

Social Exclusion and Urbanization in Hanoi Focusing on Educational and Employment Opportunities for Poor Residents

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doi:10.56397/SSSH.2024.10.03

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between social exclusion and urbanization in Hanoi, Vietnam, with a focus on the educational and employment opportunities for the city's poorest residents. The rapid urbanization of Hanoi, driven by economic reforms and rural-to-urban migration, has resulted in significant economic growth. However, it has also exacerbated social inequalities, particularly for poor residents and migrants living in peripheral areas. The study examines the challenges of educational exclusion, such as limited access to quality education due to overcrowded schools, hidden costs, and disparities in resources between wealthy and poor areas. It also addresses employment barriers, including the concentration of poor residents in the informal sector, a lack of vocational training, and social discrimination. Government policies and social programs aimed at addressing these issues, such as scholarships, vocational training, and microfinance initiatives, are analyzed for their effectiveness. The findings suggest that while some progress has been made, significant gaps remain in ensuring equitable access to education and employment for marginalized communities. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for comprehensive and inclusive policy interventions to mitigate social exclusion in Hanoi and ensure that all residents benefit from the city's urbanization.

Keywords: social exclusion, urbanization, Hanoi

1. Introduction

Urbanization is one of the most significant global phenomena of the 21st century, fundamentally reshaping economies, societies, and cities across the world. In Vietnam, rapid urbanization has been particularly transformative in its capital, Hanoi. Over the past few decades, the city has experienced unprecedented growth, driven by both rural-to-urban migration and governmental policies aimed at fostering economic development. According to data from Vietnam's General Statistics Office, the urban population in the country grew by over 10 million people between 2000 and 2020, and much of this growth has been concentrated in cities like Hanoi. As the capital city expands, it has attracted a large number of rural migrants seeking employment opportunities and better living conditions. While urbanization brings with it new economic opportunities, it also exacerbates socio-economic inequalities. The infrastructure, resources, and services in urban areas often fail to keep pace with the influx of new residents, leading to the marginalization of certain groups, especially the urban poor. In this context, social exclusion has become an increasingly pressing issue. Social exclusion refers to the process by which individuals or groups are systematically denied access to the resources, rights, and opportunities necessary for full participation in society. This can manifest in various forms, including limited access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment, as well as exclusion from social and political networks. In Hanoi, social exclusion is particularly pronounced among poor residents, many of whom are internal migrants living in the city's expanding outskirts or informal settlements. These populations face numerous challenges in accessing basic services, particularly in the areas of education and employment. Poor educational opportunities limit their ability to secure well-paying jobs, while their exclusion from formal labor markets forces many into precarious,

low-wage employment. This marginalization perpetuates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to escape. Moreover, the lack of social protections in the informal sector exacerbates their vulnerability, making it harder for poor residents to improve their economic circumstances and integrate fully into urban life. The objective of this essay is to explore the relationship between social exclusion and urbanization in Hanoi, focusing on how urbanization has impacted educational and employment opportunities for the city's poorest residents. By examining the structural barriers that prevent poor residents from accessing quality education and secure employment, this essay seeks to shed light on the deeper issues that underlie social exclusion in one of Vietnam's most rapidly growing cities. Furthermore, it will analyze the government's efforts to address these challenges and assess whether current policies are sufficient to promote greater inclusion for all citizens. Ultimately, this discussion aims to highlight the importance of addressing social exclusion as an integral part of sustainable urban development in Hanoi.

2. Urbanization in Hanoi

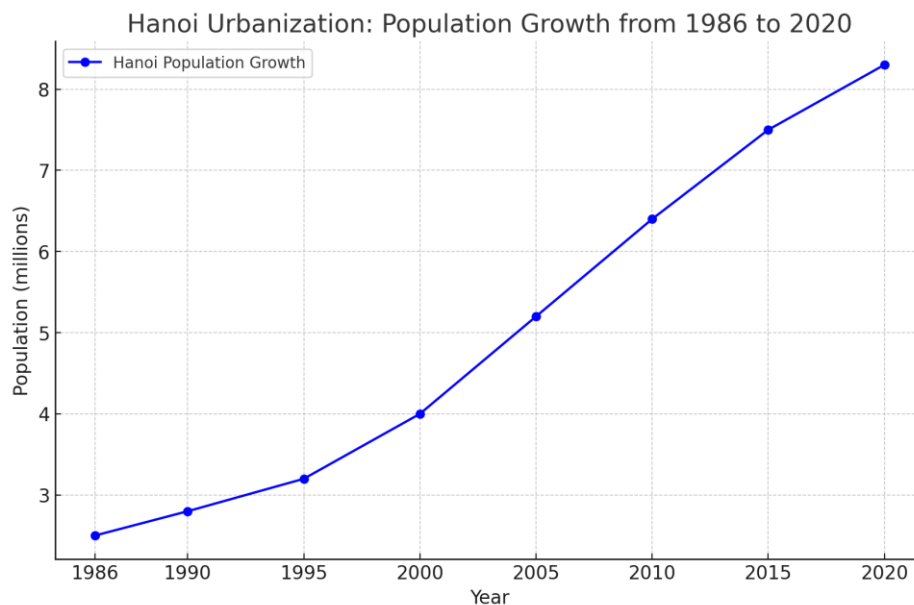


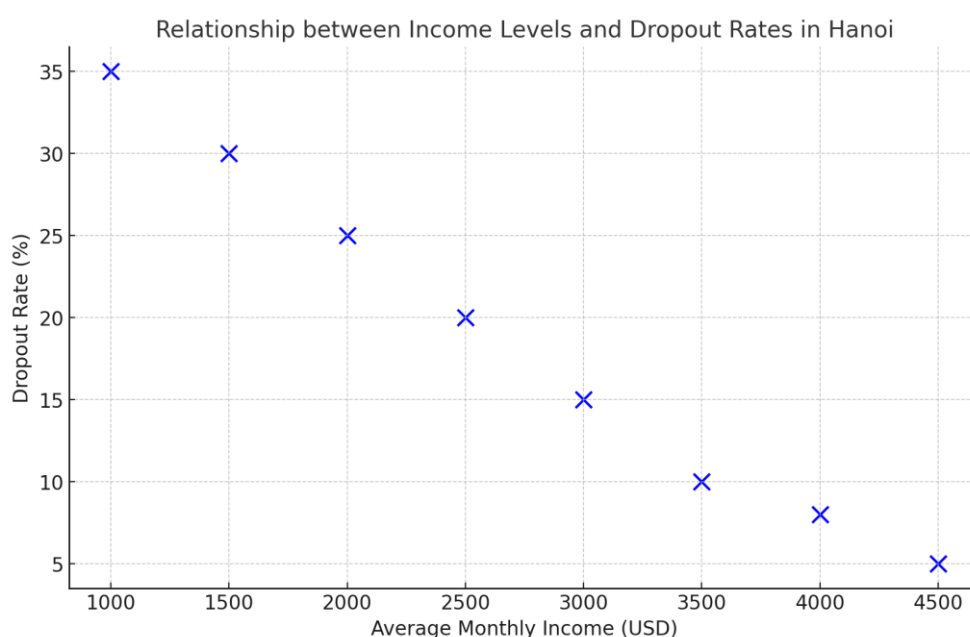
Figure 1. Hanoi Urbanization: Population Growth From 1986

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, has undergone rapid urbanization since the late 20th century. This transformation is primarily the result of the country's shift from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system under the *Đổi Mới* reforms initiated in 1986. These reforms catalyzed economic development, attracted both foreign and domestic investments, and led to significant infrastructural growth in urban areas. As a result, Hanoi's population has surged from around 2.5 million in the mid-1980s to over 8 million by 2020, making it one of the fastest-growing cities in Southeast Asia. One of the most important drivers of urbanization in Hanoi has been the large-scale migration from rural areas to the city. Many rural migrants, often from economically disadvantaged regions, move to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities, as urban areas offer more diversified job prospects in comparison to the declining agricultural sector. The increasing mechanization of agriculture and the conversion of rural land into industrial zones have left many rural workers without sustainable livelihoods, pushing them to seek employment in urban environments. Consequently, Hanoi has experienced not only population growth but also significant changes in its social and economic structure. The migration-driven urbanization in Hanoi has, however, been accompanied by challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the unequal distribution of urbanization's benefits, which has led to deepening social inequalities. While central areas of Hanoi have seen rapid modernization—with investments in infrastructure, transportation, housing, and commercial development—the city's poorer residents, particularly those in peripheral districts, have not shared equally in these benefits. The development of high-end residential areas, shopping malls, and business centers caters primarily to wealthier citizens and expatriates, leaving low-income residents struggling with inadequate living conditions. As Hanoi expands outward to accommodate its growing population, many of the city's poor and migrant residents have been relegated to informal settlements on the outskirts of the city. These peripheral areas, sometimes referred to as "urban villages," often lack basic infrastructure and services, such as clean water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. The residents of these areas, particularly internal migrants who have moved to the city without official registration (*hộ khẩu*), face significant barriers to accessing public services.

The *hộ khẩu* system, which regulates access to social services based on household registration, effectively marginalizes migrants who do not have official Hanoi residency. As a result, many migrants and poor residents find themselves excluded from the full benefits of urbanization. The spatial segregation of Hanoi's population is one of the most visible manifestations of the unequal distribution of urbanization's benefits. Wealthier residents live in well-served central districts or newly developed suburban areas with modern infrastructure and amenities. In contrast, poor residents, many of whom are migrants, live in overcrowded, poorly serviced areas on the urban periphery. These informal settlements, while providing affordable housing, are characterized by substandard living conditions, including poor sanitation, unreliable electricity, and a lack of public transportation. These conditions not only affect the quality of life of poor residents but also limit their access to employment and educational opportunities. Urbanization has also led to a widening gap in employment opportunities between different social groups in Hanoi. While the city's economic growth has created jobs in sectors such as finance, technology, and manufacturing, many of these positions require a level of education and skill that poor residents and migrants often lack. As a result, many of the urban poor are confined to low-wage, precarious employment in the informal sector, where jobs are typically unstable and lack social protections, such as health insurance and retirement benefits. Migrants, in particular, often work in construction, street vending, or domestic services—jobs that are physically demanding, poorly paid, and offer little opportunity for upward mobility.

The education system in Hanoi, although improving, remains inequitable, with significant disparities in access and quality between wealthier and poorer districts. Schools in underdeveloped areas, particularly in peripheral districts where many poor residents live, are often overcrowded and underfunded, limiting the ability of children from low-income families to receive a quality education. This educational inequality further entrenches social exclusion, as poor educational outcomes limit future employment opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. In response to the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, the Vietnamese government has initiated various urban development plans, such as the Hanoi Master Plan 2030, aimed at addressing spatial inequalities and improving infrastructure in underdeveloped areas. These plans seek to upgrade housing, improve public transportation, and extend access to basic services in the city's peripheral districts. However, the implementation of these policies has been slow, and the needs of Hanoi's poor and migrant populations continue to outpace the government's ability to provide adequate services and infrastructure. Urbanization in Hanoi has been a complex process marked by significant economic growth and development, but also by deepening social inequalities. The city's poorest residents, particularly migrants, face substantial challenges in accessing the benefits of urbanization, including quality education, stable employment, and adequate living conditions. As Hanoi continues to grow, addressing these inequalities will be crucial for the city's long-term social and economic stability. The equitable distribution of urbanization's benefits—through inclusive policies and targeted interventions—remains a pressing issue for policymakers and urban planners in Hanoi.

3. Social Exclusion: An Overview



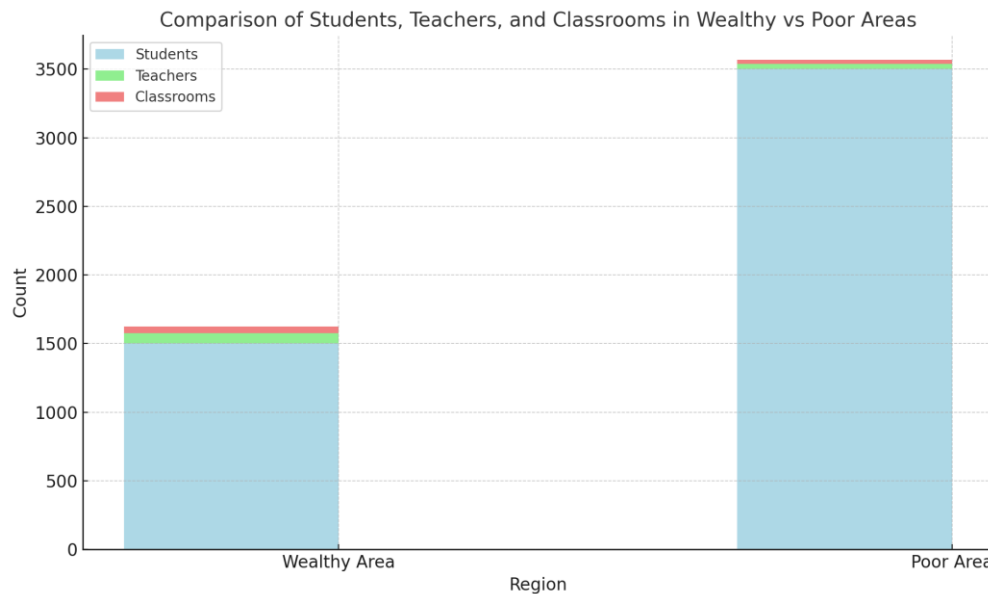


Figure 2.

Social exclusion is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that refers to the systematic marginalization of individuals or groups from full participation in the social, economic, and political life of their communities. It encompasses not only economic deprivation but also the inability to access fundamental rights, resources, and opportunities that are necessary for achieving social mobility and integration. In the context of urbanization, social exclusion becomes particularly pronounced as cities grow rapidly, often leaving certain segments of the population, especially the poor, behind. Social exclusion in urban areas like Hanoi is deeply intertwined with processes of economic marginalization, lack of access to services, and spatial segregation. In Hanoi, the exclusion of poor residents is driven by several interrelated factors, including poverty, internal migration, and institutional barriers. Many of the city's poorest inhabitants are internal migrants who have moved from rural areas to the capital in search of better economic opportunities. However, despite their relocation to the city, they often find themselves excluded from the full benefits of urban life due to economic and social barriers. The household registration system (*hộ khẩu*), which ties access to public services like education, healthcare, and housing to official residency status, plays a significant role in reinforcing this exclusion. Migrants without Hanoi *hộ khẩu* registration are often ineligible for these services, even if they have lived in the city for years. This institutional exclusion is compounded by the economic challenges that many poor residents face. Educational exclusion is one of the most significant dimensions of social exclusion in Hanoi. While Vietnam has made strides in improving access to primary education, disparities in educational quality and access persist, particularly for poor residents living in peripheral districts or informal settlements. These areas often have overcrowded and underfunded schools, limiting the ability of children from poor families to receive a quality education. Without access to quality education, these children face significant barriers to upward mobility, as their lack of qualifications limits their employment opportunities later in life. Similarly, employment exclusion is another critical aspect of social exclusion in Hanoi. Many poor residents, particularly migrants, are confined to the informal labor market, where jobs are characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of social protections. These informal jobs, such as street vending, domestic work, or construction, offer little security and limited prospects for long-term economic stability. Moreover, the exclusion from formal employment opportunities is exacerbated by the lack of vocational training and the discrimination that poor and rural-origin individuals often face when seeking jobs in the formal sector. This exclusion from both education and employment opportunities creates a cycle of poverty and marginalization, making it difficult for poor residents to break free from their circumstances and fully integrate into the social and economic life of the city. Social exclusion in Hanoi, therefore, is not only a reflection of economic inequality but also a result of institutional barriers, limited access to education, and unequal employment opportunities. Addressing these issues will require targeted policy interventions to ensure that all residents, regardless of their socio-economic background or migrant status, can access the resources and opportunities necessary for their full participation in urban life.

4. Educational Exclusion

Education is a fundamental tool for reducing social inequality, fostering economic mobility, and breaking the

cycle of poverty. However, in Hanoi, many poor residents, particularly those living in peripheral districts or informal settlements, face significant barriers to accessing quality education. This educational exclusion not only affects the individual opportunities of the poor but also perpetuates broader patterns of social and economic inequality within the city. As urbanization continues to reshape Hanoi, ensuring equitable access to education is critical for promoting social inclusion and enabling long-term development. One of the most significant barriers to education for poor residents in Hanoi is the difficulty in enrolling in public schools. Vietnam's education system is ostensibly inclusive, but many children from poor households, especially those of internal migrants, face challenges in obtaining the necessary documentation for school enrollment. The *hộ khẩu* (household registration) system, which ties access to public services to official residency status, creates additional hurdles for migrant families. Those without Hanoi residency status may struggle to enroll their children in local schools, as priority is given to students with official household registration in the city. As a result, many migrant children are either forced to attend overcrowded, underfunded schools in peripheral districts or, in some cases, are unable to access education altogether. In addition to administrative barriers, poor families often face significant financial challenges in sending their children to school. Although primary education is technically free in Vietnam, hidden costs—such as textbooks, uniforms, extracurricular activities, and school fees—place a considerable financial burden on low-income families. For many poor residents, these expenses are prohibitively high, leading to higher dropout rates among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Families living in informal settlements or peripheral areas, where incomes are already low, are particularly vulnerable to these hidden costs. Consequently, many children from poor households either drop out of school or attend irregularly, limiting their educational attainment and future opportunities. Another dimension of educational exclusion is the significant disparity in the quality of education between wealthier urban districts and poorer, peripheral areas. Schools in the wealthier central districts of Hanoi benefit from better infrastructure, access to more qualified teachers, and greater financial resources. In contrast, schools in low-income areas, particularly on the city's outskirts, often struggle with overcrowded classrooms, a lack of teaching materials, and underqualified staff. These conditions severely affect the learning outcomes of students in poor districts. The overcrowded nature of these schools often forces teachers to focus on rote learning rather than interactive or individualized teaching methods, further hampering students' educational development. In the long term, this disparity in educational quality deepens the divide between rich and poor, as children from wealthier families are better equipped to pursue higher education and secure well-paying jobs. The long-term impact of educational exclusion on employment opportunities cannot be overstated. In an increasingly competitive urban labor market, education is a key determinant of economic success. Poor educational outcomes limit access to higher-paying jobs in sectors such as finance, technology, and professional services, which require specific skills and qualifications. As a result, many of Hanoi's poor residents, especially those from migrant families, are confined to low-wage, unskilled jobs in the informal sector. These jobs, which include street vending, construction work, and domestic labor, offer little in terms of job security or career advancement, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The lack of vocational training programs for disadvantaged students further limits their employment prospects. Vocational education, which could provide an alternative pathway for those unable to pursue academic education, remains inaccessible to many poor residents due to high costs and limited availability in low-income areas. As a result, students from poorer backgrounds are often left with few viable options for improving their employment prospects. Educational exclusion in Hanoi is a critical issue that exacerbates social and economic inequality. The barriers to accessing quality education—whether administrative, financial, or structural—disproportionately affect poor residents, limiting their opportunities for upward mobility. Without targeted interventions to address these disparities, educational exclusion will continue to perpetuate cycles of poverty, hindering both individual and societal progress in Hanoi. Equitable access to quality education, particularly for marginalized and low-income communities, must be prioritized to promote inclusive development in the city.

5. Employment Barriers

One of the primary challenges facing poor residents is their concentration in the informal sector. The informal sector in Hanoi encompasses jobs such as construction work, street vending, domestic labor, and small-scale service provision. These jobs are characterized by low wages, insecure employment conditions, and a lack of social protections such as health insurance, retirement benefits, or paid leave. Street vendors, for instance, often work long hours in hazardous conditions, with little to no legal protection. Construction workers, many of whom are migrants from rural areas, frequently face dangerous working environments without adequate safety measures. Furthermore, these workers are often paid daily wages that are insufficient to cover the rising cost of living in an urban environment like Hanoi. This form of employment provides no long-term financial security, leaving workers vulnerable to economic shocks or personal crises. The informal sector's lack of social protection is one of the most significant barriers to social and economic mobility for the poor in Hanoi. Without formal contracts, workers are not eligible for benefits such as health insurance or pensions, which would provide a safety net in times of illness, injury, or old age. For many informal workers, an accident on the job or a health

issue can mean a sudden and complete loss of income. Moreover, the lack of job security means that informal workers can be easily exploited or dismissed without notice. This instability makes it difficult for poor residents to accumulate savings, invest in their futures, or escape the cycle of poverty.

Another critical employment barrier for poor residents is the lack of access to education and vocational training, which limits their ability to obtain formal sector jobs. The rapid development of Hanoi's economy has increased demand for skilled labor in sectors such as finance, information technology, and professional services. However, these jobs require specific educational qualifications and technical skills, which many poor residents do not possess due to their exclusion from quality education. The lack of vocational training programs further compounds this issue, as many disadvantaged individuals are unable to acquire the skills necessary to transition into higher-paying, formal employment. Consequently, many poor residents remain trapped in low-skill, low-wage jobs with little prospect for advancement. Discrimination based on socioeconomic status or rural origin further exacerbates employment barriers for poor residents. Many internal migrants from rural areas face social stigma and are often considered "outsiders" by employers in the urban labor market. This bias can prevent them from securing formal jobs, even when they possess relevant skills or experience. Employers may view rural-origin workers as less reliable or less skilled than their urban counterparts, reinforcing stereotypes that marginalize these populations. As a result, rural migrants often find themselves excluded from formal employment opportunities, regardless of their actual qualifications or work ethic. This discrimination perpetuates social exclusion, limiting access to stable jobs and reinforcing economic inequality.

The vulnerability of informal sector jobs to economic shocks has been starkly demonstrated by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, many informal workers in Hanoi lost their jobs or experienced a sharp decline in income as the demand for services such as construction, street vending, and domestic work plummeted. Unlike formal sector employees, informal workers received little to no government support or unemployment benefits, leaving them without any financial safety net. The pandemic highlighted the precarious nature of informal employment and the deep insecurity faced by poor residents who depend on these jobs. Economic shocks like this exacerbate existing inequalities, as the poor bear a disproportionate share of the economic burden during times of crisis. The instability of informal employment also has broader implications for social exclusion in Hanoi. Employment in the informal sector not only offers limited economic security but also limits workers' access to social and political networks that are crucial for upward mobility. Informal workers are often excluded from labor unions or professional organizations that could advocate for their rights and improve their working conditions. This exclusion from formal social structures reinforces their marginalization, making it harder for them to achieve social mobility or escape poverty. Additionally, because informal workers often do not contribute to social security systems, they are excluded from the long-term benefits that these systems provide, such as healthcare and pensions.

Employment barriers for poor residents in Hanoi, particularly in the context of urbanization, are deeply intertwined with issues of education, social protection, and discrimination. While the city's economic growth has created new job opportunities, these benefits have not been equally distributed, leaving many poor residents stuck in precarious, low-wage jobs in the informal sector. The lack of access to formal employment, compounded by educational barriers and social discrimination, perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Addressing these employment barriers will require targeted interventions, such as expanding vocational training, improving social protections for informal workers, and tackling the institutional biases that limit opportunities for rural migrants and the urban poor. Only by addressing these structural inequalities can Hanoi ensure that the benefits of urbanization are shared more equitably among all its residents.

6. Government Policies and Social Programs

One of the key areas of government intervention has been education. The government has introduced scholarships and subsidies for children from poor families to improve access to primary and secondary education. These programs are designed to offset some of the hidden costs associated with schooling, such as textbooks, uniforms, and school fees, which often act as barriers for poor families. Additionally, the government has made efforts to improve infrastructure in underdeveloped areas by building more schools and upgrading facilities in peripheral districts. These policies have led to increased school enrollment rates among children from low-income households, marking an important step toward reducing educational exclusion. However, despite these efforts, significant challenges persist. Many poor families still struggle to cover the costs associated with education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, where fees are higher and government support is more limited. Furthermore, while scholarships and subsidies help alleviate some financial burdens, they do not address the issue of poor educational quality in under-resourced schools. Schools in peripheral areas of Hanoi continue to face overcrowding, insufficient teaching staff, and a lack of educational materials, limiting the effectiveness of government interventions. These structural issues hinder the long-term prospects of students from poor families, making it difficult for them to compete with their wealthier peers.

In the area of employment, the Vietnamese government has introduced vocational training programs and microfinance initiatives to promote job creation and improve the skills of the urban poor. Vocational training centers, often supported by international development agencies, offer courses in areas such as construction, automotive repair, and hospitality, which are designed to provide practical skills for the job market. Microfinance programs, on the other hand, aim to provide small loans to low-income individuals, enabling them to start their own businesses or invest in income-generating activities. These initiatives are intended to reduce the reliance on informal sector jobs and help poor residents transition into more stable, formal employment. While these programs have shown promise, they face several challenges that limit their overall impact. Vocational training programs often suffer from underfunding and a lack of coordination with the private sector, which means that the skills taught do not always align with the demands of the labor market. As a result, many trainees struggle to find employment after completing their courses. Similarly, microfinance programs, while beneficial for some, are often inaccessible to the poorest residents due to stringent loan requirements or a lack of awareness about the programs. Additionally, the small size of the loans limits the scope of businesses that can be started, often resulting in marginal enterprises that struggle to survive in a competitive urban economy. The effectiveness of government policies is hampered by bureaucratic inefficiency and a lack of coordination between different levels of government and social service providers. Many of the programs designed to support the urban poor are implemented at the local level, but limited resources and capacity often undermine their success. For example, while Hanoi's urban development plan emphasizes the need for inclusive growth, implementation is often slow, and the benefits of these policies do not reach all marginalized communities, particularly those living in informal settlements.

The Vietnamese government has made important strides in addressing social exclusion in Hanoi through its policies and social programs. Efforts to improve education access, provide vocational training, and support small-scale entrepreneurship have shown partial success in alleviating some of the challenges faced by the urban poor. However, these initiatives have not been sufficient to fully address the deep-rooted issues of exclusion, particularly for migrants and residents in peripheral areas. Moving forward, the government will need to address the structural weaknesses in its programs, improve coordination between various agencies, and ensure that resources are more effectively targeted at the most vulnerable populations to create a more inclusive urban environment.

7. Conclusion

Social exclusion remains a significant issue in Hanoi, exacerbated by the city's rapid urbanization. While urbanization has driven economic growth and development, it has also deepened social and economic inequalities, particularly for the city's poor residents. Migrants and low-income individuals, especially those living in peripheral districts, face substantial barriers to accessing quality education, formal employment, and social services, which perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion. These marginalized groups are often confined to the informal labor market, live in underdeveloped neighborhoods with inadequate infrastructure, and encounter administrative and financial obstacles in enrolling their children in schools. As a result, they remain disconnected from the full benefits of urban growth. Urbanization has contributed to this inequality by creating a dual economy where wealthier residents enjoy the advantages of modernization—such as access to high-quality education, healthcare, and formal employment—while the poor struggle with precarious jobs and substandard living conditions. The spatial segregation of the population, with wealthier residents in the city center and poor residents on the outskirts, further entrenches this divide. As Hanoi continues to expand, it risks reinforcing these patterns of exclusion unless targeted interventions are made to address the specific needs of marginalized groups. To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is essential. Improving access to quality education for poor and migrant families is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling upward social mobility. Expanding vocational training programs and creating more inclusive employment opportunities are also key to ensuring that all residents, regardless of their background, can participate in the city's economy. Government policies must prioritize the inclusion of marginalized communities by providing better social protections and addressing the inefficiencies and inequities in the *hộ khẩu* system. Without decisive action, the persistence of social exclusion will continue to undermine Hanoi's social cohesion and sustainable development. A comprehensive and inclusive approach that targets the root causes of exclusion is necessary to create a more equitable and just urban future for all residents of the city.

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