

First Submitted: 20 December 2023 / Accepted: 21 January 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61707/dsywa603>

Access to Educational Services for Children from Migrant Worker Households in Vietnam's Industrial Zones

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, Vietnam's export processing zones and industrial parks have grown in number, drawing foreign laborers to places like Hanoi, Bac Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Binh Duong, and Long An. In such scenario, getting social services is extremely difficult for immigrant workers in industrial parks and processing zones for a variety of reasons. The availability of schooling for children from working-class and immigrant families is a common example. In addition to having a direct impact on the stability of immigrant workers' lives and the growth of enterprises in industrial parks and export processing zones, failing to address the learning needs of this particular set of children also lowers their quality of life. Impacting the Vietnamese government's ability to carry out its obligations under the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Based on the synthesis and analysis of secondary data sources gathered in Bac Ninh and Hanoi, the article's main goal is to give a general picture of how immigrant working families currently ensure their children's right to an education. From there, some suggestions are made to address this issue in the future from the standpoint of social work.

Keywords: Children's Rights, Education, Migrant Workers, Social Work, Industrial Zones, Viet Nam.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam had approximately 563 industrial zones planned in 61 out of 63 provinces and cities as of the first quarter of 2023. There are 398 industrial parks in the nation; 292 of them are operational and 106 are in the process of being built. Over 10,000 DDI projects and almost 11,000 FDI projects with a combined registered capital of more than 340 billion USD have been drawn to IPs and EPZs. (Massard et al., n.d.) The provinces with the highest number of active intellectual property in the nation are Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Ho Chi Minh City, Long An, and Bac Ninh [Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2023]. This fact has shown the right line between the Communist Party and the State when advocating to promote the development of industrial zones and export processing zones, motivating Vietnam to become an industrial country shortly. (Nhung et al., 2023) Two new trends in developing industrial parks and export processing zones in our country today: Building an industrial park model associated with urban and service (WHA – Nghe An) and an industrial park model operating according to the digitalization trend. These models aim to build a sustainable economy and green growth in Vietnam in the coming time. (Geographical & 2021, n.d.)

Hanoi and Bac Ninh cities have many industrial zones in the North. In particular, the Government has approved Hanoi to establish 33 industrial parks, export processing zones, and high-tech parks. Of which, 18 industrial parks have been planned, nine have come into operation, attracting 663 projects. The total number of employees working in industrial zones in Hanoi is currently about 161,896 people [Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2021]. In Bac Ninh, as of June 2021, there were 16 industrial parks, and the number of enterprises in the province has more than doubled from 2015 to 2020 (from 4,492 enterprises to 10,123 enterprises). (M. Nguyen et al., n.d.) The total number of employees in provincial enterprises has increased from 281,341 people in 2015 to 454,225 in 2020 (an increase of 47.3%), of which more than 70% of workers work in industrial zones [Bac Ninh Provincial Statistics Office, 2021]. The development of industrial zones and export processing zones increases the number of enterprises and creates many jobs, attracting migrant workers from other localities to these areas to work. Bac Ninh's immigration rate in 2020 compared to 2015 increased by 155.8%, while the province's migration rate was always low; the highest was only 5.09% [Bac Ninh Provincial Statistics Office,

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2021]. More than 60% of workers working in industrial zones of Hanoi and Bac Ninh are now women. (Q. Pham et al., 2016) When migrating to industrial and export processing zones, young workers often get married, have children, and settle down in areas near the workplace. Most children in these families will attend school at local educational institutions where the shelter is located. However, the ability to provide educational services to this group of children is limited due to inadequacies in awareness, pressure on facility conditions, and policy implementation. This reality is adversely affecting the livelihoods of migrant worker households, affecting the production stability of enterprises and, in particular, harming the commitments of the Government of Viet Nam to ensure children's access to education enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). (D. Chi et al., n.d.)

The article approaches the issue of ensuring the right to education of children in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs from the perspective of social work – a science, a professional profession pursuing action goals to ensure social security, social justice, and progress. Children from migrant worker families impoverished migrant workers are among those needing social work assistance. This article clarifies two aspects of the issue: (i) General description of difficulties and challenges in ensuring children's access to education in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs; (ii) Propose some recommendations for solutions to solve the problem from the perspective of Social Work.

METHODOLOGY

The research review shows that there have been many different approaches when it comes to understanding the issue of access to education of children of migrant workers, such as the policy analysis approach (assessing the problem from the perspective of implementing education policies), (D. Chi et al., n.d.) Human rights-based approach (considering children's access to education across four criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability). As mentioned above, this article explores the access to education of children in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs from the perspective of Social Work, approaching the issue from the standpoint of ensuring the implementation of children's rights in international conventions. In addition, the study applies President Ho Chi Minh's view on comprehensive education, concretized in Resolution No. 29- NQ/TW of the Party Central Committee (Session XI, 2013), on fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training. Accordingly, cultural education must be associated with education on ethics, lifestyle, education in practical skills, and application of knowledge into practice. Therefore, this article addresses the right of children in migrant working families to access education in all three dimensions: early childhood and universal general education, vocational education, life skills development, and specialized education. (T. Tran et al., 2018)

Regarding research methodology, the article uses secondary data sources from previously published related studies, combined with additional qualitative data obtained from 10 in-depth interviews with industrial park managers, educational institution managers, etc migrant workers with children attending school, representatives of local authorities, and business representatives in industrial zones of Hanoi and Bac Ninh. (T. Ha et al., 2022)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Children's rights are all that children need to live and grow healthily and safely. Children's rights aim to ensure that they are passive recipients of adult benevolence and active participants in their development. Children's rights are an integral part of human rights. (Accounting & 2020, 2019)

Children's right to access education is specified in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accordingly, every child has the right to education. Primary education is free and encourages the development of various forms of secondary education for all children. Discipline in schools should respect children's dignity and rights. More affluent countries must support poorer nations to achieve this [UNCRC, 1989]. In Vietnam, children's right to education and education is stipulated in many current legal documents such as the Constitution (2013), the Law on Children (2016), the Law on Education (2019), the Law on People with Disabilities (2010), the Law on Marriage and Family (2000), the Law on Vocational Education (2014) etc. Specially, Article 39 of the 2013. (T. H. Ha et al., 2022) Constitution stipulates: "Education development is the top national policy aimed at raising people's knowledge, developing human resources and fostering talents,

the State prioritizes investment and attracts other investment sources for education; care for preschool education; ensure that primary education is compulsory and that the State does not charge tuition fees; gradually universalize secondary education; development of higher education, professional education; implement reasonable scholarship and tuition policies...” [Constitution, 2013]. The Law on Children (2016) also stipulates: “Children have the right to education and learning to develop comprehensively and reach their full potential. Children are equal in learning and educational opportunities; develop talents, aptitudes, creativity and inventions” [Article 16, Law on Children, 2016].

Ensuring access to education for children is also mentioned in Clause 1, Article 44 of the Law on Children (2016): “The State shall adopt policies to support and ensure that all children attend school, minimizing the situation of children dropping out of school; adopt policies to support disadvantaged children, children belonging to poor households, near-poor households, ethnic minority children, children living in border communes, mountainous areas, islands and communes with tough socio-economic conditions to access universal education, inclusive education, vocational training, and job placement suitable to age and labour law” [Article 44, Law on Children, 2016].(D. Q. Chi & van den Broek, 2020)

Ensuring children’s access to education in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs - Challenges

Public preschool establishments have not met the access needs of Children in migrant working families; non-public preschool establishments still have many shortcomings, high Costs and potential risks. Most industrial and export processing zones do not have preschools for children of workers and employees. The results of the study “Access to Early Childhood Education of Children of migrant workers - Current Situation and Policy Recommendations” by the Center for Education Support and Empowerment for Women (CEPEW) (under the Vietnam Association for Learning Promotion), in collaboration with the Vietnam Association for Education for All (VAEFA), show that Children of migrant workers are disadvantaged in terms of access to early childhood education, as well as the right to access care and play.(M. T. Nguyen et al., 2022) Due to the lack of kindergartens and kindergartens to serve the children of workers and local people, there have been many private and people-established preschool establishments “growing” for migrant workers to send their children. However, with a monthly fee of about 1 - 1.5 million VND, not all families have enough money. Therefore, the children were sent back to their hometowns to be cared for by grandfathers and grandmothers. According to statistics in 2014, the country has about 260 industrial parks and export processing zones in operation, with a total of 2.8 million employees, while there are only 112 preschools in industrial parks and export processing zones. This has led to a severe shortage of public preschool facilities for children.(Xuan Tran et al., 2019)

Table 1. Proportion of children in migrant working families attending preschool by type of educational institution

Unit: %

Education level	General		Divided by IPs in Hanoi				
	Amount	Rate, %	Noi Bai	North Thang Long	Southern Thang Long	Quang Minh	Sai Dong
Total number of children	331	100,0	64	88	49	66	64
Educational institutions of the industrial park	19	5,7	10,9	1,1	0,0	1,5	15,6
Public educational institutions of communes and wards	162	48,9	46,9	46,6	59,2	43,9	51,6
Private educational institutions of communes and wards	150	45,3	42,2	52,3	40,8	54,5	32,8

Source: Vietnam Association of Vocational Education and Social Work (2021)

The survey results in Table 1 showed that only 48.9% of children in migrant working families in 6 industrial zones in Hanoi attended preschool at public educational institutions; the rest had to participate in private institutions (45.3%). Table 1 also shows that the educational institutions of the industrial park have only met 5.7% of the children participating in school. (Tri et al., 2021) Although the Government has adopted policies to develop preschools in labour-intensive areas, the land fund planned for investment in building preschool education institutions is not enough.² Bac Thang Long Industrial Park (Hanoi) has over 60,000 workers and thousands of children, but only three public kindergartens are nearby.³ In Bac Ninh industrial zones, no kindergartens are built for workers' children [Nguyen Thi Thu Nguyet, 2020]. Similarly, in 10 industrial zones and industrial zones in Hanoi, no childcare facilities are built to serve nearly 165,000 workers [Hanoi Confederation of Labour, 2022]. Meanwhile, non-public preschool institutions still have many shortcomings. According to preliminary statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training, about 2/3 of the more than 16,000 independent preschool classes operating spontaneously are licensed. The rest have not been licensed because these establishments are not qualified in terms of facilities, problems with procedures for renting places, unstable teachers and staff, and limited qualifications. Young group owners lack weak managerial experience, expertise and expertise in preschool education care. In addition, the supervision inspection of the education department encountered difficulties, failing to detect errors in time to correct due to the spontaneous group of private independent preschool children and classes scattered in the residential area. Many cases of child abuse, food insecurity, unsafe infrastructure, low quality of education, etc., Mainly occur in spontaneous childcare facilities operating without a license. (Hoa et al., 2021)

Box 1. Difficulties in service quality at non-public preschools

"... Sending my children to private classes, I also determined that mainly the girls who watch my kid eats and sleep, I don't know if my kid can learn anything, the cost is higher than public school, even the recent abuse, my husband and I are worried, but there is no other way..."

(Interview migrant worker, female, 30 years old, Sai Dong Industrial Park, Hanoi)

Regulations on service provision at public preschools are unsuitable for the needs and work characteristics of workers and migrant workers in industrial parks and export processing Zones. Most preschools, especially public schools, only accept children aged 18 months and older, children aged 6 months to 18 months, and workers must send their children to private childcare or have relatives take care of them. (Zhao et al., n.d.) Migrant workers find it difficult to arrange time to pick up and drop off children, especially in public schools. Schools usually drop off children around 16:00 to 17:00, while many migrant workers in IPs and EPZs work in shifts, crews or overtime on Saturdays and Sundays. Meanwhile, private preschool facilities with time regulations can be more flexible (look late to 19 hours), but the cost is high. (T. Ha et al., n.d.)

Box 2. Difficulties in regulating pick-up and drop-off times at public preschools

"... Public schools only look after children during office hours, not on holidays (Saturday and Sunday), but workers mostly work shifts, mainly 2nd shifts, from 2 pm to 11 pm, working all Saturday. At times when many jobs, workers also work overtime, so sending their children to public schools, parents who cannot pick them up have to ask someone to pick them up. If both spouses have the same shift, it is challenging to arrange child care and must be looked after by other families".

(Results of discussion of workers group at Noi Bai Industrial Park, Hanoi)

"My wife and I are workers from other places to rent. When my kid was young, I asked my mother to help me, but my father was in the countryside and was not in good health, so she could not stay long. When my kid was about one year old, I had to send him to the landlady to look, and she also took in children in the same area. I will send my kid to class soon, but I still have to ask the landlord's husband to pick me up (with rent) because my wife and I can't pick up the kids..."

(Interview migrant worker, 26-year-old female, Tien Son Industrial Park, Bac Ninh)

The implementation of poliCies to support the development of presChool eduCation in IPs and EPZs, according to the Government's Decree 105/2020/ND-CP, still needs to improve. According to the approved regulations, private and people-founded preschool education institutions in industrial zones with many employees will be supported to equip one-time facilities at least VND 20 million. Children studying at preschool education institutions of the people-founded and private type that competent agencies have licensed to establish and operate by regulations have parents or caregivers and nurturers of children who are workers or employees working in industrial zones that are supported by enterprises signing labour contracts according to rules 160,000 VND/child/month and not more than nine months/year. Preschool teachers working at private preschool establishments in the area with industrial zones with standard qualifications for title training, labour contracts, and directly caring for children in classes where 30% of children are workers' children, employees in industrial zones are supported with 800,000 VND/month. However, implementing this policy in practice still has many barriers, such as the application process needing to be revised and completed. In many private preschool institutions, preschool teachers need to meet the criteria to receive support.(B. Tran et al., n.d.)

Box 3. Difficulties in implementing support policies under Decree 105/2020/ND-CP

"... According to the guidelines, to receive support of 160,000 / month, parents must apply for confirmation from the company where they are working. Some companies sign quickly, but there are also cases where they have to wait. The support payment is divided into two instalments (the first 4 months of the school year from August to December and the next 5 months in the next administrative year) due to the record keeping calculated by the administrative year to receive the 2nd phase of support. We must ask parents to apply for a new confirmation in January to save until the end of the school year (May). Many parents are slow to add documents, making it difficult for us to compile lists to send out within 15 days..."

(Interview manager of the private preschool establishment, 40-year-old female, Sai Dong Industrial Park, Hanoi)

"I also heard from the teacher that I applied for tuition support. I also did ask to confirm the company's labour contract submitted to the teacher but have not received the support".

(Interview migrant worker, female, 30 years old, Sai Dong Industrial Park, Hanoi)

For general education, the most significant barrier for children in migrant working families in IPs and EZPs is the issue of hukou. Although there is no requirement that children must have a permanent residence to attend public schools, in practice, schools often prioritize children with permanent residency, policy categories, and disadvantaged families first and then consider temporary resident types; this depends on the enrollment regulations of each school that the student wants to enroll. Only children in migrant worker households with a long-term brief residence registration period of more than 12 months will be identified as on the correct route. (L. Le et al., n.d.) However, most migrant workers are unaware of this problem. In particular, children from migrant worker households in industrial zones in Hanoi cannot access education services at the high school level due to Hanoi city's regulations on high school enrollment for public non-specialized high schools. Meanwhile, private schools at this level have high education costs beyond the affordability of most migrant worker households working in industrial zones. As a result, most children in migrant worker families working in industrial zones in Hanoi have to return to their hometowns to attend high school. This fact entails many consequences that make children lack attention and care from parents. Survey results in a recent study by the Vietnam Association of Vocational Education and Social Work in 2021 showed that only 1.8% of children in migrant working families in 6 IPs in Hanoi attend high school - this is too low compared to the actual needs of children of migrant workers in industrial zones current (Table 2).

Table 2. Child attendance rate in migrant worker families in industrial zones divided by education level

Unit: %

Education level	General		Divided by IPs in Hanoi				
	Amount	Rate, %	Noi Bai	North Thang Long	Southern Thang Long	Quang Minh	Sai Dong
Total number of children	628	100,0	127	136	100	157	108
Kindergarten/preschool/ kindergarten	331	52,7	50,4	64,7	49,0	42,0	59,3
Primary (level 1)	227	36,1	41,7	28,7	34,0	42,0	32,4
Middle school	59	9,4	7,1	5,1	14,0	13,4	7,4
High school	11	1,8	0,8	1,5	3,0	2,5	0,9

Source: Vietnam Association of Vocational Education and Social Work (2021)

Regarding special education, children in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs face difficulties accessing specialized education services when in need. A gap that is rarely mentioned when discussing the right of children to access education in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs is the need and level of access to specialized educational services for children with neurodevelopmental disorders (autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity, speech disorders, mental retardation, bipolar affective disorder, etc.). Qualitative survey results obtained from in-depth interviews show that not only universal education but the demand for access to specialized education of migrant workers in general as migrant workers in IPs and EPZs, in particular is tending to increase. But the most significant barrier is that in current Vietnamese laws, children with neurodevelopmental disorders are not yet regulated as children with disabilities. As a result, families and children do not receive support in education policies. Meanwhile, the cost to access this service is often relatively high compared to the income level of migrant workers, the number of construction facilities near IPs and EPZs is small, the time to pick up children is not suitable for parents' working hours are the most significant barriers mentioned in interview data. (C. Pham et al., 2017)

Box 4. Difficulties in accessing specialized education services

"... Our system has about 25% of children enrolled in school are children of migrant workers working in Tien Son, Que Vo, Yen Phong, Dai Dong industrial zones... There are a lot of difficulties for children, parents and people who do this service like us. The biggest difficulty for children's families is cost; for families of workers and migrant workers with children studying, tuition fees are a concern. While in terms of policy, the group of children with neurodevelopmental disorders does not have a specific policy to support them, etc. Specialized workers like us have little capital, and the local Government needs specific policies on land rent incentives or other support policies for specialized education institutions, so we would like to. Still, we cannot balance the cost if we completely waive tuition fees for these families".

(Interview, manager of specialized education system in Bac Ninh, female, 42 years old)

Thus, it can be seen that ensuring the right to access education for children in working families, workers in general, and migrant workers in industrial zones and industrial zones in particular currently exists many difficulties and challenges. This reality is causing many negative impacts on workers' families, threatening the production stability of enterprises, the progressive development of communities, and the goal of universal education in the country. Ensuring the right to education and education for this group of children is the responsibility of the State, relevant ministries, departments and branches from central to local levels. It is the social responsibility of enterprises to realize equal rights in access to education for children. Solving this problem requires interdisciplinary coordination to develop and implement comprehensive, sustainable and practical solutions.(T. Ha et al., 2023)

Some common groups of solutions

Group of solutions focusing on policies and local governments: Recommend the Government to issue special guidance circulars for localities to develop and implement preferential policies on land, credit, and tax to encourage socialization in investing in building non-public preschool facilities in industrial zones, export processing zones;

Study and amend to supplement regulations on compulsory land funds for the construction of educational institutions near industrial zones, and export processing zones right after the initial planning;Continue to implement policies to support the development of preschool education in IPs and EPZs according to the Government's Decree 105/2020/ND-CP, but it is necessary to simplify administrative procedures, speed up the processing of applications and pay support to migrant workers;Study and amend regulations on household registration and enrollment regulations on "on- line" and "off-line" enrollment in the examination of entrance dossiers at all education levels to ensure equal access to education among children in migrant and non-migrant working families;(L. H. Le & Nguyen, 2023)

Regularly organize propaganda to raise awareness for people in the community and businesses about the responsibility to ensure children's rights and access to education. Group of solutions focusing on businesses: Promoting corporate social responsibility in coordinating with local authorities to invest in new construction, renovation, and expansion of educational institutions near industrial zones and export processing zones; Promote the role of trade unions in enterprises to negotiate and develop collective bargaining agreements, including policies to support education for children of migrant working families such as tuition fee support, school buses, etc., special education allowances for workers with children with special education, etc.(L. H. Le & Nguyen, 2023)

Amending and supplementing internal regulations, supporting to accelerate the certification of labour contracts for cases where employees need to make documents to receive support from state policies.Group of solutions

focusing on educational service providers: Organize periodic surveys and assessments of learners' needs and academic service provision capacity to propose to local authorities proactively plans to renovate and expand facilities, avoid overcrowding caused by rapidly increasing migration; (L. H. Le & Nguyen, 2023)

For preschool education institutions in industrial zones, export processing zones need to research solutions to be able to flexibly provide services outside of office hours to serve the needs of households of workers and labourers;

Regularly conduct training and retraining to improve the quality of human resources to provide the best services to the community. The group of solutions focuses on migrant workers' families and people in the community: Migrant workers working in industrial zones and export processing zones need to actively explore administrative policies and procedures, propose support to businesses and local authorities to create the best conditions for children to access education; For the community, it is necessary to promote the roles and resources of organizations and individuals in the community to support the implementation of the right to access education for children in migrant worker families. The Front Working Committee supervises and helps ensure that class groups operate safely and effectively. (L. H. Le & Nguyen, 2023)

Roles and activities of social workers

Children in migrant worker families face many difficulties in accessing social services that need attention and support from social workers. Ensuring the right to access education for this group of children is one of the tasks of social workers in enterprises, industrial zones, Social work centres, social work in schools, learning promotion associations, children's rights protection associations, etc. In the process of implementing solutions, social workers can perform some of the following support activities: (B. Tran et al., n.d.)

Advocating for the development of policies to support access to education, such as tuition fee exemption, adjustment of household registration regulations, and specific guidelines for groups of children with neurodevelopmental disorders in migrant working families in industrial zones and export processing zones to exercise access to education; Organize communication strategies for migrant workers, employers, and people in communities to raise awareness of their responsibilities to ensure access to education for children in general and children in migrant worker families in particular; (Xuan Tran et al., 2019)

Coordinate with trade unions in advocating and negotiating with employers to implement programs to support access to education for children of migrant workers; Providing and connecting special education intervention services for children in migrant working families in industrial zones and export processing zones when in need; Organizing parenting courses for migrant workers on parenting skills to understand children; School counselling for children in migrant worker families;

Participate in supervising the quality of private preschool education service providers in the locality to prevent and prevent situations of violence and abuse against children; Consulting, policy consultation, guidance for migrant worker families on administrative procedures, making documents to receive support; Mobilizing resources from all parties to propose, formulate, and organize the implementation of projects and models to support access to education for children in working families, migrant workers in community-based IPs, and EZPs (models of love classes, community education, etc.); Collect data, develop reports, conduct surveys on children's access to education needs in migrant working families in IPs and EZPs to make forecasts, advise on management and development strategies for agencies (local authorities, the management board of IPs, EZPs, etc.).

CONCLUSION

Ensuring the right to access education for children in general and children in migrant working families in IPs and EPZs is a matter of concern to society. Due to many different reasons, implementing this group of children's access to education is facing many difficulties and challenges. The State has issued many support policies to increase the level of access to education for children of migrant workers in industrial zones and industrial zones. However, the effectiveness of the policy still needs to be improved. Reality requires implementing more synchronous models and solutions, affecting many stakeholders from ministries,

departments, local authorities, enterprises, educational institutions, migrant working families in Ips and EPZs, and people in the community. Social work is a science, a professional profession that pursues the goals of bringing social justice and ensuring social security for groups in need of support in many aspects. Therefore, providing access to education for children in migrant working families, especially low-income migrant working families, is one of the tasks of professional social workers in schools, enterprises, and Social work centres in localities. In various roles, social workers provide interventions and support for migrant working children and families to better access comprehensive education services from preschool general education to specialized education.

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