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XUẤT KHẨU XI MĂNG CỦA VIỆT NAM SANG ASEAN TRONG KHUÔN KHỔ HIỆP ĐỊNH ĐỐI TÁC KINH TẾ TOÀN DIỆN KHU VỰC (RCEP): CƠ HỘI, THÁCH THỨC VÀ KHUYẾN NGHỊ

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Tóm tắt

Hiệp định Đối tác Kinh tế Toàn diện Khu vực (RCEP) chính thức có hiệu lực đã mang đến những động lực đáng kể cho hoạt động xuất khẩu của Việt Nam, trong đó có ngành xi măng. Việc triển khai RCEP được kỳ vọng sẽ tiếp tục mở rộng khả năng tiếp cận thị trường cho các sản phẩm xi măng Việt Nam trong khu vực ASEAN – một thị trường quan trọng với nhu cầu xây dựng ngày càng gia tăng và mức độ liên kết thương mại nội khối ngày càng sâu rộng. Xi măng là một trong những mặt hàng xuất khẩu quan trọng của Việt Nam, đóng góp đáng kể vào sản xuất công nghiệp và nguồn thu ngoại tệ của quốc gia. Mục đích chính của nghiên cứu này là phân tích thực trạng hoạt động xuất khẩu xi măng của Việt Nam sang các quốc gia thành viên ASEAN trước và sau khi RCEP được thực thi. Trên cơ sở đánh giá đó, nghiên cứu xác định những cơ hội và thách thức phát sinh từ các cam kết cắt giảm thuế quan, sự gia tăng cạnh tranh và những thay đổi trong động thái thương mại khu vực. Từ đó, một số khuyến nghị chính sách và giải pháp chiến lược được đề xuất cho Chính phủ cũng như các doanh nghiệp xi măng trong nước nhằm

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tận dụng tối đa lợi ích mà RCEP mang lại, đồng thời nâng cao năng lực cạnh tranh và tính bền vững của xuất khẩu xi măng Việt Nam tại thị trường ASEAN.

Từ khoá: RCEP, xuất khẩu xi măng, ASEAN, Việt Nam

VIETNAM'S EXPORT OF CEMENT TO ASEAN UNDER THE REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP): OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Abstract

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which officially came into effect, has brought notable momentum to Vietnam's export activities, including the cement industry. The implementation of RCEP is expected to further expand market access for Vietnamese cement products within ASEAN – a key regional market with growing construction demand and increasing intra-regional trade integration. Cement is one of Vietnam's important export commodities, contributing significantly to industrial production and foreign exchange earnings. The main objective of this study is to analyze the current situation of Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN member states before and after the implementation of RCEP. Based on this assessment, the study identifies the opportunities and challenges arising from tariff reduction commitments, increased competition, and evolving regional trade dynamics. On that basis, several policy and strategic recommendations are proposed for the government and domestic cement enterprises in order to maximize the benefits of RCEP and enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of Vietnam's cement exports in the ASEAN market.

Keywords: RCEP, cement exports, ASEAN, Vietna

1. Literature review and Methodology

1.1. Literature review

There have been a great number of researchers who show their concern over the economic impact of RCEP on Vietnam's exports, including to ASEAN markets.

FiinGroup (2025) analyzed Vietnam's cement market outlook, forecasting a 3.3% increase in cement export volume to 20.5 million tons in 2024, with potential 10-12% annual growth from 2025 onward due to stable demand in ASEAN markets like the Philippines. The report highlights opportunities from infrastructure development in key destinations such as the Philippines and Malaysia, but notes challenges from oversupply, high production capacity, and competition from Thailand, Indonesia, and China. However, it does not specifically model RCEP's tariff reductions or rules of origin for cement products.

Vietnam Cement Association (2025) reported that cement and clinker exports reached nearly 30 million tons valued at \$1.12 billion in the first ten months of 2025, with major ASEAN destinations including the Philippines, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. This growth, up 17% in volume year-over-year, underscores RCEP's role in facilitating regional trade amid tariff liberalizations, yet the study points to emerging hurdles like stricter environmental regulations, technical standards, and anti-dumping probes in markets such as Taiwan and the Philippines. The analysis relies on aggregate trade data without isolating RCEP-specific effects on cement competitiveness.

S&P Global (2025) examined Vietnam's cement exports, noting a 9% monthly volume increase to 3.47 million tons in October 2025, driven by ASEAN demand despite global pressures. Key challenges include intensified competition from surplus producers like China and Thailand, alongside trade defense measures in ASEAN importers, which could undermine RCEP's cumulative rules of origin benefits for Vietnamese cement. Nonetheless, this market update lacks quantitative modeling of RCEP's long-term impacts, such as phased tariff eliminations on construction materials.

The Ministry of Construction Vietnam (2026) documented record cement exports of nearly 37 million tons in 2025, generating \$1.36 billion, boosted by a clinker export tax cut from 10% to 5% under policies aligning with RCEP integration. This supports opportunities for ASEAN market penetration via reduced costs and public infrastructure booms, but highlights vulnerabilities from real estate slumps and fluctuating regional demand. The report uses descriptive statistics without deeper econometric analysis of RCEP's trade creation effects for cement.

However, in terms of its effect on Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN under RCEP, there has not been any thorough research that integrates sector-specific modeling, comprehensive challenges like non-tariff barriers, and targeted recommendations, which acts as a motivator for the writers to carry this out.

1.2. Methodology

This research has been conducted during the project implementation period, starting from January 2026. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach based on secondary data which involves the compilation, processing, and analysis of statistics from official sources. The research design emphasizes a time-based comparison aligned with major RCEP milestones when the Agreement was signed on 15 November 2020 and entered into force for Vietnam on 1 January 2022. The expected outcomes of this methodology are:

(1) to describe trends and the magnitude of changes in Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN across the RCEP phases.

(2) to identify opportunities and challenges, such as tariffs, rules of origin, intra-regional competition, and logistics costs.

(3) to propose recommendations for policymakers and firms to better leverage the preferences and favorable conditions created by the RCEP.

2. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

2.1. Overview

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement (FTA) among 15 Asia-Pacific economies, which include the ten ASEAN countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, and five partners: China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. The RCEP agreement was signed in November 2020 and after more than eight years of diplomatic discussions, the member states completed their required ratification process by 1 January 2022. The agreement established the world's most extensive free trade agreement, which linked a market of about 2.3 billion people and 30 percent of GDP while providing a single legal system for all trade activities between its member nations (Vietnamnews, 2025).

RCEP's objectives and coverage aim to foster economic development through enhanced trade and investment activities, tariff reductions with commitments covering a high percentage of tariff lines over time, and the establishment of standardized trade rules throughout member nations. The agreement consists of 20 chapters that address major topics such as trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property, e-commerce, customs procedures and dispute resolution. At the same time, it builds on existing ASEAN+1 FTAs by consolidating them into one framework with unified rules of origin to support regional value chains.

Compared with other major FTAs, RCEP is the largest in terms of market size and population, yet it is often regarded as less deep in certain high-standard commitments. For instance, whereas RCEP covers a broader population and GDP share than agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), its tariff liberalization and non-trade obligations (e.g. labor and environmental standards) tend to be less strict. Vietnamese businesses, which already operate under several FTAs such as CPTPP and the EU-Vietnam FTA (EVFTA), can benefit from broader market access under RCEP, but must also navigate increased competition within the bloc and take advantage of the agreement's unified rules to expand exports and integrate into regional supply chains (Vietnam Briefing, 2022).

2.2. RCEP's regulations related to cement exporting

2.2.1. Rules of Origin and Certificate of Origin

The RCEP Agreement requires that cement under HS heading 25.23 meet its hereto rules of origin in Chapter 3 and Annex 3A to be eligible for preferential tariff rates. For cement, the applicable Product-Specific Rule (PSR) is CTH (Change in Tariff Heading) at 4-digit level. Therefore, any non-originating materials used in the production process must be in a tariff heading different from HS 25.23. In practice, this will allow for imported raw materials such as limestone (HS 25.21) or gypsum (HS 25.20), as they do not share the same tariff headings as cement, thus satisfying the requirement for transformation.

However, this rule has limits. If a producer imports non-originating clinker (also classified under HS 25.23), and only grinds that clinker into the finished product of cement, they will fail to demonstrate that the origin requirement has been met because no change in tariff heading has

occurred. This demonstrates that the origin of a good is based on the activities undertaken to produce that good, therefore, substantial production, rather than minimal processing, will guide the determination of origin. Accordingly, the CTH rule will encourage manufacturers in RCEP member countries to add local value rather than simply repackaging or performing finishing operations.

The De Minimis rule also provides RCEP's flexibility because it allows products to achieve originating status when their non-originating components meet CTH requirements except for a small portion of materials. In particular, the materials value must not exceed 10% of the final product's FOB value. This provision is relevant for cement manufacturers that may use small quantities of imported inputs that do not fully satisfy the tariff change rule.

Exporters need to present legitimate Proof of Origin documentation to receive preferential treatment. The documents can be presented as Certificate of Origin (CO) issued by an authorized body or as Declaration of Origin by approved exporters or as self-declaration by exporters or producers. However, Vietnam has a 10-year transition period from the entry into force of RCEP to implement the self-declaration mechanism.

When cement is shipped through an intermediate RCEP Party before reaching its final destination, a back-to-back Proof of Origin may be issued by the intermediate country's authority, provided the goods have not undergone further processing beyond logistics operations. This facilitates regional distribution networks while maintaining the integrity of origin certification.

2.2.2. Trade Facilitation

Chapter 4 of RCEP on Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation introduces measures aimed at increasing the cross-border movement of goods, which is particularly important for bulky construction materials such as cement. An important measure is pre-arrival processing, under which importers may submit customs documentation electronically before the goods arrive at the destination. This allows customs authorities to begin processing early, therefore reducing delays once shipments reach the port. Vietnam committed to full implementation of this system by 31 December 2023.

Another major commitment concerns the release of goods. RCEP members are required to adopt procedures ensuring that goods are released within a time period no longer than necessary for compliance verification. The agreement sets a target of release within 48 hours of arrival and submission of required information. Vietnam committed to full implementation of this system by 31 December 2021, which supports faster turnover and lower storage costs for cement shipments.

The agreement also strengthens legal certainty through the advance ruling mechanism. Exporters and importers may request a written advance ruling from the importing country's customs authority concerning tariff classification, origin, or customs valuation before the goods are shipped. The authorities should issue these rulings within 90 days whenever possible, and the rulings should remain valid for three years. This mechanism reduces uncertainty and risk for cement exporters when planning cross-border transactions.

Finally, RCEP requires customs authorities to implement risk management systems. These systems direct inspection resources towards high-risk shipments while allowing for fast tracking of shipments which present low risk. Standardized cement shipments, which are typically homogeneous and predictable, are likely to benefit from such streamlined procedures. Vietnam

committed to full implementation of risk management measures by 31 December 2023, further enhancing trade efficiency within the RCEP region.

2.2.3. Commitments on Tariff

Table 1: Detailed Tariff Commitment Schedule for Vietnam’s Exports to ASEAN Countries under RCEP

Country	HS Code	Product Description	Base Rate	Detailed Commitment Schedule
Brunei	2523.10.10.00	Clinkers used for white cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.10.90.00	Other cement clinkers	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.21.00.00	White Portland cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.29.10.00	Coloured cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.29.90.00	Other Portland cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.30.00.00	Aluminous cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
	2523.90.00.00	Other hydraulic cements	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 25.
Indonesia	2523.10.10.00	Clinkers used for white cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.10.90.00	Other cement clinkers	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.21.00.00	White Portland cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.29.10.00	Coloured cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.29.90.00	Other Portland cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.30.00.00	Aluminous cement	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.90.00.00	Other hydraulic cements	0.0%	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.10.10	Clinkers used for white cement	15%	Gradual reduction: 13% (Yr 3), 9% (Yr 8), 5% (Yr 12), reaching 0% by Year 15.

Cambodia	2523.10.90	Other cement clinkers	15%	Same reduction path as white clinkers, reaching 0% by Year 15.
	2523.21.00	White Portland cement	15%	Remains at 15% throughout Year 20 and beyond.
	2523.29.10	Coloured cement	15%	Remains at 15% throughout Year 20 and beyond.
	2523.29.90	Other Portland cement	15%	Gradual reduction reaching 0% by Year 15.
	2523.30.00	Aluminous cement	15%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.90.00	Other hydraulic cements	15%	Gradual reduction reaching 0% by Year 15.
Laos	2523.10.10	Clinkers used for white cement	5%	Remains at 5% throughout Year 20 and beyond.
	2523.10.90	Other cement clinkers	5%	Remains at 5% throughout Year 20 and beyond.
	2523.21.00	White Portland cement	5%	Slow reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
	2523.29.10	Coloured cement	10%	Gradual reduction: 8% (Yr 3), 4% (Yr 9), reaching 0% by Year 15.
	2523.29.90	Other Portland cement	10%	Gradual reduction reaching 0% by Year 15.
	2523.30.00	Aluminous cement	5%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.90.00	Other hydraulic cements	5%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
Malaysia	2523.10 000	Cement clinkers	Nil (0%)	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.21 000	White Portland cement	25.0%	Remains at 25.0% through Year 23.
	2523.29 100	Coloured cement	5.0%	U (Unbound): No specific commitment to reduce.
	2523.29 900	Other Portland cement	50.0%	Remains at 50.0% through Year 23.

	2523.30 000	Aluminous cement	Nil (0%)	Maintains 0.0% from Year 1 through Year 23.
	2523.90 000	Other hydraulic cements	25.0%	Remains at 25.0% through Year 23.
Myanmar	2523.10.10.00	Clinkers used for white cement	1%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.10.90.00	Other cement clinkers	1%	Remains at 1% until Year 12, then 0% from Year 13.
	2523.21.00.00	White Portland cement	1%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.29.10.00	Coloured cement	1%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.29.90.00	Other Portland cement	1%	Remains at 1% until Year 12, then 0% from Year 13.
	2523.30.00.00	Aluminous cement	1%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.90.00.00	Other hydraulic cements	1%	Remains at 1% until Year 12, then 0% from Year 13.
Philippines	2523.10.10	Clinkers used for white cement	3%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.10.90	Other cement clinkers	U	Unbound: No specific commitment listed.
	2523.21.00	White Portland cement	3%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.29.10	Coloured cement	5%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.29.90	Other Portland cement	U	Unbound: No specific commitment listed.
	2523.30.00	Aluminous cement	3%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.90.00	Other hydraulic cements	U	Unbound: No specific commitment listed.
	2523.10.10	Clinkers used for white cement	10%	Linear reduction (0.5% yearly), reaching 0% by Year 20.

Thailand	2523.10.90	Other cement clinkers	10%	Linear reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
	2523.21.00	White Portland cement	10%	Linear reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
	2523.29.10	Coloured cement	10%	Linear reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
	2523.29.90	Other Portland cement	10%	Linear reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
	2523.30.00	Aluminous cement	1%	Reduced to 0% starting from Year 1.
	2523.90.00	Other hydraulic cements	10%	Linear reduction reaching 0% by Year 20.
Singapore	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Author's compilation

3. The situation of Vietnam's cement export to the ASEAN industry in the context of implementing RCEP

3.1. *Cement export to ASEAN situation of Vietnam before RCEP came into effect*

In terms of turnover: Prior to the implementation of RCEP, Vietnam's cement industry already faced various challenges amid multiple global crises, mainly due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and intense competition from neighboring markets.

Vietnam's Total Cement Export Turnover to the ASEAN Market experienced a complicated fluctuation between 2010 and 2021. During the period from 2014 to 2017, although cement export shared a high percentage of total Vietnamese exported value, which recorded the highest share at 44,5% in 2016, there was a significant decrease in the turnover of cement export, ranging from around 304.000 thousand USD to 248.000 thousand USD. This decline can be largely attributed to intense international competition and unfavorable price dynamics, where low cement-producing countries such as China, Pakistan, and India promoted exporting activities (Thuong, 2016). Moreover, domestic cement capacity expanded faster than demand (TechAdmin, 2018), creating a crowded and highly price-competitive market, combined with weak export prices and logistics constraints, leading to export turnover to stagnate or fall despite rising production capacity.

In 2018, there was again robust growth in the export turnover of cement, rising from nearly 248.000 thousand USD to an impressive 368.000 thousand USD, while the contribution to total Vietnamese export value decreased by 4%. A favorable export environment reinforced this rebound in that year, when strong regional GDP growth and supportive trade conditions from ASEAN countries and China enhanced Vietnam's overall export performance.

However, the period between 2019 and 2020 recorded significant disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to export industries, leading to a renewed decrease in cement export turnover. During Covid-19, not only was the supply chain disrupted, but also construction activities were significantly reduced as consumers had a high demand for necessary items for anti-viruses.

From table 1, the Philippines was considered to be the most cement-imported country in the ASEAN market from Vietnam, with the value always more than 150.000 thousand USD throughout the pre-RCEP period. In the period of 6 years, the Philippines is outstanding compared to other countries, which never exceeded 30.000 thousand USD, meaning the Philippines imported value from Vietnam was fifth as much as each other in ASEAN countries.

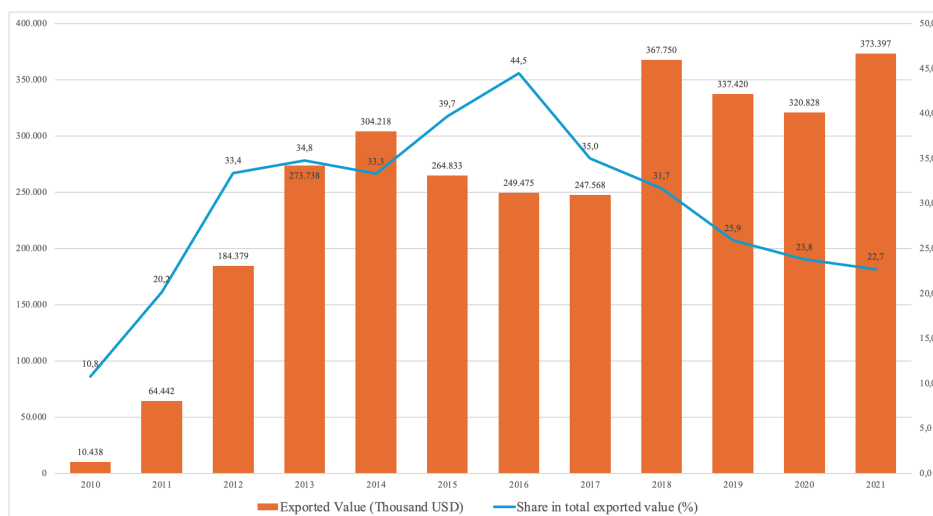


Figure 1: Vietnam’s Total Cement Export Turnover to the ASEAN Market, 2010–2021

Source: ITC calculations based on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UN COMTRADE statistics.

Table 2: Vietnam’s Cement Export Turnover to ASEAN Countries, 2016–2021 (Thousand USD)

Markets	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Philippines	184.235	204.156	312.119	257.504	288.263	342.299
Singapore	842	0	1	8.757	910	6.232
Malaysia	19.413	16.678	27.719	27.193	10.946	14.114
Cambodia	18.083	12.143	16.198	28.957	14.628	7.214
Lao People's Democratic Republic	15.753	10.865	10.009	12.710	5.482	2.781
Brunei Darussalam	0	0	1.434	2.281	578	681
Indonesia	8.650	0	30	16	8	74
Thailand	0	2.698	208	2	13	2
Myanmar	2.499	1.028	32	0	0	-

Source: ITC calculations based on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UN COMTRADE statistics.

In terms of market structure: Prior to the implementation of RCEP, Vietnam’s cement industry was highly concentrated on Portland cement with HS - 252329. This product continuously accounted for the largest contribution to the export turnover throughout the period

and experienced an upward trend, rising from nearly 155.000 thousand USD in 2016 to about 330.000 thousand USD in 2021. This reflects our national comparative advantage in large-scale production and export of Portland cement, and this product is still used for mass construction demand in ASEAN markets.

Following Portland cement were cement clinkers (HS - 252310) and cement (HS - 232390) respectively; however, a notable point is that export turnover of cement clinkers peaked in 2018 with approximately 102.4 thousand USD and recorded a significantly decreasing trend in 2 next years. This can be attributed to a decline in regional demand due to the effect of Covid-19 pandemic.

White Portland cement (HS - 252321) represented only a marginal share of Vietnam's cement export turnover to ASEAN markets; however, it brought to national revenue a great amount of money, with always higher than 650 thousand USD earned from export activities.

Table 3: Vietnam's Cement Export Structure to ASEAN Market, 2016–2021 (Thousand USD)

HS code	Product label	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
252321	White Portland cement, whether or not artificially coloured	1.001	17.290	15.080	679	876	798
252390	Cement, whether or not coloured (excl. portland cement and aluminous cement)	7.628	5.918	3.644	7.133	1.213	5.250
252310	Cement clinkers	86.079	89.304	102.363	41.663	22.291	37.687
252329	Portland cement (excl. white, whether or not artificially coloured)	154.767	135.056	246.664	287.943	296.446	329.662

Source: ITC calculations based on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UN COMTRADE statistics.

1.1. Cement export to ASEAN situation of Vietnam after RCEP came into effect

After RCEP entered into force on 1 January 2022, Vietnam's cement exports to the ASEAN market increased notably. RCEP seemed to coincide with an expansion in market scale and a reorientation of Vietnam's cement exports within ASEAN.

Table 4: Vietnam's Cement Export Turnover to ASEAN Countries, 2022 - 2024 (Thousand USD)

Markets	2022	2023	2024
Philippines	362.579	358.320	319.389
Singapore	8.367	94.238	77.517
Malaysia	49.150	68.395	57.002

Cambodia	8.054	4.875	4.237
Lao People's Democratic Republic	3.369	3.783	3.232
Brunei Darussalam	1.705	3.018	2.589
Indonesia	351	1.297	23
Thailand	6	-	2
Myanmar	0	0	0

Source: ITC calculations based on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UN COMTRADE statistics.

In terms of the turnover from the year 2022 onwards, RCEP eliminates 90-100% of intra-ASEAN import duties, reinforcing ATIGA's zero rates and giving Vietnamese cement a decisive price edge in Singapore and Malaysia, markets with high demand from urbanization and housing projects. Flexible C/O Form D has enabled easier access for clinker exports to Laos and Thailand, accelerating post-COVID recovery, according to VCCI.

The Philippines dominated the market throughout the period, while Myanmar recorded no exports, and total turnover fluctuated amid shifting regional demand. The Philippines, the largest market, peaked at 362.579 thousand USD in 2022 before declining steadily to 358.320 thousand USD in 2023 and 319.389 thousand USD in 2024 which was a drop of over 12% from the start. This trend likely stems from intensified competition from local producers and Thailand's surplus capacity, alongside stricter import quotas amid post-pandemic construction slowdowns in the Philippines.

At the same time, Singapore, emerging as a new star via infrastructure like Smart Nation showed the sharpest growth, surging from a mere 8.367 thousand USD in 2022 to 69.238 thousand USD in 2023 (over 700% increase) and further to 77.17 thousand USD in 2024. It seemed that rising infrastructure projects, such as urban redevelopment under Singapore's Smart Nation initiative, drove this uptick, supported by RCEP tariff reductions enhancing Vietnam's price competitiveness.

Malaysia, being benefited from national housing plans, maintained relatively stable exports around 49 thousand USD annually, reflecting consistent demand from housing but offset by domestic supply expansions. While smaller markets like Laos (peaking at 3.783 thousand USD in 2023), Brunei (highest at 3.018 thousand USD in 2023), and Thailand (volatile, from 35.1 thousand USD down to 1.297 then rebounding to 23 thousand USD) showed minor fluctuations due to limited infrastructure needs and proximity-based competition, Myanmar remained at zero, likely due to political instability disrupting trade. By that, RCEP clearly provides a stable legal framework for long-term investment.

Regarding product structure, Vietnam's abundant raw materials such as limestone allow clinker and Portland cement to meet regional cumulation standards, expanding reach from traditional outlets to emerging ones like Brunei and Indonesia. To be specific, Portland cement (HS - 252329) continued to account for the largest share of exports, but clinker (HS - 252310)

played a more substantial role than before, especially in 2022 and 2024, suggesting a broader mix of cement products in Vietnam’s ASEAN exports.

Table 5: Vietnam’s Cement Export Structure to ASEAN Market, 2022-2024 (Thousand USD)

HS code	Product label	2022	2023	2024
252329	Portland cement (excl. white, whether or not artificially coloured)	340.289	425.611	350.926
252310	Cement clinkers	84.591	78.776	58.775
252390	Cement, whether or not coloured (excl. portland cement and aluminous cement)	7.997	29.533	54.252
252330	Aluminous cement	0	0	21
252321	White portland cement, whether or not artificially coloured	705	7	15

Source: ITC calculations based on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and UN COMTRADE statistics.

Portland cement (HS 252329) consistently accounted for the largest proportion of Vietnam’s cement exports to the ASEAN market over the 2022-2024 period. Export value increased markedly from 340.289 thousand USD in 2022 to a peak of 425.611 thousand USD in 2023, before moderating to 350.926 thousand USD in 2024. The strong growth in 2023 likely reflected robust post-pandemic construction demand in ASEAN economies, while the subsequent decline in 2024 may indicate slowing regional construction activities and heightened competition.

In contrast, cement clinkers (HS 252310) exhibited a steady downward trend, falling from 84.591 thousand USD in 2022 to 78.776 thousand USD in 2023, and further to 58.775 thousand USD in 2024. This decline suggests a gradual structural shift away from exporting semi-processed clinker toward higher value-added finished cement products.

Meanwhile, cement under HS 252390 recorded rapid growth, rising from 7.997 thousand USD in 2022 to 29.533 thousand USD in 2023, and further to 54.252 thousand USD in 2024, indicating expanding demand for this product category. White Portland cement (HS 252321) remained at a relatively modest level, decreasing sharply from 705 thousand USD in 2022 to 7 thousand USD in 2023, before slightly recovering to 15 thousand USD in 2024.

Notably, aluminous cement (HS 252330) debuting in 2024 marks a shift from raw clinker to high-value specialty products, boosting added value by 15-20%. This development highlights a clear diversification and product upgrading in Vietnam’s cement export structure. The emergence of aluminous cement exports suggests product upgrading and greater specialization within the industry. Furthermore, the implementation of RCEP, with its tariff reductions and simplified rules of origin, likely facilitated deeper market penetration in ASEAN, encouraging Vietnamese exporters to broaden their product portfolio while gradually reducing reliance on clinker exports.

Despite RCEP's benefits, Vietnam's cement sector confronts mounting non-tariff barriers, particularly stringent green standards and carbon emission certifications in Singapore and Malaysia that many local plants struggle to meet. Moreover, the Philippines' tighter import quotas since 2023, combined with Thailand's 20 million-ton surplus capacity continue to erode price competitiveness, which drive down margins by 10-15% in the largest market. Geopolitical instability keeps Myanmar exports at zero, while Cambodia and Laos remain vulnerable to cheap Chinese cement flooding local markets.

Therefore, it is suggested that Vietnamese cement firms should prioritize technological upgrades to produce low-carbon, high-value products like aluminous and specialty cements, targeting Singapore's Smart Nation projects and Malaysia's housing boom. Another recommendation would be pursuing actively diversified market penetration by aiming for 30% non-Philippines revenue by 2027 through joint ventures in Laos and Indonesia, likely to mitigate quota risks. Still, government support for RCEP C/O compliance training and green certification funding remains essential to unlock tariff benefits fully, while long-term investments in logistics infrastructure may cut delivery costs by 15-20% across ASEAN routes.

2. Opportunities and Challenges of Vietnam's Export of Cement to ASEAN under RCEP

2.1. Opportunities

The implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has created several structural opportunities for Vietnam's cement industry when exporting to ASEAN markets. These opportunities mainly arise from expanded market access, diversification of export products, reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers, greater prospects for technological upgrading through regional investment flows, and institutional reforms stimulated by deeper economic integration. Together, these factors strengthen Vietnam's competitive position in the ASEAN cement market and support a gradual shift toward a more diversified and higher-value export structure.

Expansion of the export market scale

One major opportunity created under RCEP is the expansion of export market scale for Vietnamese cement within ASEAN. Through tariff reductions and improved market access commitments, the agreement lowers trade costs and facilitates greater intra-regional trade among member economies. Trade data show that Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN increased after RCEP entered into force in 2022. Major markets such as the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia recorded noticeable growth, reflecting broader regional market penetration. For example, exports to the Philippines reached 362.579 thousand USD in 2022, remaining Vietnam's largest ASEAN market, while exports to Singapore rose sharply from 8.367 thousand USD in 2022 to 94.238 thousand USD in 2023, an increase of more than 700%. This trend indicates that RCEP improves geographical market access, allowing Vietnamese exporters to expand into multiple ASEAN markets instead of relying heavily on a single destination.

Opening export markets for a wider range of cement products

Another opportunity under RCEP is the expansion of export markets for a wider range of cement products. Trade liberalization encourages firms to diversify their export structure and introduce new cement varieties to regional markets (Upply Supply Chain Analysis, 2023). Recent trade data show increasing diversification in Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN. While Portland cement (HS 252329) continues to dominate exports, other categories have grown significantly. For instance, exports under HS 252390 increased from 7.997 thousand USD in

2022 to 29.533 thousand USD in 2023 and 54.252 thousand USD in 2024, indicating rising demand for alternative cement products. More notably, aluminous cement (HS 252330) appeared in Vietnam's export structure for the first time in 2024 with a value of 21 thousand USD, while no exports were recorded in 2022 or 2023. This development suggests that Vietnamese producers are gradually diversifying their export portfolio, supported by RCEP's rules of origin and trade facilitation mechanisms, which allow exporters to access preferential tariffs for a broader range of products.

Reduction of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers

RCEP also creates opportunities through the reduction of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, which lowers transaction costs and improves the competitiveness of Vietnamese cement exports. Under the agreement, about 92% of goods traded among member countries will eventually enjoy tariff elimination, significantly improving market accessibility (Allen&Gledhill, 2022). In addition, RCEP promotes trade facilitation measures such as simplified customs procedures and improved regulatory transparency. The impact of these mechanisms can be observed in the rapid growth of exports to Singapore, which increased from 8.367 thousand USD in 2022 to 77.517 thousand USD in 2024.

Encouragement of technology transfer and investment from industrialized economies

Another opportunity associated with RCEP is the potential for technology transfer and investment cooperation from more industrialized economies such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. The agreement promotes deeper regional economic integration and strengthens cross-border supply chains (FBIC ASEAN, 2022). For Vietnam's cement industry, this integration may facilitate the transition from exporting semi-processed materials such as clinker toward exporting more value-added finished cement products. Trade data already suggest early signs of this structural change: clinker exports declined from 84.591 thousand USD in 2022 to 58.775 thousand USD in 2024, while exports of finished cement products such as HS 252390 increased significantly during the same period.

Acceleration of domestic institutional and industrial adjustment

Finally, RCEP encourages domestic institutional reform and industrial restructuring, improving the long-term competitiveness of Vietnam's cement exports. Participation in a large regional trade agreement requires improvements in customs procedures, regulatory transparency, and trade-related administrative systems. At the industry level, stronger regional competition encourages Vietnamese cement producers to improve production efficiency, upgrade machinery, and modernize production processes, thereby supporting long-term export competitiveness.

2.2. Challenges

Although RCEP provides significant opportunities for Vietnam's cement exports to ASEAN markets, several structural challenges remain. These challenges mainly include intensified regional competition, limited value-added in the export structure, fluctuations in regional demand, regulatory differences across ASEAN economies and domestic supply-demand imbalance. Together, these factors may constrain the extent to which Vietnamese cement producers fully benefit from the trade liberalization framework created by RCEP.

Intensified intra-regional competition

One major challenge arising from RCEP is stronger competition among cement producers within ASEAN. As tariffs decline and market access improves, producers from countries such as Thailand and Indonesia gain similar preferential access to regional markets. Vietnamese exporters, therefore, face direct competition from regional producers with large production

capacities and established distribution networks. This pressure is reflected in export trends. Although the Philippines remains Vietnam's largest ASEAN market, export turnover declined from 362.579 thousand USD in 2022 to 319.389 thousand USD in 2024, representing a decrease of more than 12%. This suggests that increased regional competition may gradually reduce Vietnam's market share in some ASEAN markets.

Limited value-added in the export structure

Another challenge lies in the relatively low value-added structure of Vietnam's cement exports. Despite some diversification, exports remain heavily concentrated on standard construction materials such as Portland cement and clinker. Trade data show that Portland cement (HS 252329) still dominates exports to ASEAN markets, reaching 425.611 thousand USD in 2023 before declining to 350.926 thousand USD in 2024. Although this reflects Vietnam's strong production capacity, reliance on basic cement products limits access to higher-value market segments, while specialized products such as white cement or aluminous cement remain a small share of exports.

Fluctuating regional demand and market dependence

Another challenge is the volatility of demand across ASEAN markets, which affects the stability of Vietnam's cement exports. Even with improved trade conditions under RCEP, export performance remains closely linked to construction cycles and infrastructure investment trends in importing countries. Cement demand is highly sensitive to fluctuations in construction activity because infrastructure and real-estate development constitute the primary sources of cement consumption. For instance, infrastructure development projects and urban construction programs across Asia are key drivers of cement demand, meaning that any slowdown in these sectors can directly reduce import demand for cement products (Global Growth Insights, 2025).

Remaining non-tariff barriers and regulatory differences

Furthermore, non-tariff measures (NTMs) and regulatory requirements across ASEAN also pose challenges. Even in an RCEP liberalized environment, ASEAN importers may enforce technical standards, certification requirements, or environmental compliance protocols that cement shipments must satisfy to gain market entry (WTO Center, 2025). These compliance costs in documentation, testing, and logistical adjustments can offset some of the cost advantages derived from tariff preferences, especially for smaller exporters with limited resources to manage complex regulatory landscapes.

Domestic supply-demand imbalance and rising production costs

Lastly, the ongoing supply - demand imbalance in Vietnam's domestic market complicates export strategy. Vietnam's cement production capacity remains significantly higher than domestic consumption, contributing to oversupply and forcing producers to seek export outlets. While exports to ASEAN and beyond have grown, this oversupply can exert downward pressure on prices and weaken bargaining power in contract negotiations, especially in price-sensitive segments of ASEAN markets. Also, rising input costs such as electricity and raw materials, which are reported as ongoing issues, further constrain exporter cost structures and reduce competitiveness in external markets, including ASEAN (Vietnam News, 2025).

3. Recommendations for improving Vietnam's Export of Cement to ASEAN under RCEP

3.1. Policy recommendations for Vietnam's government

Strengthen trade facilitation and customs modernization

Vietnam's government should accelerate the full implementation of trade facilitation commitments under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), particularly in the areas of pre-arrival processing, electronic customs clearance, risk management systems, and advance rulings mechanisms. This recommendation directly leverages the opportunity of reduced tariff and non-tariff barriers under RCEP while addressing remaining procedural inefficiencies that may limit firms' ability to fully benefit from improved market access. RCEP Chapter 4 on Customs Procedures and Trade Facilitation requires member countries to simplify, standardize, and digitalize customs procedures in order to shorten clearance time and reduce administrative burdens. This commitment is especially important for bulk, low-margin goods such as cement, where port delays and procedural inefficiencies significantly increase logistics costs and erode export competitiveness. Effective implementation of these measures is expected to reduce port congestion, lower demurrage and warehousing costs, shorten delivery time, and ultimately enhance the price competitiveness of Vietnamese cement exports in ASEAN markets.

Upgrade logistics and port infrastructure for bulk cargo

Because cement is a heavy and low-value bulk commodity, transportation costs account for a large share of total export costs. This issue becomes particularly critical in the context of domestic oversupply and intense price competition, where cost efficiency plays a decisive role in export performance. Therefore, efficient bulk logistics infrastructure plays a critical role in maintaining export competitiveness. The Vietnamese government should prioritize public and private investment in specialized bulk cargo ports, cement terminals, and coastal shipping networks, particularly in key port clusters such as Hai Phong - Quang Ninh in the North, Nghi Son - Chan May in the Central region, and Cai Mep - Thi Vai in the South. The World Bank highlights that Vietnam's logistics costs remain high relative to regional peers due to infrastructure bottlenecks, fragmented port systems, and limited bulk cargo handling capacity. For cement exports, which are highly sensitive to transportation and handling costs because of their heavy weight and low unit value, inefficient port infrastructure significantly reduces export profitability and delivery reliability. Strategic investments in port modernization, coastal shipping development, and public-private partnership schemes are therefore essential to reduce logistics costs, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen Vietnam's export competitiveness in ASEAN markets.

Support green cement transition and carbon reduction

Vietnam should introduce targeted financial incentives and technical assistance programs to support cement enterprises in adopting waste heat recovery systems, increasing the use of alternative fuels, and developing low-carbon cement products. This recommendation directly responds to the challenge of increasing non-tariff barriers and environmental regulations in ASEAN markets, which may otherwise constrain export opportunities despite tariff liberalization. The cement industry is recognized as one of the largest contributors to industrial carbon emissions, and international organizations emphasize the urgent need for decarbonization in this sector. In ASEAN, environmental and sustainability standards for construction materials are gradually becoming stricter, particularly in more advanced markets. Without timely policy support, Vietnamese cement exporters risk facing regulatory barriers and declining competitiveness. Implementing green credit schemes, tax incentives for energy-efficient investment, and public funding for research and development would facilitate the green transition of the cement industry, reduce carbon emissions, and enhance Vietnam's long-term export sustainability.

Improve trade defense capacity and early warning systems

As competition intensifies under RCEP and regional markets become more open, Vietnamese cement exports may increasingly face trade remedy measures such as anti-dumping investigations and safeguard actions. This reflects the challenge of intensified intra-regional competition, where increased market openness also exposes domestic producers to greater protectionist responses from importing countries. Vietnam should therefore strengthen its national trade remedy monitoring framework. Several ASEAN countries have previously imposed safeguard measures on cement imports, creating significant uncertainty and market access risks for Vietnamese exporters. In the absence of timely information and legal preparedness, enterprises often face sudden disruptions and financial losses. The establishment of a comprehensive early warning system, combined with legal advisory support and bilateral consultation mechanisms under RCEP, would enable Vietnamese authorities and firms to proactively respond to trade defense actions, safeguard export interests, and maintain stable market access within ASEAN.

Promote industry restructuring and capacity management

The Vietnamese government should promote industry restructuring and more efficient capacity management in the cement sector. This recommendation directly addresses the structural challenge of domestic supply-demand imbalance, which places downward pressure on export prices and limits the benefits gained from expanded market access under RCEP. Vietnam's cement production capacity significantly exceeds domestic demand, creating oversupply pressures and forcing producers to rely heavily on export markets. Without appropriate industry planning, excessive capacity may lead to intense price competition and declining export profitability. Therefore, the government should encourage industry consolidation, support technological upgrading, and guide new investments toward higher value-added and environmentally sustainable cement production.

3.2. Business strategy recommendations for Vietnam's enterprises

Market diversification within ASEAN

Vietnamese cement enterprises should gradually shift from heavy reliance on a single export market toward a diversified ASEAN strategy, with particular focus on Malaysia and Indonesia. This strategy both leverages the opportunity of expanded market access under RCEP and mitigates the challenge of demand volatility and market dependence in individual ASEAN countries. Trade statistics indicate that these markets continue to experience strong construction demand driven by infrastructure expansion and urbanization. Market diversification helps reduce vulnerability to safeguard measures, regulatory changes, and cyclical downturns in individual countries, thereby enhancing export stability. Firms are encouraged to establish regional distribution hubs, develop long-term supply contracts, and cooperate with local distributors in order to strengthen market penetration and build resilient distribution networks.

Product upgrading and portfolio diversification

Enterprises should shift export strategies away from low-margin bulk Portland cement toward higher value-added products such as white cement, high-grade blended cement, and low-carbon cement. This recommendation responds to the challenge of limited value-added in Vietnam's export structure while taking advantage of emerging opportunities for product diversification under RCEP. International experience suggests that these product segments command premium prices, face less intense price competition, and generate higher profit margins, especially in advanced ASEAN markets. Product upgrading would enable Vietnamese firms to increase export value, improve profitability, and reduce vulnerability to intense price competition in traditional bulk cement segments.

Optimize rules of origin utilization under RCEP

Vietnamese exporters should fully leverage the unified Rules of Origin framework under RCEP by increasing domestic value-added content, reducing dependence on imported clinker, and applying for approved exporter status. This recommendation directly utilizes the opportunity created by RCEP's trade facilitation and rules of origin provisions, enabling firms to access preferential tariffs across a wider range of products. RCEP's flexible rules of origin are designed to encourage deeper processing and regional production integration, enabling firms to qualify more easily for preferential tariffs. Effective utilization of these provisions would enhance tariff preference uptake, strengthen Vietnam's position in regional value chains, and promote domestic industrial upgrading.

Strategic pricing and logistics integration

Vietnamese cement enterprises should strengthen technology cooperation and strategic partnerships with firms from advanced RCEP economies such as Japan and South Korea. This approach leverages the opportunity for technology transfer and investment cooperation under deeper regional integration, while also supporting the transition toward higher value-added and more sustainable production. Such cooperation may facilitate the adoption of energy-efficient production technologies, waste heat recovery systems, and low-carbon cement production methods. Technology upgrading would not only improve production efficiency but also help Vietnamese exporters meet increasingly strict environmental standards in ASEAN markets.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Vietnam's export of cement (HS - 2523) under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is poised to have a long term impact on the national economy, trade relations, and industrial development. The RCEP agreement, signed by Vietnam and ASEAN countries, and China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, has brought various opportunities for economic growth, integration and cooperation, especially in ASEAN markets.

However, Vietnamese exporters of cement to ASEAN markets have not always experienced significant advantages since RCEP implementation in 2022. It is important to acknowledge that Vietnam still and will face intense regional and global competition in the cement export industry. Besides, due to many crises in geopolitics, international economics will face many challenges and fluctuations. Thereby, to maintain our national competitiveness, Vietnamese exporters should continue investing in innovation, research and development, and diversify our products.

In conclusion, in the future, Vietnam's overall exports to ASEAN markets, especially the export of cement is predicted to significantly increase thanks to the positive conditions provided by RCEP. Simplified customs procedures and rules of origin will help the export process easier, encouraging many Vietnamese enterprises to expand into not only ASEAN markets but also the international market. By leveraging opportunities and addressing the challenges ahead, Vietnam can solidify its position as a key player in the global cement industry, contributing to its overall economic prosperity and regional integration.

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