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# **gist**

*File  
Amerasians*

A quick reference aid on U.S. foreign relations  
Not a comprehensive policy statement  
Bureau of Public Affairs • Department of State

## Amerasians in Vietnam

August 1988

Background: The Department of State has long been concerned about the status of Amerasians in Vietnam--those born of Vietnamese mothers and American fathers between January 1, 1962 and January 1, 1976. Some 4,500 of them and 7,000 members of their families have been accepted and have departed for resettlement in the US since September 1982, when the Vietnamese authorities began to permit the Orderly Departure Program of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to process Amerasians and their families.

In September 1984, Secretary Shultz, in statements before the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, announced on President Reagan's behalf that over a 3-year period the US would accept for admission all Amerasians, their qualifying mothers, and other close family members then in Vietnam--provided that they were released by the Vietnamese Government. Estimates of the number of Amerasians vary from 10,000 to 15,000. Most of them live with their mothers and other family members; a few are orphans. The difficult circumstances of life in today's Vietnam are even worse for Amerasians, who face special hardships because of their mixed racial background.

US policy: Amerasians are eligible for consideration for admission to the US under the President's program because of their close ties to the US and the suffering caused by their mixed race. To qualify for admission under the program, Amerasians must show only that they have American paternity; they need not prove their fathers' identities.

Program's history: After the 1984 announcement of the President's admissions program, the initial Vietnamese response was encouraging. Compared to an average monthly departure rate in fiscal year 1984 of 182 Amerasians and their family members, a monthly average of 319 persons was permitted to leave Vietnam in fiscal year 1985. On January 1, 1986, however, the Vietnamese authorities unilaterally suspended interviewing for all people seeking to leave Vietnam for the US under the Orderly Departure Program (including the Amerasians and their family members) and slowed down departures to other countries.

In a series of meetings with Vietnamese officials under UNHCR auspices, the US Government repeatedly urged that the interviewing of Orderly Departure Program applicants, including Amerasians, be permitted to resume. During these meetings, the Vietnamese stated that discussion of the Amerasians should be conducted bilaterally rather than under UNHCR auspices. In view of its strong humanitarian concern for the Amerasians, the US agreed to this proposal and, beginning in September 1986, bilateral talks about the Amerasians took place in Hanoi. In September 1987, the Vietnamese finally agreed to accept a US proposal permitting the processing of Amerasian applicants to resume under a bilateral program with interviews of Amerasians and their families performed by US consular and immigration officials visiting Ho Chi Minh City. Interviewing resumed in October 1987.

Legislation passed in December 1987 provides that Amerasians and their close family members departing Vietnam during a 2-year period beginning March 21, 1988, will be admitted to the US as immigrants but will continue to receive refugee benefits. A few Amerasians enter the US as American citizens or as immigrants who are beneficiaries of visa petitions filed on their behalf by relatives in the US.

American citizenship: Many of the Amerasians in Vietnam were born out of wedlock. If an American father is identified, some Amerasians may have a claim to US citizenship under a recent amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act. Besides meeting other requirements under this law, an American father must prove a blood, as well as legal, relationship to the young person before he or she reaches the age of 18. This may include acknowledging paternity under oath and agreeing in writing to provide financial support until his or her 18th birthday. For further information on citizenship requirements, contact the State Department's Office of Citizens Consular Services (202) 647-3675.

How the program works: The Amerasian program operates through the cooperative efforts of the Vietnamese, Thai, and US Governments. The US office with operational responsibility for the program is the Orderly Departure Program Office at the US Embassy in Bangkok. Officials from the embassy travel to Ho Chi Minh City to interview and begin processing Amerasians and their families. The Vietnamese Government schedules the interviews with US consular and immigration officials for those wishing to exit Vietnam.

After the Amerasians are approved, they undergo a required medical examination. If they pass it, the US then notifies the Vietnamese authorities who prepare a manifest of cases approved for departure. By agreement with the Thai Government, the manifest must be received in Bangkok 2 weeks before the Amerasians and their families arrive for final processing, which can last up to 12 days. Most then depart for the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines for a 6-month English-language and cultural orientation program, available to all refugees leaving Southeast Asia. Final sponsorship and resettlement are arranged by private voluntary agencies that work under contract with the State Department.

Adoption and foster parenthood: Very few Amerasian minors are available for adoption because few are orphans. Those who depart Vietnam without their mothers are placed in foster homes. The foster care is arranged by the refugee resettlement agencies working with the State Department.

For further information: Contact the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State, Washington, DC 20520 or call (202) 663-1053.