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Affordable Housing for Migrants in the Suburban Areas of Ho Chi Minh City: Current Situation and Demands Based on Field Surveys

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Abstract: The rapid urbanization process in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) has led to a mechanical increase in the population, especially from migrants coming from the southern provinces of Vietnam. The objective of this study is to determine the current living conditions and access to affordable housing for migrants in the suburban areas of HCMC. This research will investigate and analyze the current situation and demands for affordable housing among migrant workers, particularly in the suburban districts of Binh Chanh, Hoc Mon, Nha Be, and Cu Chi—areas with several industrial zones and attracting a large number of migrants with low to medium incomes. Through surveys and in-depth interviews with workers and local officials, the research team identified a shortage of affordable housing, poor living conditions in unauthorized lodging areas, and limited access to housing policies. The study also clarifies the awareness, desires and actual demands of migrants in HCMC regarding affordable housing. Based on this, the authors propose policy directions for developing appropriate and sustainable affordable housing models in the context of rapid urbanization in the suburban areas of HCMC.

Key words: Affordable housing, migrants, housing needs, suburbs, Ho Chi Minh City.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the rapid urbanization process in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) has led to a mechanical increase in population, especially from the number of migrants coming from the southern provinces of Vietnam. In order to seek job opportunities, most migrants choose to live in suburban areas—where there are several industrial zones and clusters, and the cost of living is relatively lower than in the inner city areas [1]. However, the rate of population increase has not been accompanied by the synchronized development of the housing infrastructure system, especially the affordable housing segment for migrant workers with low to medium incomes [2, 3]. Many people are forced to rent in cramped, unauthorized housing areas lacking minimum living conditions, leading to negative consequences for social security, living environment and urban management.

Currently in HCMC, although affordable housing and social housing have become a topic of interest in urban development policies, the specific demands, accessibility, and awareness of migrants, the group directly affected, have not been fully surveyed, especially in suburban areas such as Binh Chanh, Hoc Mon, Nha Be, and Cu Chi districts.

The research team has conducted a survey on the current housing situation and analyzed the demands for affordable housing among migrants in several suburban districts of HCMC in the year 2024-2025, using over 770 questionnaires combined with in-depth interviews. The study also approached the perspectives of workers in IPs (industrial parks) and EPZs (export processing zones) and local management officials, aiming to provide a multi-faceted view of the challenges and opportunities for improving housing policies in HCMC.

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The objective of the study is to determine the current living conditions and access to affordable housing for migrants in the suburban areas of HCMC. From there, synthesizing data and proposing some solutions and policies on affordable housing in the suburban areas of HCMC. Part of the research for this article was carried out by the group of authors Le-Minh Ngo and colleagues, thanks to funding support from the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Science and Technology in the period 2024-2026 [4].

2. Method and Materials

The objective of this research is to understand the current situation of affordable housing for migrant workers in the suburban districts of HCMC. This will serve as a basis for proposing planning and architectural solutions for affordable housing for migrants in these suburban districts, aiming for sustainable development. Therefore, to collect complete, accurate, and objective data, a sociological survey method was applied.

The survey methods used include qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods consist of group discussions, scientific seminars, observation, and in-depth interviews with experts and local land management officials. Quantitative methods are implemented using questionnaires and survey systems. The sociological survey was applied to collect information on affordable housing and the impacts on affordable housing in the suburban areas of HCMC. Simultaneously, the study collected information assessing the awareness of local officials regarding affordable housing, the impacts on affordable housing in HCMC, combined with surveys to collect detailed data and drawings of affordable housing areas in the suburban districts of HCMC.

a. Survey area: Several suburban districts of HCMC where IPs-EPZs (industrial parks and export processing zones) are operating;

b. Survey size and number of questionnaires: 770 questionnaires. These were divided into 3 samples corresponding to 3 groups of survey subjects: (1) Migrant residents; (2) Residential area management officials; (3) Land administration officials or local management officials.

Groups 1 and 2 had 746 questionnaires; Group 3 had 24 questionnaires. The total number of questionnaires was 770.

c. The survey process and plan are carried out according to the process diagram below:

3. Results and Discussions

The research team conducted surveys and collected data on affordable housing in the suburban districts of HCMC in order to understand the current situation and demands for affordable housing. Understanding the current housing situation of migrants not only helps assess their access to this type of housing but also provides important insights on actual housing demands to guide the development of housing funds in accordance with local resources.

Regarding the current situation of affordable housing for migrants in the suburban districts of HCMC, it is divided into 3 groups as follows:

a. Regarding housing types: Survey data from 4 suburban districts of HCMC: Binh Chanh, Nha Be, Hoc Mon and Cu Chi clearly reflect the inadequacies in housing types for migrants. In particular, boarding houses are the dominant type of housing, especially in Cu Chi (96.7%) and Hoc Mon (93.6%), showing that migrant workers do not have many choices of accommodation. The rate of boarding houses in Nha Be and Binh Chanh is 73.3% and 71.5% respectively, also at a high level. Some districts such as Binh Chanh and Nha Be have worker accommodation areas (23.1% and 26.7% respectively), thanks to support policies from industrial parks such as Le Minh Xuan IP, Vinh Loc IP, and Hiep Phuoc IP [5]. Meanwhile, Cu Chi and Hoc Mon almost do not have worker accommodation areas (Cu Chi 0%, Hoc Mon 1.9%), resulting in workers having to rely on rental housing, placing additional pressure on their living expenses. According to the data collected during the survey, there are no cases of people

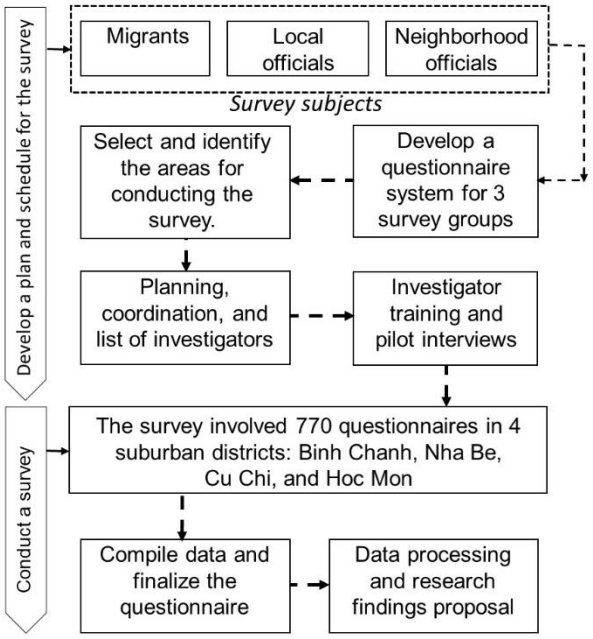


Fig. 1 Survey and sociological investigation process on affordable housing in HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).

living in apartment buildings or mini-apartments. This reflects the reality that migrants have almost no ability to rent or buy houses of average quality or higher. The main reason is limited financial conditions, income levels not commensurate with the rental/purchase price of housing [5, 6].

According to the survey results, the proportion of solid and semi-solid houses is very low, only accounting for about 1% to 4% of the total number of houses surveyed. Binh Chanh district has 1.0% of migrants living in solid houses, while Hoc Mon district has 0.6%, and Cu Chi district has 0.7%. Regarding semi-solid houses, the highest rate only reached 4.5% (Binh Chanh district). These figures show that migrants are largely unable to buy land to build their own houses, due to low income and lack of support policies from the city and local authorities (see Fig. 2).

b. Regarding the usable area of housing: The survey results show that the current dominant trend is small, cramped rental housing, with common areas of 13 m²-25 m², especially at 15 m², 18 m², 20 m², and 22 m². This group accounts for the largest proportion in all districts and is suitable for small families, young couples, or people sharing accommodation (Table 1).

In addition, very small areas (7 m²-12 m²), although not common, are still available, especially in cheap rental rooms for single workers or students. This type of housing poses a risk of not ensuring quality of life, affecting health and basic amenities.

Binh Chanh District has the most diverse range of usable areas, with some locations exceeding 40 m² or 50 m², possibly due to residents utilizing existing whole houses or land. Meanwhile, Hoc Mon and Nha Be mainly concentrate on housing units of 15 m²-22 m², reflecting financial limitations and land availability for rent.

Housing units larger than 50 m² are rare, mostly consisting of existing whole houses, which are not common among migrants due to high rental costs or underutilization of space, leading to inefficiency.

c. Assessment of the current housing situation and quality: Housing quality includes a combination of factors related to the living environment, construction structure, materials, safety, comfort, and amenities that people need, ensuring a comfortable, healthy, and safe life. Housing quality includes not only technical issues such as durable structure and materials, but also factors such as the level of comfort, social, cultural, environmental, and surrounding public utilities [7, 8].

The survey results of the research group show that migrants in the suburban districts of HCMC are living in cramped, unsanitary, and inconvenient housing conditions. Statistical results on living conditions

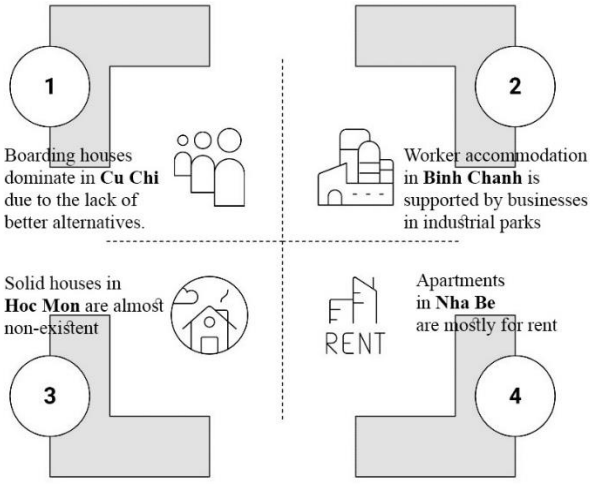


Fig. 2 Characteristics of housing types for migrants in suburban districts of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).

and amenities of residential areas for migrants in the suburbs of HCMC show the current living conditions and the level of access to affordable housing for migrants in the suburban areas of HCMC (Table 2). At the same time, the rate of using small, cramped boarding houses is very high, with an average usable area of 15-22 m², while stable housing types such as solid houses or apartments are almost non-existent.

In addition, the life quality of residents in these housing areas is also negatively affected by the heat, flooding, lack of sanitary facilities and security, etc. Generally, quality of life is affected by several factors, including physical and mental health, living and social environment, economic and educational conditions. Housing, or place of residence, plays a crucial and direct role in the physical and mental health of people [6]. A healthy living space helps improve mood and health; conversely, when the living environment is polluted or lacks security and safety, or the amenities are inadequate, the quality of life of residents will decline. Thus, quality of life is a multidimensional concept and is affected by the combination of several aspects in the lives of residents [8].

The current situation shows that the housing of migrants in the surveyed areas faces a wide range of difficulties, which can be divided into 4 main groups of problems as follows (see Fig. 3).

Regarding living space and indoor conditions: Lack of living space is the most common problem in Nha Be District (38.0%), Cu Chi (29.5%), and Hoc Mon (25.4%). The main reasons are high population density, small and cramped rental rooms, and insufficient privacy; dampness and wall/roof leaks: high rates in Nha Be (30.4%) and Binh Chanh (23.1%), reflecting poor construction quality and lack of insulation/moisture-proof materials. In addition, heat is the most serious

Table 1 Current status of housing area in the suburban areas of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).

Area	7 m²-12 m²	15 m²-22 m²	Over 40 m²	Over 50 m²
Target users	Workers, students, single individuals	Small families, young couples	Families with long-term living needs	Families with long-term living needs
Availability	Not common	Common	Only available in a few locations	Very rare
Quality of life	Low	Average	High	High
Financial impact	Low cost	Moderate cost	High cost	High cost
Location	All districts	Hoc Mon, Nha Be	Binh Chanh	All districts

Table 2 Statistics on living conditions and amenities of residential areas for migrants in the suburbs of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).

District	Binh Chanh		Nha Be		Hoc Mon		Cu Chi	
	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio
Lack of indoor living space	58	23.1	30	38.0	32	25.4	31	29.5
Dampness, leaks in walls or roof	58	23.1	24	30.4	23	18.3	11	10.5
Excessive heat, stuffy conditions	130	51.8	37	46.8	60	47.6	73	69.5
Lack of cooking space or inadequate hygienic cooking space	32	12.7	5	6.3	17	13.5	7	6.7
Lack of proper wastewater drainage in the bathroom	25	10.0	4	5.1	6	4.8	5	4.8
Lack of bathroom or shower	82	32.7	17	21.5	58	46.0	17	16.2
Lack of outdoor seating space (garden, balcony, rooftop)	99	39.4	17	21.5	44	34.9	34	32.4
Environmental pollution	84	33.5	11	13.9	20	15.9	13	12.4
Flooding	47	18.7	26	32.9	43	34.1	8	7.6
Frequent power outages, water outages	26	10.4	8	10.1	14	11.1	2	1.9
Inadequate safety and security conditions	27	10.8	2	2.5	22	17.5	6	5.7
Lack of parking space	42	16.7	6	7.6	29	23.0	32	30.5
Restricted curfew/residence access hours	90	35.9	11	13.9	36	28.6	13	12.4
Restricted leisure and social activity hours	85	33.9	13	16.5	44	34.9	18	17.1

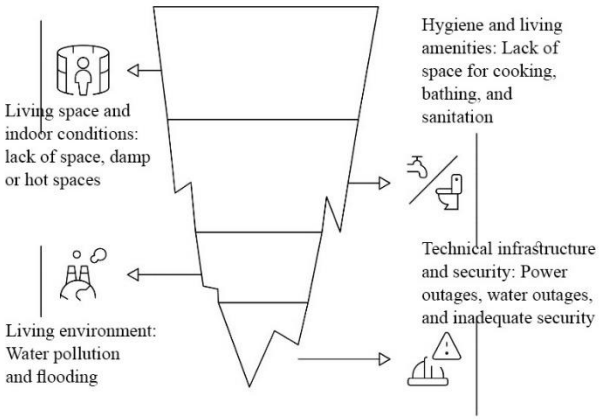


Fig. 3 Current housing situation in suburban districts of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).

problem, especially in Cu Chi (69.5%), followed by Binh Chanh (51.8%), and Hoc Mon (47.6%). This is due to heat-absorbing metal roofing, lack of ventilation systems, and cramped spaces.

Regarding housing hygiene and living amenities: Lack of cooking space or unsanitary cooking facilities is common in Hoc Mon District (13.5%) and Binh Chanh District (12.7%), indicating a lack of basic living amenities; lack of bathtubs/showers is particularly high in Hoc Mon (46%), with many boarding houses still using temporary, unsanitary bathrooms; Although the proportion of households lacking proper wastewater drainage is relatively low (below 10%), this issue persists, indicating that sanitation infrastructure is still inadequate.

Regarding living environment: Severe environmental pollution in Binh Chanh District (33.5%), due to boarding houses being near canals, landfills, and industrial zones; flooding is most common in Nha Be (32.9%) and Hoc Mon (34.1%), reflecting weak drainage systems or low-lying geographical locations.

Regarding technical infrastructure and security: Frequent power outages and water outages are serious problems in Hoc Mon (11.1%) and Binh Chanh District (10.4%), indicating that the current technical system is overloaded due to rapid population growth; inadequate security is common in Hoc Mon (17.5%) and Binh Chanh (10.8%), often associated with unauthorized lodging areas; a significant lack of parking spaces is a noticeable issue in Cu Chi (30.5%) and Hoc Mon (23.0%), indicating that the infrastructure has not kept pace with the growing demand for motorbike transportation.



Fig. 4 Current status of interior living spaces for workers in suburban areas of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).



Fig. 5 Current status of environmental pollution in the boarding house areas in the suburbs of HCMC (Source: Authors, 2025).



Fig. 6 Interviews with residents in Tan Nhut Commune, Binh Chanh District, HCMC (Source: Authors, 2024).

4. Housing Demands of Migrants Based on Survey Results

Through surveys and in-depth interviews with local workers, in addition to identifying the current state of affordable housing, the research team also investigated and determined the actual housing demands of migrants in the suburban areas of HCMC. The collected data reflected the desired housing size of migrants in four suburban districts of HCMC (Binh Chanh, Nha Be, Hoc Mon, Cu Chi). The minimum housing size requirements are as follows:

- Binh Chanh: This area has a large number of migrant workers, with the core demand focusing on small boarding houses, and the strongest desire for housing of 30-40 m² (33.7%), indicating that this is the most suitable size for the living standards of migrants in this area. The percentage of those desiring housing under 30 m² is also relatively high (27.6%), reflecting the demand for small, affordable boarding houses.
- Nha Be: Demand is more diverse, with demand for small boarding houses as well as medium-sized apartments (40-50 m²). The highest demand is for 30-40 m² houses (32.5%), but the demand for 40-50 m² houses is also quite high (23.3%). The demand for housing over 50 m² (24.4%) is higher than in other areas, indicating that the migrant group here has slightly better financial conditions.
- Hoc Mon: This area has several affordable boarding houses, and migrants tend to choose smaller units to save costs. The highest demand is for 30-40 m² houses (36.5%), higher than the area's average. The demand for houses under 30 m² (28.8%) is also quite high, showing that many migrants have low incomes.
- Cu Chi: This area has the highest demand for small boarding houses, primarily due to a lower cost of living compared to other areas. The desire for housing under 30 m² accounts for the highest percentage (34.2%), the highest among all districts. The percentage of those desiring housing over 50 m² is very low, only around 10%, indicating that the majority of migrants here are looking for small, affordable housing.

These data helped the research team to identify trends in housing size choices among migrants, thereby proposing a housing development model that suits actual demands (see Fig. 7). Accordingly, the majority of migrants desire housing with an area of 30-50 m²:

+ The highest percentage (33.9%) desired housing of 30-40 m², with 251 people out of 740 surveyed. This was followed by the group desiring housing of 40-50 m² (20.0%), with 148 people. In total, 53.9% of migrants wanted housing in the 30-50 m² range.

+ This area is suitable for small households or groups of migrants living together. Affordable boarding houses and small apartments should be commonly designed at 30-50 m² area to meet this demand.

Next, the group desiring housing under 30 m² accounts for a relatively high percentage (27.6%):

+ 204 people (27.6%) still desire housing under 30 m², demonstrating that the demand for smaller, more affordable houses remains very high. This percentage is highest in Cu Chi (34.2%) and Hoc Mon (28.8%), possibly due to lower income levels in these areas, leading them to choose smaller houses.

+ Migrants tend to choose small boarding houses to save costs, especially in areas far from the city center. The government needs to develop more compact, low-cost rental housing areas that ensure amenities.

The group desiring housing from 50-60 m² accounts for a low percentage (9.5%):

+ Only 70 people (9.5%) want housing from 50-60m², indicating that the majority of migrants do not need larger areas than this. This rate is highest in Nha Be (13.8%), possibly due to some migrant households having better financial conditions.

+ Migrants generally have low to average incomes, making it difficult for them to afford larger houses. Housing units larger than 50 m² may be more suitable for migrants with better financial conditions.

Finally, the group desiring housing over 60 m² accounts for a very low percentage (6.3%):

Table 3 Desired usable area of affordable housing (Source: Authors, 2025).

Area	Binh Chanh		Nha Be		Hoc Mon		Cu Chi		Total	
	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio	Count	Ratio
Under 30 m²	86	27.6	21	17.5	45	28.8	52	34.2	204	0.3
From 30-40 m²	105	33.7	39	32.5	57	36.5	50	32.9	251	0.3
From 40-50 m²	67	21.5	28	23.3	25	16.0	28	18.4	148	0.2
From 50-60 m²	26	8.3	16	13.3	17	10.9	11	7.2	70	0.1
From 60-70 m²	7	2.2	13	10.8	4	2.6	2	1.3	26	0.0
Over 70 m²	21	6.7	3	2.5	8	5.1	9	5.9	41	0.1
Total	312	100.0	120	100.0	156	100.0	152	100.0	740	1.0

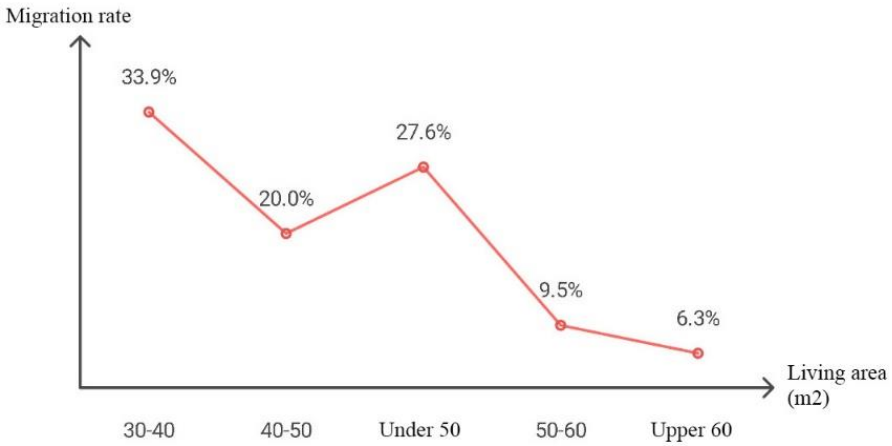


Fig. 7 The housing space needs of migrant residents in the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City (Source: Authors, 2025).

+ Only 52 people (7.0%) desired houses from 60-70 m², and 41 people (5.5%) wanted houses over 70 m². This result shows that a large living space is not a priority for migrants.

+ Housing units larger than 60 m² are usually expensive, not suitable for the budgets of migrants. Housing units larger than 60 m² should target middle-income and above households or long-term residents.

5. Conclusions

Ho Chi Minh City is regarded as a highly livable city with abundant employment opportunities for individuals across different skill and education levels. With a relatively mild climate, low exposure to natural disasters and storms, and a socially open environment, the city has attracted an increasing number of migrants, who have contributed to the city's economic development [9, 10]. Currently, the HCMC authorities have implemented several policies and solutions to improve the housing situation for workers and migrants. However, ensuring stable and affordable housing for a large number of migrant workers in the city is still a major challenge for the authorities.

Migrants in the city have to find housing themselves and face many challenges when renting rooms, small boarding houses in residental areas or apartments [11]. The survey results of the research group identified that the actual demand for affordable housing is very large and concentrated the most among the group of workers working in the IPs-EPZs. The results clearly reflect the reality of the shortage of affordable housing for migrants in the suburban areas of HCMC. Although they account for a large proportion of the labor structure in the IPs-EPZs, most migrants are still living in poor quality, cramped, and unstable housing conditions in the long term. Limited living space not only affects the physical and mental health of workers but also poses challenges to the urban environment,

social security, and sustainable development of the city. In addition, preferences for housing located near workplaces, with access to basic amenities, affordable rental prices, and options for long-term rental or installment-based ownership are well aligned with HCMC's urban development orientation [12]. However, the gap between demand and accessibility remains significant—the majority of workers lack information about workers' housing projects, as well as the necessary conditions and procedures to register for one.

Based on the survey results, the authors have a scientific basis for orienting solutions for developing affordable housing for workers, including: models for developing affordable housing, affordable apartments, worker accommodation with basic amenities and supportive financial policies. These include preferential policies for housing loans, long-term rent-to-own schemes with low interest rates, public-private partnership policies to attract enterprises to invest in worker housing development linked to industrial zones; Appropriate urban planning that allocates worker housing areas in proximity to IPs-EPZs, ensures convenient transportation and provides adequate technical infrastructure.

Finally, identifying the current housing situation and demands of migrant workers in HCMC is a crucial basis for sustainable, long-term housing development policies for the city in the new phase.

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