

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Navigating Identities — the experiences of LGBTQ+ internal migrant workers in Vietnam

## MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Motivations and preparation for migration

The participants' motivations for migration were multifaceted, driven by a combination of *personal aspirations, economic necessities, and social factors*. Many sought higher education and better employment opportunities in urban centres. Economic factors, including the desire for higher wages and improved living standards, were also significant. Additionally, *the pursuit of personal autonomy and escape from hostile environments*, especially for LGBTQ+ individuals, motivated many to migrate.



Urban centres were seen as hubs of opportunity, offering diverse job markets, educational institutions, and more tolerant social environments. Participants strategically chose destinations based on factors such as job availability, cost of living, and social acceptance. However, navigating urban life, including housing, employment, and social integration, presented challenges.

Many participants relied on personal networks, particularly family and friends, to navigate the complexities of city life. These connections provided invaluable support, ranging from practical advice on housing and employment to emotional reassurance. Online platforms also played a crucial role, allowing participants to connect with fellow migrants, seek advice, and build a sense of community.

Participants often relied on social networks for accommodation, sharing living spaces with friends or family to reduce costs. However, this could compromise privacy and comfort. Financial challenges were significant, with many struggling to cover basic expenses. The high cost of living in urban areas, coupled with unstable incomes, made it difficult to save money. Transgender individuals' additional financial burdens exist due to medical expenses.

### Living and work experiences at a new destination

Urban environments offered opportunities for greater social freedom and self-expression. Participants formed connections with other LGBTQ+ individuals through social media and community groups. However, challenges in building deep friendships and navigating social dynamics persisted. *While some individuals found acceptance and understanding, others faced discrimination and misunderstanding.*

*Navigating administrative procedures proved to be a significant challenge, particularly for transgender individuals.* The complexity of bureaucratic processes and the lack of clear guidance often led to frustration and delays. Additionally, the fear of discrimination and potential legal repercussions discouraged some participants from fully engaging with administrative processes.

*Participants faced numerous challenges in their job search, including discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status.* Many were forced to conceal their identities to increase their chances of employment, leading to significant mental and emotional stress. Additionally, the lack of transparency and fairness in the recruitment process further hindered their job prospects.

Many participants experienced job insecurity and frequent job changes due to factors such as low wages, poor working conditions, and discrimination. The nature of their work, particularly in sectors like sex work or freelance work, often contributed to instability and uncertainty. The constant search for new opportunities led to a cycle of precarity, impacting their overall well-being. *Additionally, individuals from rural areas often faced cultural barriers and regional bias when seeking employment in urban areas.*



## Living and work experiences at a new destination (cont.)

The experiences of LGBTQ+ migrant workers in Vietnam are marked by a range of challenges, including inconsistent onboarding and training, limited access to benefits and insurance, and discrimination in the workplace. Many participants faced difficulties in understanding and navigating employment contracts and insurance policies, highlighting the need for improved education and support.

*While some participants were able to express their identities more freely in social settings, they often felt constrained in professional environments.* LGBTQ+ migrant workers often encounter significant challenges in the workplace, including discrimination, prejudice, and a lack of understanding. These individuals may face different forms of discrimination, such as exclusion from social events, being the target of derogatory remarks, or being overlooked for promotions. Moreover, they may experience overt discrimination, such as harassment, bullying, and even termination of employment. The fear of negative consequences, such as job loss or social ostracism, often compels LGBTQ+ individuals to suppress their identities and conform to societal expectations. This can lead to a constant state of stress and anxiety, as they navigate a complex web of social and professional pressures. *Balancing their personal and professional lives becomes a delicate act, as they must often choose between authenticity and safety. The suppression of their true selves can result in feelings of isolation, alienation, and a diminished sense of belonging in the workplace.*

## Support and advices

Migrants rely heavily on **social networks** for support and information. **Friends, family, and online communities** provide crucial emotional and practical assistance, helping newcomers navigate challenges in housing, employment, and cultural adjustment. Sharing experiences, advice, and recommendations through online platforms and in-person networks is essential for migrants to adapt to their new environments.

Mental health support is crucial for migrants, especially those facing isolation and stress. Access to counselling services, community support groups, and online resources can significantly improve their well-being. Additionally, **a strong sense of self-reliance and resourcefulness** is essential for navigating the challenges of migration. While community support is valuable, individuals must also take the initiative to address their own needs and seek assistance when necessary. However, systemic challenges, such as limited access to healthcare, legal services, and social welfare programs, can further exacerbate the difficulties faced by migrants.

## Future Plans Of Migrants: Aspirations And Goals Post-Migration

The participants expressed a diverse range of future aspirations, **reflecting their personal values, goals, and circumstances**. Many aimed to pursue higher education to enhance their career prospects or to establish their own businesses. Others prioritized family and community, intending to return home to care for loved ones or contribute to their communities. Additionally, personal growth and well-being were important considerations, with participants seeking to balance work and personal life and to cultivate strong social connections. These aspirations highlight the **resilience, ambition, and hopefulness** of the participants, even as they navigate the challenges of migration and integration.



Please visit [thuvien.lgbt/documents](https://thuvien.lgbt/documents) to read the full research report.  
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