



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Vietnam: Ethnic and religious minority groups

Version 3.0

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#)/Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, and to provide a range of views and opinions which are compared and contrasted where possible, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance and welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 2 February 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state due to the person's ethnicity and/or religion.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Ethnic minority groups have different national cultural traditions from the majority of the population (Kinh (Viet)). This often includes following a particular faith.

1.2.2 There are 53 minority ethnic groups in Vietnam. For the purposes of this note, CPIT have looked at the state treatment of ethnic groups generally and of Chinese (Hoa), Montagnards (or Degar), Hmong and Khmer Krom specifically.

1.2.3 The government officially recognises 16 different religious traditions. For the purposes of this note, CPIT have looked at state treatment of religious groups generally and of Buddhists, Catholics, Cao Daoist, and Protestants specifically.

1.2.4 Although this note looks at ethnic groups and religions separately because these are very inter-linked, mention may be made, of ethnicity within the country information and assessment sections on religion and vice versa.

1.2.5 Country information and an analysis of the situation for Hoa Hao Buddhists is available in the CPIN on [Vietnam: Hoa Hao Buddhism](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 The person's actual or imputed race and/or religion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. Ethnic groups in general

- 2.4.1 Within the population of around 102 million the government recognises 54 ethnic groups, the vast majority (85%) being Kinh (Viet). The remaining 53 are minority ethnic groups. However, the government does not recognise ethnic minority groups as being indigenous peoples, meaning they are unable to have to right to autonomy or self-govern. The 15% of the population which belong to minority ethnic groups are mainly concentrated in the mountainous and rural regions of Vietnam with the exception of the Khmer Krom and Hoa who are concentrated in cities or the lowlands (see [Legal status of ethnic groups](#) and [Ethnic demography](#)).
- 2.4.2 All recognised ethnic minorities are Vietnamese citizens and the law prohibits discrimination against ethnic minority groups. However, these groups remain disproportionately the poorest citizens. Those ethnic minorities that live in urban areas are generally more affluent than the same ethnic group living in rural areas. In an attempt to address the social and economic inequalities of ethnic minorities, the government has provided special programmes to improve education, health facilities and expand road access and electrification of rural communities and villages. However, some local officials restrict access to schooling and prevent members of some ethnic groups from obtaining household registration papers (see [Poverty](#), [Government policies and services](#) and [Documentation](#)).
- 2.4.3 Similarly, the government has allocated land to ethnic minorities through its special programme in the Central Highlands. However, as the government does not recognise private land ownership they reserve the right to reacquire farmland for construction and investment and this type of land appropriation disproportionately affects ethnic minority communities (see [Government policies and services](#) and the [Country Policy Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#)).
- 2.4.4 Some groups, in particular the Montagnards and Hmong, are viewed with suspicion by the government who question their loyalty to the communist regime, particularly because these groups fought alongside the US forces against the communists during the Vietnam war. This can result in members of these groups being monitored, harassed and arbitrarily detained by officials. Some officials are also wary of ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands whom they believe are looking to create an autonomous region which they see as a threat to the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) (see

[Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#) and [Hmong](#) and the assessment sections below these groups).

- 2.4.5 Ethnic minority and indigenous communities face discrimination from the state authorities, particularly local officials. This includes some groups being prevented from obtaining birth certificates and household registration papers which causes problems accessing schooling and other services. Some members of ethnic minority groups also face monitoring, harassment, intimidation and physical assault and in most cases this is closely related to the practice of their faith, their political activism or their links (perceived or actual) to overseas organisations whom the government believe have separatist aims (see [State discrimination, harassment, and detention](#) and [Religion among ethnic minority groups](#)).
- 2.4.6 While members of ethnic groups face official and societal discrimination, in general this is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. It is unlikely that ill-treatment occurs based on a person's ethnic group alone.
- 2.4.7 However, where a person belonging to an ethnic minority is, or is perceived to be, a political activist or who has connections to groups that the government perceives to have separatist aims then they may face treatment that amounts to persecution or serious harm (see below for specific assessments of each group). Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate they would be at real risk from the state on return.
- 2.4.8 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#).
- 2.4.9 Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of a religious minority decision makers should refer to the relevant section below.
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b. Chinese (Hoa/Han)

- 2.4.11 There are no reliable statistics for the number of ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam but figures from the Vietnam Embassy in the UK suggest the number to be around 900,000; other sources estimate that the figure is in excess of 2 million people. The majority of ethnic Chinese live in the south of Vietnam, with large numbers residing in Ho Chi Minh City (see [Chinese \(Hoa or Han\)](#))
- 2.4.12 Most people from this group do not belong to a particular religious group. Where they do have a faith it is most likely to be an ethnic/folk religion or Buddhism (see [Chinese \(Hoa or Han\)](#))
- 2.4.13 Poverty among ethnic Chinese has decreased more than any other ethnic group and the Chinese are well assimilated in Vietnamese culture. Private

schools teaching in Chinese is forbidden unless it relates to the actual language (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#))

- 2.4.14 Where a person is ethnic Chinese (Hoa/Han) they are unlikely to be subjected to treatment which would be sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. However, each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate why they would be at risk of persecution.
- 2.4.15 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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c. [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#)

- 2.4.16 The Montagnards are a group of more than 30 indigenous communities who traditionally inhabit the Central Highlands. There are between one to 2 million Montagnards in Vietnam (see [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#)).
- 2.4.17 The majority of Montagnards are Protestant although there are small communities of Montagnards who are Catholic (see [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#), [Catholics](#) and [Protestants](#)).
- 2.4.18 Thousands of Montagnards in the Central Highlands have been refused household registration documents and identity cards, meaning they cannot access services such as healthcare or schooling. Sources state that in some cases the refusal to issue these documents is in retaliation for them refusing to renounce their faith (see [Documentation](#)).
- 2.4.19 The Montagnards fought alongside the American and South Vietnamese troops during the Vietnam war (1955-75) and are now still treated with suspicion by the Vietnamese authorities as they are unsure of their loyalty to the communist regime (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#)).
- 2.4.20 Many Montagnards worship in unregistered house churches. Montagnards have been subjected to surveillance and faced discrimination because of their membership of unregistered religious groups (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#) and see also the relevant religious section below).
- 2.4.21 Montagnards face official harassment, surveillance, property confiscation and discrimination because of their history, religious practice and actual or perceived political activism. Montagnards may be subjected to treatment which would be sufficiently serious by nature and/or repetition, or as a result of accumulation of measures, as to amount to persecution or serious harm. Such treatment is more likely where a person is a member or perceived to be a member of a group who the government believes to have separatist aims. In these cases decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Decision makers should also refer to the relevant religious section below. Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk of persecution.

2.4.22 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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d. Hmong

2.4.23 There are an estimated one million Hmong in Vietnam, with around 300,000 being members of the Protestant faith. The Hmong are present in almost all provinces but are concentrated in the Northern Highlands region (see [Hmong](#) and [Protestants](#)).

2.4.24 The Hmong have been involved in political protests in the past calling for religious freedom, land rights and autonomy. The Hmong, like the Montagnards, fought alongside the American and South Vietnamese troops during the Vietnam war. As a result the state continues to view the group with some suspicion as the Vietnamese authorities are unsure of their loyalty to the communist regime (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#)).

2.4.25 Thousands of Hmong Christians have been refused household registration documents, marriage and birth certificates and identity cards effectively making them stateless. This has resulted in some children who lacked registration documents not being able to attend school (see [Documentation](#)).

2.4.26 Some members of the Hmong community have been resettled in Subdivision 179, a small village in Lam Dong province, and issued registration documentation as part of government investment in that area although according to one source implementation remains incomplete, thousands of others have been forcibly displaced because they refused to be evicted from their villages or refused to abandon their faith (see [Government policies and services](#) and [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#))

2.4.27 Members of the Hmong ethnic group are unlikely to face treatment which would be sufficiently serious by nature and/or repetition, or as a result of accumulation of measures, as to amount to persecution or serious harm, based on their ethnic group alone. If the person is a leader of an unregistered religious group, then reference should be made to the relevant section below. Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk of persecution.

2.4.28 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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e. Khmer Krom

2.4.29 There are an estimated 1.26 million Khmer Krom in Vietnam, most are adherents of the Khmer style of Theravada Buddhism compared to the Mahayana Buddhists most Vietnamese adhere to. They mainly inhabit the Mekong delta region in the south west (see [Khmer Krom](#) and [Buddhists](#)).

2.4.30 The Khmer Krom, whose livelihoods are largely based on farming, have been negatively affected by social inequality, land appropriation and government led programmes intended to redistribute access to farmland. In May 2020 more than 100 farmers were involved in clashes with police in disputes over land rights which resulted in injuries and several arrests. The

government has also banned Khmer Krom human rights publications, has arrested Khmer Krom youth and labor activists, and controls the practice of Theravada Buddhism, as well as the registration and operation of civil society organisations (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#)).

- 2.4.31 Members of the Khmer Krom ethnic group are unlikely to face ill treatment, which would amount to persecution, based on their ethnic group alone. Where a person is or has been involved in advocating for land rights decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). If the person is a leader of an unregistered religious group, then reference should be made to the relevant section below. Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk of persecution.
- 2.4.32 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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f. Religious groups

- 2.4.33 The constitution allows for religious freedom and states that all religions are equal before the law (see [Law on belief and religion](#)).
- 2.4.34 Vietnam is officially an atheist state with, according to government figures, only 14% of the population following a religion. Those having a religion tend to correlate closely with ethnic minority groups. The CPV views religious congregations as attempting to be autonomous from the state, and they may consequently try to suppress religious observance, which adversely affects many minority ethnic groups (see [Religious demography](#) and [State discrimination, harassment and detention](#)).

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g. Registered religious groups

- 2.4.35 In January 2018 a Law on Belief and Religion came into effect which requires religious communities to register their activities, places of worship and organisations. A religious organisation must have operated for a least 5 years before it can apply for registration. The law allows the government to restrict religious activities in the interests of 'national interest', 'public order' and 'national unity'. All activities, including those which are routine, have to be registered in advance. Only registered organisations are allowed to operate. By the end of 2020 the government had officially recognised 43 religious organisations affiliated with 16 distinct religions (see [Law on belief and religion](#), [Registration](#) and [Religious activities of registered groups](#)).
- 2.4.36 The government does restrict some informal religious activities through legislation, registration requirements and surveillance, as well as through local issues and local authorities' attitudes and interests. However, in general, registered groups are mainly able to operate and believers are able to practise their faith without interference from the state. The government generally respects the religious freedom of registered groups as long as they comply with regulations and local attitudes and interests and are not a perceived threat (see [Religious activities of registered groups](#))

- 2.4.37 In general, there is no real risk of state persecution or serious harm on account of a person's religious beliefs for persons belonging to government registered groups. However, where a person has been forced to follow a registered group, they may not be able to act in accordance with their own religious beliefs. If following their religious beliefs would cause them to come to the adverse attention of the authorities and to persecutory treatment, then it is likely they would qualify for asylum.
- 2.4.38 Where a person is also a member, or perceived to be a member, of a group who the government believes to have separatist aims or considered a local/national threat, decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#).
- 2.4.39 Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk of persecution.
- 2.4.40 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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h. Unregistered religious groups

- 2.4.41 Unregistered, unrecognised, independent religious groups are able to apply to the commune-level peoples committee for permission for specific religious activities. However the government does restrict activities of some unregistered (independent) religious groups, particularly where those groups are regarded as a threat to the CPV, where the groups have been or are involved in religious freedom advocacy, get involved in local political issues or advocate democracy, or are deemed to pose a threat for other reasons (see [Treatment of unregistered groups](#)).
- 2.4.42 Religious groups that operate outside of official, government-registered and government-controlled religious institutions can be subject to monitoring, harassment and can be prevented from gathering or have their gatherings disrupted. It has been reported that attacks have been carried out by 'thugs' believed to be hired by local authorities to pressure unregistered groups to stop their religious activities. This is more likely to occur where the religious group is involved in advocating for human rights or the group has links to organisation/groups critical of the government. This treatment is also more common where a person resides in a remote area and belongs to both a religious minority and an ethnic minority (see [Treatment of unregistered groups](#) and [Religion among ethnic minority groups](#)).
- 2.4.43 In general, while members of unregistered groups and their members face discrimination, they are unlikely to be subject to persecution or serious harm for that reason alone. Instead risk will depend on the views and activities of the group toward the state, the CPV's view of the group and the role and activities of person. Members of unregistered religions who also belong to an ethnic minority group, who promote religious freedom or are otherwise involved in activities which are perceived by the government to advocate separatism and who come to the attention of the authorities, may face treatment that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition to amount to a real risk of persecution or serious harm.

- 2.4.44 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of an ethnic minority group decision makers should also refer to the relevant section above.
- 2.4.45 Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk of persecution.
- 2.4.46 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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i. **Buddhists**

- 2.4.47 The estimated number of Buddhists in the country varies from approximately 5 to 11.5 million of the population. Buddhism is the major religion in Vietnam and is found throughout the country with Mahayana Buddhism the main affiliation of the ethnic majority. Theravada Buddhism is the main religion of the Khmer ethnic group but is not recognised by the authorities as a distinct religion (see [Buddhists](#) and [Khmer Krom](#)).
- 2.4.48 Buddhist groups are divided into those who are registered with the government and those who are unregistered. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is a registered group while unregistered groups include Khmer Krom, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) and unrecognised branches of Hoa Hao (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.49 Generally, those who are members of registered Buddhists groups are able to practice their religion freely without government intervention (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.50 Unregistered Buddhist groups report that they are subject to harassment, including disruption of, and interference in, their right to worship freely. They have also sometimes been subjected to violence, including threats and intimidation to join state sanctioned groups. Buddhists, particularly those from ethnic minority areas, such as the Khmer Krom, have also been affected by land appropriation and destruction of property (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#) and [Khmer Krom](#)).
- 2.4.51 Persons associated with unregistered Buddhist groups generally face more interference in their ability to practise their religion freely. Unregistered groups also face more instances of land appropriation and destruction of property. Risk is likely to depend on the views and activities of the group toward the state, the CPV's view of the group and the role and activities of person. Members of unregistered Buddhist groups who promote religious freedom or are otherwise involved in activities which are perceived by the government to advocate separatism, such as protesting or being vocal about land appropriation, and who come to the attention of the authorities, may face treatment that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.52 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information](#)

[Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of an ethnic minority group decision makers should also refer to the relevant section above. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate they would be at real risk from the state on return.

- 2.4.53 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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j. Catholics

- 2.4.54 There are an estimated 7 million Catholics in Vietnam and whilst they reside in most districts and provinces they are mainly concentrated in Central Vietnam (see [Catholics](#)).
- 2.4.55 There are no unregistered (or independent) Catholic organisations in Vietnam. However, some groups, particularly those outside of cities, do worship in the home of believers (see [Catholics](#)).
- 2.4.56 The Catholic church played a prominent role in assisting their parishioners who were affected by the 2016 Formosa environmental disaster (a water pollution crisis). This included organising of demonstrations and protests. This has led to some Catholic leaders being denounced and imprisoned for their involvement in these protests (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.57 The Catholic church has also been affected by continuing instances of land appropriation and destruction of property. Members of the Catholic church were also vocal critics of the introduction of new cybersecurity laws in 2018 (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.58 Ethnic minority Catholics, especially the Montagnard in the Central Highlands, suffer from pressure to recant, forced eviction, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, intimidation, and damage to properties used for religious services (see [Religion among ethnic minority groups](#), [State treatment of specific religious groups](#) and [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#)).
- 2.4.59 In general, members of the Catholic church who belong to government registered Catholic groups and are not politically active are not at real risk of state persecution or serious harm. Where members of the Catholic church are/or perceived to be a political activist, including where they have been involved in the organising of protests or critical of the government then they may face treatment that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.60 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of an ethnic minority group decision makers should also refer to the relevant section above. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate they would be at real risk from the state on return.

2.4.61 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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k. Protestants

2.4.62 There are an estimated one million Protestants in Vietnam with two-thirds belonging to ethnic minority groups such as the Montagnards and the Hmong (see [Protestants](#)).

2.4.63 Protestant groups are divided into those who are registered with the government and those who are unregistered. One source noted there were more than 80 Protestant organisations in operation in Vietnam with more than 70 of these groups unregistered and unable to operate legally (see [Protestants](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).

2.4.64 Registered Protestant groups are generally able to operate without government interference but there have been instances where local authorities have prevented some groups from assembling or registering their organisation (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).

2.4.65 Some Protestants have faced pressure and harassment from local authorities to renounce their faith and/or join government registered Protestant groups (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).

2.4.66 Some Protestant Montagnard groups in the Central Highlands are viewed by the government as operating organisations advocating for separatism for ethnic minorities. Other Protestant group leaders who have been involved in political activism have also faced sanctions, including imprisonment and restrictions on their movement. Sentences have ranged from 7 to 10 years imprisonment (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).

2.4.67 Ethnic minority Protestants, especially the Montagnard in the Central Highlands, suffer from surveillance, pressure to recant, confiscation of land, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, disruption of religious services and confiscation of religious materials (see [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#), [Religion among ethnic minority groups](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#))

2.4.68 Persons associated with unregistered Protestant groups generally face more difficulties and restrictions on religious freedom than members of registered Protestant groups. Risk is likely to depend on the views and activities of the group toward the state, the CPV's view of the group and the role and activities of person. Members of unregistered Protestant groups who promote religious freedom or are otherwise involved in political activism which is perceived by the government to advocate separatism, and who come to the attention of the authorities, may face treatment that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm.

2.4.69 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of an ethnic minority group decision makers should also refer to the relevant section above. Each case must be

considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate they would be at real risk from the state on return.

For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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I. Cao Dai

- 2.4.70 There are approximately 1.2 million Cao Dai adherents in Vietnam, with the majority of those residing in the Mekong Delta region. There are registered and unregistered Cao Dai groups (see [Cao Daoists](#)).
- 2.4.71 Cao Dai formed their own army prior to 1975 and eventually formed an allegiance with the Southern Vietnamese government. This has led to the current government of Vietnam placing more scrutiny on their activities as they are suspicious of their loyalty to the communist regime. However, registered Cao Dai groups are generally able to worship without interference from the government (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.72 Unregistered groups have been subject to surveillance, violence, arbitrary detention, harassment by the authorities, which can include disruption of their religious worship and confiscation of their property and land (see [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 2.4.73 Persons associated with unregistered Cao Dai groups generally face more difficulties being able to practice their religious worship than members of registered Cao Dai groups. Risk is likely to depend on the views and activities of the group toward the state, the CPV's view of the group and the role and activities of the person. Members of unregistered Cao Dai groups who promote religious freedom or are otherwise involved in activities, which are perceived by the government to advocate separatism, such as protesting or being vocal about appropriation of land and property, and who come to the attention of the authorities, may face treatment that is sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.74 Where a person's fear is the result of their actual or perceived opposition to the state decision makers should refer to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to state](#). Where a person's fear is closely related to their membership of an ethnic minority group decision makers should also refer to the relevant section above. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate they would be at real risk from the state on return.
- 2.4.75 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities.

2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing state protection see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.

2.6.2 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 12 January 2022

3. Ethnic groups

3.1 Ethnic demography

- 3.1.1 Vietnam has an estimated population of just over 102 million (July 2021 est), with over 85% belonging to the Kinh (Viet) ethnic group¹.
- 3.1.2 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Country Information Report Vietnam, compiled from a range of sources and on the ground knowledge, published in January 2022 (the 2022 DFAT report) noted 'About 85 per cent of Vietnam's population is ethnically Kinh, according to 2019 census data. The remaining 15 per cent of the population is comprised of 53 other recognised ethnic groups, 11 of which have fewer than 5,000 people. The Kinh traditionally live in the coastal and low-lying areas while ethnic minorities are a larger proportion of the population in the Northwest, Central Highlands and areas of the Mekong Delta. Ethnic minority groups, while mostly associated with remote and mountainous regions, also live in other parts of the country because of internal migration.'²
- 3.1.3 The ethnic Kinh (Viet) population mainly inhabit the lowlands including the Red River delta, the central coastal delta, the Mekong delta and major cities. The remaining 53 official ethnic groups inhabit the interior mountain areas and highlands, which cover two-thirds of the country's territory^{3 4}. However, the ethnic groups Khmer Krom, Hoa and Lao, are concentrated in the cities or lowlands⁵.
- 3.1.4 Open Development Vietnam, a coalition of organizations aggregating and sharing information on development trends in the Mekong region, noted in an article on ethnic minorities and indigenous people that: 'Ethnic minorities are concentrated in the mountainous and rural regions of Vietnam but have also scattered throughout Vietnam due to war and migration... Many communes and villages have 3-4 different ethnic groups living side by side. Geography plays a major part in the cultural practices of many ethnic minorities, but also negatively impacts access to infrastructure and services like health care and education.'⁶ (see also [Government policies and services](#))
- 3.1.5 The below map shows the different regions and provinces within Vietnam⁷.

¹ CIA World Factbook, '[Vietnam- People and Society](#)', last updated 28 December 2021

² DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.1), 11 January 2022

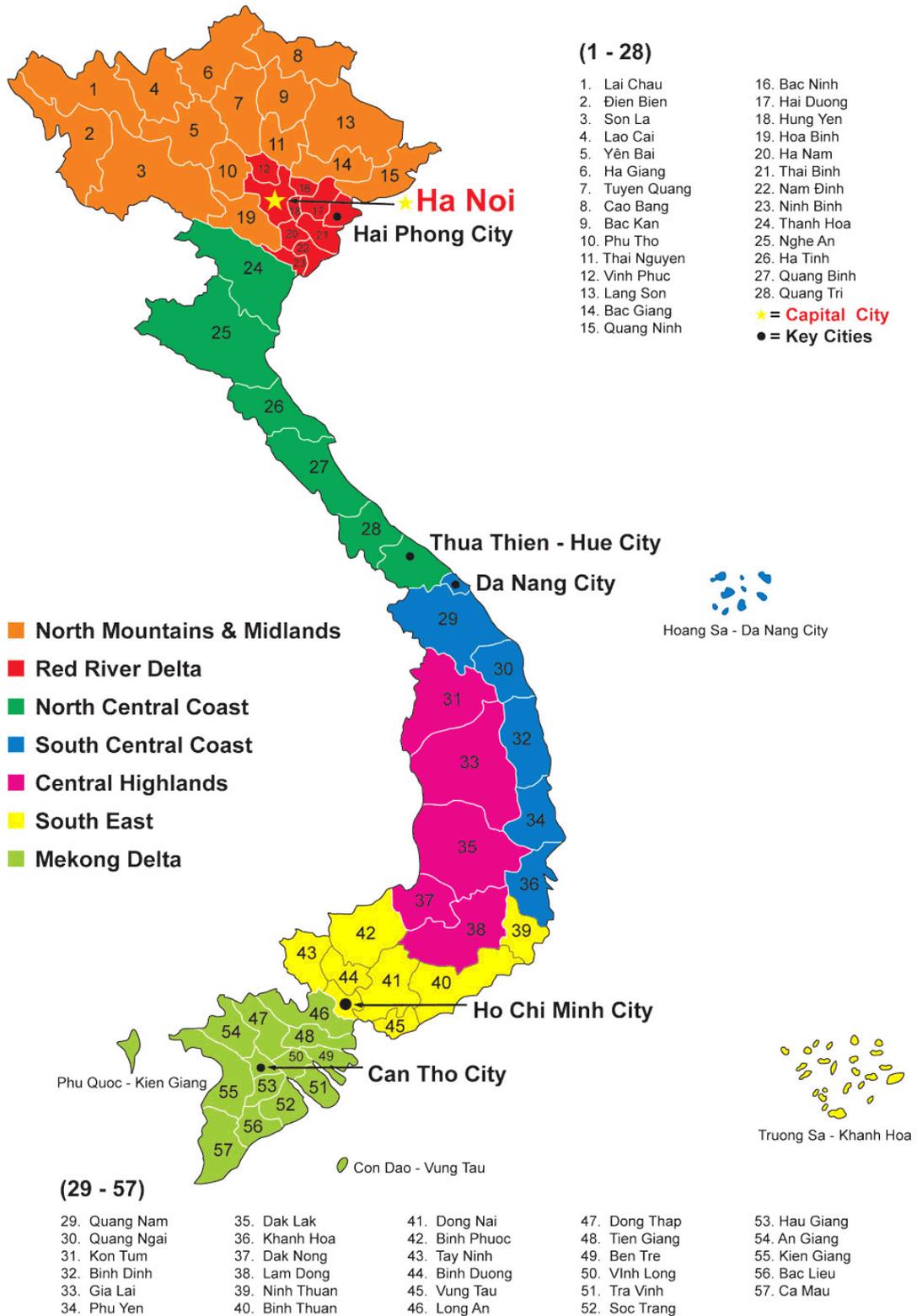
³ Embassy of Vietnam in the United Kingdom, '[Population/Ethnics- ethnic groups](#)', undated

⁴ Minority Rights Group International, '[World Directory of Minorities and...](#)', updated March 2018

⁵ Minority Rights Group International, '[World Directory of Minorities and...](#)', updated March 2018

⁶ Open Development Vietnam, '[Ethnic minorities and indigenous people](#)', 30 June 2020

⁷ Amo Travel Team, '[Map of Regions of Vietnam](#)', 10 October 2018



3.1.6 A chart showing the [composition and distribution of the Vietnamese ethnic minority groups](#) can be located on Vietnamese Embassy in the UK's website⁸.

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⁸ Embassy of Vietnam in the United Kingdom, '[Population/Ethnics- ethnic groups](#)', undated

3.2 Chinese (Hoa or Han)

- 3.2.1 According to undated figures from the Vietnam Embassy in the UK there were approx. 900,000 Chinese living in Vietnam⁹, although according to information from 2018 on the Minority Rights Group, an international NGO's, website outside sources estimate that this figure is much higher with some stating it exceeds 2 million¹⁰. The majority of Chinese live in the south with a large number residing in Ho Chi Minh City¹¹.
- 3.2.2 According to Minority Rights Group International: 'Most Hoa are descended from Chinese settlers who came from the Guangdong province from about the eighteenth century, and it is for this reason that most of them today speak Cantonese, though there is also a large group who speak Teochew.'¹²
- 3.2.3 According to the Joshua Project, a US-based research project that gathers ethnological data to support Christian missions abroad, most people from the Chinese Hoa/Han ethnic group are not religious, with those that are more likely to follow ethnic religions or Buddhism¹³.

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3.3 Montagnards (or Degar)

- 3.3.1 The Montagnards (sometimes referred to as Degar¹⁴) are a group of more than 30 indigenous communities¹⁵. Montagnards, a French term which translated means 'mountain men'¹⁶, live in the Central Highlands with population numbers of between one and 2 million¹⁷. Whilst the group traditionally inhabit the Central Highlands it is made up of 2 distinct family groups - these are the speakers of the Mon-Khmer languages such as the Bahnar, Mnong, and Sedang, and speakers of the Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian) languages such as the Jarai, Rglai and Rade (Rhade)¹⁸. The majority of Montagnards are Protestant although there are some smaller Catholic communities¹⁹.
- 3.3.2 See also [Protestants](#), [Catholics](#)

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3.4 Hmong

- 3.4.1 The 2022 DFAT report stated that:
- 'The Hmong are an ethnic group who speak mutually intelligible languages. They live in the northern and central highlands of Vietnam, traditionally across the borders of Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and China, and they may have Chinese surnames such as 'Li' and 'Yang'. Like the Montagnards, the

⁹ Embassy of Vietnam in the United Kingdom, '[Population/Ethnics- ethnic groups](#)', undated

¹⁰ Minority Rights Group International, '[Chinese \(Hoa\)](#)', updated March 2018

¹¹ Minority Rights Group International, '[Chinese \(Hoa\)](#)', updated March 2018

¹² Minority Rights Group International, '[Chinese \(Hoa\)](#)', updated March 2018

¹³ Joshua Project, '[Han Chinese, Cantonese in Vietnam](#)', undated

¹⁴ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.5), 11 January 2022

¹⁵ Minority Rights Group International, '[Highlanders](#)', updated March 2018

¹⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, '[Montagnard](#)', 7 January 2015

¹⁷ Minority Rights Group International, '[Highlanders](#)', updated March 2018

¹⁸ Minority Rights Group International, '[Highlanders](#)', updated March 2018

¹⁹ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.7), 11 January 2022

Hmong are mostly Evangelical Christian (though other forms of Christianity exist among the Hmong, including Catholicism). Some Hmong retain indigenous beliefs, including ancestor worship, and some syncretic practices also exist.²⁰

3.4.2 See also [Protestants](#).

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3.5 Khmer Krom

3.5.1 According to Minority Rights Group International:

‘The Khmer Krom (literally, the “Khmer from Below” (the Mekong)) mainly inhabit the Mekong delta region in the south-west of Vietnam. They are one of the largest minorities in Vietnam, numbering over 1.26 million, and are the remnants of the society that existed prior to the take-over of the Mekong delta by the Vietnamese in the eighteenth century. Their language, Khmer, is part of the larger Mon-Khmer language family and most are adherents of the Khmer style of Theravada Buddhism, which contains elements of Hinduism and ancestor-spirit worship, whereas most Vietnamese are Mahayana Buddhists.’²¹

3.5.2 See also [Buddhists](#).

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Section 4 updated: 12 January 2022

4. Legal status of ethnic groups

4.1.1 There are 54 ethnic groups recognised by the Vietnamese government²² with 53 of them being minority ethnic groups²³. The law prohibits discrimination against ethnic minorities²⁴.

4.1.2 Article 5 of the [Constitution](#) enshrines Vietnam’s commitment to equality, solidarity and mutual support of ethnic minorities, stating that all acts of ethnic discrimination and division are prohibited. Article 5 also states that ethnic communities have the right to use their own language and writing and preserve their ethnic identity. Article 5 also commits the government to introducing policies aimed at improving the ‘material and spiritual conditions’ of ethnic groups in Vietnam²⁵.

4.1.3 Open Development Vietnam noted that: ‘Although Vietnam voted in favour of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the government does not recognize ethnic minorities as indigenous peoples. Instead, the government uses the term “ethnic minority” to refer to everyone but the Kinh majority. The focus of the Vietnamese government is on “unity in diversity”.’²⁶

²⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.9), 11 January 2022

²¹ Minority Rights Group International, ‘[Khmer Krom](#)’, updated March 2018

²² CIA World Factbook, ‘[Vietnam- People and Society](#)’, last updated 29 June 2021

²³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.1), 11 January 2022

²⁴ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam](#)’, 30 March 2021

²⁵ ILO, ‘[Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam](#)’, 28 November 2013

²⁶ Open Development Vietnam, ‘[Ethnic minorities and indigenous people](#)’, 30 June 2020

- 4.1.4 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples guarantees various rights to Indigenous people in particular:
- ‘Article 3 Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
 - Article 4 Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.’²⁷

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Section 5 updated: 12 January 2022

5. Treatment of ethnic groups

5.1 Government policies and services

- 5.1.1 Vietnam identified the need for promoting the development of ethnic minority groups in its [Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020](#). The plan laid out specific areas for improvement in relation to ethnic minorities including the development of education and vocational training, improved implementation of social policies, the development of rural ethnic minority areas and the introduction of measures in relation to education, nutrition and sanitation to narrow the gap in opportunities for ethnic minority children²⁸.
- 5.1.2 The 2020 USSD report on human rights practices noted that the government continued to implement programmes meant to address the gap between ethnic minorities and the majority communities. Local language curricula were developed although according to the USSD report this was more comprehensive in the Central Highlands and Mekong Delta. The government encourage investment in highland areas, largely populated by ethnic minority groups, by giving preferential treatment to companies, both domestic and foreign, who invested there. They also allocated land to ethnic minorities²⁹.
- 5.1.3 Land appropriation in ethnic minority areas is common³⁰. DFAT noted that: ‘All land in Vietnam is formally owned by the state, which issues usage rights to individuals or organisations. The state retains the right to reacquire the land and landowners allege low levels of compensation, which sometimes leads to protests’.³¹ See also the section on Land disputes in the [Country Policy and Information note Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#).
- 5.1.4 The 2019 census on ethnic minority groups, carried out in October 2019, showed that 97.2% of communes in ethnic minority dominated and mountainous areas were connected to the national electric grid and 99.5% of the communes had access to medical facilities. According to the census in the 5 years to 2019 around 3,800 new schools were built in ethnic minority areas bringing the total number of schools in these areas to 48,100. The survey also showed that the percentage of school-age ethnic minority

²⁷ UN, [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#), 13 September 2007

²⁸ The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, [‘The Five-Year Socio -Economic Development Plan...’](#), 2016

²⁹ USSD, [‘2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam’](#), 30 March 2021

³⁰ USSD, [‘2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam’](#), 30 March 2021

³¹ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Vietnam’](#) (para 3.65), 11 January 2022

children not going to school dropped from 26.4% in 2009 to 15.5% in 2019³²
^{33 34}.

- 5.1.5 In January 2020 the Dam Rong District Government announced that they would be allocating 76.78 billion VND (approx. 2.4 million pounds), to Subdivision 179. Subdivision 179 is a small village in the Lam Dong Province which is mainly inhabited by members of Christian ethnic minority groups the Montagnards and Hmong. The district government further announced plans to issue Christians residents in Subdivision 179 with household registrations and in June 2020 they announced an infrastructure development plan in Subdivision 179. The plan included the construction of a road through the subdivision, a community centre, and a medical clinic^{35 36} (see also [Hmong, Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#) and [Documentation](#)).
- 5.1.6 Freedom House noted in their annual report, Freedom in the World 2021, that ethnic minorities ‘...generally have little input on development projects that affect their livelihoods and communities.’³⁷
- 5.1.7 For information on access to mental healthcare see the country policy and information note on [Vietnam: Mental healthcare](#)

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5.2 Poverty

- 5.2.1 Vietnam’s economy has experienced significant growth and the levels of poverty in the country have sharply declined from around 40% of the total population in 2012 to below 6%^{38 39}. However, as many as 86% of the poor belong to an ethnic minority^{40 41}. According to the annual report for 2020 from Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) ‘Mortality rates for children less than a year of age among ethnic minorities is four times higher than it is among Kinh children. The rate of malnutrition in the former group is the same as it was 10 years ago, despite a tripling in the number of millionaires in the last decade.’⁴²
- 5.2.2 Open Development Vietnam noted that: ‘...Ethnic minorities living in urban areas are more affluent than the same ethnic minority groups living in rural areas.’⁴³
- 5.2.3 For further information on poverty among children see the country policy and information note on [Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#)

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³² Viet Nam News, ‘[Number of poor households among ethnic minority groups remains...](#)’, 6 July 2020

³³ VIR, ‘[Results of 2019 census on ethnic minority groups announced](#)’, 4 July 2020

³⁴ Vietnam Plus, ‘[Results of 2019 census on ethnic minority groups announced](#)’, 3 July 2020

³⁵ ICC, ‘[Local Vietnamese Government Announces Infrastructure Plan to Aid...](#)’ 24 July 2020

³⁶ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

³⁷ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2021- Vietnam](#)’, 3 March 2021

³⁸ World Bank, ‘[The World Bank in Vietnam- Overview](#)’, Last updated 7 April 2021

³⁹ Macrotrends, ‘[Vietnam Poverty Rate 1992-2021](#)’, undated

⁴⁰ World Bank, ‘[The World Bank in Vietnam- Overview](#)’, Last updated 7 April 2021

⁴¹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.2), 11 January 2022

⁴² BTI, ‘[Vietnam Country Report 2020](#)’, 29 April 2020

⁴³ Open Development Vietnam, ‘[Ethnic minorities and indigenous people](#)’, 30 June 2020

5.3 State discrimination, harassment, and detention

- 5.3.1 CIVICUS, an alliance of civil society organisation and activists, interviewed Thang Nguyen of Boat People SOS (BPSOS), a civil society organisation based in the USA and Thailand, in September 2019. Thang Nguyen noted that: 'Many of the minority groups are indigenous peoples, but the government of Vietnam does not recognise them as such; it only classes them as ethnic minorities. They therefore face a fight for the right to be recognised as indigenous people. They are often separated from their ancestral land. For many groups, a religion that is a minority belief in Vietnam is part of their social and cultural makeup.'⁴⁴
- 5.3.2 The Diplomat, a current-affairs magazine for the Asia-Pacific region, in an article from November 2019 noted that the Communist party sees many ethnic groups as a threat, particularly as many fought alongside the Americans against the communists during the Vietnam war⁴⁵. This was also mentioned in the Vietnam Human Rights Networks annual report for 2020/2021 where they noted that the persecution and mistreatment of ethnic minorities is the result of suspicion of their lack of loyalty to the Communist regime (see also [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)).
- 5.3.3 The Vietnam Human Rights Networks annual report for 2020/2021 noted that the government considers ethnic minority groups a political threat to the regime, particularly since many minority groups converted to Christianity⁴⁶. The 2019 article in the Diplomat magazine also note that a number party officials believe that ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands are looking to create an autonomous region which they believe would destabilize the political system. The article also noted that the Communist party wish to suppress religious activity, as they view religious congregations as creating autonomy, which adversely affects many minority ethnic groups⁴⁷.
- 5.3.4 The US Department of State's (USSD) '2020 Country report on human rights practices', published in March 2021 noted that:
- 'Local officials in some provinces, notably in the highlands, discriminated against members of ethnic and religious minority groups.
- '...International human rights organizations and refugees continued to allege that authorities monitored, harassed, and intimidated members of certain ethnic minority groups, particularly ethnoreligious minorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands, including Christian H'mong. Local officials in several provinces in the Central Highlands, including Doan Ket village, Dak Ngo commune, Tuy Duc District, and Dak Nong Province, continue to deny registration to more than 1,000 H'mong Christians who had migrated there in recent years, according to an NGO. As a result, school officials did not allow the H'mong children to attend school.
- '...Authorities used national security laws to impose lengthy prison sentences on members of ethnic minorities for their connections to overseas organizations the government claimed espoused separatist aims. In addition,

⁴⁴ CIVICUS, [Vietnam: 'The government is using non-state actors against...'](#), 10 September 2019

⁴⁵ The Diplomat, ['Vietnam's Big Ethnic Challenge'](#), 22 November 2019

⁴⁶ Vietnam Human Rights Network, ['Report on Human Rights In Vietnam 2020-2021'](#), 20 June 2021

⁴⁷ The Diplomat, ['Vietnam's Big Ethnic Challenge'](#), 22 November 2019

activists often reported an increased presence of Ministry of Public Security agents on historically significant days and holidays in regions inhabited by ethnoreligious minorities.⁴⁸

5.3.5 Freedom House noted in their 'Freedom in the World 2021' report, covering events in 2020, that:

'Although members of ethnic minority groups are nominally represented within the CPV, they are rarely allowed to rise to senior positions, and the CPV leadership's dominance prevents effective advocacy on issues affecting minority populations.' The report also noted that: '...some local officials restrict their access to schooling and jobs. ...Members of ethnic and religious minorities also sometimes face monitoring and harassment by authorities seeking to suppress dissent and suspected links to exile groups.'⁴⁹

5.3.6 In their 2021 report the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted that: 'Ethnic minority communities faced especially egregious persecution for the peaceful practice of their faith, including physical assault, banishment, detention, imprisonment, and forced renunciation of faith.'⁵⁰

5.3.7 See also [Treatment of religious groups](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)

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5.4 Documentation

5.4.1 Birth certificates are required to access public services including education and health care but some parents, particularly those from ethnic minority groups, chose not to register their children. Some local authorities prevented people from registering their children to discourage internal migration, although it was not clear whether this specifically affected ethnic minority groups⁵¹.

5.4.2 Thousands of Hmong and Montagnard Christians in the Central Highlands have been refused household registration documents and identity cards meaning they are effectively stateless^{52 53}. The USCIRF report and a Joint Submission responding to the 5th and 6th state report on Vietnam's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child suggests that in some cases the refusal to issue documentation to these groups is a retaliation for them refusing to renounce their faith^{54 55}.

5.4.3 The 2022 DFAT report noted that:

'There is a significant backlog for applications in ethnic minority communities. Fewer members of ethnic minority communities have documentation, relative to the general population, which may be caused by

⁴⁸ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam](#)', 30 March 2021

⁴⁹ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021- Vietnam](#)', 3 March 2021

⁵⁰ USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

⁵¹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam](#)', 30 March 2021

⁵² ICC, '[Local Vietnamese Government Announces Infrastructure Plan to Aid...](#)' 24 July 2020

⁵³ USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

⁵⁴ USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

⁵⁵ Boat People SOS et al, '[Joint Submission Responding to the 5th and 6th...](#)', 28 February 2020

language differences and distrust among those communities of the process. UNICEF estimated in 2016 (most recently available estimate) that about 359,000 children under the age of five were not registered, the majority of whom were living in a 'hard to reach area', particularly the remote mountains. Birth certificates are required to access education and healthcare for children and a household registration is required to obtain a birth certificate, which means that minority children may be denied access to services in practice.⁵⁶

- 5.4.4 See also [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#).

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5.5 Societal treatment

- 5.5.1 The law prohibits discrimination against ethnic minorities⁵⁷.
- 5.5.2 An article in online magazine the Diplomat noted that there is widespread unfriendliness from the Kinh majority towards ethnic groups and that this can verge on racism. According to the article there is a stereotype among the Kinh majority that ethnic minority groups are '...backwards and undeveloped, and unwilling to change with the times.'⁵⁸
- 5.5.3 Freedom House's annual report for 2020 and the USSD 2020 human rights report both note that members of ethnic minority groups face societal discrimination^{59 60}.
- 5.5.4 The USSD trafficking in persons report for 2021, reporting on the year 2020, also noted that girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands are increasingly exploited by traffickers. Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic employment opportunities and restrictions on movement have resulted in increased vulnerability to trafficking for ethnic minority women and girls⁶¹ (see also the country policy and information note on [Vietnam: Trafficking](#)).

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Section 6 updated: 17 January 2022

6. State treatment of specific ethnic groups

6.1 Chinese (Hoa or Han)

- 6.1.1 According to Minority Rights Groups 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples':

'The overall situation for Hoa has improved dramatically, especially when compared to the repression, discrimination and loss of property that they experienced before the 1990s. Overall, Hoa Chinese appear to be benefiting from Vietnam's liberalization of the economy more than other minorities. Indeed, poverty among the Hoa since 1993 has not only decreased more

⁵⁶ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 5.37), 11 January 2022

⁵⁷ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam](#)', 30 March 2021

⁵⁸ The Diplomat, '[Vietnam's Big Ethnic Challenge](#)', 22 November 2019

⁵⁹ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021- Vietnam](#)', 3 March 2021

⁶⁰ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Vietnam](#)', 30 March 2021

⁶¹ USSD, '[2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#)', 1 July 2021

than for any other ethnic minority, it is even lower than the poverty level for majority Kinh.

'Vietnamese authorities still do not allow private schools teaching in Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese) to go beyond teaching the actual language. This results in some Hoa parents sending their children to these schools in order to preserve their language and culture rather than to Vietnamese-medium state schools.'⁶²

- 6.1.2 Open Development Vietnam noted that: '...the Hoa (ethnic Chinese), is very well assimilated into Vietnamese culture, and are important in the Vietnamese economy. Because of this, they are not usually considered an "ethnic minority".'⁶³

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6.2 Montagnards (or Degar)

- 6.2.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the section on the state treatment of [Protestants](#) and the section on [Catholics](#). Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on land disputes.

- 6.2.2 The LA Times, Voice of America (VOA) News and Radio Free Asia (RFA) noted that many Montagnards have fled to neighbouring Cambodia and sought asylum there for alleged religious and political persecution and expropriation of their land^{64 65 66}.

- 6.2.3 Minority Rights Group noted in their profile on highlanders that:

'Vietnam's indigenous communities continue to suffer persecution by state authorities. Over the past decade, hundreds of indigenous people from the Central Highlands, collectively known as Montagnards, have fled Vietnam to seek asylum in Cambodia. Systematic religious and political persecution of this mostly Christian community is well documented by human rights groups but denied by both the Vietnam and Cambodian governments. Human rights groups have documented the extensive surveillance, harassment and abuse that community members have been subjected to by Vietnamese authorities.

'...There are also continuing reports of mainly Protestant Montagnards being harassed, having property confiscated or being discriminated against because of their religion or for holding unsanctioned church services or material. The government has continued to prevent human rights monitors from having unhindered access to the central highlands.'⁶⁷

- 6.2.4 Human Rights Watch, in their January 2020 'Submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue' noted that: 'Montagnards in the Central Highlands are subjected to constant surveillance and other forms of intimidation, public criticism, arbitrary arrest, and mistreatment in

⁶² Minority Rights Group International, '[Chinese \(Hoa\)](#)', updated March 2018

⁶³ Open Development Vietnam, '[Ethnic minorities and indigenous people](#)', 30 June 2020

⁶⁴ LA Times, '[Vietnam War left a painful legacy for indigenous minority that fought...](#)', 21 May 2019

⁶⁵ VOA News, '[Montagnards' Deportation Sparks Fears about Safety](#)', 30 June 2019

⁶⁶ RFA, '[Vietnamese Montagnard Ends Prison Term, Goes Home in Failing Health](#)', 6 March 2020

⁶⁷ Minority Rights Group International, '[Highlanders](#)', updated March 2018

security force custody. In detention, the authorities question them about their religious and political activities and any efforts to flee Vietnam.⁶⁸

- 6.2.5 The Jubilee Campaign, an NGO who focus on children at risk and persecuted Christian families, noted in a written statement submitted to the UN Human Rights Council on 18 February 2020 that the government monitors Montagnards in order to disrupt worship sessions. The statement went on to note that the government:

‘...write reports on their activities, and order victims to sign police-prepared pledges to stop religious activities and leave independent churches. The government always brand adherents “criminals who undermine solidarity policy, divide the people, oppose the Party and State, or plot to overthrow the government”. The police conduct arbitrary, unannounced searches of houses during which police officers confiscate cell phones, computers, Bibles and other religious materials - without showing a warrant. They do not return seized properties to the victims.’⁶⁹

- 6.2.6 Sources reported that thousands of Montagnards lack registration papers⁷⁰⁷¹. See the section on [Documentation](#) for further information.

- 6.2.7 Several sources reported on Montagnards who have been convicted for their religious activities⁷² ⁷³. In 2019 2 Montagnards were sentenced to 7 and 10 years imprisonment respectively for following the Degar sect⁷⁴.

- 6.2.8 The 2022 DFAT report noted that:

‘The Montagnards have long been considered a sensitive group by the Government after they fought alongside American and South Vietnamese troops in the Vietnam war, and following protests in 2004 for land rights and the freedom to practise their Protestant religion.

‘Land is a particularly sensitive issue for the Montagnards. Traditional land inheritance is facilitated orally between family members and this is not recognised by the state. Land grabbing and development has displaced many Montagnards from their traditional homelands and surrounding natural resources.

‘...They may combine their spiritual beliefs with political protest and have been seen by the Government as separatists in the past (for example during protests in the first decade of this century when they demanded greater self-determination and religious freedom).

‘DFAT assesses that Montagnards face a moderate risk of official discrimination if they are involved in political activism or religious practices perceived to be political. DFAT further assesses that the Montagnards face a moderate risk of societal discrimination on the basis of their ethnic identity.’⁷⁵

⁶⁸ HRW, ‘[Submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights...](#)’, January 2020

⁶⁹ HRC, ‘[Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign...](#)’, 18 February 2020

⁷⁰ ICC, ‘[Local Vietnamese Government Announces Infrastructure Plan to Aid...](#)’ 24 July 2020

⁷¹ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

⁷² HRW, ‘[Submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights...](#)’, January 2020

⁷³ The 88 project, ‘[Database Of Persecuted Activists In Vietnam](#)’, last updated 11 October 2021

⁷⁴ HRW, ‘[Submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights...](#)’, January 2020

⁷⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.5-3.8), 11 January 2022

6.3 Hmong

- 6.3.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the section on the state treatment of [Protestants](#). Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on land disputes.
- 6.3.2 The Hmong are viewed with suspicion by the Vietnam government owing to their links to the US during the Vietnam war^{76 77}. The Joint NGO Submission responding to the 5th and 6th state report on Vietnam's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child noted that:
- '...thousands of Hmong Christians have been forced to leave their home villages in Northern Vietnam because they had refused to abandon their religious faith as ordered by the local authorities. A number of them were forcibly evicted from their village while others had no choice but to escape the mounting threats from the local authorities. Hundreds of stateless and homeless Hmong ...families have fled to Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, where they are treated as illegal migrants and can be arrested at any time.'⁷⁸
- 6.3.3 Thang Nguyen of Boat People SOS (BPSOS), in an interview with CIVICUS in September 2019, noted that many Hmong were evicted from their villages for refusing to renounce their faith, he went on to note that:
- '...They became itinerant, and it has taken them many years to coalesce into new communities, usually in previously uninhabited areas unknown to local government. Many moved to the Central Highlands. They are completely undocumented and so have become functionally stateless. They live outside society. Married people are not issued with marriage certificates, babies do not get birth certificates, children can't formally receive education – although some slip into school unofficially – and people can't get legal employment, set up a business, or open a bank account. They are restricted in their travel: pastors can't travel into these communities, while they cannot travel to worship elsewhere.'⁷⁹
- 6.3.4 In October 2019 RFA reported that a government-initiated campaign to limit the length and scale of traditional funerals adversely affected the Hmong community who are known to hold wakes lasting up to a week. The campaign placed new restrictions on the burning of fake money, the amount of time a corpse could remain unburied and also limited the number of buffaloes and cows which could be slaughtered as the authorities claimed that the practice is prohibitively expensive. The report went on to note that:
- '...Vietnam Pioneer Network, a local organization that advocates for the rights of ethnic minorities, sent an open letter to the Party Committee and Ha Giang authorities warning them that the policy would limit the community and that the government would be invading into the private affairs of minority citizens. They also pointed out that the campaign's announcement made

⁷⁶ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.10), 11 January 2022

⁷⁷ UK Home Office, '[Home Office FFM Report](#)' (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

⁷⁸ Boat People SOS et al, '[Joint Submission Responding to the 5th and 6th...](#)', 28 February 2020

⁷⁹ CIVICUS, '[Vietnam: The government is using non-state actors against...](#)', 10 September 2019

many incorrect assumptions, saying that the lengthy funerals do not impoverish relatives of the deceased.’⁸⁰

- 6.3.5 In March 2020 Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on the life sentencing of 2 Hmong men who had been convicted of attempting to overthrow the state and trying to establish a separate state in a rural district in northwest Vietnam. The report noted that:

‘Sung A Sinh, 37, and Lau A Lenh, 49, were found guilty of masterminding a plan to establish a Hmong state in the Muong Nhe district of Dien Bien province between August 2018 and March 2019, and of manipulating others to achieve their goal. They also sought to issue their own currency and build an army, the court said. A radio report on the sentencing by the Voice of Vietnam quoted the presiding judge as saying that the pair’s activities were “dangerous to the society, infringing upon the political regime of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,” according to Reuters. The Dien Bien People’s Court also sentenced a dozen of the men’s alleged accomplices to jail terms of 24 months to 20 years for covering for them and attempting to overthrow the people’s administration in Muong Nhe District.’⁸¹

- 6.3.6 The USCIRF annual report 2021 noted that: ‘During the year, central and local authorities made efforts to resettle Hmong Christians in Subdivision 179 of Dam Rong District in Lam Dong Province, but as of December implementation of this process remained incomplete’⁸². See also the section on [Government policies and services](#).

- 6.3.7 Sources reported that thousands of Hmong lack registration papers^{83 84 85}. See also the section on [Documentation](#).

- 6.3.8 The 2022 DFAT reported that that:

‘Like the Montagnards, the Hmong have historical links to the US through the Vietnam War era, when some Hmong were reportedly recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency. Hmong groups have also participated in political protests, notably protests in Dien Bien Province in 2011 that saw thousands of Hmong demand religious freedom, land rights and autonomy.

‘Hmong people will often speak various dialects of the Hmong language that are mutually intelligible with Hmong from different communities and across borders. The Vietnamese Hmong dialect is taught in schools, but many Hmong prefer to use the international version. Hmong people have access to healthcare and education, but it is limited practically because of distance and remoteness.

‘DFAT assesses that the Hmong face a low risk of official or societal discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity but a moderate risk of official discrimination if they are involved in political activism.’⁸⁶

⁸⁰ RFA, ‘[Vietnamese Rights Group: Government Campaign to Limit the Scale...](#)’, 17 October 2019

⁸¹ RFA, ‘[Vietnam Jails Two Hmong Men For Life in Alleged Campaign to Set...](#)’, 19 March 2020

⁸² USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

⁸³ ICC, ‘[Local Vietnamese Government Announces Infrastructure Plan to Aid...](#)’ 24 July 2020

⁸⁴ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

⁸⁵ UK Home Office, ‘[Home Office FFM Report](#)’ (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

⁸⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.10-3.12), 11 January 2022

6.4 Khmer Krom

- 6.4.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the section on the state treatment of [Buddhists](#). Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on land disputes.
- 6.4.2 The BTI annual report for 2020 noted that: ‘There have been reports of ethnic tension in the lower Mekong Delta as ethnic Khmer groups react to and resist certain government policies viewed as oppressive. Rising social inequality, popular resentment against government land policies, infrastructure development, environmental protection and China’s actions in the Eastern Sea (or South China Sea) all contribute to potential conflict in Vietnamese society.’⁸⁷
- 6.4.3 In May 2020 police clashed with around 100 farmers from the ethnic Khmer Krom minority following disputes over land rights. Reports indicated that around 10 farmers were injured, and several were later arrested⁸⁸. Radio Free Asia reported in May 2020 that: ‘According to local sources, the Khmer Krom had freely farmed on the land from the 1970s to the year 2000, when many went to work as hired laborers. They recently decided to cultivate on the tract of land again, but local authorities informed them that the land is now part of a conservation area.’⁸⁹
- 6.4.4 The US Department of State’s (USSD) ‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom’ (IRF), published in May 2021 noted that: ‘Khmer Krom Buddhists, whose males traditionally enter the monastery for a period of training lasting at least one month before the age of 20, reported that mandatory conscription into the military with no possibility of alternative service hampered their traditional religious rite of passage.’⁹⁰
- 6.4.5 In April 2021 Radio Free Asia reported that:
- ‘Authorities in southern Vietnam’s Dong Nai province arrested and later released an ethnic Khmer Krom youth and labor activist after he released a book about indigenous rights...
- ‘Yoeung Kaiy said in a post to his Facebook account following his release on Wednesday morning that he had been arrested a day earlier by “around 100 police officers” who raided his home allegedly without a warrant and confiscated some 100 books detailing the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, his cellphone, and his computer. He said the police returned his cellphone and computer but kept the books and charged him with “publishing without permission” and “tax evasion.”
- ‘...The Vietnamese government has banned Khmer Krom human rights publications and tightly controls the practice of Theravada Buddhism by the

⁸⁷ BTI, [‘Vietnam Country Report 2020’](#), 29 April 2020

⁸⁸ RFA, [‘Vietnam Arrests Khmer Krom Family Over Land Dispute Clash’](#), 9 June 2020

⁸⁹ RFA, [‘Vietnamese Police Clash With 100 Khmer Krom Farmers in Latest Land...’](#), 11 May 2020

⁹⁰ USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam’](#), 12 May 2021

minority group, which sees the religion as a foundation of their distinct culture and ethnic identity.⁹¹

- 6.4.6 The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization & Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation report, 'Denied Recognition: Vietnam's refusal to recognize the indigenous and religious rights of the Khmer Krom', published in September 2021 stated that:

'The Government exerts significant control over the registration and operation of civil society organizations, and mere references to the indigenous name of the Khmer-Krom homeland, Kampuchea-Krom, have resulted in arrest and interrogation of individuals. These restrictions, combined with civil and political human rights violations, effectively criminalize advocacy efforts, and prevent any meaningful pathway to bring light to human rights violations.

'The Khmer-Krom are also poorly represented in higher education and government institutions. Due to poor economic conditions, many Khmer-Krom are forced to drop out of school and seek gainful employment. Lack of Viet Nameese language skills limits access to government positions and representation in public life. Candidates in government representing minority groups must be accepted by Viet Nam's only political party which allows undue control and hinders the promotion of the Khmer-Krom within the Viet Nameese Communist Party. Coupled with the discriminatory and repressive system, decades of land appropriation have denied the Khmer-Krom access to their traditional livelihood, exacerbating poverty levels. The vast majority of the Khmer-Krom live in agrarian societies with economic opportunity tied to farming and agriculture. Government programs have collectively socialized land ownership and redistributed access to farmland. In parallel, industrial farming practices requiring significant economic investments have been introduced and have since become a formidable barrier to poor farmers. Degradation of land due to the introduction of salt water and climate change has led to further destruction of the environment, causing acute economic hardship for Khmer-Krom farmers.'⁹²

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Section 7 updated: 17 January 2022

7. Religious groups

7.1 Religious demography

- 7.1.1 Vietnam is officially an atheist state⁹³. According to the Vietnam population and housing census from 2019 around 14% of the population identify with a religion⁹⁴, although these figures vary with some sources stating it's around 20/25%^{95 96}.

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⁹¹ RFA, '[Vietnamese Authorities Detain Ethnic Khmer Krom Publisher of Book on...](#)', 14 April 2021

⁹² UNPO, '[Denied Recognition Vietnam's Refusal To Recognize The Indigenous...](#)', September 2021

⁹³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.13), 11 January 2022

⁹⁴ UNFPA, '[Results of the 2019 Census on Population and Housing in Viet Nam](#)', 2019

⁹⁵ USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

⁹⁶ UK Home Office, '[Home Office FFM Report](#)' (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

7.2 Buddhists

- 7.2.1 Figures for the number of Buddhists in the country vary from around 5% (5 million)⁹⁷ of the population to 12% (11.4 million)⁹⁸. Buddhism is the major religion in Vietnam and is found throughout the country. It has been linked to Vietnamese history and culture for thousands of years. Mahayana Buddhism is the dominant affiliation of the Kinh (Viet), the ethnic majority. Around 1% of the population, almost all of whom come from the Khmer ethnic minority group, follow Theravada Buddhism (see also [Khmer Krom](#))^{99 100}.
- 7.2.2 For information on Hoa Hao Buddhists please see the country policy and information note [Vietnam: Hoa Hao Buddhism](#).

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7.3 Catholics

- 7.3.1 The number of Catholics in the country is estimated to be around 7% (7 million)^{101 102}.
- 7.3.2 The 2022 DFAT report noted that:
'While Catholics reside in most districts, provinces and cities, the highest concentration is in central Vietnam (Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Binh Provinces).
'...The Catholic Church is, by definition, united and can deal with the Government at a national level across Vietnam. Provincial authorities might also have relationships at the diocesan level; sometimes local relationships are better than the national level relationship. In general, relationships between the Government and the Church are cordial. Individual parishes need to be registered.'¹⁰³
- 7.3.3 See also [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#)

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7.4 Protestants

- 7.4.1 The number of Protestants in the country is estimated to be around one% (one million)^{104 105}.
- 7.4.2 Two-thirds of Protestants belong to ethnic minority groups including those in the Northwest and Central Highlands such as the Montagnards, H'mong, Thai, Ede, Jarai, Sedang, and M'ngong¹⁰⁶ (see also [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#) and [Hmong](#))

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⁹⁷ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)', 12 May 2021

⁹⁸ UK Home Office, '[Home Office FFM Report](#)' (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

⁹⁹ BTI, '[Vietnam Country Report 2020](#)', 29 April 2020

¹⁰⁰ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)', 12 May 2021

¹⁰¹ UK Home Office, '[Home Office FFM Report](#)' (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹⁰² USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

¹⁰³ DFAT, '[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)' (para 3.22-23), 11 January 2022

¹⁰⁴ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)', 12 May 2021

¹⁰⁵ UK Home Office, '[Home Office FFM Report](#)' (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹⁰⁶ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)', 12 May 2021

7.5 Cao Daoists

- 7.5.1 The number of those who follow Cao Dai is approx.1.2% of the population (1.2 million)¹⁰⁷.

According to the 2022 DFAT report: ‘Cao Dai is an indigenous syncretic religion established in the 1920s by Ngo Van Chieu who claimed to have spoken to God in a séance. The religion incorporates components of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism and Daoism. It is hierarchical (with Catholic influences) and has a pantheon of saints from various religious traditions. Its most famous symbol is an eye in a triangle symbol, which represents God.’¹⁰⁸

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7.6 Other religions

- 7.6.1 The USSD 2020 report on International Religious Freedom noted that:

‘Smaller religious groups combined constitute less than 0.16 percent of the population and include Hindus (mostly an estimated 70,000 ethnic Cham in the south-central coastal area); approximately 80,000 Muslims scattered throughout the country (approximately 40 percent are Sunnis; the remaining 60 percent practice Bani Islam); an estimated 3,000 members of the Baha’i Faith; and approximately 1,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ). Religious groups originating in the country (Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Minh Su Dao, Minh Ly Dao, Tinh Do Cu Si Phat Hoi, and Phat Giao Hieu Nghia Ta Lon) comprise a total of 0.34 percent of the population. A small, mostly foreign, Jewish population resides in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. National statistics on religious adherents from the GCRA and the Vietnam Fatherland Front are considered less comprehensive, as they do not account for members of unregistered religious groups.’¹⁰⁹

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Section 8 updated: 17 January 2022

8. Law on belief and religion

8.1 Law on practising religion

- 8.1.1 Article 24 of the Constitution states:

‘1. Everyone shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law.

‘2. The State respects and protects freedom of belief and of religion.

‘3. No one has the right to infringe on the freedom of belief and religion or to take advantage of belief and religion to violate the laws.’¹¹⁰

- 8.1.2 The Law on Religion and Belief 2018 requires religious groups and clergy members to register and join a party controlled supervisory body in order to

¹⁰⁷ UK Home Office, ‘[Home Office FFM Report](#)’ (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹⁰⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.246), 11 January 2022

¹⁰⁹ USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)’, 12 May 2021

¹¹⁰ Constitution of Vietnam, ‘[Final Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam ...28 November 2013](#)’

obtain permission for religious activities¹¹¹. The 2018 Law allows the government to restrict religious activities in the interests of “national interest”, “public order” and “national unity”^{112 113}. Freedom House noted that the Law allowed ‘...extensive state interference in religious groups’ internal affairs and gave authorities broad discretion to penalize unsanctioned religious activity.’¹¹⁴

- 8.1.3 The 2022 DFAT report noted that: ‘The Law on Belief and Religion came into effect on 1 January 2018. It established a role for the state in protecting religious freedoms and established legal personhood for religious groups. It requires such groups to register with the Government, and religious activities, including routine worship, festivals or conferences, to be registered. Activities can be disallowed on national security or morality grounds.’¹¹⁵

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8.2 Legal status of religious groups

- 8.2.1 The USSD 2020 religious freedom report noted that:

‘The government recognizes 38 religious organizations that affiliate with 16 distinct religious “traditions,” as defined by the government: Buddhism, Islam, the Baha’i Faith, Catholicism, Protestantism, Church of Jesus Christ, Hoa Hao Buddhism, Cao Dai, Buu Son Ky Huong, Tinh Do Cu Si Phat Hoi, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Phat Duong Nam Tong Minh Su Dao, Minh Ly Dao Tam Tong Mieu, Cham Brahmanism, Hieu Nghia Ta Lon Buddhism, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.’¹¹⁶

- 8.2.2 According to the annual report by the US Commission on international religious freedom (USCIRF) ‘... By the end of 2020, the government had officially recognized a total of 16 religions and 43 religious organizations...’¹¹⁷

- 8.2.3 Human Rights Watch noted in their annual report for 2021 that: ‘The government restricts religious practice through legislation, registration requirements, and surveillance. Religious groups are required to get approval from, and register with, the government and operate under government-controlled management boards.’¹¹⁸

- 8.2.4 CSW, in their general briefing on Vietnam, reported that: ‘The Law requires religious groups to register for permission for a broad range of activities. The registration process is complex and open to abuse by officials prejudiced against a particular religion, belief, organisation or individual.’¹¹⁹

- 8.2.5 The USCIRF annual report published in April 2021 noted that: ‘The country’s Law on Belief and Religion, which went into effect in January 2018, requires

¹¹¹ Freedom House, [‘Freedom in the World 2021’](#), 3 March 2021

¹¹² UK Home Office, [‘Home Office FFM Report’](#) (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹¹³ HRW, [‘World Report 2021: Vietnam’](#), 13 January 2021

¹¹⁴ Freedom House, [‘Freedom in the World 2021’](#), 3 March 2021

¹¹⁵ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Vietnam’](#) (para 3.14), 11 January 2022

¹¹⁶ USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam’](#), 12 May 2021

¹¹⁷ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹¹⁸ HRW, [‘World Report 2021: Vietnam’](#), 13 January 2021

¹¹⁹ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, [‘General Briefing: Vietnam’](#), 1 March 2021

religious communities to formally register their organizations, activities, and places of worship. It allows only religious organizations that have operated for at least five years to apply for registration, and it grants registered organizations status as legal entities.¹²⁰

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Section 9 updated: 17 January 2022

9. Treatment of religious groups

9.1 State attitude towards religious groups

9.1.1 As part of a UK Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to Vietnam conducted between 23 February and 1 March 2019, Home Office officials met several diplomatic sources who told the UK Fact Finding Team (UK FFT) that:

‘Historically, religious groups have been a powerful presence in Vietnam, often with foreign support. Although there is no ideological campaign against religion, the CPV is suspicious of any organised group that may challenge its authority. Vietnam’s current approach is to allow space for religious worship but retain control through registration and oversight. Organisations and individuals that adhere to this, register and steer clear of politics are allowed to operate relatively unhindered.

‘...In practice, the treatment of religious groups and individuals varies depending on whether they are registered or recognised or not; the area they are based including local issues and local authorities’ attitudes and interests; historical factors and the level of perceived threat they present.

‘...However, they are not limited to individual religious sects, as the reasons for action are generally unconnected with the religious aspects of the group or individuals and more with the perceived threat they pose, though may manifest themselves in actions which appear targeted at the religious aspects of the group.’¹²¹

9.1.2 Sources on the FFM also noted that treatment of religious groups not only varies according to whether they are registered or not but can also vary according to location, with local issues, authorities’ attitudes and historical factors influencing treatment of groups. Religious followers based in urban, economically developed areas more likely to be able to practise their religion/beliefs freely¹²² (see also [Religion among ethnic minority groups](#)).

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9.2 Religious activities of registered groups

9.2.1 Whilst the government did ban some religious activities many government affiliated churches and pagodas were able to hold worship services¹²³ and larger cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were more likely to allow religious activities to be held without interference¹²⁴.

¹²⁰ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹²¹ UK Home Office, [‘Home Office FFM Report’](#) (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹²² UK Home Office, [‘Home Office FFM Report’](#) (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹²³ HRW, [‘World Report 2021: Vietnam’](#), 13 January 2021

¹²⁴ UK Home Office, [‘Home Office FFM Report’](#) (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

- 9.2.2 The USCIRF annual report stated that they had: ‘...received reports that during the year authorities had cited Article 34 of the Law on Belief and Religion to interfere in the election of religious officers—known as “functionaries”—of recognized religious groups, leading at least one such group to suspend its election process.’¹²⁵
- 9.2.3 The USSD 2020 religious freedom report noted that: ‘...Recognized religious denominations in [Central and Northwest Highlands and in certain parts of the Mekong Delta]...reported rapid growth and generally fewer problems with officials.’¹²⁶
- 9.2.4 The 2022 DFAT report stated that:
- ‘A key distinction is between registered and unregistered faith groups. After the Vietnam War and the establishment of the unified Socialist Republic, the state created official religious groups and, since then, further groups have become registered. Registered groups worship with limited or no Government interference...
- ‘DFAT assesses that adherents of officially recognised religious groups are generally able to practise their faith with minimal interference from national authorities, but the situation differs from place to place. Those in large cities are particularly free to practise.’¹²⁷

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9.3 Treatment of unregistered groups

- 9.3.1 Diplomatic sources told the UK Home Office FFM in February 2019 that:
- ‘...members of unregistered religious organisations that get involved in local political issues such as land or environmental protests, or that advocate democracy or are deemed to pose a threat for other reasons, have been subject to harassment, arrest and detention. Cases have mainly, though not exclusively, been in areas with large ethnic minorities in the Central and North West Highlands, and with organisations with large numbers of unregistered groups such as the Hoa Hao. However, they are not limited to individual religious sects, as the reasons for action are generally unconnected with the religious aspects of the group or individuals and more with the perceived threat they pose, though may manifest themselves in actions which appear targeted at the religious aspects of the group.’¹²⁸
- 9.3.2 Human Rights Watch world report noted that: ‘Police monitor, harass, and sometimes violently crack down on religious groups operating outside government-controlled institutions. Unrecognized religious groups, including Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Christian, and Buddhist groups, face constant surveillance, harassment, and intimidation. Followers of independent religious group are subject to public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, detention, interrogation, torture, and imprisonment.’¹²⁹

¹²⁵ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

¹²⁶ USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)’, 12 May 2021

¹²⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.15 & 3.21), 11 January 2022

¹²⁸ UK Home Office, ‘[Home Office FFM Report](#)’ (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹²⁹ HRW, ‘[World Report 2021: Vietnam](#)’, 13 January 2021

9.3.3 CSW's general briefing on Vietnam noted that:

'... Independent religious groups not recognised by the government continue to encounter various forms of harassment.

'...religious groups which choose not to register with the authorities for reasons of conscience or have had their application for registration rejected or ignored, can be subject to various levels of harassment, intimidation and violence. In recent years, attacks have been carried out by "thugs" believed to be hired by local authorities to pressure unregistered groups to stop their religious activities.'¹³⁰

9.3.4 Freedom House noted that: 'Unregistered and unrecognized religious groups face routine harassment, including violence, criminal charges, and property damage.'¹³¹

9.3.5 The USCIRF report for 2021 stated that: '... many groups refused to register for fear of persecution or concern for their independence, which has led to both state-sponsored and independent organizations competing to represent the religion in some cases.'¹³²

9.3.6 The USSD 2020 religious freedom report noted that:

'Under the law, a religious organization is defined as "a religious group that has received legal recognition" by authorities. The law provides a separate process for unregistered, unrecognized religious groups to receive permission for specific religious activities by applying to the commune-level people's committee.

'... During the year [2020], authorities continued monitoring, preventing, or disrupting the gatherings of some unregistered groups and harassed their members in different ways. In most cases, members of these religious groups were also involved in human rights advocacy activities or had links to individuals and organizations that were critical of the government. Religious leaders in urban areas and among ethnic-majority Kinh adherents largely reported the ability to practice without significant restrictions, so long as they acted transparently to official oversight. This remained true for both officially registered and unregistered religious groups. Unrecognized religious denominations operating in the Central and Northwest Highlands and in certain parts of the Mekong Delta – especially those that had a predominantly ethnic minority following – were more likely to report harassment from government officials.'¹³³

9.3.7 The 2022 DFAT report stated that:

'...those that are not registered may be pressured by Government to join the registered group. Among unregistered groups a further distinction can be made between those groups that have some (perceived) political or foreign agenda and those that do not. Different people of different religions in different areas will also have different experiences, depending on local authorities. Those in cities are less likely to experience official interference.

¹³⁰ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, '[General Briefing: Vietnam](#)', 1 March 2021

¹³¹ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021](#)', 3 March 2021

¹³² USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

¹³³ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)', 12 May 2021

‘...The extent of difficulty that a religious group could expect to face from authorities (for example, refusal of registration, questioning or disruption of activities) can depend on where they are located. Many claims of Government interference are at the hands of local and provincial authorities rather than national authorities. Attitudes and policies can differ between authorities.

‘Many incidents relate to religious groups that are politically active in local land or environmental disputes. It can be difficult to distinguish between religious and political claims. The distinction is not necessarily apparent in the everyday experiences of religious adherents or the authorities, either or both of whom may see religious activity as inherently political.

‘There are several high-profile examples of religious figures who have advocated for religious freedom and been imprisoned. Such cases are fewer in recent years but those who have been arrested and imprisoned in the past might still be under surveillance by authorities or summoned for regular interrogation. DFAT understands this is generally limited to questioning and surveillance and not violence.

‘... Adherents associated with unregistered religious groups generally face more restrictions, which vary depending on region, ethnicity, and any perceived or actual involvement in religious freedom advocacy or political activism.’¹³⁴

9.3.8 See also the section on [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)

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9.4 Religion among ethnic minority groups

9.4.1 The USSD 2020 religious freedom report noted that:

‘During the year, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported cases of government officials physically abusing individuals from religious minority groups, particularly ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, although it was not clear the reported cases were related to religious affiliation. Government officials in different parts of the country reportedly continued to monitor, interrogate, arbitrarily detain, and discriminate against some individuals, at least in part, because of their religious beliefs or affiliation. The majority of the victims of the reported incidents were members of unregistered groups engaged in political or human rights advocacy activities or with ties to overseas individuals and organizations that were outspoken and critical of authorities. Because religion, ethnicity, and politics are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of harassment as being solely based on religious identity.

‘...There were multiple reports of government discrimination against individual religious believers and religious groups across the country. Members of some religious groups whose members were poor or ethnic minorities said authorities denied some of the legal benefits to which the members were entitled.’¹³⁵

¹³⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.15- 3.21), 11 January 2022

¹³⁵ USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)’, 12 May 2021

- 9.4.2 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), in their general briefing on Vietnam published in March 2021, stated that:

'While the situation for religious communities varies widely between different areas of the country, individuals in remote areas who are both ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Montagnard ethnic minority Catholics and Protestants in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, suffer the most severe abuses. These include: pressure to recant, forced eviction, denial of access to public services and grants, beatings, torture, sexual abuse, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, threats, intimidation, disruption of religious services, prevention from attending religious services, confiscation of religious materials, denial of access to education, and damage to properties used for religious services.'¹³⁶

- 9.4.3 Freedom House noted in their annual report for 2021 that '...Members of ethnic and religious minorities also sometimes face monitoring and harassment by authorities seeking to suppress dissent and suspected links to exile groups.'¹³⁷

- 9.4.4 See also the relevant sections in [Treatment of ethnic groups](#), [State treatment of specific ethnic groups](#) and [State treatment of specific religious groups](#)

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Section 10 updated: 17 January 2022

10. State treatment of specific religious groups

10.1 Buddhists

- 10.1.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the section on the state treatment of [Khmer Krom](#). Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on land disputes. For information on Hoa Hao Buddhism see country policy and information note on [Vietnam: Hoa Hao Buddhism](#).

- 10.1.2 The USCIRF report for 2021 noted that: 'In February [2020], following the death of Patriarch Thich Quang Do—former leader of the independent Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV)—authorities interfered in Do's funeral arrangements. In addition, USCIRF received a report that local officials in the Huong Tra Township of Thua Thien-Hue Province disrupted UBCV's disaster relief work this year, claiming that it was an "illegal church."¹³⁸

- 10.1.3 The Vietnam Human Rights Network report on human rights in Vietnam published in June 2021 stated that:

'...the government only recognizes the state-run Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (formed in 1981) while outlawing the Unified Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (started much earlier as a legitimate heir to the various traditional Buddhist sects of Vietnam). Furthermore, the Vietnamese Communists kept the Church head, the Most Venerable Thich Quang Do, in prison or under house arrest for over three decades until his death in February 2020.

¹³⁶ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, '[General Briefing: Vietnam](#)', 1 March 2021

¹³⁷ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2021](#)', 3 March 2021

¹³⁸ USCIRF, '[Annual report 2021](#)', April 2021

‘...As for the Khmer-Krom Buddhists, the government dispersed the Khmer-Krom Theravada Buddhist Association and forced Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks to join the Patriotic United Buddhist Association (PUBC).’¹³⁹

- 10.1.4 The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization & Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation’s report ‘Denied recognition Vietnam’s refusal to recognize the indigenous and religious rights of the Khmer Krom’, published in September 2021 noted that:

‘The Viet Nameese government has refused to recognise Khmer Theravada Buddhism as an authorised religion. Rather, Theravada Buddhism has been classified as a religious organization, thereby stripping its practitioners of important protections, such as reading relevant religious material, such as Khmer-language books and publications, or holding such materials in the libraries. Consequently, Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks have been forced to join the Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) association established by Viet Nam’s government.

‘The Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation’s (KKF) have reported that where Khmer-Krom Buddhist monks refuse to be members of the VBS they receive threats and intimidation until they agree to join or are forced leave their monkhood. As a result, the VBS is authorized to control how the Khmer Krom practice their religion in numerous ways, including: the appointment of the Abbot (head monk) in Khmer-Krom temples; changes in Khmer-Krom temple stamps and Buddhist identification to include only the Viet Nameese language; mandatory attendance of ‘National Defence and Security’ workshops, which propagate propaganda; forced display of a portrait the Viet Nameese Communist founder, Ho Chi Minh, in the temple along with Viet Nam’s flag instead of the Buddhist flag; prohibition of speaking the Khmer language in study conferences by Khmer Buddhist monks; and overall monitoring of the teaching curriculum in the Khmer-Krom temples.’¹⁴⁰

- 10.1.5 The 2022 DFAT report noted that:

‘Groups registered with the Government experience few restrictions. High-profile Buddhist exiles and arrestees are typically also involved in advocating political change, such as for religious freedom. It can be difficult to separate out discrimination due to religion and political opinion in these cases.

DFAT assesses that Buddhists who belong to registered organisations and are not politically active face a low risk of official discrimination. Those engaged in independent sects or unregistered Buddhist organisations face a moderate risk of official discrimination, particularly if they also advocate for political change, including for religious freedom.’¹⁴¹

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¹³⁹ Vietnam Human Rights Network, ‘[Report on Human Rights in Vietnam 2020-2021](#)’, 20 June 2021

¹⁴⁰ UNPO, ‘[Denied Recognition Vietnam’s Refusal To Recognize The Indigenous...](#)’, September 2021

¹⁴¹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.41 & 3.42), 11 January 2022

10.2 Catholics

- 10.2.1 Several sources noted that some Catholic leaders have been beaten, denounced by officials and imprisoned for their involvement in protests about the 2016 Formosa environmental disasters^{142 143 144}.
- 10.2.2 There were also reports during 2017 of violent attacks against the Catholic community by the state backed “Red Flag Association”, a highly organised militant group that works with or under the direction of local authorities. DFAT reported that this association had dissolved in 2018 but the USCIRF report noted that they have moved their operations to online platforms^{145 146}. USCIRF noted that in 2020 the “Red Flag Association”, along with government bodies spread: ‘online propaganda that promoted discrimination and intolerance against religious groups and individuals such as Catholic priests’. The report went on to note that: ‘In one instance, the Red Flag Association attacked three members of the Catholic community with derogatory language on its website, calling them “terrorists” and “brain dead.”’¹⁴⁷
- 10.2.3 The Catholic Church has been affected by continuing instances of land appropriation and destruction of property^{148 149}. DFAT reported that some appropriated land is sold to the private sector for development. DFAT also noted that land seized from the Catholic church during the Vietnam War has been returned over decades and that it is still being returned including during the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁵⁰. The USCIRF reported that in August 2020: ‘...government-led thugs harassed and attacked members of a Benedictine monastery at Thuy Bang Commune in Thua Thien-Hue Province, forcing the monastery to relinquish its land. In Ho Chi Minh City, an ownership dispute involving a local parish school led one Catholic priest to sue the local government.’¹⁵¹
- 10.2.4 Several sources noted that Catholic priests have also been vocal critics of the cybersecurity law^{152 153}. In October 2021 a Catholic priest, who had been critical of the government’s handling of the Covid19 pandemic, was accused by a Ministry of Public Security newspaper of having broken the Law on Cyber Security. The paper called for the priest to be “handled” by the authorities. The priest described the accusations of having broken the cyber security law as slander¹⁵⁴.
- 10.2.5 According to the 2022 DFAT report:

¹⁴² Asia News, [‘Ky Anh, 4 thousand Catholics beaten by police for protesting...’](#), 17 August 2016

¹⁴³ World Watch Monitor, [‘Vietnam: Catholic activist’s harsh sentence...’](#), 13 February 2018

¹⁴⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, [‘General Briefing: Vietnam’](#), 1 March 2021

¹⁴⁵ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Vietnam’](#) (para 3.27), 11 January 2022

¹⁴⁶ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹⁴⁷ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹⁴⁸ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹⁴⁹ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Vietnam’](#) (para 3.28), 11 January 2022

¹⁵⁰ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report: Vietnam’](#) (para 3.28), 11 January 2022

¹⁵¹ USCIRF, [‘Annual report 2021’](#), April 2021

¹⁵² UCA News, [‘Activists vow not to be gagged by Vietnam’s cyber law’](#), 3 January 2019

¹⁵³ Asia News, [‘Vietnam’s new law on online privacy and freedom of thought...’](#), 13 June 2018

¹⁵⁴ RFA, [‘Vietnamese Priest Calls State Media Attacks Against Him ‘Slander’](#), 4 October 2021

‘Most Catholics worship in churches as part of parishes. Some communities, particularly outside of cities, worship in homes of believers. These activities may be limited by authorities in some cases, but this differs from place to place. In general, Catholics in cities worship freely in churches.

‘Some Catholic communities are growing in size with evangelism or welfare efforts. This can occur especially where the local Catholic communities have good relationships with the Government. Some sources report that Catholic missionaries and officials have had difficulty reaching more remote parts of the country in recent years, which might be related to COVID-19 restrictions. Written materials, such as newsletters, websites and social media materials exist, but their maintenance, distribution and promotion do not appear to be a priority for Catholic leaders.

‘There have been Catholic political movements that attract negative attention from authorities. The distinction between faith and politics can be difficult to draw. Examples include where Catholics are involved in political, human rights or environmental movements. For example, priests that are involved in those movements may be restricted from public ministry or given a far-away parish assignment. Participation in non-religious activities differs from diocese to diocese and parish to parish.

‘... Church officials do not have official relationships with the Catholic Church overseas (except perhaps the Vatican), but in-country sources told DFAT that individual Catholics or communities have relationships with the diaspora overseas, including in Australia, and these relationships are generally unhindered.

‘In-country sources told DFAT Catholics generally do not experience societal discrimination. Such discrimination cannot be ruled out, but DFAT understands from in-country sources that there is not a pattern of such discrimination.

‘DFAT assesses that Catholics who belong to registered churches and are not politically active face a low risk of official harassment. In-country sources told DFAT that, in general, Catholics are able to worship freely and receive sacraments such as the Eucharist, Reconciliation (confession) and Confirmation. Some Catholics in remote areas have trouble accessing a priest who may not be able to travel to remote areas, whether because authorities will not allow it or because of the remoteness. Catholics who are perceived to challenge the authority or interests of the CPV and its policies, particularly through political activism, face a moderate risk of official discrimination from authorities or their proxies, which may include arrest or violence.’¹⁵⁵

- 10.2.6 Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on the Formosa protests and land disputes.

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¹⁵⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.24- 3.31), 11 January 2022

10.3 Protestants

10.3.1 This section should be read in conjunction with the section on the state treatment of [Montagnards \(or Degar\)](#) and [Hmong](#). Reference should also be made to the [Country Policy and Information Note on Vietnam: Opposition to the state](#) for further information on land disputes.

10.3.2 Thang Nguyen of Boat People SOS (BPSOS), stated in an interview with CIVICUS, that:

‘The government authorities are directly suppressing independent house churches. In the Central Highlands, thousands of house churches have been closed, set on fire, and destroyed. In 2004 the government issued an ordinance on belief and religion, meaning that house churches have to be registered. There are credible reports that the government trained a lot of its own people to become pastors, and they have set up new churches allowed by the government. These are run and controlled by the government.

‘A major challenge is the forced renunciation of faith. Christians have been ordered to leave their parish churches and told not to follow any religion, or to join a government-controlled church. People who have resisted joining government-controlled churches have been harassed, persecuted, and tortured. Several deaths in police custody have been documented. There are quite a lot of religious prisoners of conscience, many of them Montagnard Christians.

‘...In many parts of Northwest Region, Hmong Christians who have refused to renounce their faith have been evicted from their villages by the local authorities. Their villages have been declared as Christian-free zones. Tens of thousands of Hmong have been affected, something that continues to this day.’¹⁵⁶

10.3.3 Human Rights Watch, in a January 2020 submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue reported that: ‘In March 2019, a court in Gia Lai province put Ksor Ruk on trial for following an unrecognized Dega Protestant sect and sentenced him to 10 years in prison. Ksor Ruk served a six-year prison sentence between 2005-2011 for the same violation. In August, Rah Lan Hip was convicted by the same court to seven years in prison, also for being involved with Dega Protestantism.’¹⁵⁷

10.3.4 A February 2020 Joint Submission Responding to the 5th and 6th State Report on Vietnam’s Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child noted that:

‘Tens of thousands of Montagnard Christians had to convert to a government-controlled denomination whose leadership is more loyal to the Communists than to God. Those holding on to their faith have been subjected to harassment, threats, detention, torture, denial of livelihood and denial of basic citizen’s rights.

¹⁵⁶ CIVICUS, [Vietnam: ‘The government is using non-state actors against...’](#), 10 September 2019

¹⁵⁷ HRW, [‘Submission to the European Union for the EU-Vietnam Human Rights...’](#), January 2020

‘... Some 60 Montagnard Christians have been sentenced to long-term imprisonment primarily because of their faith but the government charged them with undermining “national security” or “national unity.”’¹⁵⁸

10.3.5 The Vietnam Human Rights Network noted in their report on human rights that ‘...out of more than 80 Protestant organizations in operation, only 10 Protestant organizations have legal entities, and three are granted registration of religious activities. The rest, about 70 Protestant groups and organizations, have not been given operation registration certificates, which means they operate illegally.’¹⁵⁹

10.3.6 The BTI 2020 Vietnam country report noted that: ‘Christians, who account for about 10% of the population, ...may face career and political barriers if employed in state institutions.’¹⁶⁰

10.3.7 The 2020 USSD report noted that: ‘...in Hanoi and surrounding areas, city officials continued to allow Protestant house churches to operate drug rehabilitation centers.’¹⁶¹

10.3.8 The 2022 DFAT report noted that:

‘There is a wide-range of Protestant traditions present in Vietnam. Protestants are mostly members of ethnic minorities but Kinh Protestant communities also exist, especially in the south. Issues of religious freedom and connection with land may overlap with ethnic issues. Officially registered churches that cooperate with the Government are generally able to organise and operate relatively freely and those that are engaged in political activism are likely to attract the attention of authorities.

‘Protestant groups can face bureaucratic difficulties. For example, gatherings might be banned on technicalities such as not having approved lists of attendees. DFAT is also aware of reports of recent examples of more serious harassment such as Protestant ministers in remote areas having assets seized or premises raided – but notes, again, that religious and political issues tend to overlap.

‘Registered Protestant groups experience less interference from the Government than unregistered groups. Nonetheless, DFAT understands some unregistered churches do operate. It is difficult to assess in a general way whether they have tacit approval of authorities, but some unregistered churches still operate with house church gatherings of a few people up to several hundred people. Other house churches may have a certificate of registration for prayer groups, for example for their family. The situation likely differs from place to place.

‘In-country sources told DFAT activities such as Protestant conferences and meetings are generally unrestricted in large cities. Efforts to expand or build churches in more remote areas can be difficult. Bureaucratic obstacles, including obtaining permits, may prevent the construction of churches or the establishment of new communities.

¹⁵⁸ Boat People SOS et al, [‘Joint Submission Responding to the 5th and 6th...’](#), 28 February 2020

¹⁵⁹ Vietnam Human Rights Network, [‘Report on Human Rights in Vietnam 2020-2021’](#), 20 June 2021

¹⁶⁰ BTI, [‘Vietnam Country Report 2020’](#), 29 April 2020

¹⁶¹ USSD, [‘2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam’](#), 12 May 2021

‘...Protestant religious education is available, but again the situation may differ from place to place.

‘Different denominational traditions tend to have good relationships with each other while remaining largely independent. Some Protestants have relationships with churches overseas, including in Australia, and international Protestant conventions have occurred recently in Vietnam with few reports of difficulties.

‘...Despite some difficulties with bureaucracy, in-country sources told DFAT that efforts to evangelise and recruit new members are possible in large cities. DFAT understands that this is the case in relation to large events in which people might preach. Reports are mixed and DFAT understands that over time and in different parts of Vietnam there have been varying levels of tolerance from authorities towards evangelism.

‘DFAT assesses that members of registered Protestant churches face a low risk of official discrimination or harassment in relation to their faith. Adherents of unregistered Protestant churches face a moderate risk of official discrimination if they are engaged in political expression, protests or criticism of the Government. In-country sources told DFAT that Protestants experience little societal discrimination, especially in cities. The situation is different in small rural communities, where societal discrimination might be more prevalent but would differ from community to community.’¹⁶²

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10.4 Cao Daoists

- 10.4.1 Diplomatic sources told the UK Home Office FFM in February 2019 that: ‘Cao Dai face more scrutiny as they formed their own army before 1975, eventually forging allegiance with former Southern Vietnamese government, that is where some of the tension comes from.’¹⁶³
- 10.4.2 CSW in their March 2021 general briefing on Vietnam stated that: ‘Independent Cao Dai ...groups are also targeted with a range of violations, including disruption of religious activities, arbitrary detention of religious leaders and adherents, and confiscation of property used for religious worship.’¹⁶⁴
- 10.4.3 The USCIRF 2021 annual report noted that: ‘Authorities have in recent years also harassed independent Cao Dai believers and attempted to take over their temples or forcibly “reunite” them with state-recognized ones.’¹⁶⁵
- 10.4.4 The 2020 USSD report noted that: ‘On September 11 and 13 [2020]... members of the recognized Cao Dai Sect (Cao Dai 1997) disrupted a gathering of unregistered Cao Dai members (Cao Dai 1926) at a private residence in Ben Cau District, Tay Ninh Province.’¹⁶⁶ Reporting on the same incidence DFAT noted that: ‘The unregistered group accused the Government of using the registered group as a proxy to disrupt their

¹⁶² DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.32- 3.39), 11 January 2022

¹⁶³ UK Home Office, ‘[Home Office FFM Report](#)’ (Annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019

¹⁶⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, ‘[General Briefing: Vietnam](#)’, 1 March 2021

¹⁶⁵ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report 2021](#)’, April 2021

¹⁶⁶ USSD, ‘[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Vietnam](#)’, 12 May 2021

activities. DFAT cannot confirm if these incidents were linked to Government action or whether they represent a split between the two groups; schisms have formed in the past.¹⁶⁷

- 10.4.5 The Vietnam Human Rights Network reported that: ‘As for the Cao Dai Church, with its 2007 Charter, the government set up the Cao Dai Tay Ninh Church, ruled by an Executive Council, which Cao Dai traditionalists do not support.’¹⁶⁸
- 10.4.6 The 2022 DFAT report stated that: ‘DFAT assesses unregistered Cao Dai organisations face a moderate risk of harassment, and possible violence, from authorities or other groups such as members of other Cao Dai sects. Members of the officially registered group face a low risk of official discrimination. DFAT is not aware of societal discrimination against Cao Daists.’¹⁶⁹

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¹⁶⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.47), 11 January 2022

¹⁶⁸ Vietnam Human Rights Network, ‘[Report on Human Rights in Vietnam 2020-2021](#)’, 20 June 2021

¹⁶⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report: Vietnam](#)’ (para 3.48), 11 January 2022

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Ethnic groups
 - demography
 - Legal status
 - Language?
 - Background info on specific groups- Hoa, Hmong, Montagnards etc.
- Treatment of ethnic groups
 - Government policies and services
 - Poverty
 - State discrimination, harassment and detention
 - Societal treatment
- State treatment of specific groups
 - Chinese (Hoa)
 - Montagnards
 - Hmong
 - Khmer Krom
- Religious groups
 - Religious demography
 - Legal status
 - Background info on specific groups- Protestants, Catholics, Buddhism, Cao Dai, other religions
- Treatment of religious groups
 - State treatment of registered religious groups
 - State treatment of unregistered religious groups
- State treatment of specific religious groups
 - Protestants
 - Catholics
 - Buddhists (unified church of Vietnam)
 - Cao Dai

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Version control

Clearance

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The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information

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