

Housing solutions for immigrants in Ho Chi Minh City

Le Nguyen Huong Giang

Architect

Ho Chi Minh City's Department of Planning and Architecture

1. Shelter Situation Analysis

1.1 Basic General Data

STATISTIC OF IMMIGRANTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

		Total	Ratio
Immigrants have relatives in HCMC	No	192	37%
	Yes – without house	301	58.3%
	Yest – within house	16	3.1%
	Yes – either	516	1.4%

		Ratio
Help when coming to HCMC	Nobody	36,1%
	Have help	63,9%

						Ratio
Job before coming to HCMC	No					36,1%
	Yes					63,9%

The statistics above figures that all immigrants prepare for their movement and new life very carefully and seriously. The number of immigrant having a help and relatives in new places also figures out that they need a lot of support.

Type of house in HCMC:

Average area according to types of house

City	General	Solid house with boundaries	Solid house unboundaried	Contemporary house	Other houses
TP.HCM	16,05	23,72	20,38	14,18	10,64

Type of house and renting or not

Type of house	Renting			
	No	Yes	No interest	Total
Rent house with same room	2,6	88,9	8,5	100
Rent house with different room	0,4	83,8	15,7	100
Rent house from private owners	1,1	79,3	19,5	100
House subsidized by company	45,5	50,0	4,5	100
House of parent	77,8	0	22,2	100
House of siblings	91,7	0	8,3	100
House of relatives	85,5	11,3	3,2	100
House of friends	50,0	25,0	25,0	100
Stay in work place	88,9	0	11,1	100
Own house	58,3	1,3	40,4	100
Other	100	0	0	100
Total	29,6	52,3	18,1	100
<i>No. of survey</i>	237	418	145	800

Satisfied staying in HCMC

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very satisfied	270	33.8	33.8	33.8
Satisfied	362	45.3	45.3	79.0
Normal	164	20.5	20.5	99.5
Unsatisfied	4	.5	.5	100.0
Total	800	100.0	100.0	

Statistic From Immigrants' Interviews:

Interviews were made to understanding deeply about immigrants: what their feelings, what their's thinking, if they expect to stay permanently in Ho Chi Minh City or so on... The result are as followings:

Content of the question	Percentage (%)			
	What're the purpose of staying in HCMC	Working	Saving some money	To know how HCMC is
	80	10	10	
Where do you stay now	Close to work	Not close to work	Unconvenient	Convenient
	15	35	40	10
Which house do you stay?	Rent house	Buy house	Relative's house	
	70	10	20	
How's your current stay?	Excellent	Good	Medium	Not good
	10	20	50	20
If you are staying in a rent house? How about the renting price?	Expensive	Normal	Cheap	
	70	30	0	
Are you going to to buy a house in HCMC?	Yes	No		
	100			
What kind of house do you like to buy?	Separate house	Apartment	Other idea	
	60	30	10	
What kind of payment do you want to buy a house?	Mortgage	Cut from salary	From savings	
	50	50	0	
Are you going to stay in HCM	Contemporary	Long term	Permanent	

for long time?				
	40	50	10	
What about your income?	Good	Normal	Not good	
	20	50	30	
What do you think this life compare with your home towns'?	Good	Normal	Not good	
	30	60	10	
If your current company support to buy a house, will you work for it long?	Yes	No	Don't know	
	40	0	60	
With the bank's support of low interest, will you buy a house?	Yes	No	Don't know	
	90	0	10	

Results of interview are very interesting and they have changed totally what was supposed before about immigrants. The results are a very good and clear understanding of what immigrants thinking and expecting when they move from their cities to Ho Chi Minh City. The results also help in how to help immigrants to improve their life as well as to change the situation of housing for immigrants now.

1.2 Shelter Related Fact and Figures

Ho Chi Minh City is the biggest and most developed in Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh City has a population of 9 million people at this moment. In 2010, it is supposed to become a mega – city. Therefore there are a lot of problems need to be prepared and to be dealt as soon as possible. Among of the problems, shelter situation is quite complicated and diversified. Needs of housing is very big now for both local people and immigrants. Local people needs are not as difficult as immigrants' because immigrating is quite new, huge and becomes one of the most considerations of Ho Chi Minh City's government now.

Because of special consideration of Ho Chi Minh City's government and this is also one of urgent problems of Ho Chi Minh City, only Ho Chi Minh City's data is analysed and studied for this writing. Further more, immigrants are also very various, but in this writing, the most consideration is to aim low income immigrants.

1.3 The situation of immigrants in Ho Chi Minh City

Being formed in 1898, Ho Chi Minh has developed fast. Now it is the most important economic, social, cultural centre of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh city has attracted a lot of immigrants from other provinces.

Since the new change policies in 1986 and 1990 with “Doi Moi” polices, Ho Chi Minh City has developed dramatically. Since that time, there are more and more immigrants coming to Ho Chi Minh City.

With the fast speed of development, Ho Chi Minh City needs a huge of labour to supply for all fields. Now, in suburban areas, in Ho Chi Minh City, there are lot of industrial parks. They need labour to supply for. Therefore, there are a lot of immigrants coming from other provinces.

Some reasons make people from other provinces want to immigrate to Ho Chi Minh City as followings:

- 1 Having a most developed, dynamic economic in Vietnam;
- 2 Most of big industrial parks are located not so far from Ho Chi Minh city;
- 3 Having diversify works;
- 4 Geography position and transportation are quite convenience;
- 5 Life is not so sharp and competitive;
- 6 Immigrants have a lot of opportunities to find out jobs in a lot of fields;
- 7 Living cost is quite flexible and reasonable;
- 8 Weather is quite good;
- 9 Flexible and attractive policies for immigrants;
- 10 Local people are quite friendly, helpful.

The population of Ho Chi Minh City now is over than 9 million people but around 3 millions of them are immigrants (data in 2006). Because of the above reasons, Ho Chi Minh City is quite attractive for immigrants to stay and work. In the other hands, with needs of labour in all fields, every day, immigrant number has been increasing fast and rapidly.

One of the fields required more than labour is in industrial parks. Almost all the industrial parks are located out side of Ho Chi Minh City’s centre. In these places, immigrants gather much more. They set up many different communities around the city. It depends on where the immigrants come from, where they go to work and

which culture they belong to... Therefore, quite very complicated to organizing in housing, social structures and urban planning as well.

In fact, immigrants have changed housing structures of Ho Chi Minh City, especially in suburban areas. Even though, the immigrants make some troubles for society, but their contribution is very worthy and important. Ho Chi Minh City's people benefit a lot from them. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City's government should have some action plans to support them to make them feel comfortable, easily to live in a new places. They will stay in Ho Chi Minh City longer and more stably.

1.4 Housing structure changes effected by immigrants

Immigrants want to improve their life at their home land. That is the most important reason, they move from places to other places. When they move to Ho Chi Minh City, they will expect to have a job, so they can accept easily a normal work than other local people. Whenever they have a job, they will try to stay there longer and settle their life. Therefore, housing structures of Ho Chi Minh City will be changed because of immigrants.

Because renting payment costs a big part of income now. Living cost will be considered a lot. Immigrants will not stay in the centre because a lot of expenses such as: housing rent, food, drink... is much higher than in suburban. In the other hand, all the work location such as factories, industrial parks are located in suburban areas. They will try to settle in suburban areas.

In below, there are some clear changes effected by immigrants in housing structures in Ho Chi Minh City, especially in suburban areas:

Number of houses to supply for immigrants has been increasing and much diversified in kinds: semi detached houses, apartments. The area of a house is quite small. There are two kinds of situations as follows:

- Immigrant can afford a house, but their houses are very small and simple, maybe only 4 x 5 m. In the survey, some immigrants accept much smaller house than local people, as long as they have a place to sleep at night.
- Immigrant can't afford a house. They will rent a room. These houses belong to local people. This is in the big house and is divided into many small rooms, with or without kitchen, WC. These facilities will depend on how much immigrant can pay for a month.

- Immigrants will share the same house with others. These immigrants will have better income, so they need their life better and normally they're married and live with their partners.

Location is different, but almost concentrates in suburban districts like Tan Phu, Go Vap, Thu Duc district..., close to industrial parks. Because of the settlement, it makes Ho Chi Minh city become bigger and bigger and enlarge in areas which have more immigrants than other places.

When immigrants come, they automatically bring their own *cultures* to Ho Chi Minh City. So they will set up their communities around Ho Chi Minh City. For examples markets which only sales immigrant's special food are quite many in suburban areas in Ho Chi Minh City now.

There are more *small houses* and as simple as possible to reduce renting cost as much as possible. This is quite opposite with the economy development.

2. Identification of Shelter Problem for immigrants in Ho Chi Min City

At this moment Ho Chi Minh City's government has had some actions to solve the shelter situation for immigrant. Some apartments were built by Government's budget or on the governement land.... But those apartments are high rise buildings and still expensive in order to afford by immigrants.





In contrast to these fancy and fuxury apartments, there are still a lot immigrants living in very poor conditions.



Coming from other provinces, immigrants maybe stay in Ho Chi Minh City for a while or longer. It depends on if they can have stable works, benefit in the new living areas, and satisfy

what they need.

Their incomes are often lower than local people. They can't afford houses. They can accept just a dwelling to live after their work and quite far from the centre of the city.

They can bring their relatives or friends to stay together, so the house must be flexible for more than that house holders.

Not only do they support for themselves, but they have to support for their family in their homelands. They will try to save as much as possible. Their life will be very simple, frugal. They can save money by any ways such as self cook, save power of

elevation, walk for long distance; bring their bicycles up to their apartment... as long as they can save money. Their house must have at least those requirements.

They can live very frugally to save money to send for their family in their relatives in home lands. Facilities of apartment can be reduced as much as possible.

Their culture is much different of local people. Whenever they come and stay in Ho Chi Minh City, they will automatically bring theirs to. It is quite nice to make Ho Chi Minh City's own culture more

diversified and plentiful, but it also makes more complicated in controlling style of houses or functions inside a house.

Their work in industrial parks will require work in different shifts and the time of working will be longer than others. Their house should be in safe and security places, so when coming back from work at night, they're still safe. Their house also isolated with others to avoid making noise and bothering neighbors.



3. Analysis of Shelter Problem

Since the new open economic policy in 1990 in Vietnam, the wave of immigrants coming to Ho Chi Minh City has increased dramatically. Immigrants are also different classes. But the low income immigrants are more complicated and difficult to file, stasistic and so on.

When immigrants move to Ho Chi Minh city, they have no or some money, no job. Their most consideration is to hope to improve their lives and earn as much as they can to support themselves and their family in home towns. They will accept to have a work very easily. They also need a very simple place just for staying.

Simple, small tiny house and lacking of a lot of facilities

The more economic develops, the more city people want to live in better conditions house. It's completely opposite with immigrants. They are newcomers in Ho Chi Minh city, they don't have many choices and can't afford for a house. So they accept a very simple place just to live. Their houses are often located in a very far place, in deep and narrow alleys, far out of main street, no water pipe, lack of a lot of facilities. Immigrants have to pay more than local people for electricity bills, because of policy about permanent register residence.

Immigrants seldom stay alone. They often stay with some more friends or relatives. Their houses are very small about 12 – 18 m² including bathroom and everything mix together (living room, bedroom, kitchen...).

Because immigrants are not permanent residence, so they can't buy water and electricity as city people's price. They usually have to pay higher than, but their income are often lower. To save money, in some area, they will use water from wells. And they only pay for electricity of pumbing. But now underground water in HCMC is heavily polluted.

Inside their house, it's only a room within or without bathroom. They don't have place for drying clothes, cooking.

This kind of house will affect to urban management and urban planning a lot. Because it's involve to surrounding landscape also.

Immigrants are staying in a narrow and very deep streets. This also makes difficult for preveting and fiting fire. So it will not safe for people living around.

At this momen, all that kinds of house belong to private owerns. The owners don't want to build more than one floor to avoid the cost of construction. So almost areas are often long and narrow. Immigrants don't want to pay more for renting, so alot of these houses don't have enough place for cook, washing. Those activites are often did out door and infront of the house. They also hang clothes out side to benefit from sun light. It's really inconvenient for people living around and make worse for image of urban.

In the other hands, the number of people suddenly increase dramatically, these areas will be not enough water, electricity and so on. Ho Chi Minh city 's

infrastructure systems are too old and not enough at all for center areas, so in immigrants' areas staying, infrastructure systems are not adequate.

Poor living conditions

Instead of living in better apartment, they prefer to stay in less costly one to save money. The same, they also need only place to sleep without any facility and try to accept the current not so good living conditions.

A very new shape and kinds of house were born for immigrants. They could be a very long and tiny house, only one empty room and bath room inside, or an empty room and the bathroom is outside and used with other people. New areas, near by industrial parks are also born to meet the needs of immigrants. Markets also establish more than before. The order and structure of urban and planning was changed by immigrant.

The immigrants every year increase very fast, but infrastructure of Ho Chi Minh city is too old, back ward and no longer enough for new population.

In the other hands, immigrants contribute a lot for the labour need of Ho Chi Minh City, but immigrants themselves also makes Ho Chi Minh's images worse because of such shelter they're staying. Immigrants are from other societies and they are also not well educated in some cases. They make social control and management is also more difficult.

Almost immigrants staying in Ho Chi Minh City do not consider about their living conditions or they do not have a lot of opportunities to consider their living conditions. They're lacking of facilities in their room. They don't have privacy in the room. They usually share room with their roommates to pay less renting. Immigrants just need a place for sleep at least and shower and self cook if possible... Those are important needs of almost immigrants in every where of Vietnam. If they require a lot, the renting will increase. Therefore, they are lacking all the facilities in their home. Their renting houses are often in deep and too narrow alleys. Sometimes, the houses are too damp.

Cost of renting and basic services

Infrastructure networks in Ho Chi Minh City are better than other provinces in Vietnam, but it's still not adequate, especially in the sub urban areas. In suburban

areas, immigrants have to re buy water and electricity of house owners. Immigrants often pay much more than local people. As the government regulations, every person in one household will have a maximum quantity of water and electricity, if they are local people. If someone uses more than that quality, they have to pay with higher costs.

There is electricity and water meters in their house, but the meters are installed and reconnected from their house owners, so they always have to pay more with the charge of extra costs regulated by owners. The drinking water and electricity systems now just reach to the main streets of an area. If people are living in alleys and it is so far away from those basic service net work. Therefore, they have to pay more for buying water or electricity.

4 Proposal for Change and Improvement

Control immigrant flow increase

Actually, immigrants have helped and contributed a lot for Ho Chi Minh City. This is one of the factors to contribute in the development of Ho Chi Minh City. However, if the number of immigrants keeps increasing, it's really a serious consideration and threaten for Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, HCMC's government should have some actions to limit or control this number.

1. Set up Immigrant Management Unit in each district to have an update and latest situation of immigrants in that district. This Unit will set up which places and areas in this district have available land, house and adequate facility as well as infrastructure for more immigrants or no more vacancies for immigrants. This Unit will know exactly the number of immigrants coming in and out in its area. Every month or every quarter, this Unit will have a report of number of immigrants, numbers of houses still available or all the current situation about immigrants and submit to upper position, like People Committee. So Ho Chi Minh City will have known exactly current situations of immigrants to have a good action place for each district, or also to control the flow of immigrants.
2. Connect with other cities to balace economy. A lot of immigrants really don't want to leave their home towns. But they can't earn any thing there, so they

have to move to new place which is their new life's source. So if every city have the same economic situation, surely no immigrants move to Ho Chi Minh any more. That is not really easy action, but it's very important because it will effect a lot to urban structure and social problems involved.

Types of house

Among people in this Immigrant Management Unit, there are also some architects, urban planners, economic developers and civil engineers who should work together to determine where should build what kind of houses, how many unit of houses... This Unit will calculate carefully where they should build what kind of house, how much for one apartment, or how long they will get profit from immigrants. These activites should be two way benefication. Immigrants will have good condition house with acceptable price, but government also need to have profit from their work.

1. Frame housing apartments

Those kinds of apartment are required only structures such as: foundation, beam, column, floor and wall. An apartment will supply exactly spaces for immigrants for staying, sleeping... How an apartment inside will be organized depends on by owners. Rooms, kitchen, bathroom... will depend on house many people will stay in that house, how much they need for each room, what their cultures are... Even finishing such as: colours of paints, kinds of tiles, kitchen and toilet accessories will be also organised by immigrants. Companies which sale that apartment can help owners in instructing them about construction field, or consult them what should be better for their apartments.

Because that kind of house will be reduced considerably the cost of finishing and very simple in sharp and structures as well, so price of fame housing apartment will be much cheaper and more suitable with immigrants.

2. Low rise apartments with high construction density:

In some surveys, land price in suburban of Ho Chi Minh City is still cheap and still empty. Industrial regions in Ho Chi Minh City now are located on rural or sub urban areas. Therefore, a housing solution for immigrants is to build low rise apartments in suburban. It is feasible in sub urban areas. Because of advantages about cost of land, low rise apartments are possibly built in suburban areas. Immigrants are recently

staying almost in sub urban areas. So why do not supply accommodation close to their working places. People living in suburban areas are still not much compared with in the centre. So low rise apartment could be stretch in large areas with high construction density.

In other hand, the proposals of low rise apartments will cut dramatically fees for dwellers. As we have known, high rise apartments cost a lot of money for construction, materials, technologies as well as maintenance. While low rise one is much more simple and cheaper. The people living there do not have to pay for many kinds of fees such as: security fee, elevator fee, garbage collecting fee and so on. Therefore, a low rise apartment will have an acceptable price for immigrants.

3. Assembly housing

Assembly housing is quite new and modern technology in Vietnam. But people are very interested in this new technology. Because a house can be built in a very short time so it saves time for constructing at the site. Moreover, it is more convenience for Vietnam weather, especially in rain season. So if applied this technology for constructing house for immigrant, it will cut down a lot of cost. All components of a house: columns, walls, slabs... are able to be fabricated in factories. The components of a house will be brought to the site and connected together in the site in a not so long time compared with traditional way. It will save labour. That kind of house will also have low price to sell for immigrants.

Improve public transportation

The public transportation in Ho Chi Minh City is too bad now. There is not metro system or local train system in Ho Chi Minh City. Nobody wants to use bus for movement now. Therefore, improving public transportation is also one of the solutions to solve housing problem. People can accept to live further than in the centre if they can access to their work on time, easily and less cost.

Policies to support immigrants

Up to now, there is neither any support nor encouraged policy for immigrants to own a house or an apartment in Ho Chi Minh City. The government let an open and free market of housing. As long as immigrant can afford a house, they will own that house. The immigrant workers have been coping with a lot of difficulties. Besides

proposal of type housing, other effective ways to improve housing situation of immigrant workers should be include

1. Support policies between banks and investors: Extend more time for an immigrant worker to mortgage a house. The policy is the negotiation among banks, investors and owners, but at least it must be feasible and suitable with real situation now. At this moment, in Vietnam, the maximum time for a person can mortgage a house is only 10 to 15 years. It's so short time for them to pay all big money for housing.
2. Another proposal is agreements between employers and employees. If an employer needs their employee's loyalty and want they work longer with them. They should offer their workers some attractive polices. Offering an apartment for free renting, or support to own a house for workers who have been working with one company for over 5 years. ...for instants are some of policies which employer should try to link with the bank and government to improve the living condition
3. Vietnam Government should also check why the immigrants don't want to live in their home towns? Is that their feeling? Or because of the urgent needs of supporting life, living and earning. Actually, in Vietnam, the economy and protentia larea are only in biggest cities. In the country side and in other provinces, people are still very poor. Eduaction is also not updated and considered like in Ho Chi Minh city. That is also one of the reason let immigrants move to the biggest cities more and more. Therefore, balancing general economy in Vietnam is one of the responsibilities of Vietnam government. How it could work much better and more balant than is th