately, the group leaders and linguistic mediators were authorised to implement “political and educational measures”. Along with the embassy staff, they ensured rigid compliance with the provisions of the government agreement. Controls embraced every aspect of life, which further aggravated the isolation of the contract workers from colleagues and the society they lived in. Their world consisted of only the company they worked for and the hostel they lived in. The contract workers were also subject to the surveillance of the GDR police and security forces.

Generally, the contract workers were given a five-year contract, as mentioned, which was extended only in exceptional cases. When their contract expired, they had to return to Vietnam. They could not fall back on international agreements or apply for political asylum because the GDR had not signed the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees nor the pertinent 1967 Protocol.

The **bilateral agreement** of 1980 did stipulate that the contract workers would have the same rights as German workers, but in reality they were employed as unskilled workers and were thus paid as apprentices for the first six months. They often had to perform the tasks German workers were unwilling to do, such as assembly line work, three-shift work or physically gruelling tasks.

In brief, the 1980 agreement provided for the following:

- All social insurance contributions had to be paid although contract workers were not entitled to make use of the social services network;
- 12% of wages were to be deducted and transferred to the Vietnamese government;
- Contract workers would be subject to strict controls by the GDR and by their own embassy;
- They would not be entitled to family reunification;
- They would be compulsory members of the GDR trade union confederation (FDGB) and would pay membership contributions;
- Should contract workers become pregnant, they would be required to have an abortion or would be deported;
- Should they become politically active they would be deported;
- They would not be permitted to found associations;
- They would not be permitted to join a political party in the GDR.

The contract workers were never allowed to see the government agreement. This meant that they could never demand the rights stated therein or assert themselves, as could individuals familiar with their rights.

Since contract workers were entitled to certain material compensations, which they were allowed to send home or take home with them, they competed with the citizens of the GDR for scarce goods.

### **The situation of contract workers after 1990**

After the collapse of the GDR and the accession of the five new federal states and East Berlin to the FRG on 3 January 1990, a large number of the Vietnamese, in contrast to contract workers from Cuba, Mozambique and Angola, did not return home. Some 34,000 of the 60,000 contract workers took the compensatory payment of DM 3,000 that was offered and returned to Vietnam. There were no prospects for them in the *New Laender* with xenophobia on the rise and no sense of direction. The other contract workers, who remained in the *New Laender*, hoped even under the changed political and socioeconomic conditions to achieve the economic goals of their work-related migration.

The first thing they lost was their job. Since they did not understand the complex West German laws relating to immigrants, citizenship and labour, they were initially refused access to work and to other social benefits.

What was worse, after their GDR contracts expired, they had **no legal residence status**. Some applied for asylum. Others appealed to the administrative courts when their residence permission was not extended and their applications for a residence permit were turned down, arguing that they were entitled to the same treatment as the former guest workers in the FRG.

It was not possible to force the Vietnamese to leave the country, i.e. to deport them, because Vietnam refused to issue citizens who had sought asylum in other countries with an entry visa. Vietnam was only prepared to take in those citizens who were returning voluntarily. The initial optimism on the part of the “East Vietnamese” in view of the political transformation in Germany soon gave way to the sobering realisation of all the difficulties involved in applying for asylum. In addition to the already mentioned worsening xenophobia, the closure of the hostels they lived in, and thus the loss of free accommodations, moved many former contract workers to return to Vietnam.

Their places were taken, however, by Vietnamese contract workers from the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria who entered Germany illegally, since they feared reprisals from the Vietnamese Embassy as a result of their political activities. This considerable migration flow during the early 1990s caused negative press for the Vietnamese (in connection with cigarette smuggling). Their applications for political asylum were rejected, but the new wave of Vietnamese could not be deported because Vietnam refused to accept them. They were thus granted a de facto temporary stay of deportation. Many of these Vietnamese had to earn their living at that time with illegal cigarette smuggling activities and were involved in Mafia-like structures, which still applies to a smaller number. Crime rates soared to an unprecedented level among Vietnamese migrants. Generally, the criminal activities affected only Vietnamese individuals, who were both perpetrators and victims.

The decision made by the Conference of Ministers of the Interior on 14 May 1993 entailed an important change in terms of the legal definition of the **residence status** of former contract workers. It provided for limited residence certificates<sup>8</sup> to be granted to those contract workers who could provide evidence that they

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<sup>8</sup> Under the terms of the 1990 Immigration Act the overall term “residence authorisation” covers both limited residence rights (limited-term residence permit, residence permission, residence certificate), and unlimited residence rights (unlimited residence permit, residence entitlement). With the introduction of the Residence Act (which came into force on 1 January 2005) the overall term “residence title” comprises both limited residence rights, termed residence permits and unlimited residence rights, termed settlement permits.

had worked until April 1994. Certain conditions had to be met, before former contract workers could be granted a residence certificate:

- The asylum proceedings had to be concluded by 17 December 1993; any application for asylum had to be withdrawn by 17 April 1994 (which many Vietnamese did not know);
- The applicant had to have a clean criminal record (e.g. no involvement in illegal cigarette smuggling);
- The applicant must not have been granted any form of social welfare assistance;
- The contract workers had to have arrived in the GDR prior to 13 June 1990 and have been in residence without interruption since then.

They were granted a special **work permit** even if they did not meet the conditions. Those who were unable to provide evidence that they had worked until April 1994 were granted a temporary stay of deportation until further notice. The residence certificate was generally granted and/or extended for a two-year period.<sup>9</sup> Initially, only one-half of the period the workers had spent in Germany was counted, which helped accelerate the issuing of a residence permit. The result of this 1993 regulation of the right of abode was that the majority of the remaining contract workers were gradually able to work legally, and **most of them started up their own businesses** (restaurants and snack bars, selling flowers, fruit or vegetables, trading in second-hand clothes, etc.) In 2000, for instance, only one-sixth of the total number of Vietnamese living in Berlin (approx. 1,500) were employed as workers or employees with compulsory social insurance. Most of the Vietnamese in Berlin, especially in the east of the city, were either self-employed or unemployed.

Another regulation was the **Readmission Agreement**, signed by the Federal Republic of Germany and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in July 1995 that was tied to export guarantees and development assistance. It provided for the return of 40,000 Vietnamese by the year 2000. This applied above all to the former contract workers, who did not meet the conditions for the granting of a residence certificate (secure and legal source of income) and whose temporary stay of deportation had expired on 17 April 1994, i.e. those residing in Germany without any legal residence title or those who had a criminal record.

Repatriation proved difficult however. By the end of 1995 only 3,000 Vietnamese had been deported from Germany, rather than the 13,500 agreed upon. The government in Hanoi proved extremely reluctant to readmit its citizens. As a socialist state, Vietnam was not interested in taking in individuals who had just experienced first hand the collapse of a socialist state. Neither was it happy to do without the remittances sent home by the contract workers (to family members and relations), which were on the order of DM 1,000 per capita per annum. This figure provides a gauge for calculating current remittances to Vietnam.

The Readmission Agreement also caused an unknown number of Vietnamese to leave Germany for Eastern European countries, the Netherlands and Canada, since these countries had no repatriation agreement with Vietnam. These individuals are still included in the statistics as residents in Germany. The total number of Vietnamese repatriated between 1995 and 2000 was about 10,000, one-quarter of the number provided for in the agreement.

The **revision of the Immigration Act** on 4 July 1997 further changed the situation of former contract workers. It provided for those who could provide evidence that they were involved in gainful employment and who had a clean criminal record to be granted an unlimited residence permit. The procedure was further accelerated by the fact that the entire period spent in the GDR was now counted, rather than only half the period. This ended the years of struggles to acquire a secure residence status. It gave former contract workers the opportunity to find **a new home** in Germany and build a new life in the long term.

<sup>9</sup> The certificate could be extended three times, each time for a two-year period. In 2001 this regulation of the right of abode was replaced by residence permits or naturalisation.

There is, however, a steady inflow of former contract workers who had already received compensation and returned to Vietnam. This throws up new questions as to their status. They generally apply for asylum, and the authorities decide on the basis of the current legal situation. More Vietnamese are also entering Germany within the scope of family reunification. One of the key individuals interviewed estimated that about 100 Vietnamese return to Germany every year.

Former contract workers attempt to provide financial support for family members and relations in Vietnam, but they often have only the bare minimum themselves.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> One employee of an Asian snack bar in East Berlin stated that he earned EUR 300 a month. Another interviewee professed that in his opinion people tend to claim to earn more than is really the case in interviews of this sort.

## 5. The Vietnamese diaspora in Berlin

At the end of 2005 some 12,000 Vietnamese citizens were registered by the Berlin Statistics Office as being resident in Berlin (see Table 2 for the precise information provided by the Statistics Office).

At the Office of the Integration and Migration Officer of the Senate of Berlin (“integration officer” for short), the desk officer responsible, who is himself Vietnamese,<sup>11</sup> believes, however, that the **Vietnamese diaspora in Berlin** comprises closer to **20,000 individuals**, since the statistics do not cover naturalised individuals and their children (about 6,000 in all) or the illegal immigrants, whose numbers are put at about 2,000.

**Table 2: Vietnamese citizens registered as Berlin residents (at the end of 2005)**

West Berlin	3,000 (25%)
East Berlin	9,000 (75%)
<b>Berlin total</b>	<b>12,000</b>
Male	6,000 (50%)
Female	6,000 (50%)
Aged 18 - 60 years	8,000 (66%)
Resident in Berlin for 5 years or longer	9,000 (75%)
With limited residence status	4,000 (33%)
With unlimited residence status	5,000 (42%)

Source: Statistics Office Berlin

It seems safe to assume that the 3,000 Vietnamese living in West Berlin are primarily former boat people, while the 9,000 in East Berlin are primarily former contract workers. In the west of the city there are no particular districts with a high concentration of residents of Vietnamese origin.

### Example 1: Rollstuhl für Vietnam (Wheelchairs for Vietnam), Berlin

**Objective: Distribute wheelchairs to the needy**

2 members

The project was initiated in 2000 by a Vietnamese couple living in Berlin. Thanks to donations, the project has so far been able to distribute about 850 wheelchairs, especially to needy children and adolescents, who now find it much easier to go to school, or are indeed able to attend school for the first time. Many people in Vietnam still suffer from the consequences of the war, either because of war injuries or deformities resulting from the toxic chemicals used during the war. The Vietnamese health system is not able to provide adequate care for many of these individuals, who are thus dependent on external aid.

The “East Vietnamese” live mainly in the districts of Hohenschönhausen, Lichtenberg and Marzahn, where their hostels used to be located. East Berlin is also home to the three largest Vietnamese markets (at Herzbergstr. 129, Marzahner Str. 17 and Rhinstr. 100).

<sup>11</sup> He was a key resource person for the author thanks to his excellent overview of the situation of the Vietnamese in Berlin.

There are significant differences between “East” and “West Vietnamese”, and these differences are reflected in their organisations and the activities of these organisations.

The “**West Vietnamese**” are **well integrated**, for the most part speak passable German and have at least an average income. Most of them are **employed** by Berlin companies. Their organisations and events center on cultural and political issues. One of their main concerns is that their children maintain ties to their former home and its culture. This is one reason for offering Vietnamese language courses, where the children learn to read and write Vietnamese. Most second-generation migrants speak Vietnamese reasonably well. As former boat people, they left their country for political reasons; when they look at Vietnam today they see less the economic upswing than the lack of democracy, legal certainty and political freedom in general. The Vietnamese embassy views them with suspicion, and they aim to have as little as possible to do with the embassy and its staff. Although they still support family members and relations remaining in Vietnam, assistance is no longer on the scale seen when they first arrived in Germany in the early 1980s.

The “**East Vietnamese**” lag behind their western compatriots in terms of integration, since their overriding concern to date has been their residence status. They could secure residence rights only if they had work. Since their qualifications were mostly such that they could not find employment in German companies, a large number of them became self-employed: selling flowers, running Asian speciality stores and snack bars, selling second-hand clothing or fruit and vegetables. They continue to have serious problems with the German language since they were given only an absolute minimum of German instruction as contract workers, and are now unable to attend German classes because of the long hours they work and the expense this would entail.

#### **Example 2: Reistrommel (Rice barrel) e.V.**

**Objective: Improve the situation of Vietnamese migrants in Germany; provide assistance for young people**

ca. 30 members

The association provides support for Vietnamese migrants in Berlin and the *New Laender*. Its activities include above all counselling and advisory services for migrants (legal advice, support in dealing with the German authorities, translations, etc.), assistance for children and young people (language instruction, leisure activities, etc.), assistance for families (advice, publication of a family journal, etc.) and the provision of intercultural services (projects for schools, dance and musical events, etc.).

Although the activities of the association focus mainly on providing support for Vietnamese migrants in Germany, a project is currently being planned that would build sports grounds for a school for the disabled in Hanoi.



## 6. The Vietnamese diaspora in Hesse

The following table shows the number of Vietnamese citizens registered as being resident in Hesse at the end of 2005, and the pertinent figures.

**Table 3: Vietnamese citizens registered as resident in Hesse (31 December 2005)**

Male	1,843 (46%)
Female	2,181 (54%)
<b>Hesse total</b>	<b>4,024</b>
With permanent resident rights	1,760 (44%)
With limited residence rights	1,769 (44%)
Under threat of deportation	204 (5%)
Residence rights accorded in the wake of an application for political asylum	30 (0.7%)

Source: Statistics Office Hesse

Between 1993 and 2005, 3,285 Vietnamese citizens were also naturalised. It can thus be calculated that the Vietnamese diaspora in Hesse comprised **about 7,300 individuals** at the end of 2005. It seems safe to assume that the majority of these individuals are former boat people, since only a very few Vietnamese from the *New Laender* moved to the west of the country after reunification.

In Frankfurt am Main alone, 653 Vietnamese had registered their first place of residence at the end of 2005. Of these, 358 (54.8%) were female. The statistics kept by the City of Frankfurt do not give any information about Vietnamese citizens who have acquired German citizenship.

The **network** of Vietnamese in the greater Frankfurt area is very loose. Since most Vietnamese migrants integrated well after their arrival in Germany between 1975 and 1985, and the majority found well-paid employment, there is no immediate need for mutual assistance. Two or three times a year they meet to celebrate special holidays (e.g. the Vietnamese New Year and the Autumn Moon Festival) or for charitable events.

Between 300 and 400 people came to a meeting held in Frankfurt at the beginning of December 2006 by the “*Verein der vietnamesischen Flüchtlinge in Frankfurt und Umgebung e. V.*” (Association of Vietnamese Refugees in and around Frankfurt) (see Example 3). Almost all of them came from former West Germany. This cultural and charitable event involved Vietnamese dancing and music, and individual groups or families sold Vietnamese specialities they had made themselves. The money raised was donated to ex-servicemen who sustained disabilities fighting for South Vietnam until 1975, who receive no support from the current Vietnamese government. To illustrate the need for assistance, a small exhibition was organised with photographs of the disabled ex-servicemen in their home surroundings.

**Example 3: Verein der vietnamesischen Flüchtlinge in Frankfurt am Main und Umgebung  
(Association of Vietnamese refugees in and around Frankfurt) e.V., Hanau**

**Objective: Network Vietnamese migrants; promotion of Vietnamese culture and of a German-Vietnamese exchange**

55 members

The association organises charity and cultural events (especially music and dancing) as well as organising for Vietnamese groups to participate in fairs, neighbourhood and street parties. It also attends the meeting of the councils for foreigners in Frankfurt. The activities are financed via donations and receive occasional one-off support from the City of Frankfurt. The association does not implement any projects in Vietnam, but does transfer donations to recipients in Vietnam. In 2006, for instance, support was provided to South Vietnamese who are still suffering from the consequences of the Vietnam War.

## 7. The Vietnamese diaspora in the other 14 federal states

No studies were undertaken for the other 14 federal states, free states and free Hanseatic cities (see Table 1 for the number of Vietnamese living in the particular states). In interviews, however, repeated mention was made of active Vietnamese associations in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. In particular, the association “*Dien Hong – Gemeinsam unter einem Dach e. V.*” from Rostock enjoyed nationwide acclaim, since it was founded in response to the xenophobic attacks on the hostel Sonnenblumenhaus in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in August 1992. This association also publishes a Vietnamese-German information service.<sup>12</sup>

During our research on Berlin and Hesse, we also came upon some associations in other federal states: “*Song Hong e. V.*” in Potsdam, “*Regentropfen e. V.*” in Aschaffenburg and “*Viethilfe e. V.*” in Paderborn (see Example 4).

### Example 4: Viethilfe in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Help for Vietnam in the Federal Republic of Germany) e.V., Paderborn

**Objective: Support needy children in Vietnam**

6 members; [www.viethilfe.de](http://www.viethilfe.de)

The association uses donations to build schools, especially in the Mekong Delta but also in rural parts of Da Nang and Quang Nam provinces. Between 2003 and 2006 the construction of 10 schools, mostly with several classes, was financed. The association also provides food and school materials for needy children. They finance operations and wheelchairs for needy children and take on sponsorships for individual schoolchildren.

Finally, the association is supporting a project for street children in Ho Chi Minh City.

<sup>12</sup> See Phuong Kollat, “Der Verein Dien Hong – Selbsthilfe und Integrationsarbeit in Rostock“, in: Karin Weiss and Mike Dennis (eds.), “Erfolg in der Nische? Die Vietnamesen in der DDR und in Ostdeutschland“. See also the commemorative paper written by Renate Heusch-Lahl to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the association Dien Hong, “10 Jahre ‚Dien Hong – Gemeinsam unter einem Dach e. V.‘ - 10 Jahre gegen Rassismus und Ausgrenzung; 10 Jahre für Gleichberechtigung und Annäherung zwischen Deutschen und Zugewanderten“.

## 8. Results of the study

The Vietnamese diaspora in Berlin and Hesse has organised numerous associations, most of which are very active. Because of the very diverse migration background and context of the Vietnamese arriving in the FRG and those that came to work as contract workers in the GDR prior to 1990, the purposes and activities of their respective associations vary widely.

There appears to be a correlation between the living and working situations of the Vietnamese interviewed in the course of the study and the interests of their associations. The better the socioeconomic situation of the Vietnamese living here, the greater their capacity and their willingness to undertake activities with associations that will benefit their country of origin. A large number of the associations in Berlin address the integration concerns of the Vietnamese who live in the city, and provide them with the support they need to cope with day-to-day problems. Another important field of activities comprises efforts to promote intercultural tolerance and understanding. The association "*Reistrommel e.V.*" (see Example 2) is, however, now planning its first project in Hanoi in addition to its work to support Vietnamese migrants in Berlin and the *New Laender*. The example of the project "Wheelchairs for Vietnam" (see Example 1) shows that professional, well-integrated Vietnamese individuals can become actively involved in their country of origin.

The activities of the associations we contacted in the Frankfurt area focused on cultural and charitable events.

There are other associations outside the Frankfurt area, which implement interesting projects in Vietnam and thus offer cooperation potential. In Paderborn (North-Rhine/Westphalia), the association "*Viethilfe e.V.*" provides support for needy children in Vietnam, including the construction of schools in rural areas. The association *Regentropfen e.V.* is also planning to build primary schools in Vietnam.

The number of members involved in the associations and initiatives explored for the purposes of this study ranged from individuals to associations with 400 members; the circle of friends and sponsors of the individual associations comprises up to 500 individuals. The financial and organisational capacities of the associations, however, are limited. In terms of development activities in particular, the aspect of integrating the Vietnamese diaspora in Germany plays an important part.

The limited number of the associations and initiatives covered by this study does not allow us to make a conclusive assessment of the development activities and the cooperation potential of the Vietnamese diaspora in Germany. The involvement of additional associations in the work of the GTZ project Migration and Development would be likely to produce interesting results in this respect.

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