

Prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program (RAD)

The Vietnamese Diaspora in the United States

June 2015 Revised

Summary

Vietnamese immigrants and their children (the first and second generations) comprise one of the largest diaspora populations in the United States, at 1.8 million individuals. A large proportion of the first generation arrived in the United States as refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War: more than 200,000 were paroled in during the immediate aftermath of the war (1975-77) and, as the refugee admissions program began to be formalized, approximately 588,000 Vietnamese were admitted as refugees between 1978 and 2013. Vietnamese remain by far the largest group of people admitted as refugees to the United States. After 1996, refugee admissions from Vietnam diminished sharply, and a growing proportion of new legal permanent residents entered subsequently as family-based immigrants.

The refugee origins of the Vietnamese diaspora have shaped its experience in the United States. Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of the first generation arrived before the year 2000, compared to 64 percent of the U.S. immigrant population overall, and a much higher than average proportion of Vietnamese immigrants have become U.S. citizens (72 percent versus 44 percent of all immigrants). This is the highest citizenship proportion of the 15 groups in the Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program (RAD) analysis.¹ Nevertheless, about 2 percent of all unauthorized immigrants in the United States are of Vietnamese nationality.

Vietnamese immigrants are a relatively old population, with a median age of 44 and 13 percent over age 65. But the U.S.-born children of Vietnamese immigrants (the second generation) are younger, with a median age of 13. Seventy-three percent of the Vietnamese second generation has a mother and father who were born in Vietnam, one of the highest shares with both parents born in the country of origin among the 15 groups analyzed for RAD.

The Vietnamese diaspora has educational achievement and employment levels on par with the general U.S. population and a higher average income. Members of the Vietnamese diaspora age 25 and older are slightly more likely than the general U.S. population to hold a bachelor's degree (22 percent versus 20 percent) as their highest credential, but somewhat less likely to hold an advanced degree (7 percent versus 11 percent). Those in the Vietnamese diaspora age 16 and older have labor force participation and employment rates similar to the U.S. population as a whole. Although members of the Vietnamese diaspora are less likely than the general

¹ All Rights Reserved. © 2015 Migration Policy Institute. Information for reproducing excerpts from this report can be found at www.migrationpolicy.org/about/copyright-policy. The RAD Diaspora Profile series covers U.S.-based Bangladeshi, Colombian, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Filipino, Ghanaian, Haitian, Indian, Kenyan, Mexican, Moroccan, Nigerian, Pakistani, Salvadoran, and Vietnamese diaspora populations. This updates the initial July 2014 diaspora profile to correct an error.

population to be employed in managerial or professional occupations, their median annual household income is higher than the U.S. average (\$52,000 compared to \$50,000) as are the proportions found in the top 25 percent and 10 percent of the U.S. household income distribution.

Vietnamese immigrants are widely dispersed across the United States, though they live in greatest concentrations in California. About 230,000 Vietnamese immigrants reside in the Los Angeles metropolitan area and another 95,000 in and around San Jose. There are also significant Vietnam-born populations in Texas, Washington, Florida, and Virginia.

The Vietnamese diaspora in the United States has established many well-funded and professionally managed organizations. Many of these groups provide social services to the Vietnamese immigrant community, while others offer cultural and linguistic education or create opportunities for professional networking. There are also political action committees (PACs) representing the interests of Vietnamese Americans: the Human Rights for Vietnam PAC and the Vietnamese American PAC. As political refugees, many Vietnamese immigrants remain unfriendly with the government of Vietnam, but some of the newer diaspora organizations, often established by younger diaspora members, have taken an interest in the development of Vietnam, such as OneVietnam and Sunflower Mission. Among the 106 U.S.-based Vietnamese diaspora organizations identified for the RAD analysis, 12 reported having raised more than \$1 million over the course of their previous fiscal year; another 24 had annual revenues in excess of \$200,000. Boat People S.O.S., the Vietnamese Community of Orange County, and the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (Viet-AID) are some of the most prominent of these organizations.

The United States is home to the largest Vietnamese diaspora in the world, with Australia and Canada also being major destination countries. Remittances to Vietnam, at \$10 billion in 2012, amounted to 7.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The largest share of Vietnam's remittances—\$5.7 billion in 2012—originated in the United States.

Detailed Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics²

Analysis of data from 2009-13 reveals a Vietnamese diaspora in the United States of about 1.8 million individuals, counting immigrants born in Vietnam and U.S.-born individuals with at least one parent who was born in Vietnam.

First Generation (Vietnamese immigrants in the United States)

- Approximately 1.1 million immigrants from Vietnam resided in the United States.
- In recent decades, the population of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States has increased both in size and proportion of the overall foreign-born population. In 1980 there were approximately 230,000 Vietnamese immigrants in the United States, constituting 1.6 percent of the total immigrant population at that time; by 2012, their share of all U.S. immigrants had risen to 3.1 percent.³

² Unless otherwise noted, estimates for the diaspora population and its characteristics are based on Migration Policy Institute analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys, using five years of pooled data (2009 through 2013) collected in March of each year. All Census Bureau data were accessed from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) (Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

³ These estimates are based on MPI analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey and the 1980 Census.

- Between 1974 and 1977, more than 200,000 Vietnamese were paroled into the United States. Between 1978 and 2013, approximately 588,000 Vietnam-born people were admitted to the United States as refugees.⁴
- Seventy-two percent of immigrants from Vietnam came to the United States before 2000, above the average for the U.S. immigrant population overall (64 percent).
- Vietnamese were more likely to be U.S. citizens than the immigrant population overall: 72 percent versus 44 percent.
- Vietnam-born immigrants made up approximately 2 percent of the U.S. unauthorized population in 2011.⁵
- Eighty-two percent of Vietnamese immigrants were working age (18 to 64), though a sizable share was 65 and older (13 percent). The median age of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States was 44.

Second Generation (U.S.-born with at least one Vietnam-born parent)⁶

- The second-generation Vietnamese population consisted of approximately 689,000 U.S.-born individuals with at least one Vietnam-born parent.
- Seventy-three percent of second-generation individuals reported having two Vietnam-born parents, the fourth-highest proportion with both parents born in the country of origin in the RAD analysis (after India, Bangladesh, and Haiti).
- The median age of second-generation Vietnamese diaspora members was 13. The majority of the population, 64 percent, was under age 18, and 13 percent was working age (18 to 64).

Educational Attainment

- Those in the Vietnamese diaspora age 25 and older were slightly more likely than the general U.S. population to have a bachelor's degree, but less likely to have an advanced degree.
- Twenty-two percent of those age 25 and older had a bachelor's degree as their highest educational credential versus 20 percent of the U.S. population overall.
- Seven percent of the Vietnamese diaspora age 25 and older held a master's degree, PhD, or an advanced professional degree versus 11 percent of the general U.S. population.

Household Income

- The median annual incomes of Vietnamese diaspora households and all U.S. households were roughly equivalent: \$52,000 versus \$50,000.

4 This estimate is based on administrative data provided to MPI by the U.S. Department of State's Refugee Processing Center.

5 Michael Hofer, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan Baker, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2011," Population Estimates, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012), http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2011.pdf.

6 U.S. born is defined as born in the United States or born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent.

- Twenty-eight percent of Vietnamese diaspora households reported annual incomes above \$90,000, the threshold for the top 25 percent of U.S. households overall.
- Thirteen percent of Vietnamese diaspora households had annual incomes exceeding \$140,000, the threshold for the top 10 percent of U.S. households.

Employment

- Vietnamese diaspora members age 16 and older were slightly more likely than the general U.S. population to be in the labor force: 66 percent versus 64 percent.
- Within the labor force, the employment rate was nearly the same for the Vietnamese diaspora and the general U.S. population: 92 percent versus 91.
- Members of the Vietnamese diaspora were in professional or managerial occupations at a lower rate than the general U.S. labor force: 24 versus 31 percent.⁷ These occupations include specialized fields (e.g. engineering, science, law, or education) as well as administrative and managerial jobs (e.g. finance or human resources).

Geographic Distribution⁸

- The Vietnamese diaspora was widely scattered across the United States.
- California had the largest number of Vietnamese immigrants with a population of 490,000, followed by Texas at 150,000. The states of Washington, Florida, and Virginia were each home to between 45,000 and 50,000 Vietnamese immigrants.
- Among U.S. metropolitan areas, Los Angeles had the largest Vietnamese immigrant population (230,000). The 95,000 Vietnamese immigrants living in the San Jose metropolitan area made up 5.2 percent of the population there, representing the highest concentration in any metropolitan area. Houston, San Francisco, Dallas, and Washington, DC each had more than 50,000 Vietnamese immigrant residents.

Remittance Volume

- Vietnam's GDP was \$155.8 billion in 2012. Remittances, valued at \$10.1 billion, were 7.1 percent of GDP.
- The Vietnamese diaspora in the United States transferred about \$5.7 billion in remittances to Vietnam in 2012. The United States was by far the top source of remittances to Vietnam, as well as the top destination for emigrants from Vietnam. Other major countries for emigrants and remittances included Australia and Canada.

7 This rate is calculated based on the share of all individuals reporting an occupation for their primary job at the time the CPS was administered, or their most recent primary job.

8 Analysis based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008-12 American Community Surveys. Note that geographic distribution is only analyzed for the immigrant population. Second-generation Vietnamese diaspora members are not included in this section due to data limitations.

Tables, Maps, and Graphs

Characteristics of the Vietnamese Diaspora in the United States, 2009-13

	Vietnamese Diaspora in the U.S.*	Total U.S. Population
Household Income		
Median household income	\$52,000	\$50,000
Average household size	3.3	2.5
Share of households with high incomes (\$90,000+)	28%	25%
Share of households with very high incomes (\$140,000+)	13%	10%
Employment		
Total population age 16 and older	1,319,000	239,386,000
Share in the labor force	66%	64%
... that was employed	92%	91%
... that was in a professional occupation [†]	24%	31%
Educational Attainment **		
Total population age 25 and older	1,108,000	201,925,000
... with less than high school education	22%	13%
... with high school or some college education	49%	57%
... with a bachelor's degree	22%	20%
... with an advanced degree	7%	11%
Population Characteristics by Generation		
First- and Second-Generation Immigrant Population	1,784,000	73,140,000
First-generation immigrant population***	1,095,000	38,468,000
... that was working age (18-64)	82%	81%
... that entered the U.S. before 2000	72%	64%
... naturalized as U.S. citizens	72%	44%
Second-generation population****	689,000	34,672,000
... that was under age 18	64%	46%
... that was working age (18-64)	13%	43%
... with only one parent from Vietnam	27%	

* defined as all first and second generation

** highest level reported

*** all individuals who report Vietnam as their place of birth, excluding U.S. births abroad

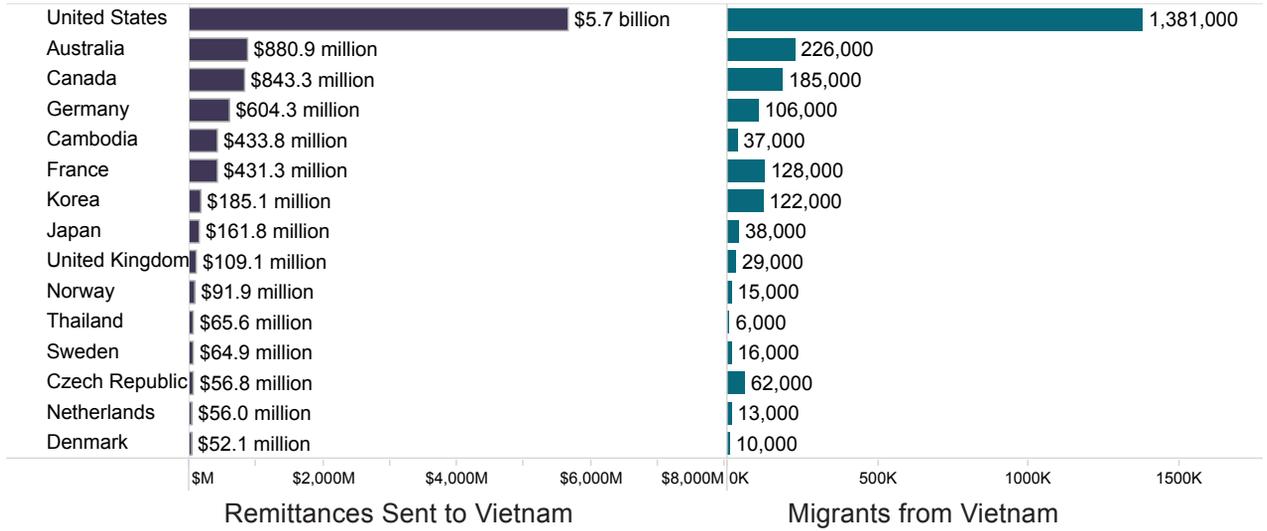
**** all individuals who report having at least one parent born in Vietnam

[†]calculated based on the share of all individuals reporting an occupation for their primary job at the time the Current Population Survey (CPS) was administered, or for their most recent primary job.

Note: Estimates are based on Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey pooled 2009-13 data.

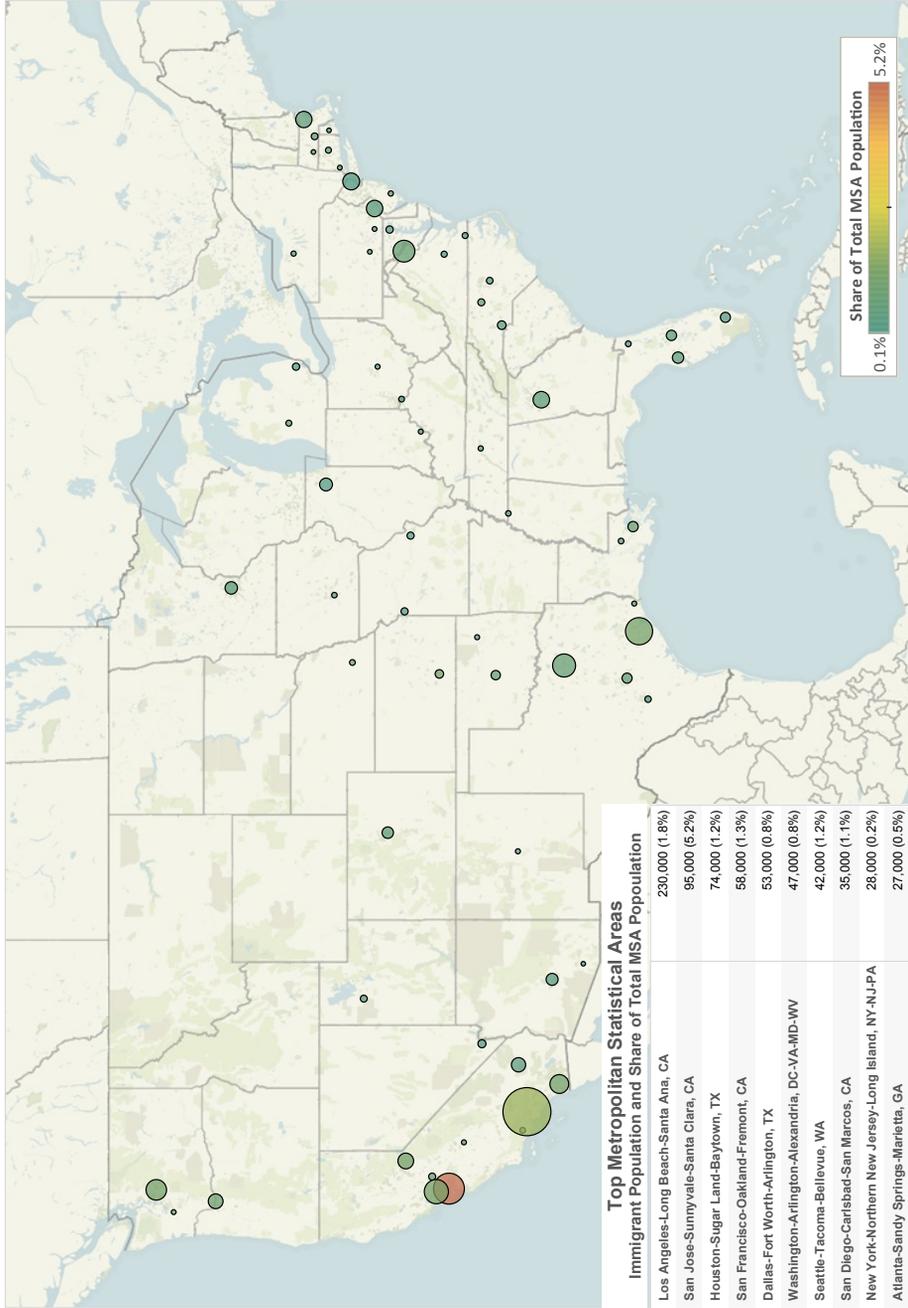
Source: All Census Bureau data were accessed from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) (Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

Remittance Inflows to Vietnam by Sending Country and the Vietnamese Emigrant Population, 2012



Source: MPI's analysis of World Bank Prospects Group tables for annual remittance inflows and outflows (October 2013 update) and the 2012 Bilateral Remittance Matrix, the World Bank's World Development Indicators, and the United Nations Population Division's Matrix of Total Migrant Stock by Origin and Destination (mid-2013).

Immigrant Population from Vietnam
 Displayed by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)



Map based on Migration Policy Institute tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B05006.

Source: MPI's analysis of 2010-12 ACS, pooled.