# ETHNIC ECONOMY, DEBTS, AND THE UNEVEN PATHS OF MOBILITY AMONG VIETNAMESE MIGRANTS IN HUNGARY

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**Abstract**

This paper seeks to examine the experiences of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary, which specifically puts a focus on their ethnic economy. Using qualitative data and an intersectional perspective, it explores the ways ethnic economy, debt, and related ethnic apparatus shape how people live their everyday life and how they navigate through options of future opportunities. This paper finds that ethnic businesses, especially restaurants and shops, together with the debt factor, form a powerful duo in shaping the paths towards upward mobility that is arguably limited in most of the cases. Ultimately, the findings show that while migrants show strong effort and resilience, deep structural barriers continue to restrict full integration and upward mobility.

**Keywords:** migration, social mobility, ethnic economy, debt, Vietnamese
**Discipline:** cultural anthropology

**Absztrakt**

ETNIKAI GAZDASÁG, ADÓSSÁGOK ÉS A MOBILITÁS EGYENETLEN ÚTJAI A MAGYARORSZÁGON TARTÓZKODÓ VIETNAMI MIGRÁNSOK KÖRÉBEN

Jelen tanulmány célja a Magyarországon élő vietnámi migránsok tapasztalatainak vizsgálata, különös tekintettel az etnikai gazdaság szerepére. Kvalitatív adatok felhasználásával, valamint interszekcionális

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megközelítés alkalmazásával elemzi, hogy az etnikai gazdaság, az eladósodás, valamint az ezekhez kapcsolódó etnikai intézményi struktúrák miként formálják az egyének mindennapi életvilágát, illetve azt, ahogyan a jövőbeli lehetőségek különböző opciói között navigálnak. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy az etnikai vállalkozások – különösen az éttermek és kiskereskedelmi egységek – az eladósodás jelenségével összekapcsolódva olyan erőteljes strukturális tényezőegyüttest alkotnak, amely meghatározza a felfelé irányuló társadalmi mobilitás pályáit, amelyek a legtöbb esetben korlátozottak maradnak. Az eredmények összességében azt mutatják, hogy noha a migránsok jelentős erőfeszítéseket tesznek és számottevő rezilienciát tanúsítanak, a mélyen beágyazott strukturális akadályok továbbra is gátolják a teljes társadalmi integrációt és a felfelé irányuló mobilitást.

**Kulcsszavak:** migráció, társadalmi mobilitás, etnikai gazdaság, eladósodás, vietnámiak

**Diszciplína:** kulturális antropológia

**Introduction**

The ethnic economy has shaped Vietnamese life in Hungary since state socialism ended. What started in the early 1990s as market trading and small-scale selling soon developed into restaurants, corner shops, nail salons, and import-export activities (Marosi & Van, 2014). For migrants, the ethnic economy became both a tool of survival and a limit to mobility. It gave families income, collective support, and space in a labor market that was often closed to them. But it also tied many to insecure and labor-heavy work (Tran, 2025).

This paper hopes to shed light on the ethnic economy closely, looking at its historical growth, daily practices, gender and generational labor, its links to legality and informality, and its impact on social mobility. It also attempts to explore debt, placing it in dialogue with studies on migration and mobility.

**Ethnic Economy (Restaurants, Shops, Informal Work)**

*Historical Trajectories of the Ethnic Economy.* The Vietnamese ethnic economy in Hungary began in the early 1990s after the fall of state socialism. When contracts ended and support disappeared, many former workers and students turned to informal trade for survival. The Four Tigers market in Budapest, often called the “Chinese market,” became the main center (Marosi & Van, 2014). Here, Vietnamese sellers joined Chinese, Arab and other groups to trade clothes, shoes, electronics, and household goods. These markets were easy to enter, needed little starting capital, and offered quick income through transnational supply networks. As time passed, migrants expanded into new areas. Some opened permanent retail shops in Budapest’s working-class neighborhoods, while others moved into gastronomy by starting Vietnamese restaurants that attracted both migrants and curious Hungarians. In the 2000s, nail salons appeared as another important field, mostly run by Vietnamese women. Together, these businesses became visible parts of Hungarian cities and placed the community within the service economy.

*Everyday Life in the Ethnic Economy.* Daily life in the ethnic economy involves hard work and family cooperation. Shops usually stay open from early morning until late evening, with relatives sharing the shifts. Children are expected to help once school finishes, doing tasks like cleaning or helping customers. This mixing of household and business life shows how family relations hold the shop together. The shop is both an economic space and a social one, where family relations are built and sometimes

tested (Tran, 2025). Debt is common in this system. Families often borrow from kin, friends, or private lenders to keep shops running or pay legal fees. Because profits are usually small, businesses often survive on the edge. Even so, families see the effort as a necessary sacrifice for their children's education and future. In this way, the ethnic economy is also moral, shaped by values of sacrifice and duty as much as by trade.

*Gendered Divisions of Labor.* The ethnic economy is strongly shaped by gender. Women often appear as the public faces of shops and nail salons to work with customers attempting to make the family more visible in Hungarian society. Men usually take care of supply chains and finances. This pattern reflects Vietnamese cultural norms as well as practical needs in small business. At the same time, it keeps gender inequalities alive since women carry both economic work and domestic duties. Ethnographic accounts show how women manage these pressures. Some say their role brings empowerment, giving them income and influence in family decisions (Tran, 2025.) Others stress the heavy load of long shop hours combined with childcare and housework. A few women register businesses under their own names, which challenges male dominance, but such examples are rare. For most, their labor in the ethnic economy is vital but not fully valued.

*Generational Roles and Youth Participation.* Generational differences shape the life of the ethnic economy. Many children of shopkeepers work after school and on weekends. Their parents see this as a way to teach their kids a sense of hard work and duty, the children however often complain since they prefer studying or leisure. The shop is a place where these different views meet: parents value sacrifice, while children want freedom and careers outside. For some, the shop is only temporary until they continue to university and new professions. For others, especially in poorer families, it has become a permanent path that reduces chances to pursue education and exacerbates inequalities. In this way, the ethnic economy helps families survive but also limits future possibilities.

*Informality, Legality, and Precarity.* The Vietnamese ethnic economy often stands somewhere between the formal and the informal. Many shops are legally registered and follow tax rules, but informal practices are also a part of everyday life. These include not reporting some income, hiring people without documents, or skipping receipts. Such practices are not simply cheating but ways to manage thin profit margins and complex regulations. The mix of legality and informality shows the uncertain position of migrants in Hungarian capitalism. Police checks add to this pressure. Traders often face sudden inspections for licenses, records, or taxes. Penalties are often heavy and can destroy profits of many months. To reduce these risks, the migrants usually rely on their own strategies such as making contacts with local officials, sharing warnings and advice, or collecting money together to pay fines. Informality therefore creates both danger and protection, and thus shapes survival under precarious conditions.

*Ethnic Economy as Enabler and Barrier.* The ethnic economy works as both a support and a limit. It gives families a way to earn income, some independence, and chances to build savings (Portes and Zhou, 1992). Those who succeed in business can invest in housing, education, or even projects in Vietnam. At the same time, staying in narrow sectors such as shops and restaurants reduces opportunities for change. These businesses are sensitive to crises, shifting consumer interests, and strong competition. Many families therefore continue with long hours and small returns, without clear ways to move upward. This mixed role shows larger patterns of how migrants are included in society. The ethnic economy gives space for agency, where families can control their work and plans. However, it also leaves

them on the edge of the national economy, often reinforcing ideas of them as outsiders. For Vietnamese in Hungary, the ethnic economy is at once a source of survival and a barrier, shaping identity, mobility, and family hopes for the future (Tran, 2025.) The ethnic economy is key to understanding Vietnamese migration in Hungary. It developed out of the crisis of the postsocialist years and has supported families for decades. It gave space for entrepreneurship and placed the community inside Hungarian society. At the same time, it is marked by insecurity, inequality, and limits. Gender roles, tensions between generations, and unclear legal status show the complexity of daily life within it. In the end, the ethnic economy reflects the paradox of migrant mobility: strength against exclusion, but also restriction in full integration.

## Debt, Brokerage, and the Mirage of Factory Jobs

A key part of the new Vietnamese migration to Hungary is the system of labor brokers and migration debts. For poor families, the chance to work abroad is imagined as a way out of hardship and a chance to earn remittances. To reach this dream, migrants often borrow 10,000 to 20,000 USD (Hoang, 2020), an amount far above the reach of most rural households, to pay intermediaries who promise them factory work in Hungary. But when they arrive, many see that the reality is different. Some jobs do not exist, or conditions are worse than promised. Instead of steady factory positions, they work in restaurants, nail salons, or other low-wage services. This part examines brokerage, debt, and how these shape the lives and futures of migrants.

*The Rise of Migration Brokerage.* Labor brokerage is now a common part of global migration. In Vietnam, both agencies and small brokers advertise Hungary as a place of opportunity. Posters, local offices, and personal contacts promise factory jobs, steady income, and even the chance to settle. For rural families with little work and low farm earnings, these promises are attractive. But the cost is very high: between 10,000 and 20,000 USD in fees (Hoang, 2020), usually borrowed from relatives, neighbors, or lenders. This creates a cycle of debt migration, where paying back loans shapes all decisions once abroad. The growth of these agencies comes from bigger forces. Vietnam promotes labor export as a way to develop, while Hungary needs cheap, flexible labor. Agencies take advantage of this situation, earning profits from workers' needs and unclear immigration rules. Many migrants know the risks but feel they cannot refuse because options at home are so limited. Brokerage turns migration into something that can be bought and sold, a market of hope and survival.

*Expectations and Promises.* The promises made before leaving Vietnam are powerful. Recruitment agencies speak about stable jobs in factories, fair wages, and contracts that guarantee security. They show pictures of dormitories, machines, and workers in neat uniforms. Families dream of their children working in Europe's industries, sending money home, and making the family proud. These promises raise expectations and frame migration as a safe bet. In practice, many of these claims are false or only partly true. Factory positions are few and often given to migrants from countries with better agreements. When Vietnamese workers arrive, they often find the jobs gone, the wages low, or the contracts unstable. Agencies usually avoid blame, saying things changed after the workers left. Migrants, already burdened by debt, have no choice but to accept whatever work is offered.

*Arrival and Disillusionment.* The arrival often brings deep disappointment. Instead of stable factory contracts, many Vietnamese migrants are pushed into restaurants, nail salons, or small grocery shops. Some find work informally in construction or ware-

houses; these jobs are unstable, poorly paid, and very demanding, and especially with little protection. For migrants already carrying heavy debt, learning that wages barely cover interest is a bitter shock. The feeling of failure is also social. Families in Vietnam still imagine their relatives in secure factory jobs, proud of their success. Migrants, however, often feel shame and avoid telling the truth. The dream of factory dignity clashes with the reality of service labor, creating not just economic but also symbolic loss.

*Debt as a Structuring Force.* Debt follows many migrants like a shadow. Every month, they must send payments to moneylenders or relatives, which creates heavy pressure to earn as much as possible. To meet these obligations, migrants often accept very long hours and/or bad working conditions. The fear of falling behind is strong, because not paying can mean shame, conflict with family, or even losing land or property in Vietnam. Debt is both a push and a weight: it gives migrants reason to endure, but it also keeps them trapped in unstable jobs. Debt also shapes how migrants see themselves. They are not only workers in Hungary but also debtors tied to families back home. This obligation creates strength but also deep vulnerability. Employers and landlords sometimes use migrants' debts against them, knowing they cannot easily refuse. In this way, debt becomes more than money—it is a form of control that connects brokers in Vietnam to everyday labor in Hungary.

*Intersectional Implications.* Not all migrants feel the impact of brokerage and debt in the same way. Class makes a big difference: richer families can sometimes avoid risky channels or cope better with losses, while poorer households take on heavy debt. Gender also matters. Many women are pushed into nail salons or domestic work, jobs where they rely on employers and brokers and have little freedom. Even when they are tired or underpaid, families expect them to keep sending money home. Young people, especially from rural villages, face disappointment when the factory work they were promised turns into low-paid service labor. Together, these experiences show how debt and brokerage increase inequality inside the community.

*Coping Strategies and Agency.* Migrants do not only suffer; they also adapt. Some rely on solidarity, sharing apartments, pooling income, or helping each other repay debts. Informal credit inside the community gives short-term relief, even if it adds pressure later. A small number manage to leave unstable jobs behind and start their own businesses, but this path is difficult and open to very few. Agency also appears in how migrants interpret their lives. Instead of seeing restaurant or shop work as a failure, some frame it as training for the future. Others take pride in learning Hungarian, handling money, or serving customers. These small acts of reframing help them keep dignity and create identity in a difficult system.

*Structural Analysis.* The brokerage system makes clear that barriers are structural, not just personal. It begins in Vietnam, where poor families face few chances and are targeted by recruiters. It continues in Hungary, where migrants are limited by visa rules and weak job protections. Brokers, agencies, and employers benefit at each stage, while migrants take on debt and risk. What is promised as mobility often becomes immobility, locking people into the same inequalities they tried to escape. Anthropology helps us see this as the selling of hope. Migration is turned into a business, with dreams of Europe advertised and sold. Failures are hidden, while the few success stories are told again and again. This keeps the cycle alive, showing how brokerage depends on both need and aspiration. Debt-financed migration through brokers shows the hidden side of the Vietnamese story in Hungary. It reminds us that the limits of mobility start not only in Hungary but already in

Vietnam. Families borrow large sums for jobs that may never exist, arriving with debt that controls their choices from the beginning. Their later struggles in restaurants, shops, or informal work are not just bad luck but the product of this system. Migration here is not only incorporation into Hungary but also a process sold as a commodity, shaped by inequalities across borders. To see the full picture, we must include how debts, hopes, and identities mix to create both strength and constraint.

**Structural Barriers and Enablers**

The Vietnamese migrants' experiences in Hungary cannot be understood without looking at the wider structures that shape mobility. Personal effort, family strategies, and community support are important but they always work within institutions that can either limit or support outcomes. The aforementioned institutions may include immigration law, labor market, schools, public opinion, and state policy. This section seeks to examine the barriers that restrict incorporation and mobility, as well as the factors that make stability and success possible. By paying attention to both limits and opportunities, we can see more clearly how intersectional dynamics work and why chances are unevenly shared within the community.

*Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers.* Legal precarity has been one of the most important barriers for Vietnamese migrants. The end of state contracts and the rise of a postsocialist immigration system left many without a stable legal position. Residence permits tied to jobs or businesses require money and paperwork, which many families struggle to provide. Constant inspections, shifting laws, and high fees deepen the problem. Even those with long-term permits may lose security because of policy changes or errors in administration (Hárs, 2016). This insecurity limits confidence, discourages business growth, and creates ongoing anxiety. These legal difficulties are not the same for everyone. Families with wealth can pay for lawyers or brokers to handle documents, while poorer households depend on informal advice that may not work under closer checks. Gender also matters: women who enter as dependents remain tied to their husbands' status, facing risk if marriages end or if businesses collapse. For youth, the move from study to work visas is uncertain, as missed deadlines or minor mistakes can block progress. Legal systems therefore divide the community by class, gender, and generation.

*Labor Market Barriers.* Labor market exclusion is one of the clearest structural barriers for Vietnamese migrants. Discrimination appears both subtle and overt. Second-generation youth describe being treated as outsiders in job interviews, their abilities doubted despite fluent Hungarian. Employers often imagine them as reliable workers but not leaders, channeling them into service roles. For their parents' generation, the issue was different: their Vietnamese diplomas and vocational training were rarely accepted. Many migrants who had been professionals in Vietnam ended up working manual jobs or in small businesses. The lack of recognition of skills not only produced deskilling but also pushed the community toward self-employment, reinforcing dependence on the ethnic economy.

*Educational Barriers.* Structural limits in Hungarian education play an important role in shaping opportunities. Tracking into different streams happens early. Children from families with money to afford tutoring and preparation usually enter academic gymnasiums, while those from poorer households, especially those who must help in family businesses, often end up in vocational schools. This creates barriers to higher education and reproduces social inequality. Racialization makes these barriers heavier. Teachers often describe Vietnamese students as disciplined but not assertive, which understandably blocks them from being seen as leaders. Peer relations can also bring exclusion or teasing,

reminding students they are outsiders. These experiences of marginalization influence self-esteem and may restrict ambitions.

*Public Discourse and Racialization.* Public stories about migrants in Hungary often show Vietnamese as a model minority. They are admired for being industrious and quiet in public life (Hárs, 2016; Tran, 2025). However, this label is not neutral. It hides inequality, reduces them to one image, and keeps pressure on them to conform. It also stresses their foreignness. They are often recognized as "good" migrants but rarely accepted as Hungarians, even if they speak the language and hold citizenship. The rampant xenophobia deepens this tension. Though Vietnamese are not the main target of hostility, they still feel the suspicion that shapes Hungarian politics (Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram, 2016; Hárs, 2016; Tran, 2025). In this context, many choose selective invisibility—avoiding politics, limiting exposure, and keeping low profiles. While this reduces risks, it also limits civic voice and weakens possibilities for integration.

*Structural Enablers.* Public views of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary often rely on the model minority image. They are admired for discipline and silence in public life. But this stereotype comes with costs. It hides inequality, erases diversity, and puts pressure on people to act in certain ways. It also stresses that they are outsiders. Even with fluent Hungarian and citizenship, they are not always seen as part of the nation. The wider mood of xenophobia makes this more difficult. Vietnamese are not targeted as openly as some groups, but they still feel the suspicion that shapes Hungarian politics. Many respond by withdrawing from public life, avoiding political debates, and limiting visibility. While this reduces risk, it also narrows their civic voice and makes integration harder.

*Intersectional Dynamics of Barriers and Enablers.* Understanding barriers and enablers requires an intersectional view. Class defines who can afford resources that ease obstacles, for example through paid brokers or tutoring. Gender organizes roles of dependence, public visibility, and recognition, influencing how men and women handle work, family, and bureaucracy. Generation also plays a role. Young people may gain advantages from education, yet they continue to face racialization and family expectations. These layers interact, so that barriers and supports are never experienced equally but depend on each person's social position. Structural barriers and supports shape the field in which Vietnamese migrants in Hungary seek survival, mobility, and belonging. Legal insecurity, workplace discrimination, school tracking, and racialized images in society restrict their chances. At the same time, community networks, small business niches, and heavy investment in education open partial paths forward. These combined forces create very different outcomes. Some families manage stability and upward steps, while others stay locked in precarious situations. Seeing these dynamics is necessary to understand both the limits and the meanings of the so-called success story of the Vietnamese in Hungary.

## Comparative Reflections with Other Migrant Groups

To understand the Vietnamese in Hungary, comparison with other migrant groups is necessary. Although they are often presented as a special case of success, their experience makes sense only when placed beside that of others. This section looks at four points of comparison: Chinese migrants, post-socialist groups such as Romanians and Ukrainians, refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa, and larger European diasporas.

By studying where these cases overlap or diverge, we see how policy, stereotypes, and structural con ditions create different paths of adaptation and mobility.

*Chinese Migrants in Hungary.* Chinese migrants are arguably the largest non-European community in Hungary, and their experience offers a contrast with the Vietnamese. Both came after the end of socialism, but the Chinese arrived with stronger resources. With more capital, larger networks, and transnational ties, they built wholesale markets and big distribution hubs. The Vietnamese, with fewer resources, remained in retail shops and restaurants. These differences in scale show how resources shape opportunities. Public opinion also sets them apart. The Chinese are often imagined as rich, powerful, and separate, which raises suspicion (Nyíri, 2003; Nyíri, 2007). The Vietnamese are described as modest, diligent, and law-abiding, forming a model minority image. These images matter: Chinese migrants are seen as rivals, while Vietnamese migrants are tolerated. Yet both groups remain vulnerable to xenophobia, administrative barriers, and legal insecurity.

*Romanians and Ukrainians.* Romanians and Ukrainians provide useful comparisons for understanding migration in Hungary. Romanians, protected by EU citizenship, move freely and work without the paperwork that constrains Vietnamese migrants. This freedom highlights how EU integration divides migrants by nationality, granting some groups privyleges while others face barriers. Ukrainians live in a more precarious position. Many work under temporary or guest-worker arrangements in low-paid sectors such as care, construction, or seasonal farming. Their nearness to Hungary and shared cultural references sometimes eases their reception, but their work remains insecure (Hárs, 2016). Like the Vietnamese, they face exploitation and few chances to move upward. These comparisons underline how nationality and geopolitics shape different paths in Hungary's migration system.

*Refugees and Asylum Seekers.* Refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa face a much harder situation in Hungary. Since 2015, politicians and media have presented them mainly as a problem, not as contributors. They are shown as risks for security and culture (Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram, 2016; Cantat, 2017). As a result, asylum rules became very strict, and detention was often used. Compared with them, the Vietnamese look very different. They are also foreigners but are seen as disciplined and useful. This comparison shows that belonging depends not only on work but also on how the state and society imagine different migrant groups.

*Broader European Comparisons.* Looking at the Vietnamese in Hungary together with other European cases shows both similarities and differences. In France, the community has a long history, starting from colonial times and later through education and elite migration. In Germany and the Czech Republic, many arrived as contract workers during socialism, but their situation developed differently. For example, in the Czech Republic, the state recognizes Vietnamese as an official minority and gives support for cultural groups (Szczepanikova and Svašek, 2008). In Hungary, there is little such recognition, and most institutions depend on their own community. These comparisons show how national policies change migrant lives. Where there is support, communities can integrate more formally. Where there is little support, like in Hungary, migrants must rely more on ethnic economy and internal networks.

*Intersectional Comparisons.* Looking at different groups through intersectional analysis shows more details. Gender roles are not the same. Vietnamese women often work in shops and nail salons, while many Ukrainian women work in domestic care.

Class also makes a difference. Chinese migrants started with more capital, but Vietnamese had to build slowly with small steps. Generational paths also vary. Second-generation Vietnamese often deal with mixed identities, while Romanians, as EU citizens, face less racial exclusion. These examples show how structures and personal positions mix to create different outcomes.

*Implications for Hungarian Society.* A comparative view gives a clearer picture of Hungary. Migrants are not included in the same way. Vietnamese are praised as hardworking but never fully accepted. Chinese are seen as useful in the economy but also distrusted. Romanians enjoy EU rights but still meet stereotypes. Refugees are often seen as dangerous and pushed away completely These examples show that inclusion in Hungary depends on conditions, not equality.

Even so, migrants are not only passive. In every group they create networks, open businesses, and survive difficult times with resilience. They help Hungary's society and economy, even when opportunities are unequal. Understanding both the structures and the efforts of migrants gives a more balanced view than simple ideas of success or failure.

Comparative reflections show that migrant incurporation is always relative. The Vietnamese story in Hungary is not fully unique, but one path among many, shaped by history, economy, law, and discourse. When placed next to Chinese traders, Romanian EU citizens, Ukrainian workers, or Middle Eastern refugees, we see how each group fits into different layers of belonging. These layers are influenced by Hungarian politics and wider European systems, making mobility uneven. For Vietnamese, incorporation has meant survival in ethnic business, being called a model minority, but also living with uncertain belonging. Looking at it this way helps us see how migration changes societies, and how societies rank migrants.

**Conclusion**

This paper attempted to show the complex reality of Vietnamese migrants in Hungary by taking a closer look at work and debt in relation to the migrants' everyday struggle. While migration is often thought of as a direct road to upward social mobility, this road is rather broken, slow, and filled with obstacles for many people. In the beginning, Vietnamese migrants arrived with hopes and dreams to settle, plus the desire to support their families. But once in Hungary, they entered a world where opportunity exists together with restriction, and effort exists together with deep inequality.

The ethnic economy takes the center stage of this experience. For many families, working in shops, restaurants, and nail salons becomes the main way to survive. These spaces provide income, community, and protection from exclusion in the wider labor market. Inside them, family bonds grow stronger, but also more strained. Long working days, limited rest, and economic insecurity slowly shape both body and mind. Life becomes focused on endurance rather than choice. The same place that offers safety also becomes the space where dreams slowly narrow.

Legal precarity and migration brokerage deepen these limits. Many migrants arrive already in debt, bound to financial obligations that shape every decision. Work becomes not a choice but a necessity. Long hours and poor conditions are accepted because there is no space to refuse. Visa procedures, inspections, and paperwork often create anxiety. Life is heavily influenced by the specter of legality: safety becomes temporary and never fully secure. Planning for the future has become more difficult when stability itself is uncertain.

The migrants have shown to be rather resilient, nevertheless. With communities being built, they share resources, and support each other on a daily basis. Small networks provide emotional comfort and practical help. Through daily acts of care and cooperation, the Vietnamese migrants create

meaning and dignity. These everyday strategies allow survival and sometimes slow improvement. However, survival should not be confused with justice or equality, and hard work does not automatically generate fair results.

The Vietnamese experience in Hungary has also expressed the paradox of migrant mobility. Movement across borders does not guarantee upward movement in society. Instead, migrants often exchange one form of insecurity for another where their lives reveal how social structures shape opportunity and limit possibility.

In the end, this study does not tell a simple story of success or failure. Instead, it offers a glimpse to stories of persistence and of the way families persist through uncertainty. Of young people navigating between cultures, hopes, and pressures. Of everyday endurance in a system that offers limited space for belonging. Their experience offers an opportunity to rethink what mobility actually means, and to question who truly has access to stability, dignity, and social inclusion.

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