



Human Trafficking in Vietnam: Patterns of exploitation, risk factors, and access to support

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Who we are

Asylos is a global network of volunteers providing free-of-charge Country of Origin Information (COI) research for lawyers helping people seeking international protection with their claim. Asylos works to ensure that people seeking international protection and their legal counsel have access to crucial sources and data to substantiate their claim. Asylos volunteers and staff use their research and language skills to access detailed information. More information can be found on Asylos' [website](#).

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¹ Asylos' CLEAR project, learn more here: <https://asylos.org/clear-coi-legal-expertise-alliance-for-asylum-research/>

² More about Dr Maja Grundler's work here: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/g/maja-grundler/>

³ Human Trafficking Research Network (HTRN) is a multidisciplinary community of academics and practitioners who are engaged in human trafficking-related research. More information on HTRN available at: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/topic/law/human-trafficking-research-network>

⁴ Refugee Law Initiative, see more here: <https://rli.sas.ac.uk/>

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Explanatory note

Building on Asylos and ARC Foundation’s⁵ previous work on trafficking,⁶ Asylos launched a new project in 2025 that intends to address information gaps about trafficked persons who are seeking international protection, and/or who have been referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in the UK.

The report was initiated in response to a need identified by legal representatives and anti-trafficking practitioners in the asylum field for more recent and updated information on the conditions faced by trafficked men, women, and children in Vietnam. This project created the opportunity to update and expand on Asylos and ARC’s 2020 Country of Origin Information (COI) report **Vietnam: Returned Victims of Trafficking: Issues Affecting Likelihood of Re-Trafficking**.

This new COI report describes the conditions experienced by Vietnamese survivors of trafficking within Vietnam, including those who have been returned to the country, and explores risk factors of re-trafficking. It also briefly highlights the accessibility of protection mechanisms in Vietnam for asylum seekers and undocumented individuals who are trafficking victims. Research terms of reference were developed in consultation with the project’s Steering Committee (comprising legal representatives, academics, and practitioners)⁷ to shed light on under-researched issues. Recognising the established link between human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants, Asylos also incorporated research questions to capture relevant information on this connection.

The report’s desk-based research is grounded in a variety of written sources that were published between June 2020 and August 2025, this time span is broader than is typical for COI reports, since information that is more than 2 years old is not usually considered sufficient to show that a person remains at risk.⁸

However consultations with lawyers and charity caseworkers indicated that this report should cover the past five years, beginning with the publication of Asylos and ARC’s 2020 initial report. This longer timeline helps illustrate the effects of COVID-19, the war on Ukraine, technological developments, and the emergence of scam compounds in Asia. The report’s geographic scope is broad, covering regional and international contexts, including the UK, where Vietnamese nationals consistently rank among the top ten.⁹

This COI report is intended as background reference material for legal representatives and those assisting asylum seekers. The COI report should be used as a tool to help identify relevant COI. Legal representatives are welcome to submit relevant excerpts cited in this document to decision makers (including judges) to assist an asylum seeker’s case. We are COI research experts and adhere to strict research principles of providing relevant, objective, transparent, timely and reliable source material.¹⁰ We therefore strive to include discoverable relevant information, whether or not supportive of any individual case. It is imperative that legal representatives and those assisting asylum seekers read the whole COI report and consider whether, having done so, the report is on balance likely to support the specific case in which it is proposed to rely upon it. Please also note that it may be appropriate for legal representatives to seek additional individualised information.

5 Learn more about ARC Foundation, here: <https://asylumresearchcentre.org/about/>

6 Asylos, **China: Loan Shark Activities, Police Protection and Corruption, and support, including mental health, to female returnee victims of trafficking**, September 2025; Asylos, **Rwanda: Trafficking**, June 2024; Asylos, **Albania: Trafficking**, April 2024; Asylos and ARC Foundation, **Vietnam: Returned Victims of Trafficking: Issues Affecting Likelihood of Re-Trafficking**, May 2020 and; Asylos and ARC Foundation, **Albania: Trafficked Boys and Young Men**, May 2019

7 Liz Williams, Eleonora Fais, Hebe Lawson, Rebecca Hacker, Nadine Finch, Dr Maria Turda, and Thao Ngoc Do

8 However, please note: if only older sources can be found then it is still worth including these along with a note that more recent information cannot be found. In certain country situations this may be due to a lack of UN or NGO access or restrictions so it is worth documenting this to show why more recent information might not be available.

9 UK Home Office, **Official Statistics Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK**, end of year summary 2025, 19 February 2026

10 Asylos, **Country of Origin Information (COI): Fundamentals**, 2024, pp.12-14

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

This research was conducted by a team of Asylos staff and volunteers and comprises interviews alongside material gathered through desk research.¹¹ After completing initial COI desk research, Asylos volunteer researchers identified several information gaps. To address these, a total of six experts with specialised knowledge in Human Trafficking and Vietnam were interviewed and corresponded with between November 2025 and March 2026. It should be noted that five of the six interview transcripts are included in the main body of this report and published in the addendum.

The fifth transcript could not be included because it was not signed off by the interlocutor during the clarification stage.¹² Top up research was conducted in February and March 2026, focusing on areas where change might have occurred since the initial COI desk research.

In this report the definition of ‘*Trafficking in persons*’, comes from Article 3(a) of the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*¹³, and Article 4(a) of the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*¹⁴, in which both articles state that:

(a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.[...]”

The term ‘*victim of trafficking*’ or ‘*VoT*’ is commonly used by sources cited in this report. It is terminology that is used in the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings,¹⁵ and the Trafficking Protocol. As noted in a report by the Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), the term ‘*victim*’ may be used by law enforcement, the justice system and some NGOs due to its legal implications.¹⁶ The IOM [Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking](#)¹⁷ also notes that the term ‘*victim*’ has been widely debated, particularly in the context of violence against women, because some consider it to imply powerlessness rather than resilience, and therefore prefer the term ‘*survivor*’. However, in the area of human rights and protection, the term ‘*victim*’ is used to describe a person who has experienced injustice for which the perpetrator is responsible. In this report, Asylos uses the term ‘*victim*’ when quoting or citing other sources and the term ‘*survivor*’ in research questions or sub-sections of this report. It is worth noting that while Vietnam’s domestic definition of trafficking broadly aligns with the Trafficking Protocol, some differences and tensions exist in scope and application, as further explored in Section 1 of this report.

Another phenomenon that is covered in this report is ‘*smuggling*’, the reason for this is that many actors are involved in trafficking, including human smugglers. It’s important to note that there is a legal distinction between smuggling of migrants and human trafficking, while also recognising the link between them. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) sets out the differences between the two crimes:

“Human trafficking is a crime involving the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploiting them. Traffickers use violence, fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick, coerce and deceive their victims. They abuse the vulnerability of their victims in order to exploit them – most of the time through forced labour or sexual exploitation. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. [...]”

¹¹ For more information about our research methodology, please consult Appendix A Methodology of this report.

¹² See Step 9 of the Methodology: Citing the interviews and writing up the full report

¹³ United Nations General Assembly, [55/25. United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#), 8 January 2001

¹⁴ Council of Europe, [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#), Warsaw, 16.V.2005

¹⁵ Council of Europe, [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#), 2005

¹⁶ Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre, [“A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking”](#), October 2022, pg.18

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration, [The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking](#), 2007

Migrant smuggling is the facilitation of irregular entry into a country where the person is not a national or resident. Smugglers engage in this illegal activity for financial or material gain. They seize the opportunity created by the need or desire of people to escape not just poverty and lack of employment opportunities but also natural disasters, conflict or persecution, in the absence of legal channels to migrate. [...]

The two crimes differ in their:

Purpose: The purpose of human trafficking is the exploitation of victims through forced labour, sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse. In contrast, the purpose of migrant smuggling is to facilitate irregular entry or stay of a person in a country where they don’t have a legal right to enter or remain. This is done in exchange for payment from the person being smuggled.

Transnationality: Migrant smuggling is always transnational, as it involves the irregular movement of people across borders. Human trafficking, on the other hand, is not necessarily transnational. Many trafficking cases happen within a single country’s borders.

Source of criminal profits: In migrant smuggling, profits are mainly earned by charging fees for transport, false documents, or other services that enable irregular migration. In human trafficking, profits come from the ongoing exploitation of victims. This can include making them to work without pay, coercing them into sexual activities, forcing them to commit crimes, or even removing and selling their organs.

Crime against what or whom: Migrant smuggling is primarily a crime against the state, as it violates immigration laws and undermines border control. While smuggled migrants may suffer harm, the act itself is not legally defined as a crime against a person. Human trafficking, in contrast, is a direct crime against an individual as it involves the abuse and exploitation of a victim.”

The two crimes happen along the same migration routes and in some cases involve the same criminal networks.¹⁸ In a 2024 report Europol noted that *‘connections also exist between migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Particularly when long and expensive journeys are involved, irregular migrants can end up exploited for the debt of the smuggling fees, either by the criminal networks facilitating their travels or by other criminal groups with which the smugglers cooperate’*. In the same report, the agency specifically pointed to the case of Vietnamese nationals been smuggled and exploited:

[...]

The members of a criminal network using fraudulently obtained work visas to smuggle Vietnamese nationals through the EU and across the English Channel to the UK, also exploited irregular migrants both en route and upon arrival at the destination. [...]³

3 Europol, April 2024, 16 arrests as Vietnamese network smuggling migrants across the English Channel busted, accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/mediapress/newsroom/news/16-arrests-vietnamese-network-smuggling-migrants-across-englishchannel-busted>

Similarly, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *“Traffickers and smugglers exploit factors that make countries and persons increasingly vulnerable to these crimes. Trafficking in person has different purposes, including sexual exploitation, labour exploitation (e.g., in mines, agriculture, domestic work) forced begging and organ removal. In contrast to human trafficking which can take place domestically and internationally, migrant smuggling is a crime that takes place only across borders. It consists in assisting migrants to enter or stay in a country illegally, for financial or material gain. Smugglers make a profitable business out of migrants’ needs and/or desire to travel across countries and the lack of safe and regular ways to do so.”*¹⁹

18 Europol, [Tackling threats, addressing challenges Europol’s response to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in 2023 and onwards](#), pg.6, July 2024

19 UNODC, [Trafficking in person and smuggling of migrants](#), undated

The issue of re-trafficking is a continuous theme from our initial report published in 2020. It shaped the development, structure and substance of both reports. For instance, the need for both reports were initiated in response to concerns raised by UK lawyers and charity caseworkers supporting Vietnamese survivors of trafficking and identified important gaps in available information in the UK Home Office Country policy and information notes (CPIN)s²⁰.

There is no internationally agreed upon definition of the term ‘re-trafficking’²¹, so for the purpose of our research, Asylos is using the following working definition set out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in their 2010 report²²:

‘Re-trafficking shall mean a situation in which a person has been trafficked on one occasion as set forth in the definition provided in the United Nations Palermo Protocol;⁴ has then exited that trafficking situation by any means; and has then later re-entered another trafficking situation, again as stated in the United Nations definition.’

- 4 According to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000):
 - (a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.
 - (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.
 - (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article.
 - (d) “Child” shall mean any person under 18 years of age.

Finally in relation to definitions, in the report, the definition of a child aligns with Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol²³ and Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)²⁴, in which both uniformly define a child as any human being below the age of 18 years. However, where possible we have also included information on young people (18-24 years), as this is often a gap in COI evidence.

The Terms of Reference of the report is divided into 7 core sections. Each section highlights critical issues relevant to protection claims from trafficking survivors, including risks posed by both state and non-state actors. The information in this report is primarily presented in reverse chronological order, to reflect the most pressing issues or changes, except for specific sections or questions where information is laid out in chronological order and are clearly marked as such in relevant footnotes. This is to highlight progress or where the reader needs to understand the sequence of events that have occurred to better understand the context.

20 UK Home Office, [Country policy and information notes](#), Last updated 1 September 2025

21 Neither the UN Trafficking Protocol nor the Council of Europe Trafficking Convention directly refer to re-trafficking, but both include clauses obliging states to protect trafficked persons from re-victimisation (UN Trafficking Protocol Article 9 (b) and ECAT article 16.5) and ensure that any repatriation should occur with due safety for the individual being returned (UN Trafficking Protocol Article 8 and ECAT article 16.2).9 Reference: <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/ylgczb3/iasc-and-rights-lab-re-trafficking-report-november-2021.pdf>

22 International Organization for Migration, [The Causes and Consequences of Re-trafficking: Evidence from the IOM Human Trafficking Database](#), 2010

23 United Nations, 2000. [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#)

24 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989, Article 1

Despite our efforts to cover as much ground as possible, it is important to understand that our research may not capture the entirety of the situation. In some cases, up-to-date and recent information was limited in the sources identified during our initial desk research, interviews, and the top-up research stage. Therefore, we have included some older sources that predate the established timeframe for this research in instances where the information is relevant.

This includes situations where more recent information was not found or where the research terms of reference relate to past events, yet remain relevant. Where information was not found in relation to our terms of reference, a note has been directly placed under the question in bold. It is important to note that the absence of information should not be taken as evidence that an issue, incident or violation does not exist.

From the sources consulted, insufficient or no information could be found on specific questions in the following sections, therefore several critical information gaps remain:

1. Legal Definitions and Framework:

- No information could be found on a clear procedural framework for identifying smuggled migrants in Vietnam.
- No information could be found on documented cases of children who have been returned due to having no immigration status/who have claimed asylum/who have claimed to have been trafficked) who are misidentified as adults overseas and returned to Vietnam.

2. Trafficking Patterns, Routes, and Actors:

- No information could be found on how the Vietnamese authorities identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking.

3. Reintegration and Opportunities for Returnees:

- From the sources consulted, no information could be found on how long support for male survivors lasts.

4. Family, Community, and Intergenerational Risk Factors:

- No information could be found within the timeframe on interventions aimed specifically towards children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked.
- In the sources consulted, no information could be found within the timeframe on community-based initiatives to break the cycle of trafficking across generations in Vietnam.

5. Access to Support, Shelter, and Healthcare:

- Sufficient information could not be found on whether or not a lack of social protection increases the risk factors of re-trafficking for women and children in Vietnam.

6. Education and Employment:

- Limited information could be found on this question from the sources consulted. *Is there any evidence that young returnees face barriers in accessing higher education and vocational training?*

7. Stigma, re-trafficking and Return-specific Risk Factors:

- No information could be found on this question from the sources consulted. *Is information available on how the stigma of trafficking impacts young people’s ability to reintegrate into society in Vietnam?*

Disclaimers

We recognise that in failing to publish versions of this report in accessible formats (such as easy read, Braille, and audio versions) we exclude many persons with disabilities from reading it and making use of its content, which is inconsistent with the inclusive principles our [Disability COI research](#) was based upon. Unfortunately, we lacked the resources to make this undertaking and came to the view that it would still be of benefit to publish it in its current form for use as evidence in refugee status determinations.

Please note that as authors of this report we are not legally accredited nor ‘experts’ in the matters we research and so cannot be classified as expert witnesses. We compile primary and secondary information to address certain country-specific questions, but we do not provide an assessment or analysis of the data. Similarly, we do not provide legal advice. The report was researched, written and edited by Asylos’ staff and its network of volunteer researchers.

Background on the research project

This report is part of a wider project producing a series of publications that present new and innovative forms of Country of Origin Information (COI). The project combines interviews with existing sources to address gaps in available information. Earlier phases of this work were published in partnership between Asylos and ARC Foundation. Across the series, all reports cover topics related to asylum seekers in the UK for whom an absence of country information forms a barrier to protection.

Previous reports published include:

- Asylos, [Sudan: Children and Young People](#), June 2024
- Asylos, [Lebanon: Stateless Palestinians](#), March 2023
- Asylos/ARC Foundation, [Nigeria: Children and Young People with Disabilities](#), October 2021
- Asylos/ARC Foundation, [Ghana: State treatment of LGBTQI+ persons](#), March 2021
- Asylos/ARC Foundation, [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking](#), May 2020
- Asylos/ARC Foundation, [Albania: Trafficked Boys and Young Men](#), May 2019
- Asylos, Afghanistan: [Young male ‘Westernised’ returnees to Kabul](#), August 2017 (Pilot report)

List of Acronyms

ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN-ACT	Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Australia Counter Trafficking
CCEC	Chinese cyber-enabled crimes
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COMMIT	Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking
CoRE	Research and Community Development
CPIN	Country policy and information notes
CPIT	Country Policy and Information Team
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
CRES	Center for re-integration of ex-prisoners into society
CWD	Center for Women and Development
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DOLISA	Department/Division of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights

List of Acronyms (continued)

ECPAT UK	Every Child Protected Against Trafficking UK
EIN	Electronic Immigration Network
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime ()
GTSEZ	Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone
HRC	UN Human Rights Council
HRC	Humanity Research Consultancy
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
INL	United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
INL	International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LSCW	Legal Support for Children and Women
MCNV	Medical Committee Netherlands Vietnam
MFA	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NAP	National Action Plan
NCA	National Crime Agency
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
NSO	National Statistics Office (formerly General Statistics Office (GSO))
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSSO	One-Stop Service Office
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SFVL	scam-forced Vietnamese labour
SPP	Supreme People's Procuracy
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCRI	US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
USDOS	US Department of State
VISLA	Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance
VND	Vietnamese dong
VoT	Victim of Trafficking
VWU	Viet Nam Women's Union

Sources consulted and reference period

We chose to focus on the timeframe June 2020 – August 2025 and so the desk-based research includes written sources published during this period and top-up research was conducted in February and March 2026.

However, as mentioned in the Explanatory note, in some cases, up-to-date and recent information was limited in the sources identified during our initial desk research, interviews, and the top-up research stage. Therefore, exceptions to the timeframe were made for rigorous academic studies addressing the history and culture background that were unlikely to rapidly change. Similarly, where more recent information was unavailable, we chose to include information produced by organisations before the beginning of the timeframe when it was clear that their mandate remained unchanged since. Where information was not found in relation to our terms of reference, a note has been placed directly under the question in bold. It is important to note that the absence of information should not be taken as evidence that an issue, incident or violation does not exist.

The Country of Origin Information (COI) presented is illustrative, but not exhaustive of the information available in the public domain, nor is it determinative of any individual human rights or asylum claim. All sources are publicly available and a direct hyperlink has been provided for each. In addition to assisting further research, the list of sources and databases consulted and provided below will enable source assessments. For more information about our research methodology, please consult Appendix A Methodology of this report. This document is intended to be used as a tool to help to identify relevant COI and the COI referred to in this report can be considered by decision makers in assessing protection applications and appeals. Additionally, this document is intended as background reference material to assist in case preparation. It should not be submitted directly, in its entirety or in isolation as evidence to decision-makers in asylum applications or appeals.

Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy, the authors accept no responsibility for any errors included in third party source material in this report.

DISCLAIMER: Recent reforms under the current US administration have affected the scope and content of information produced by the United States Department of State (USDOS) in its 2024 country reports on human rights, as discussed by various sources²⁵ and in Asylos’ [blog](#). Alongside this, growing concerns have emerged about the future of the annual USDOS Trafficking in Persons (TiP) report, a resource that provides essential information on anti-trafficking efforts worldwide and that is frequently relied upon in immigration and asylum cases. These concerns have intensified following reports of severe resource cuts facing the TiP office. Notwithstanding this context, Asylos has chosen to cite the 2025 USDOS TiP report in this instance, as it continues to provide relevant coverage on the situation of profiles pertinent to this COI report.

To find out more about an organisation, view the ‘About Us’ tab of a source’s website.

Asylos
Vietnam: returned victims of trafficking 2020
Asylos’s Research Notes [Subscription only]

Databases
EUAA COI Portal
European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)
Relief Web
UNHCR Refworld

Media
The Guardian
Al Jazeera [English; Vietnam pages]
Asia Times [English; Vietnam page]

25 [ecoi.net](#), [USDOS publishes annual report on human rights for 2024](#), Post updated 17 October

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

BBC [English]
 Le Courrier du Vietnam [French]
 Inter Press Service [English]
 The New Humanitarian [English; Vietnam page]
 Nhan Dan [English – Communist Party daily]
 Radio Free Asia [Vietnam page]
 Thomson Reuters Foundation News [English]
 VietNam News [English – state run]
 Vietnam+ [Vietnam Plus; English]
 The Voice of Vietnam [English]

Governmental bodies

Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
 DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM - December 2019
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 DFAT Country Information Report: VIETNAM, February 2025

UK Home Office

Vietnam: Mental healthcare, May 2021
 Vietnam: Fear of illegal moneylenders, February 2025
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 Vietnam: Trafficking, February 2025
 Vietnam: Ethnic and religious minority groups, December 2024
 UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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 UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
 U.S. Department of State
 Trafficking in Persons Report 2024
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Other Sources

Alliance Anti-Traffic [Vietnam page]
 Anti-Trafficking Review
 Asian Human Rights Commission
 Asia Society [Vietnam page]
 Blue Dragon
 Caritas Vietnam
 Centre for Women and Development (CWD)
 Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres
 Eldis
 Anti-Slavery International The Asia Foundation
 Amnesty International [Vietnam page]
 Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC)
 Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT UK)
 Freedom House [Vietnam page]
 Hagar International
 Human Rights Watch [Vietnam page]

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Human Trafficking Search

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada – Responses to Information Requests

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

International Federation for Human Rights [Vietnam page]

International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Counter-Trafficking

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)

Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

Oxfam

Pacific Links Foundation

Plan International [Vietnam page]

Save the Children

UN

UN Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT)

UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

UN Development Programme (UNDP) - Vietnam

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UN Human Rights Council

UN Human Settlements Programme (UNHABITAT)

UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)

UN News Centre

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) - Vietnam

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP)

WHO

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024

Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022

UN Population Fund (UNPFPA)

UN Secretary General

UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context

UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children

UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

UN Women

Vietnam Committee on Human Rights & Que Me

Vietnam Human Rights Network

Vietnam Law & Legal Forum

Books

Maja Grundler (Publisher: Routledge) – [Irregular Migration, Refugee Status and the Law Protection from Dangerous Migratory Journeys](#), August 29, 2025

Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024

Section 1: Legal Definitions and Framework

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.4 (Re-trafficking and Return-specific Risks)
- Section 4 (State Protection and Criminal Justice)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)

1. How does the legal framework in Vietnam distinguish between smuggling and trafficking?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“Vietnam’s legal framework has historically merged smuggling and trafficking; while the 2015 Criminal Code and 2024 Anti-Trafficking Law enhanced definitions and protections, procedural practices still struggle to distinguish between the two. Identification under the new guidelines from Decree 162/2025/ND-CP, especially for overseas victims (article 9) and repatriated victims (article 10), should involve specialized training and clear procedures. Many cases begin as “irregular migration” before meeting trafficking indicators (debt bondage, coercion, forced criminality). The multi-ministry approval process and local capacity gaps hinder timely recognition and response. Interpreting these legal guidelines into practice remains challenging.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, discussed the lack of existence of a legal framework for identifying smuggled migrants in Vietnam:

“[...]the Essex lorry incident in 2019 [...] came out and the people, even the Head of the Public Security of the province with the most victims,[...] did not recognize them as victims. [...] The Head of Social Security is really, really important. It’s equivalent to the police in this country, in the UK[...] He believed that everybody in that lorry is just opportunist and using human smuggling network[s] to come to look for better opportunities. So that was 2019, it’s now 2025, so I’m afraid that they have not actually recognised that[...]deep down, I have not seen the change in legislation formally.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

Clause 5, Article 4 of the 2024 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat is also referenced in this 2025, ASEAN report which mentions the introduction of a non-punishment principle:

“[...]Vietnam
Depending on the specific cases and related legal provisions, victims whose unlawful acts are a direct result of human trafficking may not be subject to administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for such acts. Article 4(5). Law No. 53/2024/QH15 on Human Trafficking Prevent and Combat passed on 28 November 2024 to take effect 1 July 2025.” (pg.91)
[...]
Viet Nam
The Minimum Standards in Provision of Services to Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2011); and 2016-2020 National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and the National Programme on Counter Trafficking in Persons during the period 2021-e2025 with a vision to 2030 do not mention the non-punishment principle.”(pg.93)

(Source: ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2 June 2025, pg.91-93, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

Clause 5, Article 4 of the 2024 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat is also referenced in this 2025, ASEAN report which mentions the introduction of a non-punishment principle:

“[...]Vietnam
Depending on the specific cases and related legal provisions, victims whose unlawful acts are a direct result of human trafficking may not be subject to administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for such acts. Article 4(5). Law No. 53/2024/QH15 on Human Trafficking Prevent and Combat passed on 28 November 2024 to take effect 1 July 2025.” (pg.91)
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The Minimum Standards in Provision of Services to Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2011); and 2016-2020 National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and the National Programme on Counter Trafficking in Persons during the period 2021- 2025 with a vision to 2030 do not mention the non-punishment principle.”(pg.93)

(Source: [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2 June 2025, pg.91-93, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

The Center for re-integration of ex-prisoners into society (CRES) in its alternative report, noted that:

“[...]8. The Government is also committed to developing a strong legal framework for combating human trafficking by adoption of a newly amended Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking in November 2024, which is effective from July 1, 2025. This newly amended law aims to address shortcomings of the 2011 law and to align with international commitments, including the ICCPR and the Palermo Protocol. The new law contains many progressive provisions: (pg.3)

Expanding the scope of protected persons to include: victims, individuals in the process of being identified as victims, accompanying persons under 18 years old; relatives of victims, individuals participating in anti-human trafficking activities or in supporting victims. The protection applies not only to Vietnamese citizens but also to stateless persons residing permanently in Vietnam and foreigners trafficked within Vietnam.¹

Strengthening support mechanisms for victims,² especially children, women and persons with disabilities.³

Providing clearer regulations on the establishment, operation and supervision of reception centers, supporting facilities and shelters for victims.

Adding responsibilities for local authorities, social organizations and businesses in supporting victims to re-integrate into the community.⁴” (pg.4)

1 Article 34, 37 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.
2 The 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking supplements provisions on the rescue, reception, and verification of victims located abroad (Article 29); supplements provisions on the reception, verification, and repatriation of foreign victims of trafficking in Vietnam (Article 31); and supplements and enhances the support regime (Article 37).
3 Clause 5 Article 7, Article 37-44, 46 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.
4 Clause 1 Article 46, 47 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee, [Center for Re-Integration of Ex-Prisoners into Society —NGO report on civil and political rights \(right to life; death penalty; elimination of slavery, servitude and trafficking in persons; access to justice; independence of the judiciary; fair trails\)](#), 20 May 2025, pp.3-4, last accessed 21 July 2025)

This news article published by Việt Nam News and Law, Vietnam News Agency, summarises key updates to Vietnam’s 2024 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat, which came into effect on July 1, 2025:

“[...]Taking effect as of July 1 this year, the 2024 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat is expected to improve the legal framework for combating human trafficking.

Compared to the 2011 version, the new Law, with 63 articles arranged in eight chapters, increases the subjects entitled to protection, including victims, people undergoing verification to be considered victims, victim-accompanying persons who are under 18 years old; relatives of victims or people undergoing verification to be considered victims; and individuals participating in human trafficking prevention and combat activities or supporting victims.

In addition, to meet practical requirements and conform to treaties to which Vietnam is a contracting party, the Law adds several important principles of human trafficking prevention and combat.

Specifically, the lawful rights and interests of victims and people undergoing verification to be considered victims will be respected and protected, regarding these people as the center, and ensuring gender equality.

The Law also states that victims and people undergoing verification to be considered victims may use a language understandable for them and receive support in conformity with their beliefs, religions, age, gender, health status, and personal characteristics.

Worthy of note, depending on each specific case and relevant regulations, victims who commit illegal acts as a direct consequence of human trafficking may be exempt from administrative handling or criminal prosecution for such acts.[...]"

(Source: Việt Nam News and Law, Vietnam News Agency – [New Law against human trafficking helps improve efficiency of human trafficking fight](#), 20 January 2025, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

Clause 5, Article 4 of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024, provides protection from administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for victims who have committed unlawful acts in certain circumstances:

"[...]5. Depending on specific circumstances and in accordance with relevant laws, victims who commit violations of the law as a direct consequence of human trafficking may not be subjected to administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for such violations."

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library²⁶ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

It appears that the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024 contains no definition of the term ‘*smuggling*’, however clause 2 of Article 2 of the same law states that the term ‘*Human trafficking*’, shall be construed as follows:

"[...]1. “Human trafficking” refers to acts of recruiting, transporting, harboring, transferring, or receiving persons for the purposes of obtaining money, property, other material benefits, sexual exploitation, forced labor, human organ harvesting, or other inhumane purposes by means of force, threats of force, deception, or other methods.
Acts of recruiting, transporting, harboring, transferring, or receiving persons under 18 years of age for the purposes of obtaining money, property, other material benefits - except as otherwise provided for by law - sexual exploitation, forced labor, human organ harvesting, or other inhumane purposes are also deemed human trafficking, even in the absence of force, threats of force, deception, or other methods.[...]

Clauses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the same article continue to provide several meanings of the following relevant terms:

- “2. “Sexual exploitation” refers to coercing victims into prostitution, organizing prostitution involving victims, bringing victims to establishments engaging in prostitution, using victims as subjects for the production of books, newspapers, pictures, films, music, or other pornographic materials, forcing victims to perform obscene acts, or compelling victims, through dependency, to meet sexual demands.
- 3. “Forced labor” refers to the use of force, threats of force, or other methods to coerce victims into performing work against their will.
- 4. “Human organs” refer to parts of the human body composed of various types of tissues that perform specific physiological functions.

²⁶ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

5. “Other inhumane purposes” include using victims for experiments; forcing victims to beg, marry against their will, bear children against their will, commit crimes, or subjecting them to other cruel purposes.

6. “Other methods” refer to exploiting marriage brokerage, job brokerage, overseas study consultancy, adoption, or overseas tourism to deceive victims; taking advantage of victims’ dependency, vulnerability, or distress; abusing positions or powers; kidnapping, intimidating, or poisoning victims; or inducing victims into a state of unconsciousness or inability to control their actions.

7. “Victim” refers to a person harmed by acts specified in Clause 1 of this Article and recognized by the competent authority.”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library²⁷ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its 2019 report, gave an overview of Vietnam’s legal framework on migrant smuggling and human trafficking. It noted that at the time Vietnam did not have a specific definition or law dedicated to migrant smuggling. Instead, related offenses are covered under the new Criminal Code, which was enacted in 2015. Although the Code was initially scheduled to take effect on 1 June 2016, its implementation was delayed due to further amendments. The revised Criminal Code officially came into force on 1 January 2018:

“XII.3 Domestic laws and policies relating to smuggling of migrants

Viet Nam has no separate statute concerning the smuggling of migrants. An offence relating to the smuggling of migrants, along with other criminal offences and general principles of criminal liability, can be found in Viet Nam’s new Criminal Code. The Criminal Code was enacted in 2015 and was meant to enter into force on 1 June 2016. Legislation was later introduced to postpone the entry into force until further amendments to the Code are made. The Criminal Code eventually entered into force on 1 January 2018. Until such time, the Penal Code of 1999, which also contains some offences relating to facilitating irregular migration, remained in operation. These offences also feature in the new Criminal Code in addition to the offence of smuggling of migrants.

In addition, the Government of Viet Nam is likely to produce a further piece of legislation, an act relating to smuggling of migrants, in coming years, which may stipulate further details about various types of smuggling as well as prevention, cooperation, and protection measures along with provisions concerning the return of smuggled migrants. Moreover, the Council of Judges, comprising up to 17 of Viet Nam’s most senior judges, is likely to produce guidelines pertaining to the interpretation of the new offences on smuggling of migrants that serve a quasi-precedential function in the Vietnamese legal system.

Obligations arising from Viet Nam’s ratification of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime are similarly reflected in provisions under the new Criminal Code. General provisions relating to immigration are contained in Law No 47/2014/QH13 of 16 June 2014 of the National Assembly on entry, exit, transit, and residence of foreigners in Viet Nam.

Viet Nam’s obligations under the Trafficking in Persons Protocol are implemented into domestic law by Law No 66/2011/QH12 of 29 March 2011 on Preventing and Combatting Human Trafficking.”

(Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pg.164, last accessed 27 March 2025)

²⁷ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property.

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In the same report the UNODC explains the evolution of Vietnam’s legal approach to the smuggling of migrants, focusing on how it changed with the introduction of the 2015 Criminal Code:

“XII.5 Offence of smuggling of migrants

Until the Criminal Code of 2015 entered into force, there were no offences criminalising the smuggling of migrants in Vietnamese law. Presently, the Penal Code of 1999 only criminalises the facilitation of irregular emigration (departure) as well as instances in which persons are coerced or forced to leave Viet Nam.”

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pg.165, last accessed 27 March 2025)

In the same 2019 report UNODC noted the domestic legislation on trafficking:

“XII.10 Other criminal offences relating to irregular migration

XII.10.1 Trafficking in persons

Trafficking in persons is criminalised in Viet Nam by the Penal Code of 1999 and, since 1 January 2018, in the new Criminal Code of 2015. A number of acts relating to trafficking in persons are also prohibited by Law No. 66/2011/QH12 on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat; these can trigger administrative sanctions only.

XII.10.1.1 Penal Code of 1999

The Penal Code of 1999 contains two offences relating to trafficking in persons: trafficking in women (Article 119) and trading in, fraudulently exchanging or appropriating children (Article 120).

Article 119(1) provides that ‘[t]hose who traffic in women shall be sentence to between two and seven years of imprisonment. Article 119(2) provides that an aggravated penalty of five to 20 years imprisonment applies where certain circumstances are present. Persons in breach of Article 119 may also be subject to a fine of between VND 5,000,000 and 50,000,000, probation for one to five years, or a residence ban of one to five years.’⁴⁴³

Article 120(1) creates an offence for trafficking in children, providing that ‘[t]hose who trade in, fraudulently exchange or appropriate children in any form shall be sentenced to between three and ten years of imprisonment’. Article 120(2) provides that an aggravated sentence of ten to 20 years’ imprisonment applies where certain aggravating circumstances are present. Offenders under Article 120 may also be subject to a fine of between VND 5,000,000 and 50,000,000, a ban from holding certain posts, practising certain occupations or doing certain jobs for one to five years, or probation for one to five years.’⁴⁴⁴(pg.174)

XII.10.1.2 Criminal Code of 2015

The new Criminal Code of 2015 contains a complex set of trafficking in persons offences. Trafficking in adults Article 150(1) of the new Criminal Code entitled ‘human trafficking’ criminalises the use of violence, threats to use violence, deception, or employment of other tricks to commit any of the following acts:

- (a) transferring or receiving people in exchange for money, property or other material gains;
- (b) transferring or receiving people for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labour, harvesting body organs of victims or for other inhumane purposes; or
- (c) recruiting, transporting or harbouring other people for the commission of any of the acts specified in (a) and (b).”(pg.175)

⁴⁴³ Article 119(3) Penal Code of 1999.

⁴⁴⁴ Article 120(3) Penal Code of 1999.

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#),

2019 pp.174-175, last accessed 27 March 2025)

2. How do these definitions align or differ from international legal standards (e.g., Palermo Protocol, and Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air)? Have any key reservation(s) been made?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, stated that:

“[...]Article 150 applied to children between the ages of 16 and 17 years old and required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a sex trafficking crime. In November 2024, the government adopted revisions to the 2011 anti-trafficking law; this new 2024 anti-trafficking law was scheduled for implementation after the reporting period. Consistent with international law, the new 2024 anti-trafficking law removed the required demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion when identifying child sex trafficking victims. The 2024 anti-trafficking law also added “other inhumane purposes” to the definition of trafficking, which included forced criminality. The 2024 anti-trafficking law, similar to the 2011 anti-trafficking law before it, did not amend the penal code, creating conflicting provisions. For example, the penal code still required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a sex trafficking crime in cases of victims ages 16 and 17. In March 2025, the government described plans to revise the penal code, including a review of Articles 150 and 151 to address this conflict and fully criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking.

[...]Authorities did not provide prosecution or conviction data disaggregated by sex or labor trafficking and did not provide sufficient information to determine whether data involving unspecified forms of exploitation met the definition of trafficking according to international law.

All identified victims were Vietnamese, and the government did not provide data disaggregated by form of exploitation, compared with reporting 176 victims exploited in labor trafficking and 40 victims of “sexual exploitation” in 2023; some of the victims of “sexual exploitation” reported in prior years may not have been victims of trafficking as defined by international law. Furthermore, the government likely included victims of unspecified forms of trafficking in their reported data, such as “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” which were inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 17 February 2026)

In a peer-reviewed article titled ‘*Features of human trafficking investigation in Russia: comparative legal analysis and application of experience in Vietnam*’, and published by Aurora Journals in July 2025, it was noted that:

“[...]Vietnam has already taken important steps in the field of legislation, in particular with the adoption of Law No. 53/2024/QH15 of November 28, 2024 *on the Prevention and Combating of Human Trafficking*, which marked a turning point in the transition from a traditional approach to a victim-protection paradigm. At the same time, Vietnam is actively integrating into international legal mechanisms, implementing the ASEAN Convention on Combating Human Trafficking (ACTIP), as well as concluding bilateral agreements with China, Cambodia and Laos. Nevertheless, in the field of practical investigation, issues such as the lack of specialized specialists, the lack of technical equipment and ineffective mechanisms for information interaction between departments remain unresolved, especially in the context of the rapid growth of cybercrime, ahead of legislative reforms.[...]”

(Source: Nguyen, T. (2025), Published by Aurora Journals²⁸ – [Features of human trafficking investigation in Russia: comparative legal analysis and application of experience in Vietnam, Police and Investigative Activity, 3, 93–116](#). 31 July 2025, last accessed February 2026)

In a story posted in July 2025, the ASEAN-ACT, mentions Vietnam’s newly adopted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking:

28 About the publisher: https://aurora-journals.com/view_page_2647.html

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“[...]Vietnam’s newly enacted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking, adopted in November 2024, marks an evolution in the country’s approach to counter-trafficking. The law expands the definition of trafficking to include newer forms of exploitation, such as forced labour in online scam operations, forced begging, coerced marriage, and exploitation of vulnerable groups – categories often overlooked. It also mandates improved procedures for victim identification, support and protection – paving the way for more coordinated and inclusive responses across sectors.”

(Source: Australian Aid | ASEAN - Australia Counter Trafficking – [Vietnam launches new tools to promote inclusive justice for trafficking survivors](#), 28 July 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, stated that:

“[...]Civil society observers previously reported this led to confusion among the courts on how to handle cases involving 16- and 17-year-old children, particularly for cases involving labor trafficking, and that it precluded child-centered best practices in such cases. In an effort to address this concern, in 2021, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) issued a new policy outlining child-centered procedures for the investigation of trafficking crimes committed against persons younger than the age of 18; this was the first government-issued guidance instructing law enforcement to handle trafficking cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds as child trafficking cases. Vietnam also maintained a broad 2011 anti-trafficking law that focused primarily on prevention and protection measures; it contained some provisions that reportedly conflicted with the definitions outlined in the penal code. According to NGO representatives, some officials were therefore unsure whether to apply the 2011 law or penal code provisions when handling trafficking cases. In accordance with a six-step action plan developed in 2021, the government continued efforts to revise the 2011 anti-trafficking law to address deficiencies in the law. After releasing a draft version of the revised law for public comment, MPS submitted the draft to the National Assembly for review and consideration in an upcoming legislative session. However, observers reported the law still requires further edits and review, which may delay its passage beyond the initial schedule the government has outlined.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 17 February 2026)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, mentions legal gaps and recent efforts to reform Vietnam’s anti-trafficking framework, particularly regarding the treatment of minors aged 16-17 years old:

“[...]Inconsistent with international law, Article 150 applied to children between the ages of 16 and 17 years old and required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a sex trafficking crime; it therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. Civil society observers previously reported this led to confusion among the courts on how to handle cases involving 16- and 17-year-old children, particularly for cases involving labor trafficking, and that it precluded child-centered best practices in such cases. In an effort to address this concern, in 2021, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) issued a new policy outlining child-centered procedures for the investigation of trafficking crimes committed against persons younger than the age of 18; this was the first government-issued guidance instructing law enforcement to handle trafficking cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds as child trafficking cases. Vietnam also maintained a broad 2011 anti-trafficking law that focused primarily on prevention and protection measures; it contained some provisions that reportedly conflicted with the definitions outlined in the penal code. According to NGO representatives, some officials were therefore unsure whether to apply the 2011 law or penal code provisions when handling trafficking cases. In accordance with a six-step action plan developed in 2021, the government continued efforts to revise the 2011 anti-trafficking law to address deficiencies in the law. After releasing a draft version of the revised law for public comment, MPS submitted the draft to the National Assembly for review and consideration in an upcoming legislative session. However, observers reported the law still requires further edits and review, which may delay its passage beyond the initial schedule the government has outlined.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 27 March 2025)

According to the Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation’s 2021 report titled ‘*What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking? Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam*’:

“[...]Further gaps in recognising victims result from the lack of a comprehensive definition of ‘human trafficking’ in Vietnam’s legal framework. Our data shows the emergence of new forms of trafficking, such as baby trafficking. However, due to gaps in the legal definition of human trafficking, the current legal framework is insufficient in addressing this type of trafficking even though it was specifically discussed during the 8th session of the National Assembly XIV in 2019.³⁸”

38 Thiên Thảo, 2019, Vẫn nóng tình trạng mua bán bào thai qua biên giới, Trang Thông tin điện tử Công an tỉnh Nghệ An, truy cập tại: congan.nghean.gov.vn/an-ninh-trat-tu/201911/van-nong-tinh-trang-mua-ban-bao-thai-qua-bien-gioi-883443.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking? Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam](#). Hanoi: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, 2021, pg.48, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

This 2020 review prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP²⁹ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, noted that:

“7. Trafficking victim protection in Viet Nam

7.1 Laws and policies on victim protection in Viet Nam In Viet Nam, the anti-trafficking framework is set out in the 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (“Law on Human Trafficking”, which establishes that a trafficking victim is a person subject to trafficking in persons as defined in the Criminal Code (Articles 150 and 151).¹¹⁷ In 2015, amendments to the Criminal Code strengthened and clarified the articles related to trafficking in persons.¹¹⁸ Article 150 of the Criminal Code (as amended in 2015) establishes crimes of trafficking in adults.¹¹⁹ Article 151 establishes crimes of trafficking of children, however some child victims of trafficking aged over 16 do not fall within article 151 of the Criminal Code and are reportedly treated as adults.¹²⁰ Article 297 establishes the crime of forced labor.¹²¹

Article 6 of the Law on Human Trafficking sets out the rights and obligations of victims as follows: 1) to request competent agencies, organizations or persons to take measures to protect them or their relatives when they have or are threatened to have their life, health, honor, dignity or property infringed upon; 2) to receive support and protection under the law; 3) to be compensated for damage under the law; 4) to provide information relating to violations of the law to competent agencies, organizations and persons; and 5) to comply with requests made by competent authorities concerning trafficking in persons cases. Article 32 establishes support for trafficking victims who are Vietnamese or stateless, including support to meet essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, support in general education and vocational training, initial difficulty allowance and support in loan borrowing. Foreign trafficking victims may receive support to meet essential needs for travel, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid.”

117 Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking, Law No. 66/2011/QH12 (2011). Prior to 2015 amendments, Articles 150 and 151 of the Criminal Code were articles 119 and 120 respectively.

118 U.S. Department of State, 2017 Trafficking in Persons Report (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State, 2017), 426.

119 Article 150 of the Criminal Code defines trafficking in persons as a) transfer or receipt of person in exchange for money, property or other material gain; b) transfer or receipt of person for sexual exploitation, forced labor, body organ removal or other inhuman purposes; and c) recruitment, transportation and harboring of persons for the purposes set out in point b. There are inconsistencies between the Vietnamese definitions of trafficking in persons and the international definition of trafficking in persons as stated in the UN Trafficking Protocol.

120 The Criminal Code is also referred to as the Penal Code in some documentation. Implementing guidelines for the Criminal Code provisions on trafficking reportedly took effect in March 2019.

121 Criminal Code, Law No. 100/2015/QH13 (2015).

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pg.91, last accessed 27 March 2025)

29 This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. A five-year (2016–2021) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional initiative that aims to reduce human trafficking in Asia through activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

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In this 2019 report, the UNODC noted on the following terminology and definitions of smuggling in the Vietnamese legal framework:

“XII.4 Terminology and definitions

The terminology employed by the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol is not used in Viet Nam’s laws. Existing and new offences do not use the term ‘smuggling of migrants’ and terms such as ‘financial or other material benefit’ or ‘illegal entry’ are also not defined. In general, the terms used in Viet Nam’s criminal law are unique to individual provisions, and the new Criminal Code, just like its predecessor, the Penal Code of 1999, does not have a separate definition section or a ‘dictionary’ in which commonly used terms are defined or explained. The general part of both Codes is mostly concerned with setting out the general principles of criminal liability under Vietnamese law.

Viet Nam’s principal statute concerning immigration, the Law No 47/2014/QH13 of 16 June 2014 of the National Assembly on entry, exit, transit, and residence of foreigners in Viet Nam has an interpretation section in Article 3 which explains a number of terms used throughout this statute, but these definitions have no immediate bearing on the offences relating to smuggling of migrants in Viet Nam’s criminal law.”

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pg.164, last accessed 27 March 2025)

In the same report, the UNODC explains how Vietnam’s new Article 348(1) of the 2015 Criminal Code addresses migrant smuggling and how it compares with international standards, particularly the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants:

“[...]X.5.1.1 Physical elements

The conduct element of new Article 348(1) involves the ‘organising’ or ‘intermediating’ of the illegal entry, exit or stay in Viet Nam of another person. The terms organising and intermediating are not further defined in the Criminal Code. It is suggested that it involves situations in which illegal entry etc. is facilitated in a professional or commercial manner. This broadly corresponds with the conduct element of ‘procuring’ in the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol.

Unlike the Protocol, new Article 348(1) is not limited to facilitating illegal entry, but also extends to situations where the accused ‘organises’ or ‘intermediates’ the illegal stay or exit of another person. ‘Organising or intermediating illegal stay’ may be seen as the equivalent of ‘enabling illegal stay’ under Article 6(1)(b) of the Protocol;⁴³⁶ ‘brokering illegal exit’ has no equivalent in international law.

The object of the offence, the smuggled migrant, is not further specified in new Article 348(1); it can be any person whose entry, exit or stay in Viet Nam is illegal.

X.5.1.2. Mental elements

The offence under new Article 348(1) requires that the accused acts ‘due to their own benefits’. This expression is not further defined and may be a very literal translation of the Vietnamese phrase. In the absence of any information to the contrary, it can be assumed that the expression is to be understood to mean for personal gain. This interpretation would bring this element in line with the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol’s mental element ‘in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit’.

The new Criminal Code is silent on the mental element for the conduct element of ‘organising’ or ‘intermediating’. There is no provision of the Criminal Code which provides that criminal offences must be committed intentionally unless otherwise provided. It is, however, difficult to conceive how ‘organising’ or ‘intermediating’ could involve anything less than intention.

[...]

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“XII.8.2 Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Smuggled Migrants

Aggravations relating to inhuman or degrading treatment of smuggled migrants are neither contained in Article 275 of the *Penal Code of 1999* nor in the new offences under Articles 349, 349, and 350 of the *Criminal Code* of 2015. The aggravations of causing ‘serious or very serious consequences’ or ‘particularly serious consequences’ in Article 275(2) and (3) of the Penal Code of 1999 are, however, broad enough to capture some instances of inhuman or degrading treatment of smuggled migrants or, indeed, other persons.”

436 See further Section XII.7 below.

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pg.167, last accessed 27 March 2025)

In its 2019 report titled ‘*Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States*’, the UNODC outlined Vietnam’s then status and position regarding key international legal instruments related to transnational organized crime and human trafficking:

“XII.2 Ratification of and accession to international legal instruments

Viet Nam is a State Party to the international instruments relating to transnational organised crime and trafficking in persons. It signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime on 13 December 2000 and ratified the Convention on 8 June 2012. Viet Nam filed a reservation pursuant to Article 35(3) of the Convention concerning the settlement of disputes, stating that it does not consider itself bound by the provisions of Article 35(2) of this Convention. Further, a declaration was filed stating that”

1. The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam declares that the provisions of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime are non-self-executing. The implementation of provisions of this Convention shall be in accordance with constitutional principles and substantive law of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the basis of bilateral or multilateral cooperative agreements with other States and the principle of reciprocity.
2. Pursuant to principles of the Vietnamese law, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam declares that it does not consider itself bound by the provisions with regard to the criminal liability of legal persons set forth in Article 10 of this Convention.
3. The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, pursuant to Article 16 of this Convention, declares that it shall not take this Convention as the direct legal basis for extradition. The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam shall carry out extradition in accordance with the provisions of the Vietnamese law, on the basis of treaties on extradition and the principle of reciprocity.

On 8 June 2012, Viet Nam acceded to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Viet Nam filed a reservation pursuant to Article 15(3) of the Protocol concerning the settlement of disputes, stating that it does not consider itself bound by the provisions of Article 15(2) of this Convention. (pg.163)

“Viet Nam is not a Party to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol. An Action Plan by the Vietnamese Government on the implementation of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime stipulates that Viet Nam may be considering signing the Protocol in the future, though for several years further steps have been delayed. In conversations held in Hanoi for the purpose of this project, it was, however, communicated that it is still the intention of Viet Nam to become a Party to the Protocol at some point in the future.”(163-164)

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pp.163-164, last accessed 27 March 2025)

This 2016 ASEAN review, highlights several legal limitations in Vietnam’s 2011 Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking, mentioning that there was no clear definition of trafficking:

“[...]Article 3 of Viet Nam’s Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking (2011) does not define trafficking, rather listing a number of “prohibited acts” which includes “trafficking in persons as stipulated in Article 119 and Article 120 of

the Penal Code” and the “recruitment, transportation, harbouring, transfer and receipt of persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, organ removal or “other inhuman purposes”. While there are no “means” elements listed in the “prohibited acts” provisions, the definitions given for sexual exploitation and forced labour include elements of force and coercion (Article 2). However there appears to be no force, coercion or other means required for the act of organ removal or for other “inhuman purposes”, which are not defined. Further, there is no penalty stipulated for these or any of the other ten “prohibited acts”, which include “discrimination against victims” and disclosure of information regarding victims.”

(Source: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – [REGIONAL REVIEW on Laws, Policies and Practices within ASEAN relating to the Identification, Management and Treatment of Victims of Trafficking, especially Women and Children](#), October 2016, pg.25, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

3. Is there a clear procedural framework for identifying victims of trafficking versus smuggled migrants? If so, is there evidence of this being implemented?

From the sources consulted, no information could be found on a clear procedural framework for identifying smuggled migrants in Vietnam.

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“[...]Law No. 53/2024/QH15 expands protection to include victims, those under verification, minors accompanied by guardians, and relatives. It adopts a non-punishment principle and broadens the recognized types of exploitation, such as forced labor in online scams, forced begging, coerced marriage, and other inhumane practices. The law also clarifies procedures for victim identification and legal aid (see Art. 41), and through Decree 162/2025/ND-CP, it details processes for reception, verification, referral, and assistance involving commune, health, and police officials, with suggested timelines. However, two issues remain: first, operational capacity, as by the end of 2025, the NRM and screening toolkit have not been fully updated; second, legal gaps—such as the treatment of 16–17-year-olds—still need alignment. Therefore, while the 2024 law addresses key design issues, effective implementation will continue to be a major challenge.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, discussed the lack of existence of a legal framework for identifying smuggled migrants in Vietnam:

“Legal framework, I’m afraid not yet because Vietnam has always considered for a long period of time what we call ‘victims of human trafficking’, but they always consider [it] as a human smuggling network. Or the people who actually actively look out to travel abroad and to look for a better opportunity, they don’t actually recognise these people as victim[s] at all for so long, you see, until [...]the Essex lorry incident in 2019 in the UK that came out. And the people, even the Head of the Public Security of the province with the most victims, came out in the media where he did not recognize them as victims. To him as the Head of Social Security is really, really important. It’s equivalent to the police in this country, in the UK, isn’t it? And if they don’t people in his position did not recognise that kind of victims of human trafficking. He believed that everybody in that lorry is just opportunist and using human smuggling network[s] to come to look for better opportunities. So that was 2019, it’s now 2025, so I’m afraid that they have not actually recognised that, although they talk about it, and some people have to retract their interviews, whatever opinion that they said in the interview. But deep down, I have not seen the change in legislation formally.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

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The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, outlined Vietnam’s efforts to protect victims, and noted some remaining barriers:

“[...]The government used victim identification criteria disseminated by the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking (COMMIT), along with its own victim identification procedures approved in 2014. The government continued using survey forms, developed in partnership with an international organization, for border guards to screen Vietnamese adults and children for trafficking indicators at border crossings. However, authorities did not consistently or proactively use the COMMIT criteria or their own procedures to screen for trafficking indicators among key vulnerable populations in all regions, including individuals in commercial sex, individuals transiting border stations, workers in the fishing and seafood processing industries, migrant workers returning from abroad, child laborers, or individuals fleeing online scam operations in neighboring countries. The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. The government maintained an NRM approved in 2014, but some local officials’ unfamiliarity with anti-trafficking protocol and policies, insufficient interjurisdictional cooperation, and limited social worker capacity continued to hinder its systematic and effective implementation. Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services. The 2024 anti-trafficking law, when enacted, would expand many protection services to potential victims, shortening the time between initial identification and service provision under the NRM. The 2024 anti-trafficking law also expanded services available for trafficking victims and mandated a government policy of non-punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government had not implemented this law, nor updated its NRM, by the end of the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) Department of Social Vices Prevention continued to develop a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars. The government reported further revising the screening toolkit; however, for the third year, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period and had not provided a timeline for doing so.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

And Article 7 of Decree Number: 162/2025/ND-CP, which details regulations on the *Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024* came into force from July 1, 2025, provides detailed guidance on how victims are to be identified and referred:

“[...]Article 7. Reception and verification of reporting individuals

1. The People’s Committee at the commune level, the Public Security agency, the Border Guard, the Coast Guard or the agency or organization when receiving the person reporting as prescribed in Clause 1, Article 27 of the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking shall perform the following tasks;³⁰

a) Guide reporting individuals to file Form No. 2 under Appendix attached hereto. Where reporting individuals are children or persons incapable of declaring at their discretion, receiving officials shall record the reporting individuals’ statements. Where reporting individuals do not understand Vietnamese, translators shall be provided in accordance with Article 19 hereof.

Following declaration, receiving authorities shall refer persons suspected as human trafficking victims and dossiers to commune-level People’s Committees of administrative divisions where agencies, organizations are based;

Where represented individuals do not accompany their legal representatives, receiving agencies have the responsibility to refer dossiers to commune-level People’s Committees of administrative divisions where the represented individuals reside;

³⁰ Note this text in clause 1 of Article 7 of the Decree (number: 162/2025/ND-CP) is a google translation, provided to Asylos, and is cited here for context as the translation on Vietnam Law Library does not translate this point.

b) Commune-level People’s Committees shall, upon receiving reporting individuals and dossiers referred to in accordance with Point a of this Clause and on the basis of conditions and needs of reporting individuals provide essential needs, medical assistance, legal assistance and issue documents notifying, referring the reporting individuals and dossiers to Departments of Health that receive the reporting individuals;

Where dossiers of represented individuals are referred by receiving agencies, commune-level People’s Committees of administrative divisions where represented individuals reside have the responsibility to notify and refer dossiers to Departments of Health of administrative divisions where the represented individuals reside.

2. Within 3 working days from the date on which Departments of Health that receive reporting individuals or govern administrative divisions where representative individuals reside receive represented individuals or dossiers referred from commune-level People’s Committees in accordance with Point b Clause 1 of this Article, receiving Departments of Health shall:

a) provide medical assistance, translation assistance, and/or psychological assistance for reporting individuals and represented individuals on the basis of practical demands and situations. Where accommodation cannot be arranged and provided for reporting individuals, reporting individuals shall be referred to social support facilities, human trafficking victim support facilities. These facilities have the responsibility to provide support services for persons under human trafficking victim determination process in accordance with Chapter III attached hereto.

b) cooperate with provincial police forces of administrative divisions where reporting individuals file the reports, represented individuals reside, or where the incident occurs in conducting initial verification of documents, dossiers in order to identify human trafficking victims, relatives, personal background, and case-related information;

c) provide travel allowance to allow reporting individuals and represented individuals to return to their residences or attend social support facilities or human trafficking victim support facilities in accordance with Article 22 hereof if reporting individuals and represented individuals possess sufficient documentations in order to be identified as human trafficking victims;

dd) inform social support facilities, human trafficking victim support facilities to provide appropriate support services for human trafficking victims in accordance with Chapter III hereof after receiving verification results from provincial police forces in accordance with Point b Clause 3 of this Article. Inform Departments of Health of administrative divisions where human trafficking victims reside in order to provide assistance as per the law as soon as the victims return to their residence.

3. Provincial police forces of administrative divisions where reporting individuals, represented individuals reside or where human trafficking occurs shall:

a) determine and identify human trafficking victims within the time limit under Clause 3 Article 27 of the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking;

b) issue notice of confirmation as a human trafficking victim using Form No. 5 under Appendix attached hereto in case criteria for human trafficking victim are met; issue notice of confirmation of non-human trafficking victim using Form No. 6 under Appendix attached hereto in case criteria for human trafficking victim are not met and send confirmation results to Departments of Health that receive reporting individuals.[...]”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library³¹ – [Decree, Detailed Regulations On A Number Of Articles And Measures For Implementing The Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Number: 162/2025/ND-CP\)](#), Hanoi, 29 June 2025, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

In a story posted in July 2025, the ASEAN-ACT mentions Vietnam’s newly adopted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking:

“[...]Vietnam’s newly enacted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking, adopted in November 2024, marks an

³¹ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property.

evolution in the country’s approach to counter-trafficking. The law expands the definition of trafficking to include newer forms of exploitation, such as forced labour in online scam operations, forced begging, coerced marriage, and exploitation of vulnerable groups – categories often overlooked. It also mandates improved procedures for victim identification, support and protection – paving the way for more coordinated and inclusive responses across sectors.”

(Source: Australian Aid | ASEAN -Australia Counter Trafficking — [Vietnam launches new tools to promote inclusive justice for trafficking survivors](#), 28 July 2025)

The Center for re-integration of ex-prisoners into society (CRES) in its alternative report published May 2025, noted that:

“[...]8. The Government is also committed to developing a strong legal framework for combating human trafficking by adoption of a newly amended Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking in November 2024, which is effective from July 1, 2025. This newly amended law aims to address shortcomings of the 2011 law and to align with international commitments, including the ICCPR and the Palermo Protocol. The new law contains many progressive provisions: (pg.3)

- Expanding the scope of protected persons to include: victims, individuals in the process of being identified as victims, accompanying persons under 18 years old; relatives of victims, individuals participating in anti-human trafficking activities or in supporting victims. The protection applies not only to Vietnamese citizens but also to stateless persons residing permanently in Vietnam and foreigners trafficked within Vietnam.¹
- Strengthening support mechanisms for victims,² especially children, women and persons with disabilities.³
- Providing clearer regulations on the establishment, operation and supervision of reception centers, supporting facilities and shelters for victims.
- Adding responsibilities for local authorities, social organizations and businesses in supporting victims to re-integrate into the community.⁴”(pg.4)

¹ Article 34, 37 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.
² The 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking supplements provisions on the rescue, reception, and verification of victims located abroad (Article 29); supplements provisions on the reception, verification, and repatriation of foreign victims of trafficking in Vietnam (Article 31); and supplements and enhances the support regime (Article 37).
³ Clause 5 Article 7, Article 37-44, 46 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.
⁴ Clause 1 Article 46, 47 of the 2024 Law on Anti-Human Trafficking.

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee, Center for Re-Integration of Ex-Prisoners into Society – [NGO report on civil and political rights \(right to life; death penalty; elimination of slavery, servitude and trafficking in persons; access to justice; independence of the judiciary; fair trials\)](#), 20 May 2025, pp.3-4, last accessed 21 July 2025)

Clause 1, Article 27 of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024 states:

“[...]Article 27. Reception and verification of persons filing a report
1. Any person who has grounds to believe they are a victim, or a legal representative who has grounds to believe the person they represent is a victim, may report the trafficking to the commune-level People’s Committee, Public Security forces, Border Defense forces, Coast Guard forces, or the nearest agency or organization. Public Security forces, Border Defense forces, Coast Guard forces, and other agencies receiving the report are responsible for immediately bringing the individual to the commune-level People’s Committee where the agency or organization is headquartered. The commune-level People’s Committee must promptly notify the district-level specialized labor, war invalids, and social affairs agency. Where necessary, the receiving commune-level People’s Committee shall provide support as prescribed in Chapter V of this Law. [...]”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library³² – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by

³² Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted:

“[...]The government continued using survey forms, developed in partnership with an international organization, for border guards to screen Vietnamese adults and children for trafficking indicators at border crossings. However, authorities did not consistently or proactively use the COMMIT criteria or their own procedures to screen for trafficking indicators among key vulnerable populations in all regions, including individuals in commercial sex, individuals transiting border stations, workers in the fishing and seafood processing industries, migrant workers returning from abroad, child laborers, or individuals fleeing online scam operations in neighboring countries. The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services. The MOLISA Department of Social Vices Prevention continued to develop a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars. The government reported further revising the screening toolkit; however, for the second year, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 27 March 2025)

The Blue Dragon Foundation in 2021 noted weaknesses in Vietnam’s legal framework and its implementation, particularly in recognising and identifying both domestic and cross-border trafficking victims:

“[...]The current legal framework and implementation of relevant laws is weak in terms of recognising and identifying victims of domestic trafficking. (pg.47)

There are also some weaknesses in identifying victims of cross border trafficking. The US Department of State TIP Report 2020 puts the number of identified victims at 670, 490, 300, and 121 in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively.³⁷ However, based on our data it is likely that these numbers are an inaccurate representation of the scale of the problem and, in fact, the number of trafficked Vietnamese increased over those years. Many victims of international human trafficking are not verified by government authorities under the current legal framework and are thus not included in official data. In turn, these victims do not receive the support they need and are entitled to.”(pg.48)

³⁷ US Department of State, June 2020, Trafficking in Persons Report, p.606.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking? Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam](#). Hanoi: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, 2021, pp.47-48, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

This 2020 review prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP³³ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, noted with regards to victim identification procedures that:

“7.2 Procedures and guidance on victim identification and referral in Viet Nam The Vietnamese government’s approach to victim identification is determined by the common victim identification criteria of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking (COMMIT), as well as a formal identification procedure. The 2014 Joint Circular on Instructions and Procedure for and Cooperation in Identification, Receipt and Repatriation of Victims of Human Trafficking (also referred to as Inter-Agency Circular 01) sets out the formal procedures for identification, receipt, referral, and repatriation, according to

³³ This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. A five-year (2016-2021) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional initiative that aims to reduce human trafficking in Asia through activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

Article 24, Article 25 and Article 26 of the Law on Human Trafficking.¹²³ The principles set out in Article 2 call for identification, receipt and repatriation to be: “[t]imely, accurate, and safe; able to protect the life, health, dignity, lawful rights and interests of victims” as well as “[a]ble to protect the confidentiality of information about victims their families.”

Inter-Agency Circular 01 sets out procedures for three different categories of victim, depending on the how they come to the attention of authorities, as outlined below.

- Vietnamese victims trafficked abroad (Articles 4-5): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) will identify trafficking victims in order for them to be returned home. MPS or the Ministry of Defense (MOD) will then receive trafficking victims or refer to DOLISA for initial support.
- Vietnamese victims trafficked domestically (Articles 6-7): Trafficking victims or their relatives can report to local authorities, who then report to the Department/Division of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) for initial support.
- Foreign trafficking victims in Viet Nam (Articles 8-9): Trafficking victims will be received and identified by police, border guards, or coastal police and referred to DOLISA for initial support.

According to Article 5 of Decree No. 62/2012/ND-CP, Providing on the Grounds Defining Trafficked Victims and Safety Protection for Victims and their Families, the information, statements, and documents on which identification decisions are to be based include those provided by criminal justice agencies, victim-rescuing agencies, overseas Vietnamese missions, competent overseas agencies or organizations, victims, perpetrators, other persons aware of the matter, and other lawful information and documents.¹²⁴

When it cannot be proven that a person is a trafficking victim, other grounds can be considered including that the person was identified with victims and was treated like them, as well as physical and mental manifestations. When an individual is determined to be a trafficking victim, Article 28 of the Law on Human Trafficking lists documents to be issued, including a “Victim Certificate” issued by the district level People’s Police or the rescuing agency, or written documents issued by the investigating agency, the People’s Procuracy, the People’s Court, or a foreign agency and legalized by a Vietnamese Diplomatic Mission or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [...]”

¹²³ MPS et al., Joint Circular on the Procedure for and Cooperation in Identification, Receipt, and Repatriation of Victims of Human Trafficking (Hanoi: Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

¹²⁴ Decree No. 62/2012/ND-CP, Providing on the Grounds Defining Trafficked Victims and Safety Protection for Victims and their Families (2012).

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020 pg.96, last accessed 27 March 2025)

This 2016 ASEAN review provided this detailed outline of Vietnam’s legal framework for victim identification and referral:

“2.2: Victim Identification and Referral in the Law, Policy and Practice of AMS
2.2.1. Legal Provisions on Victim Identification and Referral

Unlike many other AMS, Viet Nam’s legal framework provides relatively detailed guidance on how victims are to be identified and referred. The principal TIP law (LPSAHT, articles 24 and 25) provides that trafficked victims are referred to an appropriate government body where they are initially checked for basic information and given a “certificate of victim status” within three days and subsequently referred to appropriate care services. A 2012 decree on the identification and safety of victims and their relatives removes the requirement in the law that victim identification and support be contingent on the identification or arrest of the trafficker. The decree affirms that victim identification is based on a range of sources including documents and evidence by the agency conducting the proceedings; information and documents issued by the rescued victims; information and documents provided by the Vietnamese representative offices abroad; documents issued by the foreign counterpart; the testimony provided by the victim; and the testimony provided by witnesses. If these sources are insufficient, other factors (such as whether the person was rescued in the company of other victims, signs of sexual exploitation or forced labour, etc.)

will be considered in deciding whether a person is a victim of trafficking.¹² These laws are supplemented by an earlier inter-ministerial circular setting out detailed guidelines specifically for the identification and reception of trafficked Vietnamese women and children from abroad. This 2008 circular identifies a focal point and responsible agencies and procedures for handling victim identification and referral in a range of scenarios (return from border and non-border countries; referral from a Vietnamese Representative Agency Overseas; victims who have been rescued or returned on their own, etc.).[...]"

¹² Decree No. 62/2012/ND-CP on Prescribing the Grounds for Identification of Trafficked Victims and Safety Protection of Victims and Their Relatives(Viet Nam)

(Source: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – [REGIONAL REVIEW on Laws, Policies and Practices within ASEAN relating to the Identification, Management and Treatment of Victims of Trafficking, especially Women and Children](#), October 2016, pg.36, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

4. Are frontline authorities (e.g., border police, immigration officers) trained to apply the distinctions between trafficked and smuggled persons? If so, is there evidence of this being implemented?

In a press release published on December 2025, by UNICEF, the United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) shared the conclusion of a four year project to support children, noting:

“[...]Specialized training on counter-smuggling and trafficking prevention: Developed a comprehensive training curriculum for frontline officers, particularly those stationed at border gates, focused on counter-smuggling and early detection of trafficking victims. These officers serve as the first line of defense against cross-border crime and the first point of contact for migrants and children at risk.[...]

“We are proud to see the specialized curriculum equip 310 border gate officers with essential skills, from document checks and risk assessment to victim identification, while promoting a victim-centered, child-friendly approach. This effort aligns with Viet Nam’s revised Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking,” said Kendra Rinas, IOM Chief of Mission in Viet Nam. [...]"

(Source: UNICEF – [Press Release Viet Nam and Partners Advance Child-Friendly Justice through Four-Year Collaboration](#), 18 December 2025)

The Blue Dragon Foundation provided the following support to survivors of human trafficking in Vietnam between 2023 and 2024:

“[...]42,202 people trained on children’s rights and the prevention of trafficking, labour exploitation, child marriage and sexual abuse, including:

- 1,637 government officials”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Annual Report 2023-2024](#), January 2025, pg.11, last accessed: 11 March 2026)

Authors Dr Daniel Silverstone³⁴ and Dr Hai Thanh Luong³⁵, noted in their 2024 research article that:

“[...]Meanwhile, the Vietnamese State, embarking on rapid growth, encouraged foreign working and the remittances that this brought. With the withdrawal of Cold War arrangements, this meant sending labour to other rapidly growing local markets in Asia, such as Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and China. Simultaneously, migrations continued to Australia, the United States, Canada and Europe. All of this meant that the infrastructure to efficiently remit money was established as

³⁴ Director of Liverpool Centre for Advanced Policing Studies at Liverpool John Moores University
³⁵ Lecturer in criminology (Assistant Professor) at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University

were both formal and informal lending mechanisms and access to visas which enable both sponsored legitimate migration and irregular migration, where leaving the country was legal but the work in the final destination country was not (Vietnam Investment Review 2024; Whittle & Silverstone, 2024). In a country where documents to access services are linked to where you reside, it is inconceivable that Vietnamese authorities and their police service, the Ministry of Public Security are not aware of the multiple agencies offering migration services. Indeed, many of them are state owned, and it is likely that state employees directly benefited from these arrangements. Historically, as today, some of those who migrated to the United Kingdom experienced rapid and smooth journeys (via fake documents and flights and so on) whilst others experienced the opposite (Pham, 2021; Tan & Nguyen, 2017): long arduous journeys by road and sea where exploitation and human trafficking occurred en route and upon arrival. Again, it is hard to generalise here as routes change and exploitation is contingent on an individuals’ vulnerabilities and circumstances (Nica, et al. 2021a).¹³

13 For example, research has always been clear that there are two ways reaching the UK advertised, one basic and one premium with one costing far more than the other. However, the reality is according to, Gentleman 2017; Van Dinh 2020 cited in Pham 2022, is that these arrangements are not always honoured.

(Source: Silverstone D, Luong HT via Springer — [Special Issue of International Criminology: ‘Misleading the World? Reassessing the International Impact of the British Modern Slavery Agenda: Vietnam](#), 17 December 2024, no page number)

The news article titled *‘IOM and Viet Nam Border Guard New Project Set to Drive Collaborative Solution to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Cross-Border Crimes’*, published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in October 2024, announces a new project where its activities are aimed at promoting safe migration and reducing irregular migration in vulnerable border areas:

“[...]Building on the success of the previous project between IOM and the Viet Nam Border Guard, this project aims to enhance the technical capacity of Viet Nam Border Guard, especially frontline officers in hotspot border areas, to better detect, investigate, and handle TIP cases and identify, protect, and assist trafficking victims, particularly when the crime has evolved to online space.

Within its framework, the project will introduce a new training curriculum on counter-trafficking and victim protection for frontline officers. This curriculum, updated with the latest laws, criminal trends, and specific case files, will be distributed to Border Guard stations in target provinces. It will be used to conduct 16 training workshops for over 600 frontline counter-crime and immigration control Border Guard officers across Viet Nam. With the technical equipment to be provided by the project to support criminal investigations, officers are expected to immediately apply their enhanced capacity to tackle complex TIP and related cross-border criminal cases as well as to better protect and support victims of such crimes.

As part of this initiative, the project will create more opportunities to foster cross-border collaboration between the Viet Nam Border Guard and their counterparts in the region. This new platform will enable them to exchange effective methods, professional skills, and practical experiences that have been successfully applied in investigating and prosecuting cross-border crimes.

Additionally, the project also emphasizes training frontline officers in communication skills to effectively conduct community engagement activities. These activities aim to promote safe migration and reduce irregular migration among vulnerable communities in border areas.”

(Source: IOM Viet Nam – [IOM and Viet Nam Border Guard New Project Set to Drive Collaborative Solution to combat Trafficking in Persons and related Cross-border crimes](#), 10 October 2024, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted the frontline authorities with responsibility for identification, and some shortcomings in Vietnam’s anti-trafficking efforts, particularly the identification and treatment of trafficking victims:

“[...]A lack of capacity, personnel, and resources likely hindered law enforcement, border guard, and other officials’ ability to consistently and proactively screen for trafficking victims. In the past, civil society groups reported Vietnamese victims feared reprisals from authorities for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and international observers reported government officials often blamed Vietnamese citizens for their exploitative conditions abroad or suggested victims inflated abuses to avoid immigration violations. Authorities did not report formally identifying any victims during the more than 28,500 inspections conducted at establishments at high risk of sex trafficking, compared with more than 32,000 inspections and identifying two sex trafficking victims in 2022. State-run media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not report on the status of the potential victims, nor whether authorities screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, authorities may have penalized some unidentified trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. According to one observer, authorities reportedly threatened and harassed survivors of labor trafficking in labor export companies, and their families, to intimidate them from sharing their experiences.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 27 March 2025)

In examining the trafficking of Vietnamese nationals to the UK, Dr Chung Pham³⁶ a Vietnam and Anti-Trafficking Specialist for Locate International, a UK Charity, noted in a 2022 article that:

“[...]Such lack of support and disregard for victims upon their return to the country, as well as the general disbelief that these people are victims, because their departure from the country was consensual and that they paid for their journey, was one of the reasons these victims would not seek help from authorities when they are in the UK. This is partly because the victims themselves hold the same belief as those in Vietnam and they did not know or did not believe that they were the victims “because I chose to come here”, said Hoang Nguyen. Nguyen said the reason he did not come forward to seek help from authorities when he was assaulted in the West Midlands was because he feared that he would then be deported to Vietnam and that was the last thing he wanted. He had to work to earn money as so much had been invested in his journey to the UK. The situation was similar to that of Thanh Tran who feared deportation so much that he would abscond from the safe house that he was sent to and ran back to his ‘keepers’ regardless of the maltreatment he experienced when being with them previously. For these people, any slim hope of remaining in the UK, to earn some money to recover at least the cost for their journey, would be worth holding onto.”(pp.6-7)

(Tran 2019) Tran, Van. 2019. Victim Support in Hai Phong. Hanoi: Tien Phong

(Source: Social Sciences, Author Chung Pham – [Combatting the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK](#), 26 December 2022, pp.6-7, last accessed 1 August 2025)

In this 2021 article that was published in the ‘*International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*’, exploring how governmental and nongovernmental actors perceive victims of human trafficking in Vietnam, the authors noted that:

“[...]Public awareness campaigns can perpetuate images of ideal victims—who are trafficked for sexual exploitation and young, innocent and blameless (O’Brien 2013). However, this depiction might make police less likely to identify the diversity of victims of trafficking; for example, people voluntarily agree to be smuggled for different reasons (Jones 2012). To some extent, the images and language of slavery in these campaigns generates ideal victims of trafficking with the oversimplification of factors concerning the causes and experiences of trafficking (Hoyle, Bosworth and Dempsey 2011). (pg.129)

Goodey (2005, p. 124) claims that those who appear vulnerable are likely to be observed as victims of crime who deserve sympathy. Meanwhile, ‘those whose character, past conduct, or actions can be considered as undesired, or as somehow contributing to their victimization’ are not deserving. In human trafficking, Srikantiah (2007, p. 158) argues the concept of

³⁶ Short Biography of Dr. Chung Pham can be accessed here: https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2147415?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name

deserving victims of trafficking refers to ‘iconic victims’ who are completely controlled by traffickers from recruitment to exploitation for various purposes. Turning to the US, Srikantiah (2007) presents iconic victims of trafficking as females who are trafficked for sexual exploitation, are good witnesses, cooperate effectively with law enforcement agencies and are rescued by law enforcement. However, this concept overlooks that males are also trafficked for sex, and some females are trafficked for labour or other purposes (Yea 2015). Victims could also choose to move abroad and refuse to cooperate with law enforcement agencies. Further, victims can escape alone or with the assistance of other people rather than police rescue exclusively (Nichols and Heil 2015). (pp.129-130)

Many trafficked people do not absolutely fit the ideal image as a deserving victim. For example, numerous studies found that trafficked women sell sex in destination places, trafficked people violate the immigration laws of destination countries and trafficked people can also have a close relationship with traffickers (Matthews 2015). Indeed, traffickers target the vulnerabilities of potential victims to recruit them (Greenbaum 2014). To illustrate, in Vietnam, traffickers prey on vulnerable people, who are ethnic minorities, young, poor or uneducated (Vijayarasa 2013). Therefore, it is unfair for those who agree to participate in sex work because their vulnerabilities are not classified as trafficking victims (Hoyle, Bosworth and Dempsey 2011).” (pg.130)

(Source: Nguyen, O. and Le, T. Published on International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy – [Perceptions of Governmental and Nongovernmental Actors of Human Trafficking Victims: The Case of Vietnam](#), pp.129-130, 2021)

This 2020 report prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP³⁷ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, outlines responsibilities of Actors. It provides Table #24 on roles and responsibilities in the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims in VietNam:

Table #24
Roles and responsibilities in the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims in Viet Nam

Responsible Actor(s)	Role/Responsibilities
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	Receives trafficking victims and returns them to Viet Nam and supports the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to identify victims. Labor representatives at diplomatic missions abroad provide basic assistance to Vietnamese migrant workers abroad, including those who have been trafficked.
[...]Ministry of Defense (MOD)	Border guards under the Ministry of Defense are tasked with formally identifying victims of trafficking in border areas and providing initial support to trafficking victims. (pg.94)
People’s Committee (and other actors at provincial level)	Receives reports from trafficking victims or others, then reports to DOLISA to receive victims of trafficking. Article 27 of Decree 09 (No. 09/2013/ND-CP) Stipulating in detail a number of articles of the anti-human trafficking law sets out the victim protection responsibilities of the provincial-level People’s Committee, including: its management; guidance at district and commune-level; directing victim support work in localities in accordance with law; allocating funds for victim support work; licencing and oversight of victim support establishments; victim support policy implementation in localities; and reporting to MOLISA. (pp.94-95)

³⁷ This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. A five-year (2016-2021) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional initiative that aims to reduce human trafficking in Asia through activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

[...]In addition to (and in cooperation with) government agencies in Table #24 above, the Law on Human Trafficking lists the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Information and Communications and other ministries and ministerial-level agencies as responsible for coordinating with the MPS to implement the law. Provincial and community level government agencies, in particular DOLISA, are directly involved in identification, referral, and assistance, including reintegration support. Other stakeholders, according to the Law on Human Trafficking, include the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and its member organizations, who are to participate in activities to support the integration of victims of trafficking (Article 17) and the Women’s Union, which is tasked with prevention activities (Article 18). The Women’s Union is also involved in operating shelters, including for victims of trafficking, with support from development partners and the government. NGOs and other civil society actors also provide support and services to trafficking victims.

7.2 Procedures and guidance on victim identification and referral in Viet Nam
[...]

Inter-Agency Circular 01 sets out procedures for three different categories of victim, depending on the how they come to the attention of authorities, as outlined below.

- Vietnamese victims trafficked abroad (Articles 4-5): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) will identify trafficking victims in order for them to be returned home. MPS or the Ministry of Defense (MOD) will then receive trafficking victims or refer to DOLISA for initial support.[...]

When an individual is determined to be a trafficking victim, Article 28 of the Law on Human Trafficking lists documents to be issued, including a “Victim Certificate” issued by the district level People’s Police or the rescuing agency, or written documents issued by the investigating agency, the People’s Procuracy, the People’s Court, or a foreign agency and legalized by a Vietnamese Diplomatic Mission or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Further details on the identification, receipt and repatriation procedures set out in Inter-Agency Circular 01 are set out in Table #25 below.

Table #25³⁸

Roles and responsibilities related to the identification, receipt, and repatriation of victims in Viet Nam, as outlined in Inter-Agency Circular 01

Responsible Actor(s)	Role/Responsibilities
Border guard/Coast guard	When a trafficking victim returns home to Viet Nam from abroad on their own, and reports at a border station or is otherwise found by the border guard or coast guard, the border guard or coast guard shall: • Provide temporary shelter and fulfill essential needs of the presumed victim. • Take a statement from the presumed trafficking victim, check papers related to identity, nationality, other information and documents to help identity the victim. • Collect information and documents about the traffickers from the victim to support investigation and prevention. • Send the victim to the Peoples’ Committee of nearest commune
People’s Committee of the commune, district DOLISA and police department	When a trafficking victim returns from abroad on their own and reports at a police department or the local authority, then the receipt, identification, and provision of assistance for the trafficking victim shall be carried out as if that person is a victim of intra-country trafficking according to Article 6.

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pp.91-94-96-97, last accessed 23 February 2026)

38 Note: Table was recreated by Asylos for readability and accessibility

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

5. Are there reports or documented cases on when smuggling becomes trafficking within, to or from Vietnam? If so, under what conditions does this happen?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]During migration, European gangs and traffickers often exploit Vietnamese victims in forced labor and sex trafficking before they reach their final destination.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

Dr Joseph Whittle and Dr Daniel Silverstone noted in their in 2024 research article:

“Migrants can set out willingly and then find themselves trafficked either during the journey or on arrival in a country. For example, Vietnamese migrants are sometimes coerced into exploitative working conditions within the United Kingdom in unsafe cannabis factories; some become subject to forced labour or debt bondage despite leaving Vietnam voluntarily (Silverstone 2021; Pham 2023).

[...]

With regards to Vietnamese illegal migration a smuggling network can become a trafficking network, as though the migrant consented to leave the country, the terms of the contract were not as anticipated, they had to work in exploitative work to raise funds on the journey and so on. Or, whilst wanting to work in cannabis cultivation, they found themselves trafficked, in that they are moved to cannabis cultivation, not paid for their work and find themselves working excessive hours, in cramped, dangerous conditions and ultimately not being paid what was agreed.”

(Source: Whittle, J., Silverstone via Springernature Link – [A comparison of Vietnamese and Chinese human smuggling networks transporting people to the UK; similarities and differences in methods used and the experience of migrants travelling to and living in the UK](#), Trends Organ Crim (2024), 18 July 2024)

In this 2023 article, titled ‘Integration beyond ‘modern slavery’? Vietnamese experiences of agency and precarity in the UK immigration system’, published by Oxford Brookes University, a trafficking expert and practitioner who was interviewed as part of the project, noted:

“over the last 10 years, about 90% to 95%, of the Vietnamese victims of trafficking that I’ve dealt with them started their journey, as a migration journey. They have started that journey, believing to have some sort of migration experience, which will lead them to a better life ...” (Trafficking Expert, UK/Southeast Asia, 2022)[...]”

(Source: Barber T, Nguyen H, Nguyen PV (Open Access version on RADAR) – [Integration beyond “modern slavery”? Vietnamese experiences of agency and precarity in the UK immigration system](#), 2023, pg.11)

In examining the trafficking of Vietnamese nationals to the UK in a 2022 article, Dr Chung Pham³⁹ noted the following two relevant case studies:

“Case Study A: Hoang Nguyen—male, mid-forties

In 2017, Hoang Nguyen was arrested in an estimated-half-a-million-pound cannabis factory in Yorkshire, England. “I spent six months in prison, in a foreign country, not knowing what would happen to me and not completely understanding the situation. It was while I was waiting to be tried that the prosecution dropped the case, as they eventually recognised that there were grounds to believe I was a victim of modern slavery”.

Hoang Nguyen was not brought into the UK against his will, but through his own choice: “I wanted to build a better future for myself”. However, the UK destination was not in his initial plan: “I had been preparing to go to South Korea, and I was actually

³⁹ Short Biography of Dr. Chung Pham can be accessed here: https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2147415?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name

attending a pre-departure Korean language and culture course—which was a requirement—when I was approached by an agent who told me that working in the UK would earn three times more than in South Korea—three thousand pounds each month”. Because of the promise of such lucrative employment, Nguyen decided to try his luck with this agent.

“The problem was that I was only able to pay 300 million dong out of the 900 million dong quoted (equivalent to £10,000 out of £30,000). The agent said they were happy with that, and the rest could be paid off once I started work in the UK”. Through this Hanoi based agent, Nguyen obtained the necessary travel documents and was flown to Russia, before being transported by land through various eastern European countries and getting into a lorry in France bound for the UK. However, his arrival in the UK, was not as he had hoped.

“When we got to the UK, I was told I had to keep working for the network, and I would only be able to work as a free man after the cost of bringing me to the country was paid off”. Nguyen then spent two years taking different jobs assigned to him by the network. “I believed after all that time that I must have paid off the debt, so I decided to leave”. He did not seek approval of the network: “I simply ran away from where we were staying in London—I just left. But they found me in the West Midlands and that was an horrific experience. They decided they had to ‘teach me a lesson’. I was beaten up and even had my leg broken”. After this incident Nguyen could not walk properly and was sent to be the cook for a group of Vietnamese workers employed in the half-million-pound cannabis farm where he was arrested. (pp.3-4)

[...]

Case Study C: Thuong Bui—female, early forties

Thuong Bui was brought to the UK from Hai Phong in the north east of Vietnam. Her family's business went bankrupt and as she was being hunted down by the loan sharks, she opted for a desperate overseas escape: “I had to pay 400 million dong (equivalent to £13,000) through borrowing from my relatives and selling my only piece of farmland in order to be able to make the journey. Then I was brought to the UK by lorries. I was told my work would be childminding or else in restaurants”. However, upon arriving in the UK, Bui was told that the money paid previously was only enough to cover her journey from Vietnam to France.

“They [the traffickers] told me I was under their control until I paid off the debt for the leg of the journey from France to the UK by working for them. They promised that after that I could be a free worker”. But Bui’s work for the traffickers was extremely harrowing: “I was made to work at cannabis farms in the day, and then in prostitution at night—truly awful. And it was absolutely terrifying—four years of a living hell—but I was able to escape in 2019 with help from one of the ‘customers’”. After her lucky escape from the keepers Bui ended up floating around as an undocumented illegal immigrant who would take any work she could find: “I was desperate and had to do anything I could to make money”. Most of her work in this time was domestic work, cleaning, cooking, babysitting, etc. She only came forward to seek help as the COVID pandemic hit the country: “Nobody wanted to take me in. The pandemic situation made things really difficult”. Bui had been looked after by a charity who spotted her after she came to them for free meals during the lockdown.

Recalling her ordeals, Bui said: “The keepers were brutal. I lived in constant fear of physical punishment and I was badly beaten up more than once. It has left me with health issues, including constant migraines. I think this because of head injuries I have sustained from being beaten up on several occasions”. Bui was referred to a body of the Home Office called the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which is responsible for identifying victims of modern slavery and allocating appropriate support to them. Bui has since received help while she was applying for protection from the UK government.”(pp.4-5)

(Source: Social Sciences, Author Chung Pham – [Combatting the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK](#), 26 December 2022, pp.3-5)

In this 2022 news article, the Vietnam News reported on the arrest of three individuals arrested in the UK for people smuggling, the report also mentions:

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

“[...] Two are being held on suspicion of holding a person in slavery or servitude, production and supply of a controlled drug and cultivating cannabis. The third suspect was arrested on suspicion of arranging the travel of another person with a view to exploitation.

Three people have been arrested in the UK as part of an investigation into the smuggling of mainly Vietnamese migrants to work in illegal cannabis farms.
 Officers from the National Crime Agency (NCA) raided addresses in the city of Birmingham and took three men into custody. [...]

NCA senior investigating officer Paul Boniface said: “Our investigation is focused on a crime group suspected of trafficking mainly Vietnamese migrants into the UK illegally.

“The victims would be transported often hundreds of miles across the country and then put to work in cannabis farms.”[...]”

(Source: Viet Nam News – [Three arrested in UK for people smuggling](#), 22 August 2022)

In a 2022 book chapter using Vietnam as a case study to examine the effects of climate change; the relationship between climate change, migration, human smuggling, and human trafficking; and the specific risks for women, author Amy Patel noted that:

“Although migration, human smuggling, and human trafficking are distinct concepts, they are often conflated. “Migrants tend to take illicit and dangerous routes, making them easy prey for criminal networks.”²² Researchers interviewing Vietnamese trafficking victims in Europe found that many began their trips abroad as an attempt to seek legitimate employment, but they later discovered they were part of a human smuggling ring. Finding themselves in a vulnerable position, they were at risk of exploitation and became trafficking victims along the journey through Europe.²³ “Women and girls are particularly susceptible to sexual exploitation at the hands of traffickers and even the peers they are travelling with.”²⁴”

²² Mely Caballero-Anthony, “A Hidden Scourge,” Finance & Development Magazine 55, no. 3 (September 2018): 20.
²³ Precarious Journeys, 11.
²⁴ Precarious Journeys, 65

(Source: Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education. Marine Corps University Press – [The Nexus of Climate Change, Migration, and Human Trafficking](#), 2022, pg.110, last accessed 17 July 2025)

6. Does Vietnam recognise re-trafficking? If so, is there a clear definition?

From the sources consulted, a clear definition of ‘re-trafficking’, in the Vietnamese context could not be found, however as presented below the law acknowledges the risk of victims being trafficked again.

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia, whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, commented that:

“As far as I can tell there is no distinct concept of re-trafficking. There is some acknowledgement of risk of victims being re-trafficked, but no separate category, and no statutory definition. The issue of re-trafficking is very controversial as there are some claims that re-trafficking is not very common, but in my opinion that is not true.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Article 41(1) of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024, mentions that victims undergoing victim identification, and individuals under 18 years of age accompanying them, shall receive legal support through counseling to prevent re-trafficking:

“[...] Article 41. Legal support and legal aid

1. Victims, persons undergoing victim identification, and individuals under 18 years of age accompanying them shall receive legal support through counseling to prevent re-trafficking, guidance on residence registration, civil status procedures, ID card issuance, and access to support schemes.

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁴⁰ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

Similarly, Article 36 of the Penal Code, mentions that victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again:

“[...] Article 36. Legal aid

1. Victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again and legal aid to register residence and civil status, receive supports, claim compensation, participate in judicial proceedings and carry out other legal procedures related to human trafficking cases.[...]

(Source: ILO — [Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking \(No. 66/2011/QH12\)](#), March 2011, pg.22, last accessed 11 August 2025)

7. Is there a statutory defense for crimes committed under exploitation? And are there any exclusions? If so, is there any information available about awareness of this defence/ whether it is actually successfully raised in cases? Does Vietnam provide legal protections (e.g., non-punishment for immigration offenses committed due to trafficking)?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The 2024 anti-trafficking law also expanded services available for trafficking victims and mandated a government policy of non-punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government had not implemented this law, nor updated its NRM, by the end of the reporting period.[...]

In the past, civil society groups reported Vietnamese victims feared reprisals from Vietnamese authorities for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and international observers reported government officials often blamed Vietnamese citizens for their exploitative conditions abroad or suggested victims inflated abuses to avoid immigration violations. Authorities did not report formally identifying any trafficking victims during the more than 23,000 inspections conducted at establishments at high risk of sex trafficking in 2024. State-run media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not issue data on the status of the potential victims nor whether authorities consistently screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. According to one observer, authorities have previously threatened and harassed survivors of labor trafficking in labor export companies, and their families, to intimidate them from sharing their experiences.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

⁴⁰ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property.

Vietnam’s new 2024 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat is also referenced in this 2025, ASEAN report which mentions the introduction of a non-punishment principle:

“[...]Vietnam
Depending on the specific cases and related legal provisions, victims whose unlawful acts are a direct result of human trafficking may not be subject to administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for such acts. Article 4(5). Law No. 53/2024/QH15 on Human Trafficking Prevent and Combat passed on 28 November 2024 to take effect 1 July 2025.” (pg.91)
[...]
Viet Nam
The Minimum Standards in Provision of Services to Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2011); and 2016-2020 National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and the National Programme on Counter Trafficking in Persons during the period 2021- 2025 with a vision to 2030 do not mention the non-punishment principle.”(pg.93)

(Source: ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2 June 2025, pg.91-93, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

The same 2025 ASEAN guidance, noted that:

“Domestic law
Most countries in ASEAN have explicit non-punishment provisions in their domestic legislation (see Annex 1). Exceptions are Cambodia, and Singapore have no explicit non-punishment provision in their domestic laws. Viet Nam amended its counter-trafficking in persons law in November of 2024 to include a non-punishment provision. That law will take effect from 1 July 2025.
Domestic non-punishment provisions take different approaches to establishing the relationship between a victim’s unlawful conduct and his or her trafficking experience.

- One country (Indonesia) requires that the victim has been compelled to participate in the unlawful activity in order for the non-punishment principle to apply.
- Other countries (Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Viet Nam) require that unlawful acts committed by the victims are directly related to the acts of trafficking. [...].”

(Source: ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2 June 2025, pg.28, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

Clause 5 of Article 4 of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024 requires that unlawful acts committed by the victims are directly related to the acts of trafficking. It is worth noting that information within Decree Number: 162/2025/ND-CP, which details regulations on the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024 came into force from July 1, 2025, did not provide details on the implementation of Clause 5 of Article 4 of the new Law:

“[...]5. Depending on specific circumstances and in accordance with relevant laws, victims who commit violations of the law as a direct consequence of human trafficking may not be subjected to administrative penalties or criminal prosecution for such violations.

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁴¹ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

⁴¹ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property.

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Observers reported authorities routinely penalized victims exploited in cyber scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in cyber scam operations and also did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens.[...]”

(Source: US State Department – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed 23 February 2026)

In this 2022 report, Dr. Marika McAdam, ASEAN-ACT International Law and Policy Adviser, noted that:

“2.10 Vietnam
[...]

Non-punishment principle in law and policy No explicit non-punishment provision: There are no provisions relevant to nonpunishment of victims of trafficking in Vietnamese legislation. Law No 66/2011/QH12 on Prevention, Suppression Against Human Trafficking is silent on the issue of non-punishment. State officials explained that the non-punishment provision was not included in the 2011 Counter-Trafficking Law because it was not considered consistent with other provisions. However, they expressed the view that the principle is captured across other instruments, including the decree on victim protection. Decree No. 62/2012/ND-CP of August 13, 2012, prescribes the grounds for identification of trafficked victims and safety protection of victims and their relatives, and Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP stipulates in detail a number of articles of the anti-human trafficking law, but do not address non-punishment. In the view of some respondents though, the absence of a specific non-punishment provision in law is compensated for by other instruments that uphold the principle, as well as in practice by police and immigration officials who act to protect rather than punish victims.

Other relevant protections in legislation: Respondents referred to the human rights set out in the Constitution as a minimum basis for victim protection in specialised trafficking laws and bilateral agreements that include the non-punishment principle (see below under International Cooperation). These laws were emphasised as being in line with international law, though it was acknowledged that further effort could be made to ensure their implementation. Practitioners also pointed to the Penal Code and Criminal Procedural Law relating to force and other mitigating factors to protect victims from punishment for offences, not on the basis that they are a victim of trafficking, but on the basis of nonliability for acts in the absence of the fault element, and the defences set out therein.

Relevant provisions of the Penal Code: Article 46 of the Penal Code (No. 15/1999/QH10) provides ‘Circumstances extenuating penal liability’, for which Courts may opt to apply lesser sentences than those prescribed. Some of these may be relevant to the crimes committed by trafficked persons as a direct result of their trafficking, including: (e) Crimes are committed in cases where offenders are mentally incited by the illegal acts of the victims or other persons; (f) Crimes are committed due to particular difficulty plights not caused by themselves; (i) Crimes are committed due to threats and/or coercion by other persons; and (j) Crimes are committed due to ignorance.(pg.100)

Non-punishment not explicitly addressed in counter-trafficking policies: The Minimum Standards in Provision of Services to Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2011), the 2016 – 2020 National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons are silent on the principle of non-punishment. The National Programme on Counter Trafficking in Persons during the period 2021-2025, with a vision to 2030 does not explicitly include non-punishment but details strong victim support and even speaks to referral mechanisms for those who do not meet the threshold of trafficked victims.”(pp.100-101)

(Source: ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking, McAdam, M – ‘[Implementation of the non-punishment principle for victims of human trafficking in ASEAN member states](#)’. Bangkok: ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking, 2022, pp.100-101, last accessed 19 June 2025)

Dr Marika McAdam also noted in the same report that:

“[...]Prosecution of Vietnamese victims returning to Viet Nam: Non-state respondents note the challenge faced by returning Vietnamese citizens, who have been recognized as victims in destination countries, but not upon their return to Viet Nam where they are instead subject to fines for illegal exit and illegal work. Practitioners referred to a case of a Vietnamese victim trafficked into forced prostitution in China who murdered the owner of the brothel she was exploited in who was subsequently subject to 15 years in imprisonment upon her return to Viet Nam. Respondents explained that in this case, the victim had committed the crime as a direct consequence of being trafficked, pointing to the need for consideration to be given to whether a person has been compelled to commit a crime, or whether there were alternatives, for instance, self-defence that did not result in death.(pp.104-105)

Prosecution of foreign victims of trafficking in Viet Nam and migration status considerations: Opinions varied as to whether foreign victims are punished for offences they may have committed in the course of being trafficked in Viet Nam. Non-citizens were noted as being more difficult to identify and less likely to identify themselves to authorities, and therefore at higher risk of prosecution.” (pg.105)

(Source: Australian Aid, Author: Dr Marika McAdam – [Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Victims of Human Trafficking in ASEAN Member States](#), pp.104-105, 23 April 2022, last accessed 9 July 2025)

This 2022 ODI thematic brief on ‘Labour Migration in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam: Migrants’ Vulnerabilities and Capacities across the Labour Migration Cycle’, states:

“[...] In Vietnam, undocumented migration makes it harder to identify victims of trafficking on their return, and travelling without the correct documentation may be a criminal offence. While Vietnam has no legal provision for the non-criminalisation of victims for violations, such as illegal border crossings, practitioners say that most identified victims of trafficking will not be fined [...]. For those who cannot prove or provide any information/evidence that they are victims of trafficking, they may risk being fined in the absence of clear guidance from central agencies.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour Migration in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam: Migrants’ Vulnerabilities and Capacities across the Labour Migration Cycle](#), December 2022, pg.14. Last accessed: 09 June 2025)

In this 2019 report, the UNODC noted:

“[...]XII.9.2 Participation as an accomplice, organising and directing others

[...]Because the conduct elements of the offences of organising or coercing others to flee abroad or to stay abroad illegally (Article 275 Penal Code of 1999), organising, intermediating for other persons to illegally exit, enter Vietnam or illegally stay in Vietnam (Article 348 Criminal Code of 2015) and organising, intermediating for other persons to flee abroad or to stay abroad illegally (Article 349 Criminal Code) are cast widely, it may be difficult in some cases to separate primary liability of a perpetrator from secondary liability as an organiser, instigator or abettor.”

(Source: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019 pg.173, last accessed 6 August 2025)

8. Are there cases where victims of trafficking are prosecuted for crimes committed under coercion (e.g., illegal entry, forced labour, or sex work)?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted:

“[...]The 2024 anti-trafficking law also expanded services available for trafficking victims and mandated a government policy of non-punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government had not implemented this law, nor updated its NRM, by the end of the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) Department of Social Vices Prevention continued to develop a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars. The government reported further revising the screening toolkit; however, for the third year, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period and had not provided a timeline for doing so.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The U.S Department of State 2023 Trafficking in Persons report documented that:

“PROTECTION
[...]Despite conducting more than 32,000 inspections of the most at-risk establishments for sex trafficking, authorities only identified two sex trafficking victims. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, authorities may have penalized some unidentified trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) Department of Social Vices Prevention developed a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars; however, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period.

Authorities did not proactively identify victims exploited in cyber scam operations as trafficking victims or provide them with services, including foreign national victims identified in Vietnam, despite widespread reports indicating the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking. Observers reported authorities routinely penalized victims exploited in cyber scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in cyber scam operations and also did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed 19 June 2025)

Section 2. Trafficking Patterns, Routes, and Actors

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.1 (Demographic Vulnerability)
- Section 3.2 (Debt Bondage and Economic Risk)
- Section 3.5 (Gender and Age-specific Risks)
- Section 4 (State Protection and Corruption)
- Section 7 (Trends and Emerging Issues)

1. What are the main smuggling and trafficking routes within, to and from Vietnam?

In his 2024 book titled ‘*The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees*’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“Vietnam serves as a significant source country for individuals, including men, women, and children, who fall victim to sex trafficking and forced labour. While it is primarily a source country, to a lesser extent, it also becomes a destination for such exploitative practices.[...]

Typically, both children and adults who fall victim to trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation are taken from their home country, such as Vietnam, and transported to their destination country, including various European nations like Russia, Germany, or France, before finally reaching the UK.²⁸ Their transportation often occurs covertly within trucks carrying goods to avoid detection. Once in the UK, they are relocated to sites of forced labour or drug cultivation, where they are isolated from the outside world and made to work under exploitative conditions. Alternatively, they might be confined to specific residences for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This trafficking network involves the involvement of China, Russia, Germany, and possibly other countries. Many Vietnamese trafficking victims are known to stay in France temporarily until the network is ready to transport them to the United Kingdom. It is acknowledged that Vietnamese persons are trafficked or exploited for the purpose of working on cannabis farms in the UK and distributing illegal cigarettes in Germany.²⁹ According to a report by the United States Department of State: “Vietnamese and Chinese organized crime groups are involved in the forced labor of Vietnamese children on cannabis farms in the UK, where they are subject to debts up to the equivalent of approximately \$32,000 each. Reports indicate that many of these Vietnamese victims fly with an agent to Russia and then are transported via trucks through Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and France before arriving in the UK.”³⁰ However cases where victims were brought to the United Kingdom by air with false documents have also been reported. Furthermore, ‘Vietnamese organized crime networks recruit Vietnamese adults and children under pretenses of lucrative job opportunities and transport them to Europe—particularly the United Kingdom—and subject them to forced labor on cannabis farms.’³¹ It is also quite common that trafficking occurs and affects vulnerable Vietnamese once they are in the UK, as there are widespread networks of traffickers in the UK.³²[...]”

²⁸ UNHCR, Refworld, “2012 Trafficking human persons – Vietnam”

²⁹ <http://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/2074011/huge-cannabis-farm-uk-nuclear-bunker-was-staffed-trafficked> (25 February 2017); <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-cannabis-cultivation-marijuana-farm-vietnamese-minors-children-short-film-a7999426.html> (17 October 2017)

³⁰ US Department Of State, OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report (Vietnam), see also the 2016 report

³¹ U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report”, OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, 2018

³² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-vietnam-trafficking-children/vietnamese-child-trafficking-victims-in-uk-vanish-from-care-charities-idUSKBN1CI26N> (13 October 2017)

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, Chapter 14, pg.126)

A 2023 report that was produced by the ODI, in partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT), titled ‘Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam’, stated that:

“[...]9.2.7 Vietnam is estimated to have 560,000 migrant workers in 43 countries, although the actual number, including irregular migration, is probably far higher. (pg.9)

[...]Most labour trafficking begins with a choice to migrate for work. While they may exercise choice, migrant workers do not always have the power to demand better working conditions or control their migration journeys.[...] (pg.13)

Sectors of vulnerability include construction, forestry, garment manufacturing, and nail salons. There has been an increase in cases identified in recent years, transiting through countries such as China, Russia, Belgium, or Germany to then move on to France, Netherlands, or the UK, in risky conditions. The UK authorities have recognised Vietnamese migrants as among the most vulnerable to trafficking, where adults and children experience differing degrees of coercion and force in criminal activity, such as growing cannabis, as well as exploitative work in nail salons.”(p.37)

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.9, 13, 37, last accessed 10 February 2026)

The DFAT stated in its 2022 report:

“[...]3.8.7‘Vietnam is a source, transit and destination country for trafficking. Women and children, particularly from ethnic minorities, are common victims, but men have also been subjected to trafficking. Victims are trafficked using coercion, force or deception to higher and lower wealth countries in Asia and the Middle East, but also via complex routes to Western countries, including in Europe. ... [...] Advocates claim the situation has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is more likely to be organised online.”²⁵ (pg.15)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via [ecoi.net – Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 11 January 2022, pg.23, last accessed 10 February 2026)

In this 2021 article, the Guardian reported that:

“[...]Mimi Vu, an anti-trafficking expert living in Vietnam, has spent the past months researching the links between bilateral visa schemes in eastern Europe and the exploitation of Vietnamese migrant workers. “A key selling point to the Serbia route is that, like Romania, you can migrate legally through the reciprocal visa arrangements and it only costs a few thousand pounds, which is seen as a great bargain compared to the more traditional routes of going through Moscow or one of the central EU countries such as Poland or the Czech Republic into Europe, which can cost up to £30,000,” she said.[...]”

(Source: The Guardian — [Revealed: the secret ‘forced labour’ migration route from Vietnam to the UK](#), 25 December 2021, last accessed 10 February 2026)

The joint 2019 report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery International, and the Pacific Links Foundation refers to the dominant route from Vietnam to Europe:

“European routes
[...]

A recent trend shows the dominant route from Vietnam to Europe encompasses travel to Russia, onwards to Latvia or Belarus then to Lithuania, where migrants are transferred by cars to Poland and some further west, to Germany, France or the UK.²⁰³ There are also reports that Vietnamese nationals pass through the Belarusian and Latvian forests on foot. The 2018 TIP Report notes a growing number of Vietnamese victims transit through Poland en route to Western Europe after being subjected to labour trafficking in Russia.²⁰⁴ Our research undertaken in Poland also identified this trend.

Aside from being smuggled or trafficked over land, travelling into the EU by plane, coupled with visa fraud, has been reported. Dutch police have identified Vietnamese children who travel by plane from Vietnam, Malaysia or Taiwan on a ticket to Russia or South America with a layover in Amsterdam. They purposely miss their connecting flight at the airport in Amsterdam where they are encountered by Dutch authorities and taken into care, so they will not be removed from the country.²⁰⁵ A similar tactic is used in France. One organisation noted that approximately 35% of the unaccompanied children they work with at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport are Vietnamese, making them the number one nationality they encounter.

The last leg of the journey is often from France. From the north of France, attempts are made to reach the UK by paying a smuggler to be hidden in a secret compartment of a truck, or to hide oneself in a truck close to the harbour without the driver noticing.²⁰⁶ A field survey commissioned by France Terre d’Asile²⁰⁷ confirmed this pattern and highlighted that the French stage is crucial in the journey of Vietnamese migrants moving towards the UK. In France, the difficulty of making it to the UK increases; there are precarious conditions in migrant camps and the cost of passage is exorbitant.

There are also cases of Vietnamese nationals attempting to reach the UK via the Netherlands. The most common route into the Netherlands has been reported as crossing into China and traveling over land via Russia, Belarus or Ukraine and Poland into Germany and then via France to the Netherlands.²⁰⁸ The main Dutch harbour from which the journey to the United Kingdom is attempted is the harbour of Hook of Holland, from where a ferry to Harwich departs daily.²⁰⁹ [...] (pg.61)

[...]Emerging trend: South American route

New transit routes that integrate South American travel via Peru (Lima), Brazil or the Dominican Republic are being used more frequently to reach Europe, in particular to reach France. This route involves air transport in South and Central America before entering the EU. Some stakeholders identified routes through Panama and Chile to France.²¹³

In December 2018, the Spanish Policía Nacional, support by EUROPOL, arrested 37 members of an international gang that had charged 730 Vietnamese migrants €18,000 EUR each to be smuggled into Spain.²¹⁴ The migrants had been smuggled from Vietnam and transported via South America into the EU in groups of 6 to 12.”(pg.61)

²⁰³ Sobolewski, S. (2018). Unpublished Expert Report.
²⁰⁴ US TIP Report (2018). Russia. See: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2018/282736.htm>
²⁰⁵ National Police (July 2016). Internal administrative report, cited in Kooy H. (2018), unpublished expert report
²⁰⁶ FOIA document (2016). Conversation report with Vietnamese migrant. COA internal communications. Requested by Argos Lost in Europe
²⁰⁷ Tan, D. and Nguyen, H. (2017). En Route to the United Kingdom: A Field Survey of Vietnamese Migrants. See: http://www.france-terre-asile.org/images/stories/publications/pdf/En_route_to_the_United_Kingdom_-_a_field_survey_of_vietnamese_migrants.pdf
²⁰⁸ Kooy, H. (2018). Vietnamese Nationals and human Trafficking in the Netherlands, unpublished Expert Report
²⁰⁹ FOIA document (July 2017). Notes Nidos expert meeting. COA internal communications. Requested by Argos/ Lost in Europe.
²¹³ Round-table Consultation, Vietnam, November 2018
²¹⁴ Europol, ‘From Vietnam to Spain: An Illegal Journey Costing EUR 18 000’, 6 December 2018. See: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/vietnam-to-spain-illegal-journey-costing-eur-18-000>

(Source: ECPAT UK/Anti-Slavery/Pacific Links Foundation — [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pp.61-63, last accessed 30 June 2025)

2. Who are the main actors (individuals or organised crime groups) involved in these activities?

The UK National Crime Agency has reported that five people were arrested as part of their investigation into a people smuggling network suspected of transporting Vietnamese migrants to the UK:

“[...]Five people have been arrested as part of a National Crime Agency investigation into a people smuggling network

suspected of transporting Vietnamese migrants to the UK in lorries and small boats. NCA officers apprehended a 22-year-old man at an address in Rawmarsh, Rotherham, early this morning (17 February). Officers also re-arrested four other men who are currently on remand in prison after being charged with money laundering and ID document offences in September and October last year.

They were three men aged 27, 31 and 33, who were produced from a prison in Liverpool, and a 31-year-old man produced from a prison in Birmingham.

All five, who are currently being questioned by NCA investigators, are alleged to be key figures in an organised crime group smuggling people from France to the UK since the summer of 2024 and holding the genuine Vietnamese passports of those they transported to enforce debt bondage.[...]"

The Agency later updated the news article with this additional information:

"[...]Van Huy Nguyen, 22, apprehended at an address in Rawmarsh, Rotherham; Vinh Van Nguyen, 31, Lia-Chien Trong, 33, Sy Trai Ho, 27, produced from a prison in Liverpool, and Quang Van Nguyen, 31, produced from a prison in Birmingham, were all charged with one count of conspiracy to assist illegal entry to the UK and one count of transferring criminal property.[...]"

(Source: National Crime Agency – [Five arrested in National Crime Agency people smuggling investigation](#), 18 February 2026, last accessed 16 March 2026)

A report by the US Department of State explains that traffickers can include family members:

"Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam, and traffickers exploit victims from Vietnam abroad. Sixty-nine percent of workers are employed in the informal economy where labor laws are not effectively enforced, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including children who were homeless – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases."

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Vietnam profile noted:

"[...] Extortion and protection racketeering remain widespread in Vietnam, involving both local and foreign actors. These activities are concentrated in major cities and wholesale markets, where coercive debt collection, property appropriation and intimidation occur. Criminal networks have infiltrated legitimate sectors, forming opaque ties with private companies, banks and financial institutions to enforce illegal lending practices. Gangs profit from black-market credit operations and online lending scams, sometimes charging exorbitant interest rates and resorting to threats or violence to receive repayment. These practices extend into rural areas, fuelling conflict and public fear. Although some prosecutions have occurred, persistent under-reporting and recurring gang formation continue to undermine enforcement efforts and enable market expansion."

(Source: Global Organized Crime Index – [Country profile- Vietnam](#), 2025)

Amnesty International in a 2025 report, noted:

"[...]2.4 CORPORATE ACTORS
The primary actors responsible for the human rights abuse perpetrated at scamming compounds are organized, criminal groups. These actors rely on a network of companies for their scamming operations. This report is not focused on these corporate actors. Therefore, no companies involved directly or indirectly in the scamming operations are named or identified in this report. In addition, while other companies may have been operating near or at the scamming compounds and suspicious locations listed in this report (see Annexes I and II), Amnesty International is not naming or identifying them and therefore not alleging in any way that such companies are linked to the human rights abuse documented in this report.[...]"

(Source: Amnesty International – [‘I was someone else’s property’: slavery, human trafficking and torture in Cambodia’s scamming compounds](#), June 2025, pg.21, last accessed: 11 July 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“TRAFFICKING PROFILE:
[...]Within the country, ongoing pandemic-related unemployment and other socio-economic stressors increased vulnerabilities to trafficking, particularly for women and children in rural areas and among ethnic minorities. Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including unhoused children – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases. [...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

A 2024 article [A1] produced by the BBC News provides some insight into the individuals who smuggle Vietnamese citizens from the northern French coastline, to the UK. The BBC documents their experiences of meeting with a smuggler:

“We met an experienced smuggler who is operating in the UK and forging documents for migrants seeking to reach Europe. Separately, our undercover reporter - posing as a Vietnamese migrant - arranged, by phone and text, to meet a smuggling gang operating in the woods near Dunkirk in order to find out how the process works.

“A small boat service is £2,600. Payment to be made after you arrive in the UK,” the smuggler, who called himself Bac, texted back. We heard similar figures from other sources. We believe Bac may be a senior figure in a UK-based gang and the boss of Tony, the blonde man in the woods.

He had given us instructions about the journey from Europe to the UK, explaining how many migrants first flew from Vietnam to Hungary - where we understand it is currently relatively easy for them to get a legitimate work visa, often obtained using forged documents. Bac said that the migrants then travelled on to Paris and then to Dunkirk. “Tony can pick you up at the [Dunkirk] station,” he offered, in a later text.

The BBC news article explains who facilitates the smuggling across the English Channel:

“[...]The Vietnamese do not control the small boat crossings themselves, which are largely overseen by a handful of Iraqi Kurdish gangs. Instead they negotiate access and timings.

“The Vietnamese are not allowed to touch that part of the process [the crossing]. We just deliver clients to [the Kurdish gangs],” says another Vietnamese smuggler, who we are calling Thanh, currently living in the UK. He tells us the extra cash secures priority access to the small boats for their Vietnamese clients.[...]

Are these people victims of human trafficking? It is unclear. All the Vietnamese migrants we spoke to said they were in debt. If they ended up working for the smuggling gangs in the UK in order to pay for their journey and to pay off their debts then they would, indeed, have been trafficked.

We had sought to draw the blonde Vietnamese smuggler, Tony, out of a nearby forest and onto more neutral territory, where his gang - possibly armed, as other gangs certainly are - might pose less of a threat to us. We intended to confront him about his involvement in a lucrative and often deadly criminal industry. But Tony remained wary of leaving his own “turf” and grew impatient and angry when our colleague, still posing as a potential migrant, declined to follow him into the forest.[...]

The Vietnamese gangs may be promising a quick, safe, “elite” route to the UK, but the reality is much darker - a criminal industry, backed by threats, involving deadly risks and no guarantee of success.”

(Source: BBC News — [Smuggler selling ‘fast track’ Channel crossing speaks to BBC undercover reporter](#), 28 October 2024)

The 2023 ODI report noted:

“4.1 Facilitators

[...]This was confirmed in interviews, which identified a growing diversity in the facilitators of labour migration, ranging from brokers to family relatives, local acquaintances approaching people in difficulty, and brokers operating in the name of formal recruitment agencies.¹³ [...] As Hoang (2020: 33) found, ‘transnational labour migration in Asia is largely organised by sophisticated networks of commercial brokers who thrive on highly restrictive migration regimes and disparities in the distribution of labour and employment across the region.’”(pp.28-29)

¹³ Interview with government agency, Vietnam January 2022

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.28-29, last accessed 2 July 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, also noted:

“Vietnamese men and women migrate abroad for work informally, including through illicit brokerage networks operated by other Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or through state-owned or state-regulated labor recruitment enterprises. [...] Vietnamese traffickers, including members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service, have reportedly exploited Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in Saudi Arabia.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁴², titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham provide more specific information on trafficking from Vietnam to China and the profiles of the traffickers involved:

“Context: Traffickers and the crime of trafficking in persons in Vietnam

[...] In this article, based on over 100 human trafficking court cases from the past ten years, we analyse the characteristics of individuals prosecuted for human trafficking.[...]

Key Findings

Characteristics of Traffickers

In the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation to China, which were the only type recorded and analysed, most Vietnamese recruiters found young women and tricked them to go to China. In China, they were met by other people, both Vietnamese and Chinese, who then sold them on to the respective buyers. The court case database analysed for this research only includes traffickers from the Vietnamese side who are relatively low-level recruiters and would not normally be considered professional criminals. Of the 206 traffickers for whom we have detailed information, 79 per cent had violated the law for the first time. Fifty-nine per cent were men (140 of 236) and 41 per cent women (96 of 236), with their average age being 29 years. The traffickers profiled in this data source are ethnic minority people who are as economically disadvantaged as their victims. Sixty-five per cent (153 of 236) are from ethnic minorities who tend to be poorer and more disadvantaged than the Kinh majority. The level of education of these traffickers was low: 16 per cent (39 people) were illiterate and 60 per cent (139 of 236) had not completed twelve grades of education. [...]”(pp.37-38)

The recruiters are very often known to their victims. In fact, 62 per cent of the victims (123 out of 199 victims) knew their traffickers prior to the trafficking situation: as boyfriends, work colleagues, fellow villagers, or extended family members. The recruitment role is often fulfilled by people from similar backgrounds who may have friends or relatives in China who ask them to find wives for them. Twenty per cent of the recruiters in the dataset were people who worked in China or women married to Chinese men who knew someone who persuaded them to take Vietnamese women and girls to China. The majority of the other traffickers with no criminal background had acquaintances, friends, or relatives working or living in China. [...] (pg.38)

⁴² See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal, here: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

Discussion

[...]Over 60 per cent of both traffickers and their victims are from ethnic minority groups, especially H’mong. The H’mong are the poorest and most disadvantaged ethnic group in Vietnam, who tend to live in mountainous areas with infertile agricultural land and minimal access to government services.[16] Illiteracy, distance from town centres, complicated bureaucratic requirements, and poverty mean that many H’mong children are not registered at birth, or, if identity papers are lost, adults do not renew them.[17] As a result, H’mong people have limited opportunities to generate income, lack social safety nets, and largely rely on subsistence farming combined with labour migration. Many families lack savings or access to government assistance if illnesses or other shocks occur in the family. Due to all these disadvantages, H’mong people are very vulnerable to both trafficking victimisation and perpetration. [...](pg.44)

This means that the traffickers are very likely to be poor and disadvantaged prior to their crimes, as evidenced by the information about traffickers’ occupations contained in the court documents. Of 236 traffickers, one was a factory worker, two were hairdressers, and one was an office worker for a small company. The remaining 232 were unemployed, worked on a home farm, or in low-wage, casual jobs. Almost all were from rural areas. In 2018, the average national yearly income per capita was approximately VND 58,500,000 or USD 2,540,[19] while in rural areas it was VND 35,880,000 (USD 1,558).[20]”(pg.45)

[16] Mekong Development Research Institute, 54 Ethnic Groups: Why the difference?, Hanoi, 2018; T D Lo et al., Multidimensional Poverty in Vietnam: Reducing poverty in all its dimensions to ensure a good quality life for all (Summary Report), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and UN Development Program, Hanoi, 2018.

[17] Blue Dragon experience working with communities. See also J van der Straaten and N Pairaudeau, Unregistered Children Project. Vietnam Report, Plan International, Manila (ESARO)/Hanoi, 1999.

[19] The World Bank, ‘GDP Per Capita (current US\$) – Vietnam’, World Bank, retrieved on 27 May 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=VN>.

[20] P Lien, ‘Tăng nhanh thu nhập bình quân đầu người/năm ở nông thôn’, dangcongsan, 12 May 2020, <https://dangcongsan.vn/kinh-te/tang-nhanh-thu-nhap-binh-quan-dau-nguoi-nam-o-nong-thon-554604.html>

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review, Issue 18, 2022, pp.37-45, last accessed 29 June 2025)

The 2022 OHCHR report noted:

“UN human rights experts* today raised serious concerns about the alleged forced labour of a group of approximately 400 Vietnamese migrant workers, who are reported to be victims of trafficking in Serbia. According to information received, eight companies, including Vietnamese labour recruitment agencies and Chinese construction companies registered in Serbia, have allegedly been implicated in serious human rights abuses against Vietnamese migrant workers.”

*The experts: Ms. Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; Mr. Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Mr. Felipe González Morales, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Ms. Elżbieta Karska (Chairperson), Mr. Githu Muigai (Vice Chairperson) Mr. Surya Deva, Ms. Fernanda Hopenhaym Ms. Anita Ramasastry Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

(Source: OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – [UN experts deeply concerned by alleged trafficking of Vietnamese migrant workers to Serbia](#), 21 January 2022, last accessed: 25 May 2025)

The data used in this 2022 Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation report is from two sources: cases in which Blue Dragon directly supported investigations and prosecutions, and trafficking cases published by the Supreme People’s Court of Vietnam:

“The vast majority of traffickers were Vietnamese, with only three Chinese and one Cambodian trafficker prosecuted. The region of the trafficker closely matches the region of the victim, and therefore the court case, meaning that most traffickers are ‘working’ in their local area. [...]

Table 6: Relationship between victims and traffickers

How the victim knew the trafficker	No. victims	%
Met on Internet, via phone	67	33.67%
Boyfriend, friend, acquaintance, classmate, neighbours	67	33.67%
Someone from the same district	43	21.61%
Relative, family member	10	5.02%
Other (marriage broker, fortune teller)	8	4.02%
Work colleague	3	1.51%

In this data, the number of people trafficked by family members is relatively low, however Blue Dragon knows that it can be more difficult to prosecute cases that involve family as the victim is often hesitant to provide a statement against a family member. Thus, the low figure here may not be an accurate representation of how many victims are trafficked by family members.

In this data, 10 victims were trafficked by their relatives or family members, including three infants. The babies were all rescued in the process of being trafficked. One mother in Nghe An was sentenced to prison. The other two mothers were not considered traffickers and not prosecuted.

Excluding the three babies, the other seven victims were trafficked by their cousin, mother in-law, sister-in-law, i.e. more distant relatives. In one case, the police could not prove that a direct relative (a sibling) was involved in selling her younger sister.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking & Traffickers in Vietnam](#), February 2022, last accessed: 02 July 2025)

This 2021 Guardian article provides details on the gang members who were found responsible for the Essex lorry deaths:

“The two ringleaders of the people-smuggling gang responsible for the deaths of 39 Vietnamese people who suffocated in a sealed refrigeration container as they were transported across the Channel from France have received prison sentences of 27 and 20 years.

Ronan Hughes, 41, who ran a haulage company and organised the lorries and drivers to transport the migrants, was sentenced to 20 years at the Old Bailey on Friday. He pleaded guilty last year to 39 counts of manslaughter and conspiring to bring people into the country unlawfully.

Hughes, an Irish haulier, alternated between legitimate shipments of waffles, soft drinks and wine from warehouses across Europe and illegal smuggling of alcohol, cigarettes and people.
His co-conspirator Gheorghe Nica, 43, a Romanian lorry mechanic who helped coordinate the transport of the migrants, and who was found guilty last year of manslaughter and people-smuggling, was sentenced by Mr Justice Sweeney to 27 years in prison.

Maurice Robinson, 26, the lorry driver from Northern Ireland who collected the container containing the 39 people from the port in Essex in October 2019, and also pleaded guilty last year to manslaughter and people-smuggling, was sentenced to 13 years and four months.[...]

(Source: The Guardian – [People-smuggling gang members jailed over Essex lorry deaths](#), January 2021)

3. Are these actors the same throughout the recruitment, transport and exploitation process or do they change?

Presented in this 2025 report, Amnesty International conducted in-person and remote interviews with 58 survivors from scamming compounds in Cambodia, including the following 2 Vietnamese cases:

“[...]6.1.3 TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN

[...]Yeruo, a 14-year-old boy from China, was trafficked to a compound in Sihanoukville in 2024. A recruiter told Yeruo he would be paid USD 1,570 per month for a job in China. Yeruo took a bus from his home city to Guangxi, before being collected with three other people by a person in a car. Four days later he arrived in Cambodia after transferring between cars and being driven through Viet Nam by Vietnamese drivers.²⁴⁸ [...]”(pg.68)

248 Amnesty International interview with Yeruo, 2024

A Vietnamese woman, Diep, was told by her boss that she had been sold to him: “[H]e told me I was sold here for USD 3,000.” Upon arriving at the compound, Diep overheard her Chinese recruiter and another man, who later turned out to be her boss, bartering over the price for delivering her to the compound. Diep would later be sold twice more to different companies within the OS01 compound.”³⁶⁹(pg.84)

369 Amnesty International interview with Diep, 2024.

(Source: Amnesty International —‘**I was someone else’s property’: slavery, human trafficking and torture in Cambodia’s scamming compounds**, June 2025, pp.68-84, last accessed: 11 July 2025)

In this research report, produced in May 2025 by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)’s Observatory of Illicit Economies in Asia-Pacific in partnership with the Australian-funded ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking programme and the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, the authors explained the different actors in the region:

“[...]Key Players

Across Southeast Asia, cyber scam operations exploit and thrive in a well-established criminal ecosystem already comprising many different illicit markets and actors. According to the GI-TOC’s 2023 Global Organized Crime Index, the region hosts diverse criminal actors, including criminal networks, state-embedded actors and foreign criminal groups.⁹² Cyber scam operations are run and facilitated by a variety of actors who operate across the region and beyond. Inside scam compounds, cyber scams involve numerous actors, ranging from organized criminal groups to recruitment networks and individuals forced to conduct the scams. The criminal networks are often fragmented with smaller groups operating alongside larger criminal organizations. Researchers have often uncovered multiple scam operations and managers operating in close proximity in major scam locations.

CRIMINAL ACTORS AT SCAM COMPOUND LEVEL:

[...]
2 Scam operations managers are primarily actors within Chinese-speaking criminal networks running the day-to-day operations, including by providing security for a compound. There are also reports of local criminal networks as well as networks from South Korea, Japan and other Southeast Asian countries who often work in collaboration with Chinese-speaking criminal networks.

3. Recruiters and traffickers consist of multiple actors including brokers, smuggling and traffickers spanning multiple countries. Recruiters sometimes operate from trafficking victims’ countries of origin, and some function like legitimate job agencies, deceiving job seekers with fake jobs and then trafficking them to compounds. Some are reportedly based at compounds as ‘human resources’ staff or as scam workers who recruit friends and acquaintances.’

[...]

5. Corrupt officials include police, military or border guards and other government officials. They not only facilitate workers’ journeys to scam compounds, but also provide protection from raids and physical security on-site. They have also been reported to facilitate the movement of scam operatives between compounds.

6. Role shifters are business owners, politicians and crime bosses who hold multiple roles (and who sometimes shift between those roles). Individuals may be closely aligned with one profile than others, but their defining feature is their ability to switch. They have significant influence over investments, law-making and law enforcement processes and wield their influence to shape the criminal economy of the region.[...]”

92 See GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index, South-Eastern Asia, https://ocindex.net/region/south-eastern_asia; Ranking behind Central America (1st), Western Asia (2nd), South America (3rd), and East Africa (4th)

(Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime – [Compound Crime Cyber scam operations in Southeast Asia](#), May 2025, pg.13, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁴³ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁴⁴ noted the following profiles of online scam offenders in their 2024 journal article:

“[...] (1) how the victims lured into scam compounds in Cambodia to become scammers work under the Chinese and their accomplices (Cambodians and/or Vietnamese), and (2) how these victims/scammers enter and work under certain conditions at their workplaces. Also, the next section provides brief information regarding the victim’s location in Vietnam, gender, and ethnicity. Our current documents/records reflect the blurred coexistence between former victims and current offenders. They are likely to come from one Vietnamese offender (victim and offender) or through a third person (middleman). For the former, it is clear evidence of an overlapped person who is a Vietnamese victim of a scam operation and returns to the offending role to join the network in Cambodia. They likely still remain in Cambodia to operate in scam compounds or have returned to Vietnam to recruit other potential victims, including their relatives and/or friends. For the latter, the third person includes either a broker/word-of-mouth person or a friend of a friend without identification. They are often at large when investigating and prosecuting and are too difficult for authorities to capture. Regarding their occupation, it is easier to identify their exact place of employment with official records from companies/organizations before joining the scam operation. Our records reflect that either the offender worked in Cambodia in different roles (e.g., translators, master chefs, and/or accountants) or did not work/come to Cambodia (known as unstable jobs) while committing a crime. Those individuals who have experience living and working with Chinese associates in Cambodia’s gambling compounds often understand what their demands are directed at new Vietnamese victims and how much commission they can earn from selling these victims. However, in some cases, with personal expectations of gaining benefits, they have actively sought jobs on the Internet and voluntarily joined these illegal gambling groups in Cambodia. Another unique issue for law enforcement agencies is the ability to distinguish between the victim-and-offender overlap and others.[...]”

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective. Laws 2024, 13, 70](#). <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws13060070>, 21 November 2024, pp.5-6)

Dr Joseph Whittle and Dr Daniel Silverstone noted in their in 2024 research article:

“[...]Law enforcement officers interviewed recently (*n*=3) did not support the contention that Vietnamese facilitators are involved in brothels or as sex workers. This despite the National Referral Mechanism recording consistently high numbers of Vietnamese who have allegedly been trafficked for sexual services. It appears to be the case that those who organise the migration are separate networks from those who offer (illegal) employment in the UK. For example, the trial of those who orchestrated the fatal smuggling operation in 2019, offered an insight into how the business is structured and the amount

43 School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia
44 National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

of money and constant activity involved. Those involved made at least four successful journeys and were paid £13,000 per migrant. As the judge concluded:

“...there was evidence of four such transportations...(the operation was a) sophisticated, long-running and profitable conspiracy to smuggle mainly Vietnamese nationals across the channel. The conspiracy amounted to professional organised crime, with the use of largely unregistered phones, committed to make a profit” (Nica Rv et al. 2021 p.17).

Yet despite the established nature and criminal robustness of this organisation there was no evidence of evidence to control migrants once they arrived. Indeed, it was also the case that at least some of those involved in this fatal conspiracy were also working in legitimate haulage in addition to their criminality (Mackin 2021)[...]

Therefore rather than large flexible and potent organised crime groups, the mundane reality is that illegal migration from both countries is brokered by fairly non-descript, but effective, facilitators.[...]”

(Source: Whittle, J., Silverstone via Springernature Link – [A comparison of Vietnamese and Chinese human smuggling networks transporting people to the UK; similarities and differences in methods used and the experience of migrants travelling to and living in the UK](#), Trends Organ Crim (2024), 18 July 2024, last accessed 16 March 2026)

Dr Chung Pham in her 2022 article ‘Combating the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK’ observed:

“it can be difficult for researchers in the field to put together a complete picture of the human trafficking situation due to its complexities. It can be very difficult to do this because agencies along the trafficking journey are often not connected with each other, as some are only used on an ad hoc basis, and only responsible for one leg of transportation from one country to another. Therefore, it can be very difficult to assess the whole process from place of origin to final destination.”

However, Dr Chung Pham caveats the above comment by stating:

“however, the agencies from departure, either in Vietnam or China, would often be connected with those in a country in Europe, France or Belgium for instance, and finally the UK. This is because these agents need to cooperate with each other to control the journey payments and/or any debts/bondage.”

(Source: Chung Pham, ‘[Combating the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK](#)’ , Social Sciences 12, no. 1 26 December 2022, last accessed 20 February 2026)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁴⁵, titled ‘What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham noted that:

“Key Findings
Characteristics of Traffickers
In the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation to China, which were the only type recorded and analysed, most Vietnamese recruiters found young women and tricked them to go to China. In China, they were met by other people, both Vietnamese and Chinese, who then sold them on to the respective buyers.[...]”

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review, Issue 18, 2022, pg.37, last accessed 14 July 2025)

45 See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal, here: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

4. What are the key methods used by traffickers in Vietnam and China (e.g., social media, recruitment tactics, transport, coercion techniques)?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Traffickers in border villages reportedly lure Vietnamese women and girls, particularly from the Hmong ethnic minority group, to China for forced marriages that often involve sex trafficking and/or forced labor. There are past reports of Vietnamese women and girls in forced childbearing, including cases in which traffickers lure them to China with false job offers, abduct them at the border, and transfer them to unregulated hospital facilities, where they are subjected to forcible artificial insemination and confined until they give birth.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁴⁶ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁴⁷ noted the following profiles of online scam offenders in their 2024 journal article:

“[...] (1) how the victims lured into scam compounds in Cambodia to become scammers work under the Chinese and their accomplices (Cambodians and/or Vietnamese), and (2) how these victims/scammers enter and work under certain conditions at their workplaces. Also, the next section provides brief information regarding the victim’s location in Vietnam, gender, and ethnicity. Our current documents/records reflect the blurred coexistence between former victims and current offenders. They are likely to come from one Vietnamese offender (victim and offender) or through a third person (middleman). For the former, it is clear evidence of an overlapped person who is a Vietnamese victim of a scam operation and returns to the offending role to join the network in Cambodia. They likely still remain in Cambodia to operate in scam compounds or have returned to Vietnam to recruit other potential victims, including their relatives and/or friends. For the latter, the third person includes either a broker/word-of-mouth person or a friend of a friend without identification. They are often at large when investigating and prosecuting and are too difficult for authorities to capture. Regarding their occupation, it is easier to identify their exact place of employment with official records from companies/organizations before joining the scam operation. Our records reflect that either the offender worked in Cambodia in different roles (e.g., translators, master chefs, and/or accountants) or did not work/come to Cambodia (known as unstable jobs) while committing a crime. Those individuals who have experience living and working with Chinese associates in Cambodia’s gambling compounds often understand what their demands are directed at new Vietnamese victims and how much commission they can earn from selling these victims.[...]”

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective](#), 21 November 2024, pp.5-6)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁴⁸, titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham outlined various methods used to recruit trafficking victims:

“[...]The court case documents contain detailed information about how the victims were recruited and what promises were made to convince them to go with the traffickers. The majority were recruited via false job offers (34 per cent) and false relationship/friendship offers (26 per cent). Marriage brokers recruited another 25 per cent of the victims to marry Chinese men, but this turned out to be domestic and sexual servitude with no legal marriage taking place [...] A significant proportion of victims (34 per cent) were recruited online, largely through Facebook and the Zalo messaging app¹².”(pg.40)

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⁴⁷ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

⁴⁸ See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal, here: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

Table 2:
Means of recruitment of victims

MEANS OF RECRUITMENT	NO OF VICTIMS	% OF TOTAL
Marriage brokerage to Chinese men	50	25.1%
Job offer in China	40	20.1%
Invitation from a friend/online friend to meet up in Vietnam	39	19.6%
Promise of marriage (as a boyfriend)	27	13.6%
Job offer in Vietnam	23	11.6%
Invitation from a friend/online friend to meet and travel in China	12	6.0%
Job offer in another country (South Korea, Laos)	4	2.0%
Adoption	3	1.5%
Unconfirmed	1	0.5%
Total	199	100%

12 A Vietnamese-developed messaging platform that is the most popular messaging app in Vietnam.

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review, Issue 18, 2022, pg.40, last accessed 29 June 2025)

The joint 2019 report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery International, and the Pacific Links Foundation noted:

“Trafficking profile
 [...]Social media is increasingly being used to deceive and lure potential victims into situations of exploitation and vulnerability. Young women and girls are particularly susceptible to this when they develop online relationships with men who coerce them to move abroad and subsequently traffick them for the purposes of labour and/or sexual exploitation.⁵⁹

[...]Organised crime networks also play a part in luring people to Europe under false pretences of lucrative job opportunities and subjecting them to forced labour instead.⁶² Debt-bondage, false promises and document confiscation are tactics and controls commonly used by traffickers, and social media is increasingly being used to deceive and lure potential victims into situations of exploitation and vulnerability.⁶³ (pg.32)

[...]Vietnam’s supply chain is highly at-risk for trafficking and slavery, as workers are vulnerable to being recruited away from factory jobs by traffickers offering better opportunities and posing as labour brokers. The brokers enter the migrant worker ecosystem in places such as bus stops, dormitories and factory floors, offering seemingly legitimate and higher-paying jobs at other factories in neighbouring provinces or overseas.

[...]At the community level, brokers (or traffickers posing as them) can take on the identity of a friendly neighbour or a service that is recommended by word of mouth. Interviews conducted with families from Nghe An province who were considering sending a family member to the UK highlighted the abundance of these services. (pg.47)

[...]Forced marriages

Trafficking from Vietnam to China for the purpose of forced marriage and sexual exploitation is at the forefront of anti-trafficking efforts in Vietnam. Women and girls are deceived with false promises of work, groomed on social media apps (Facebook Messenger, Zalo, WeChat) and even abducted. (pg.48)

[...]Debt bondage

Debt bondage refers to the burden of excessive debt that victims of trafficking accumulate as part of the migration process, which traffickers then use to coerce, control and exploit victims.²³³ [...] The system of debt bondage is prevalent amongst Vietnamese victims of trafficking in Europe. Smugglers demand interest on borrowed money and the amounts owed can quickly rise.” (pg.69)

59 US TIP Report (2018). Vietnam. See: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2018/282780.htm>

62 Ibid

63 Ibid

233 US TIP (2014). What is Modern Slavery? See: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/what/>

(Source: ECPAT UK/Anti-Slavery/Pacific Links Foundation – [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pp.32-47-48-69, last accessed 30 June 2025)

5. Are there reports or documented cases of corrupt officials? If so, what role do they play in facilitating smuggling or trafficking in Vietnam?

The 2025 Global Organised Crime Index has noted the following:

“[...]State-embedded actors facilitate multiple criminal markets, including wildlife and human trafficking, non-renewable resource crimes and financial crimes. Their level of involvement often correlates with their rank and political protection. Low-level officials have reportedly enabled wildlife and drug trafficking, while higher-ranking officials are more commonly implicated in human trafficking and financial crimes. Corruption extends from local commune authorities – who have allegedly extorted trafficking victims and enabled forced marriages – to diplomats and police accused of concealing trafficking operations or exploiting stranded citizens. These actors use bribery to exert influence and facilitate illicit activity, with recent cases exposing senior officials who accepted payments to authorize illegal sand mining beyond regulatory limits.

Foreign criminal actors are active across multiple markets in Vietnam, particularly in drug trafficking, cybercrime and cyber-enabled financial fraud. Foreign groups from China, Myanmar and Cambodia are key players in online gambling, ransomware and scam operations linked to human trafficking, using Vietnam as a recruitment hub. These activities are often managed from regional scam compounds, where Vietnamese victims are trafficked into forced criminality. Cooperation between foreign and local actors is common, particularly in human smuggling, where diaspora networks in Europe enable migration flows. Geographic patterns vary: South East Asian actors dominant in drug and human trafficking, while African and European groups are more involved in wildlife trafficking and smuggling.

Private-sector actors in Vietnam play a facilitative role in organized crime, notably through money laundering, illicit finance and the concealment of illegal goods within legitimate supply chains. Financial institutions and the real estate sector are commonly used to launder proceeds from wildlife trafficking and other illicit markets. Criminal networks operate under the guise of businesses that offer predatory loans or engage in fraud through law firms and debt recovery services. Employees in logistics and transport companies have been implicated in drug and wildlife trafficking. High-profile corporate embezzlement cases and the laundering of illegal timber through Vietnam’s import-dependent supply chain underscore the vulnerabilities of private-sector channels to criminal exploitation, both domestically and transnationally.”

(Source: Global Organised Crime Index – [The Organized Crime Index – Vietnam](#), 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]In prior years, there were reports of some complicit Vietnamese officials, primarily at commune and village levels, who allegedly facilitated trafficking or exploited victims by accepting bribes from traffickers, overlooking trafficking indicators, and extorting money in exchange for reuniting victims with their families. In 2019, the government reported it had ceased the practice of subjecting drug users to forced labor in its 105 rehabilitation centers; this claim has not been independently verified. In 2021, the government reported revising its regulations on drug addiction treatment, stipulating that any labor performed by detainees in compulsory drug rehabilitation centers must comply with provisions of Vietnam’s labor law and include remuneration. A 2014 legal provision requires a judicial proceeding before detention of drug users in compulsory drug rehabilitation centers and restricts detainees’ maximum workday to four hours. There were prior reports that prisoners, including political and religious dissidents, were forced to work in agriculture, manufacturing, and hazardous industries, such as cashew processing. North Korean nationals working in Vietnam may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor. The Cuban regime may have forced Cuban regime-affiliated workers, including medical professionals, in Vietnam to work. Vietnamese authorities reported Cuban medical workers are paid directly by employing hospitals.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

Vietnam Investment Review⁴⁹ published this 2025 online article titled ‘Legal proceedings launched against ex-official for taking bribes’, noted that:

[...]
Hanoi - The Ministry of Public Security’s Investigation Security Agency has initiated a bribery investigation targeting former Deputy Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Nguyen Ba Hoan and three other other officials, in connection with a case involving the Hoang Long Construction and Manpower Supply JSC (Hoang Long CMS) and several affiliated units.[...]

As part of the expanded investigation, Hoan’s role in the case has been found. Hoan is accused of directing the Department of Overseas Labour Management under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) (now the Ministry of Home Affairs) to impose licensing requirements that were not legally mandated for companies involved in labour export contracts. These arbitrary regulations created barriers and difficulties for businesses, forcing them to pay bribes to leaders at the MoLISA and its Department of Overseas Labour Management.

Companies concealed these illicit payments by inflating service fees charged to workers, often exceeding legal limits, thereby misappropriating funds from them.

Based on the investigation results, on June 3 and June 10, 2025, the Ministry of Public Security’s Investigation Security Agency issued additional decisions to prosecute the criminal case for the charge of “taking bribes.”[...]

It has called on relevant organisations, individuals, and businesses involved in the wrongdoings of this case to proactively report and provide information to the Ministry’s Investigation Agency in order to be considered for leniency under applicable legal provisions.

(Source: Vietnam Investment Review – [Legal proceedings launched against ex-official for taking bribes](#), 12 June 2025, last accessed 11 August 2025)

49 About us: <https://vir.com.vn/about-us>

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, there remain significant concerns about the government’s handling of a case first reported in 2021. In June 2022, the government recalled a labor attaché and another staff member from Saudi Arabia who allegedly directly facilitated the forced labor of several Vietnamese nationals in Saudi Arabia. The government reprimanded and investigated the two officials for potential trafficking crimes in 2022; at an unspecified time during the current reporting period, the government ended the investigation against the labor attaché with no charges, citing a lack of evidence, and reinstated him at MOLISA in the Department of Overseas Labor. The government reported it had ended the investigation against the other diplomat at an unspecified time in 2022. Although authorities previously imposed administrative penalties on some of the entities involved in the initial fraudulent recruitment or transportation of the victims to Saudi Arabia, but reported the alleged facilitation of labor trafficking did not rise to the level of criminal conduct. Authorities did not vigorously prosecute other claims of labor trafficking in state-licensed labor export companies.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

In his 2024 book titled ‘The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“[...]Police often are either bribed or intimidated by the violence of gangs who are known to take revenge against police officers who cross them, and therefore cannot be relied upon to protect their victims.⁸[...]”

8 Based on interviews with victims in Vietnam. See also US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017, Vietnam, and US State Department Trafficking in People Report, Vietnam, 2018, for the corruption of officials and the acceptance of bribes from criminals

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, pg.126)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted:

“[...]In May 2022, courts sentenced two police officers for concealing a trafficking crime and knowingly extorting a trafficker instead of reporting him. In June 2022, the government recalled a labor attaché and another staff member from Saudi Arabia who allegedly directly facilitated the forced labor of several Vietnamese nationals in Saudi Arabia. In January 2023, the government reported initiating criminal procedures against the two officials; the government had previously removed the labor attaché from his position and issued a disciplinary decision. Although authorities imposed administrative penalties on some of the entities involved in the initial fraudulent recruitment or transportation of the victims to Saudi Arabia, they did not seek criminal accountability; some of these alleged accomplices returned to Vietnam or traveled elsewhere, and at least one reportedly continued recruitment activities with impunity. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) administered disciplinary actions – including warnings, arrests, and expulsion from the CPV – against numerous current and former Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials, including four high-ranking MFA consular officials, for their role in a long-running bribery scandal involving MFA-chartered repatriation flights during pandemic lockdowns. The MFA officials forced Vietnamese nationals stranded abroad during the pandemic to pay exorbitant repatriation fees – a common source of indebtedness that traffickers were known to exploit.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

The 2022 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“The government maintained efforts to protect victims, but two allegedly complicit officials took measures to harass, intimidate, and facilitate the re- exploitation of some survivors of trafficking with impunity.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 July 2022, last accessed: 18 May 2025)

The joint submission report published in 2020 by three organisations included an anecdotal case in which alleged perpetrators were detained by the police and later released, with the victims’ appeals ignored:

“[T]here are many reported cases of children abducted and sold across the border into Cambodia, Laos and China while their traffickers, identified by the victims or their family members, have been treated with impunity. Appeals for rescue and denunciation letters are often ignored by responsible authorities. Below is an illustrative example, where the Police at both the district and province levels have for 9 years ignored repeated appeals by the victims’ relatives, chastised the victims who came forth as witnesses, and set free traffickers despite eye-witness identification by the victims. [...]

Case in point: Ly Thi Sinh (aged 20), her younger sister Ly Thi Sua (aged 15) and their cousin Ly Thi Minh (aged 14), residents of Khuoi Vin Hamlet, Ly Bon Commune, Bao Lam District, Cao Bang Province. They were abducted by Lo Van Hien and two of his accomplices while attending a festival at Khau Vai Market in Ha Giang Province on April 28, 2011. After eight days in captivity, Ly Thi Sua managed to return home with the help of the Chinese police. She saw Lo Van Hien at the local market. Her family immediately made a report to the police, requesting that they mount a rescue operation for the other two victims. On July 11, 2011 the police arrested and detained Hien for a few days and released him. When questioned by Sua’s parents, Mr. Duong Minh Hai, Deputy Public Security Chief of Bao Lam District, declared that Hien was innocent. Repeated appeals by the victims’ families to the police to rescue Sinh and Minh were ignored.”

(Source: CRC – UN Committee on the Rights of the Child – [Joint Submission Responding to the 5th and 6th State Report on Vietnam’s Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 28 February 2020, last accessed: 21 June 2025)

An academic interviewed by the 2019 UK Home Office fact-finding mission described corruption within the police:

“[...] Annex D: Notes of meetings w/ sources(pg.62)
 Academic source (1), 25 February 2019 [...] How prevalent is corruption within the police?
 It’s at every level. Bribery to the police on the road, to the Ho Khau official they can ask why you make Ho Khau. Even the police who investigate criminal cases can ask for bribes from the victim and/ or from the criminal too. A very serious situation here. In the last year there are many corruption cases related to the police here. There are no checks and balances, the power of the police is big and there is no control on them. (pg.58)

Do you think protection from the police is effective, if you were fearing criminal gangs or trafficking would you be able to get protection?
 There are some small cases. The CPV knows it must maintain order and the confidence of the people. There is social pressure on police from local communities and people believe in police to maintain security and protect the people. I would rate around 6 or 7/10 for the police system. On one hand they use the police system for the power of the regime, but they also use it for social order and security of the people [...]”(pg.59)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission to Vietnam Conducted between 23 February and 1st March 2019](#), 9 September 2019, pp. 58 and 59)

6. Is information available on the links between trafficking/traffickers in Vietnam and China and/or other countries and transnational trafficking beyond China?. And what is the profile of traffickers in these areas?

In the article ‘Wombs of Entrapment: Forced Pregnancy and the Manipulation of Maternal Bonds Among Vietnamese Trafficking Survivors ’, published in 2025, Le Khanh Chi Tran identifies Vietnamese women as being targeted for bride trafficking:

“[...]In addition to risk factors such as poverty, low levels of education and unstable family backgrounds, a key driver for trafficking is the shortage of women in China and increasingly South Korea and Taiwan (O. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). The unbalanced sex ratio in China, exacerbated by policies such as the former one-child policy, has fueled bride trafficking. The trend of transnational marriage migration to countries like South Korea and Taiwan has also led to situations of commodification and

abuse (T. H. Nguyen & McIntyre-Mills, 2021). Additionally, the porous borders with China, Cambodia, and Laos facilitate cross-border trafficking, with China and Cambodia identified as significant destinations for trafficked women (N. T. Nguyen, 2019).

The Vietnamese government recognizes the forced marriages of young Vietnamese women to foreign men as a serious concern but lacks comprehensive policies to address this issue, which leaves brides vulnerable to exploitation (O. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).[...]"

(Source: Journal of Human Trafficking (Tran, L. K. C., Davies, S., & Deckert – **Wombs of Entrapment: Forced Pregnancy and the Manipulation of Maternal Bonds Among Vietnamese Trafficking Survivors**, 23 September 2025, pp.1–13, last accessed 13 February 2026)

This May 2025 research report, produced by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)’s Observatory of Illicit Economies in Asia-Pacific in partnership with the Australian-funded ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking programme and the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, noted that:

“[...]Scam victims

Many reported victims are based in Australia, Canada, China, Europe, India and the US.⁸¹ Some rescued scam labourers have reported that they were specifically told not to target Asians. However, people in many countries across the region – notably Thailand,⁸² Vietnam,⁸³ Singapore⁸⁴ and Indonesia⁸⁵ – are frequently targeted by scams.⁸⁶[...]”

⁸¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Report 2023, 2023, https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2023_IC3Report.pdf; Kathleen Magramo, Gangs netting up to \$3 trillion a year as Southeast Asia human trafficking becomes a global crisis, Interpol says, CNN, 28 March 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/28/asia/southeast-asia-interpol-scam-human-trafficking-crime-intl-hnk>; Kareyst Lin, Why investment scams are on the rise and how you can protect yourself, The Straits Times, 1 September 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/why-investment-scams-are-on-therise-and-how-you-can-protect-yourself>

⁸² Diego Almada Lopez, Binance unmask \$277 million crypto scam in Thailand, Crypto Briefing, 3 October 2023, <https://cryptobriefing.com/binance-unmasks-crypto-scam-thailand/>

⁸³ Quoc Vu, Man says he’s trapped in a scam compound with ‘thousands’, Radio Free Asia, 11 January 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/human-trafficking-01112024095958.html>

⁸⁴ Christine Tan, I was told to scam Singaporeans: Bangladeshi man who was trafficked to scam compounds, The Straits Times, 11 April 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courtscime/i-was-told-to-scam-singaporeans-bangladeshi-man-whowas-trafficked-to-scam-compounds>

⁸⁵ Phon Sothyroth and Leila Goldstein, Cambodian police contradict Indonesian officials, claim repatriated Indonesians are not victims, CamboJA News, 10 August 2023, <https://cambojanews.com/cambodian-police-contradict-indonesian-officials-claim-repatriated-indonesians-are-not-victims/>

⁸⁶ Emily Fishbein, ‘A global monster’: Myanmar-based cyber scams widen the net, Frontier Myanmar, 24 August 2024, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/a-global-monster-myanmar-based-cyber-scams-widen-the-net/>

(Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime – **Compound Crime Cyber scam operations in Southeast Asia**, May 2025, pg.10, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁵⁰ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁵¹ noted the following profiles of online scam offenders in their 2024 journal article:

“[...] (1) how the victims lured into scam compounds in Cambodia to become scammers work under the Chinese and their accomplices (Cambodians and/or Vietnamese), and (2) how these victims/scammers enter and work under certain conditions at their workplaces. Also, the next section provides brief information regarding the victim’s location in Vietnam, gender, and ethnicity. Our current documents/records reflect the blurred coexistence between former victims and current offenders. They are likely to come from one Vietnamese offender (victim and offender) or through a third person (middleman). For the former, it is clear evidence of an overlapped person who is a Vietnamese victim of a scam operation and returns to the offending role to join the network in Cambodia. They likely still remain in Cambodia to operate in scam compounds or have returned

⁵⁰ School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia

⁵¹ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

to Vietnam to recruit other potential victims, including their relatives and/or friends. For the latter, the third person includes either a broker/word-of-mouth person or a friend of a friend without identification. They are often at large when investigating and prosecuting and are too difficult for authorities to capture. Regarding their occupation, it is easier to identify their exact place of employment with official records from companies/organizations before joining the scam operation. Our records reflect that either the offender worked in Cambodia in different roles (e.g., translators, master chefs, and/or accountants) or did not work/come to Cambodia (known as unstable jobs) while committing a crime. Those individuals who have experience living and working with Chinese associates in Cambodia’s gambling compounds often understand what their demands are directed at new Vietnamese victims and how much commission they can earn from selling these victims. However, in some cases, with personal expectations of gaining benefits, they have actively sought jobs on the Internet and voluntarily joined these illegal gambling groups in Cambodia. Another unique issue for law enforcement agencies is the ability to distinguish between the victim-and-offender overlap and others.[...]

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective](#), 21 November 2024, pp.5-6)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East, and Europe – such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms.

[...]Traffickers continue to take advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad, often in online scam operations. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to commercial sex establishments on the borders of the [People’s Republic of China] PRC, Cambodia, and Laos, or elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe. Traffickers exploit an increasing number of Vietnamese women and girls in sex trafficking in Burma. Traffickers exploit some Vietnamese women who travel abroad for internationally brokered marriages or jobs in restaurants, massage parlors, and karaoke bars – including to Burma, Japan, ROK, Malaysia, the PRC, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Taiwan – in forced labor in domestic service or sex trafficking. Reports indicate traffickers continue to exploit women and girls domestically in Vietnam to sex trafficking in massage parlors, karaoke bars, and hotels. ...Traffickers in border villages reportedly lure Vietnamese women and girls, particularly from the Hmong ethnic minority group to the PRC for forced marriages that often feature corollary sex trafficking and/or forced labor indicators. There are past reports of Vietnamese women and girls in forced childbearing, including cases in which traffickers lure them to the PRC with false job offers, abduct them at the border, and transfer them to unregulated hospital facilities, where they are subjected to forcible artificial insemination and confined until they give birth. ... Organized crime syndicates operating within Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Southeast Asia – particularly in the Golden Triangle SEZ at the intersection of the Burmese, Thai, and Lao borders – exploit Vietnamese nationals through deceptive recruitment and in sex trafficking. Traffickers increasingly use the Internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. Men often entice young women and girls with online dating relationships, persuade them to move abroad, then exploit them in forced labor or sex trafficking. During migration, European gangs and traffickers often exploit Vietnamese victims in forced labor and sex trafficking before they reach their final destination. The operators of Vietnamese national-owned agricultural plantations exploit local internal migrants in forced labor in neighboring Laos.

[...]Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including unhoused children – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases.

[...]Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in street hawking and begging in major urban centers, and in forced or bonded labor in brick factories, and urban family homes. Adults are also at risk of forced labor in the garment industry. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands,

including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse, reportedly from elsewhere in Asia, the UK, other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, exploit children in Vietnam.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

Authors of a 2023 academic article, published in the Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology titled ‘*Assessing the Hotline Services on Child Trafficking Victims: An Analysis of Vietnam*’, Oanh Van Nguyen⁵² and Hai Thanh Luong⁵³ noted that:

“[...]Vietnam is predominantly a source country for trafficked children for illegal adoption, forced labor, and sex regional and international tourism activities. Although the Vietnamese victims are destined for countries within the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), Western Europe, Africa, and the Middle East (Belanger 2014; Raschke 2014), China and Cambodia remain the most prevalent destinations (Luong 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nguyen and Nguyen 2018). The Vietnam-to-China route is the main route, with about 90% of trafficked victims, including children. It is believed that traffickers use unofficial paths and border gates in the northern provinces of Vietnam to transport girls to commonplace destinations in China while trafficking Vietnamese boys from minority ethnic groups for forced labor in mines and brick factories in China (Blue Dragon 2020a). Vietnamese children (particularly boys) are also trafficked to China for adoption due to the high demand for Chinese couples who have a girl and cannot have a second child in China’s “one child” policy (Tran et al. 2020). In contrast, most Vietnamese women and girls are trafficked for prostitution in Cambodia’s cities (Nguyen 2019). Most have severe economic conditions and lack social knowledge, life skills, and psychological lightness (Le 2017; Pham 2016). Among 4279 trafficking cases and 9304 victims identified from prosecution’s process at all court levels in 2007–2016, Le et al. (2018, p. 254) confirmed that “most Vietnamese victims are young, impoverished, uneducated and unemployed.” While traffickers, in many cases, are known to be either victims in the past or their relatives, friends, and even the same local community, around 67–70% are female with a low education qualification (Le et al. 2018, p. 254).[...]”

(Source: Springer Nature | Oanh Van Nguyen and Hai Thanh Luong – [Assessing the Hotline Services on Child Trafficking Victims: An Analysis of Vietnam](#), 4 July 2023, pp.874-875, last accessed 5 August 2025)

In a report published in 2022, titled ‘Human Trafficking & Traffickers in Vietnam’, the Children’s Foundation, Blue Dragon noted that:

“The majority of prosecuted cases crossed the border in Quang Ninh – which is the busiest border station to China, with high numbers crossing in Lao Cai and Lang Son, which are also busy borders. [...]

The youngest person who got involved in trafficking her classmate to China was 13 years old. [...] 20.34% of the recruiters were people who worked in China or were married to Chinese men and knew someone who persuaded them to take Vietnamese women and girls to China for sale. The majority of the remaining traffickers had acquaintances, friends or relatives working or living in China. This shows the importance of the social networks in China for facilitating this cross-border trafficking.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking & Traffickers in Vietnam](#), February 2022, last accessed: 02 July 2025)

7. Is there awareness and/or evidence of trafficking linked to scam operations in Vietnam, including cross-border cases? If so, are there reports on the types of scams (e.g., forced online fraud, cyber scams, pyramid schemes for investors) linked to trafficking?

Amnesty International conducted in-person and remote interviews with 58 survivors from scamming compounds in Cambodia, including this Vietnamese case:

“[...]In another example, Diep, a Vietnamese woman confined at OS01, said she saw a Telegram group chat on her boss’s

⁵² Faculty of Criminal Police, The People’s Police Academy, Vietnam, Hanoi

⁵³ School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, QLD

phone that appeared to be used for her bosses to coordinate with the Cambodian police. Diep said she saw images of people from the compound and names being shared in the group chat. Diep told Amnesty International that the police in O'Smach, the town where OS01 is located, "work for the compound and will report requests for help back to the compound bosses". When she made her own request to be rescued, she submitted her name and location to the police and was approached by her bosses soon afterwards. They asked her if she wanted to stay at the compound or go to jail. She interpreted this to mean that Cambodian police had informed her bosses of her request to be rescued.⁴³²[...]"

⁴³² Amnesty International interview with Diep, 2024

(Source: Amnesty International – [‘I was someone else’s property’: slavery, human trafficking and torture in Cambodia’s scamming compounds](#), 3 June 2025, pg.93, last accessed: 11 July 2025)

The same report documented:

"Van, a Vietnamese boy, was trafficked to a compound in Bavet in 2023 after entering Cambodia through a jungle path in the middle of the night. Van, who was 15 years old at the time, described how he and his friend were told they had been sold to the compound after they had entered it believing they would be given jobs. Van discovered that his friend had trafficked him into the site, possibly knowing they would be confined there. Van spent a year inside the compound and was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment by bosses in a room that was known to people in the compound to be set up for this purpose.²⁵⁵"

²⁵⁵ Amnesty International interview with Van, 2024

(Source: Amnesty International – [‘I was someone else’s property’: slavery, human trafficking and torture in Cambodia’s scamming compounds](#), June 2025, pg.69, last accessed: 11 July 2025)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report:

"3.142 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that growing numbers of victims were trafficked into forced labour in online scam centres('scam factories') in Myanmar and, in particular, Cambodia’s Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone. Victims are typically lured through online advertisements and, once in-country, have their passports confiscated and are forced to perpetrate various forms of online fraud. According to in-country sources, victims were forced to work long hours against their will, recruit others, and subjected to confinement, violent assault and sexual exploitation; they could only leave by paying a ransom or if they were sold on. Escape can be high-risk (compounds are heavily guarded), and some victims have experienced serious injury by jumping from windows of multi-storey buildings in their attempts to escape. Vietnam has sought to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries as part of its counter-human trafficking efforts; in December 2023, it formally committed to jointly fight human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime with Cambodia and Laos. According to the US Department of State, between mid-2022 and June 2024, Vietnam rescued and repatriated 4,100 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam centres in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and the Philippines." (pp.48-49)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.48-49, last accessed 25 June 2025)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁵⁴ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁵⁵ noted the following profiles of online scam offenders in their 2024 journal article:

"[...] 6. Nexus Between Cybercrime and Human Trafficking

By examining the recent findings regarding the nexus of pig-butchering and trafficking of persons in the Southeast Asian region (OHCHR 2023; UNODC 2024a, 2024b; USIP 2024), our study also investigates and gauges this new concern in Vietnam. The scheme often begins with a casual conversation initiated by a stranger, who may falsely claim to have obtained the

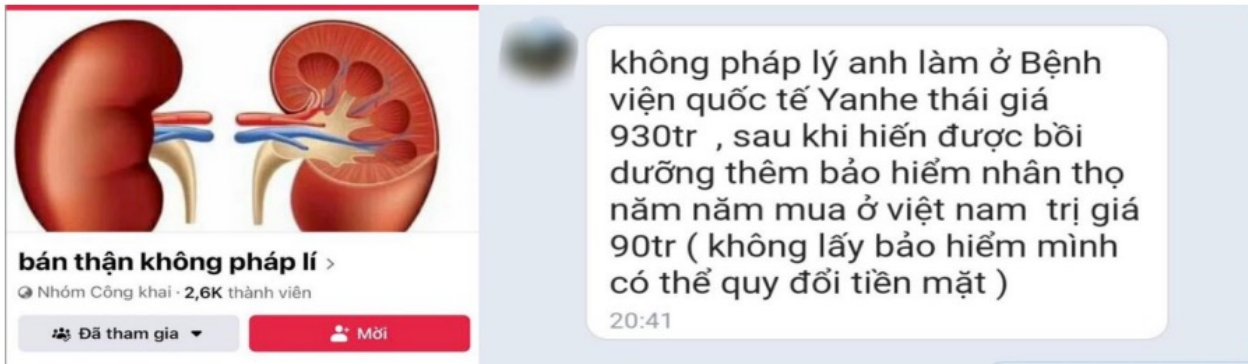
⁵⁴ School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia

⁵⁵ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

victim’s contact information from a mutual acquaintance. Ultimately, this results in two groups of victims: the laborers subjected to forced work, debt servitude, and severe physical abuse, and the victims of the online financial scams, which the trafficked individuals are coercing. Both of these victims’ scenarios involve working with either traffickers or scammers in their vicious cycle. On the one hand, they will be targeted by traffickers who play an important role in looking for them in various locations across the different countries in the region. On the other hand, scammers manipulate them with enticing promises of high returns, supported by fake images and deceptive portfolios, before trafficking to another country, often Cambodia territories and, to a lesser extent, Laos. Our current data identify three specific factors explaining why the link between human trafficking and scam-induced criminal activity occurs in Vietnam. Primarily, we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated issues have exerted a significant influence on this trend. Among the various negative impacts of the pandemic, high unemployment and limited job opportunities are the primary factors affecting the economic conditions faced by local people in Vietnam. Consequently, individuals are compelled to seek out opportunities to secure employment and maintain their standard of living while the state grapples with the challenge of rebuilding society. In other words, most laborers often need more financial stability to apply for official migration through registered recruitment agencies, which is time-consuming and expensive. Secondly, amid the pandemic and restricted movements, individuals increasingly turn to social media for job vacancies instead of relying on official reports from state authorities. This is considered one of the main issues leading to the proliferation of ‘simple job, high salary’ advertisements everywhere in cyberspace and on social media platforms. Furthermore, Vietnam lacks educational campaigns and professional skills to better understand the risks of exploitation associated with labor migration, which largely stems from insufficient information dissemination by migration agencies and local authorities during recruitment. Under these disadvantageous circumstances, both scammers and traffickers often exploit them to identify and target potential victims.

Recently, the tricks and promises of finding ‘simple job, high salary’ jobs that have been widely propagated by law enforcement agencies and local authorities are no longer effective. Scammers and traffickers are now using the trick of buying kidneys at high prices to trick people who want to sell their kidneys illegally across the border and become victims of human trafficking crimes. Through social networking sites such as Facebook, Zalo, and Telegram, they promise to buy kidneys for hundreds of millions of VND. They lure victims in by promising a simple procedure, and financial bonuses with optional benefits combined with lifetime services (see Figure 6)⁵⁶. With this trick, they have deceived many people who are in difficult economic situations and trust them to accept the offer. Then, they guide the victims to the Mien Dong Bus Station in Ho Chi Minh City, before sending a car to pick them up and take them to the Moc Bai International Border Gate, Tay Ninh. In almost all cases, those traffickers often take the victims illegally across the border to Cambodia and sell them to online gambling compounds. Our current records show that first-hand connectors can confirm that they were primarily employed by casinos, virtual enterprises, and online gaming compounds for 12–16 h a day, without proper living conditions and with failed work expectations. The individuals were trafficked under false pretenses and found themselves in challenging unescapable situations, where they were controlled under 24/7 security surveillance and bodyguard escorts. Attempting to leave would result in physical abuse, electric shock, or being sold to another employer. Furthermore, those seeking to return to their hometowns were forced to pay a ransom. [...]”

56 Figure 6. A translated text from Vietnamese to English. Left: Facebook’s public group (2.6k members joined) – Sell Kidney without Legal Barriers. Right: @NOLAW: I work at the YANHE International Hospital. The price is VND 930 million (around USD 40,000). After transplanting your kidney, we will offer money (Source: <https://congan.kontum.gov.vn/an-ninh-trat-tu/canh-giac-voi-toi-phammua-ban-nguoi-qua-thu-doan-mua-than-gia-cao-.html> (assessed on 10 August 2024) [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]).



(pg.12)

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective. Laws 2024, 13, 70](#), 21 November 2024, pp.11-12)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified. NGO reports indicate the government identified at least five victims from online scam operations; however, this represents a fraction of the total number of potential victims the government did not take steps to identify. [...] Authorities repatriated more than 4,100 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines since mid-2022; in December 2023, the government chartered a series of flights from Burma to Vietnam to repatriate nearly 1,400 Vietnamese citizens and several third country nationals. Widespread reports indicated the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking; however, officials did not report how many, if any, of these potential victims were formally identified, while NGO reports indicated five of the 4,100 potential victims were formally identified.”

Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

In a 2024 report titled ‘Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam’, the Children’s Foundation, Blue Dragon report noted:

“Preliminary data from 2023 confirms that the trends that emerged during the pandemic, such as the increased exploitation among homeless youth and the upsurge in human trafficking in Cambodia and Myanmar, notably into large-scale scam compounds, remain significant threats today. The number of victims continues to be very high, with Blue Dragon involved in the rescue and repatriation of 202 human trafficking victims and the assistance of 137 new children and youth on the streets of Hanoi between January and September 30, 2023. The new routes and forms of exploitation continued to be significant during 2023. In particular, human trafficking for forced scamming continued to grow and expand, as did the levels of brutality and the variety in the multiple forms of exploitation and abuse inflicted upon trafficking victims held in these compounds.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.32, last accessed: 02 July 2025)

This same report included a specific case of a young person who was forced into online scamming:

“For several months, Chien was one of these domestic human trafficking victims. The 18-year old found an appealing job offer on social media. A company in Vinh Phuc province, just a few kilometres outside of Hanoi, was seeking a security guard and offered a competitive salary. Chien contacted the enterprise and was offered the job right away. The teenager hopped on a bus and travelled all the way from his home in south central Vietnam to Vinh Phuc. When he arrived, the company placed Chien in a rented room and — alleging to need it for paperwork purposes — asked him to hand over his identification document to them. However, the job he had been offered did not exist. In fact, Chien would soon realise he had fallen victim to forced scamming. Instead of guarding the premises of a company, Chien was to use social media to coax others into buying poor-

quality products. He was given a target that he had to meet, and his employers expected him to contact friends and relatives to get them to purchase these products and, eventually, to get them to sell the items themselves. Chien had been caught in the web of lies of a multi-level marketing scam.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.22, last accessed: 30 June 2025)

In this August 2023 briefing series titled ‘*Organised Crime in the Mekong, Briefing Series*’, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, provided the following:

“[...]Human vulnerabilities and social media

The use of private Facebook groups is also a distinguishing factor in types of human trafficking. For example, there has been a recent proliferation of Vietnamese Facebook groups, many of which are public and disguised variously as recruitment agencies,⁸⁵ marriage-brokering services,⁸⁶ adoption services,⁸⁷ or even as organizations soliciting organ donation for humanitarian purposes.⁸⁸ Others are designed for the purposes of labour exploitation (this often involves workers being sent abroad through seemingly legitimate ‘labour exportation’ schemes), bride and child trafficking, or organ trafficking.(pg.39)

Digital technology and social media have enabled new pathways and avenues for human traffickers to operate.⁸⁹ They are no longer required be in the same physical space as their victims but can use webcams, voice-chat systems and messaging apps to coerce, extort and exploit victims into making online sexual material that is livestreamed or recorded for distribution. Traffickers can market their victims on various online platforms, both on the surface web and the dark web, while buyers use technologies to access, watch, record, disseminate and store information and materials on their victims. Social media and digital technologies have also lowered the entry barriers and costs for perpetrators by making it relatively cheap and straightforward to commit such a crime – one only needs to have a cell phone and internet access. (pp.39-40)



FIGURE 1 Stages and elements of online commercial sexual exploitation of children.

⁸⁵ See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vietnamxuatkhaulaodong>
⁸⁶ See, for example, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1358987694440869> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1471395326577163>
⁸⁷ See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188736706018963>
⁸⁸ See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/501429297752351>
⁸⁹ Lucia Bird et al., Transformative technologies: How digital is changing the landscape of organized crime, GI-TOC, June 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/cyber-tech-organized-crime>

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, another phenomenon which involves human trafficking into so-called cyber-slavery scam operations has been observed across the Mekong. Indeed, thousands of people under the age of 18, especially boys,⁹³ are reported to have been ‘lured’ by the promise of fraudulent job opportunities advertised on various social media and messaging platforms, a situation aggravated by the economic hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic. As widely reported in international media, there are thousands of cases of Vietnamese, Thai, Lao and Chinese boys and men trapped in Chinese-run casinos in Cambodia, held hostage with significant debt bondage while being forced to conduct scam operations in their native languages.[...]” (pg.41)

⁹³ Pacific Links Foundation, a GI-TOC contact, shared that the majority of victims whom they supported and were referred to, were mostly young boys from various regions of Vietnam, including ethnic groups and indigenous communities.[...]”

(Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) – [Organised Crime in the Mekong](#), Briefing Series, pp.39-40-41, August 2023, last accessed 11 August 2025)

8. Which industries are involved, and how do they operate? What are the profiles of traffickers (e.g., industries, gender) and victims in these cases (e.g., education levels, digital skills, socioeconomic backgrounds)?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“Traffickers exploit tens of thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Traffickers are reportedly increasingly using Ho Chi Minh City as a transit point for trafficking. Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations. There are at least 10,000 Vietnamese nationals ostensibly working in casinos and gaming businesses in Burma – industries that frequently disguised online scam operations – though the true number of Vietnamese nationals exploited in these operations is almost certainly much higher. Traffickers increasingly use the internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. Male traffickers sometimes entice young women and girls with online dating relationships, persuade them to move abroad, then exploit them in forced labor or sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to commercial sex establishments on the borders with China, Cambodia, and Laos, or elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe. Traffickers exploit an increasing number of Vietnamese women and girls in sex trafficking in Burma. Traffickers exploit some Vietnamese women who travel abroad for internationally brokered marriages or jobs in restaurants, massage parlors, and karaoke bars – including to Burma, Japan, ROK, Malaysia, China, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Taiwan – in forced labor in domestic service or sex trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam also noted that:

“Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Authorities reported knowledge of at least 10,000 Vietnamese nationals ostensibly working in casinos and gaming businesses in Burma – industries which frequently disguised online scam operations – though the true number of Vietnamese nationals exploited in these operations is likely much higher. Traffickers continue to take advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad, often in online scam operations.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“Traffickers exploit victims in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, the ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East, Europe, and the UK, including in nail salons and on cannabis farms. There are increasing reports of Vietnamese labor trafficking victims in Taiwan, continental Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and in Pacific maritime industries, including on Indonesian and Taiwanese fishing vessels operating under complex ownership and registration arrangements that enable traffickers to evade detection and intervention by law enforcement. The lack of requirement for labor contracts and the use of oral agreements in the fishing industry increases fishermen’s vulnerability to trafficking. Labor brokers in the fishing industry help facilitate labor trafficking by forcing fishermen to involuntarily work on fishing vessels.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

This 2023 research by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, noted that:

“[...]Other key trends raised included Vietnamese and Chinese women being recruited into the sex industry.⁴⁶ Interviews suggested that some women were willingly migrating to work in the industry while others ended up in situations of forced labour. Importantly, it is not only the sex industry that is associated with forced labour – there have been reports of forced labour and severe exploitation of migrant workers in the glove manufacturing industry as well.⁴⁷[...]”

⁴⁶ Interview with an academic on irregular migration in Malaysia, October 2021
⁴⁷ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, Malaysia: Medical & rubber glove manufacturers accused of subjecting migrant workers to forced labour & withholding wages, 2020, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/malaysia-medical-rubber-glove-manufacturersaccused-of-subjecting-migrant-workers-to-forced-labourwithholding-wages>

(Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime – [Maritime people smuggling and its intersection with human trafficking in South and South East Asia](#), Trends and issues, 9 March 2023, pg.11 Last accessed 11 August 2025)

9. Is there evidence of online and technology facilitated human trafficking within, to or from Vietnam? If so, in what types of exploitation (e.g. sexual exploitation, forced labour etc)? What is the modus operandi of traffickers? What means are they using to control people? (e.g. blackmail, sextortion, ransom and/or debt bondage etc)

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“[...] I read a recent article on VTV Online⁵⁷, a national website, indicating traffickers give victims false promises. At the beginning of 2023, a group of offenders used Facebook accounts to join groups such as “Karaoke Staff Recruitment” to search for young women across various provinces who were looking for jobs. According to the 2023 Migration Profile, published by Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in coordination with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), trafficking for the purpose of forced labour became increasingly prominent and alarming in 2023. Technology has become a powerful tool for traffickers. Human trafficking is increasingly highly organised, operating through closed and sophisticated networks, making detection and dismantling more difficult.”
(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

The 2025 Blue Dragon report highlights the traffickers’ widespread and increasing use of social media to lure new victims:

“How were the victims deceived?
We can consider the recruiters of victims of forced scamming as either “Known people” or “Unknown people”. By “Known

⁵⁷ VTN Times, [Nỗi ám ảnh của nạn nhân mua bán người](#) (Google auto translation: The trauma of human trafficking victims, 17 January 2025)

people”, we mean acquaintances, friends, family members and neighbours. By “Unknown people”, we mean friend of a friend, strangers and victims recruited via the internet through online job advertisements.

Similar to other forms of human trafficking, most victims of forced criminality knew their traffickers, with 84 (64.6%) victims being deceived by people known to them. Meanwhile, 44 (33.8%) victims were deceived by “Unknown people”. For two victims, this information is missing.

Among Kinh victims, 51 (60%) were deceived by “Known people” while among the ethnic minority victims, this figure was 28 (77.8%) people. This suggests that traffickers exploit preexisting trust or relationships within close social circles across all ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Further, from the group of victims who were deceived by “Known people”, 73.8% were deceived by people from either the same commune, village, district or province, indicating that traffickers tend to look for victims from within their own social and economic circles and rely on familiarity when identifying victims.

When considered along with the demographic data, it can be inferred that traffickers of forced criminality come from similar backgrounds as their victims and are primarily exploiting social and friendship networks. (pg.43)

Previous Blue Dragon reports have noted that the most common reason Vietnamese victims leave home and become vulnerable to trafficking is the promise of a job.⁴³ This hypothesis is especially true in the case of forced criminality: 128 (98.5%) victims were recruited through fake job offers, while two were recruited for illegal organ donation in Cambodia in return for money. (pg.45)

Of the victims trafficked to Cambodia, 71 (85.5%) victims were told that the prospective jobs were in Cambodia, while 10 (12%) were told that the prospective jobs were in Vietnam. A similar pattern was seen in the case of Laos, where 36 (90%) victims were offered jobs in Laos and 4 (10%) were offered jobs within Vietnam. In contrast, for victims trafficked to Myanmar, all seven were told that the prospective offers were in Thailand, possibly because applicants may be more suspicious of job offers in Myanmar due to the ongoing conflict. (pg.46)

[...]Online recruitment

At the start of 2025, 79.8 million people were using the internet in Vietnam, and the country had 76.2 million social media accounts, equivalent to 75.2% of the total population.⁵⁸ With the ubiquity of the internet and social media in Vietnam, platforms like Facebook, Telegram⁵⁹ and Zalo are being used by human traffickers to identify, groom, recruit and exploit victims. While digital platforms offer opportunities for employment and connection, they have also become a primary tool for traffickers to exploit individuals through deceptive recruitment tactics. It has been found that technology is now at the heart of the business model of human trafficking. Evidence from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) illustrates the widespread misuse of technology at every stage of trafficking, from grooming and recruitment, to movement, coercion, control and advertisement of victims, and ultimately to the exploitation of those victims for profit.⁶⁰

The ubiquity of social media in Vietnam and the use of digital technology by traffickers has led to both new and previously vulnerable groups falling victim to trafficking in large numbers. Digital channels allow anonymity and a vast reach across geographic and social boundaries. Through digital channels, traffickers can pose as potential employers, romantic partners or friends to lure victims into exploitative situations. These platforms enable traffickers to operate across borders, targeting victims remotely and coordinating recruitment efforts in real time. (pg.72)

Even when recruitment occurs through relatives or friends, social media plays a key role in influencing victims. Traffickers share images of a successful life abroad on social media, presenting themselves as role models that others in their communities aspire to emulate. In one case, a victim was invited by a relative and, after the family saw appealing posts of travel and comfort online they consented, ultimately leading to the trafficking of over a dozen individuals from the same community.

Online recruitment blurs the distinction between personal relationships and professional opportunities making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between legitimate employment prospects and predatory schemes. Young workers in particular can

be susceptible to deceptive online recruitment tactics due to their inexperience in the job market and reliance on digital platforms for employment opportunities. This vulnerability is exacerbated within ethnic communities, where informal labour referred by friends and neighbours is not only a common source of income but also a widely accepted means of employment. With job opportunities circulated through personal networks rather than formal channels, messaging apps serve as key communication tools, making individuals more susceptible to traffickers who exploit these practices to disguise exploitative job offers as legitimate opportunities.

Unlike formal job recruitment channels, social media platforms and mobile messaging services such as Facebook, Telegram and Zalo lack effective oversight and verification mechanisms, making it easy for traffickers to create fraudulent job listings and impersonate legitimate employers. These platforms do not require identity verification for recruiters and utilise encrypted messaging, allowing traffickers to continuously target vulnerable individuals with minimal risk of detection.”(pg.73)

43 Le, Wyndham and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’. Le and Wyndham, ‘Beyond Need and Greed’.
58 Kemp, ‘Digital 2025: Vietnam’, Datareportal, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-vietnam>
59 Note that in May 2025 the Vietnamese government blocked Telegram due to its association with a wide range of criminal activities. See Vu Lam, ‘Why Is Vietnam Blocking Access to Telegram?’, The Diplomat, 2 June 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/why-is-vietnam-blocking-access-to-telegram/>
60 OSCE, ‘Policy Action to Address Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings: Report of the Regional Consultations Led in 2023’ (Vienna: OSCE, 2024), <https://www.osce.org/cthb/579190>

(Source: Blue Dragon – **Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality**, September 2025, pp.43-45-46-72-73, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“Authorities reportedly repatriated more than 5,000 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines since 2022. Widespread reports indicated the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking; however, officials acknowledged most of these potential trafficking victims were not screened or identified as victims prior to or following their repatriation, or provided with specialized or long-term services. Authorities provided emergency medical care for many potential victims and coordinated with each individual’s home provinces when conducting repatriations. Border officials reportedly screened some returnees from online scam operations in neighboring Cambodia and Laos. [...]

Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor and forced criminality in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified. [...]

Traffickers exploit tens of thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Traffickers are reportedly increasingly using Ho Chi Minh City as a transit point for trafficking. Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations. There are at least 10,000 Vietnamese nationals ostensibly working in casinos and gaming businesses in Burma – industries that frequently disguised online scam operations – though the true number of Vietnamese nationals exploited in these operations is almost certainly much higher. Traffickers increasingly use the internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. “

(Source: US Department of State (USDOS) – **2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam**, 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

An academic report looking at “pig-butcherer scams” in Cambodia included interviews with 12 Vietnamese police officers and identified the targeting of trafficking victims with specific skillsets:

“Many victims in Southeast Asia have been trapped in pig-butcher schemes in Cambodia during and after the pandemic. As new forms of scam-forced criminality via trafficking in persons operated by Chinese-related syndicates, traffickers use social platforms to pose as job recruiters and post fraudulent employment opportunities in cyberspace. Unlike other traffickers, however, scam operations target educated victims with exploitable skills and promise attractive salaries for positions in customer service, IT, computer programming, and related industries. Combining content analysis of 10 selected cases (2018–2023) and interviews with 12 police officers in Vietnam, this first mixed-methods qualitative study unveils the nature of scam-forced Vietnamese labour (SFVL) operated by Chinese cyber-enabled crimes (CCEC). Findings demonstrate the existence of structured networks with multiple layers within a single scam syndicate, with the Chinese leading their accomplices, who are either Vietnamese or from other nationalities. There are complex scenarios in the nexus of cyber-trafficking victims and many scam-forced criminality, known as overlap victim-and-offender scams. From Vietnam’s example, this study also calls for further research to focus on the nexus of (1) offenders and victims, (2) human trafficking and scam-forced criminality, and (3) technology and crime.”

(Source: Hai Thanh Luong – [‘Simple job, high salary’: unveiling the complexity of scam-forced criminality in Southeast Asia](#), 12 August 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

In an October 2025 news article, local news reports covered work by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Vietnam to raise awareness of the rise in online-facilitated trafficking, including the use of social media, AI and deepfakes in recruitment:

“HÀ NỘI — As digital technology continues to transform the way people work, communicate and travel, cybercrime has become increasingly sophisticated. In Southeast Asia, a region known for its dynamic economies and tech-savvy youth, the rapid rise of online scams, digital fraud and technology-facilitated human trafficking has emerged as a pressing concern.

To address these challenges, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the Embassy of Canada in Việt Nam, has launched ThinkB4UClick, a youth-focused training initiative designed to equip young people with practical knowledge and digital skills to prevent human trafficking, strengthen critical thinking and promote online safety.

Việt Nam News spoke with Kendra Rinas, Chief of Mission at IOM Việt Nam, about these evolving threats and the collective efforts needed to build a safer and more responsible digital environment.

In today’s fast-evolving digital landscape, what are the main online risks facing young people and how serious is the problem of cyber-enabled scams and human trafficking in Southeast Asia and Việt Nam?

Young people today are what we call digital natives – creative, curious and full of potential. Yet this digital power also comes with certain risks. Across Southeast Asia, online scams, fake job offers and digital exploitation have emerged as new forms of human trafficking.

Here in Việt Nam, we’ve seen a sharp increase in AI-generated scams and deepfake impersonations, with criminals pretending to be government officers, recruiters or even family members. These scams are not only financial; they isolate victims and sometimes lead to trafficking and forced labour. This highlights something crucial: human trafficking is no longer only physical. It is digital, complex and increasingly difficult to detect.

In Việt Nam recently, many people, particularly young and even well-educated individuals, seek opportunities abroad to earn income and support their families. At the same time, this group is highly active online and relies heavily on social media to access information and job opportunities. According to IOM’s recent regional study, the number of trafficking victims forced into criminal activities and supported by IOM has tripled – from 296 in 2022 to over 1,000 in 2025. Alarmingly, half of these victims are high school graduates and the other half are university graduates.

Traffickers and scammers use online platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, Instagram and TikTok to post fake job offers, often promising high salaries or overseas placements. Once individuals agree and travel abroad, they discover that the jobs are not real. Many end up being exploited or forced to participate in online scams targeting others.”

(Source: Viet Nam News – [Building digital resilience among young Vietnamese against online scams and trafficking](#), 28 October 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 DFAT report noted that victims are trafficked through online scams and exploited to perpetrate online fraud:

“3.142 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that growing numbers of victims were trafficked into forced labour in online scam centres(‘scam factories’) in Myanmar and, in particular, Cambodia’s Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone. Victims are typically lured through online advertisements and, once in-country, have their passports confiscated and are forced to perpetrate various forms of online fraud.” (pp.48-49)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pp.48-49, last accessed 13 April 2025)

In this 2025 report, Amnesty International documented this timeline:

“[...] Location Bavet, Svay Rieng province; 11.0715, 106.1636(pg.120)...

Timeline[...]

17 January 2025 Vietnamese news outlet NGHE AN 24H reports that debt collectors at a casino detained a man likely at a building in BA11 in November/December 2024 until he could repay his debts. The organized criminal group members allegedly called the man’s wife demanding a ransom and threatening to kill the man. The man tried to escape, upon which the compound guards recaptured him. He was reportedly transferred out of the compound but was killed by his captors in the process.⁵¹⁵ The news report refers to a casino likely located at the front of BA11 as the site where this took place.⁵¹⁶ Amnesty International interviewed two children from BA11 who were threatened while their families’ were told to pay ransoms to secure their release.⁵¹⁷(pg.121)

515 NGHE AN 24H, “Băng nhóm người Việt tại Campuchia cho vay tiền, sát hại dã man con bạc” [“Vietnamese gang in Cambodia lends money, brutally murders gamblers”], 17 January 2025, <https://nghean24h.vn/bang-nhom-nguoi-viet-tai-campuchiacho-vay-tien-sat-hai-da-man-con-bac-a742706.html> (in Vietnamese) and Hai Duong Online Newspaper, “Hàng nghìn cảnh sát truy bắt nhóm tra tấn, phi tang xác con bạc” [“Thousands of police hunt for group that tortured and disposed of gambler’s body”], 2 February 2025, <https://baohaiduong.vn/hang-nghin-canhsat-truy-bat-nhom-tra-tan-phi-tang-xac-con-bac-404304>. [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

516 NGHE AN 24H, “Băng nhóm người Việt tại Campuchia cho vay tiền, sát hại dã man con bạc” [“Vietnamese gang in Cambodia lends money, brutally murders gamblers”], 17 January 2025, <https://nghean24h.vn/bang-nhom-nguoi-viet-tai-campuchiacho-vay-tien-sat-hai-da-man-con-bac-a742706.html> (in Vietnamese) and Hai Duong Online Newspaper, “Hàng nghìn cảnh sát truy bắt nhóm tra tấn, phi tang xác con bạc” [“Thousands of police hunt for group that tortured and disposed of gambler’s body”], 2 February 2025, <https://baohaiduong.vn/hang-nghin-canhsat-truy-bat-nhom-tra-tan-phi-tang-xac-con-bac-404304>. [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

517 Amnesty International interview with survivor, 2024.

(Source: Amnesty International – [‘I was someone else’s property’: slavery, human trafficking and torture in Cambodia’s scamming compounds](#), June 2025, pp.120-121, last accessed: 11 July 2025)

The 2025 Country Information Report published by the DFAT documents that once Vietnamese victims are trafficked into forced labour in online scam centers, they are controlled by traffickers in various ways:

“According to in-country sources, victims were forced to work long hours against their will, recruit others, and subjected to confinement, violent assault and sexual exploitation; they could only leave by paying a ransom or if they were sold on. Escape can be high-risk (compounds are heavily guarded), and some victims have experienced serious injury by jumping from windows of multi-storey buildings in their attempts to escape.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pg.49, last accessed 13 April 2025)

In this 2024 report published by the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) noted:

“[...]Trafficking Tactics

Trafficking tactics in Laos and Dubai rely on various platforms and methods to recruit victims into scamming compounds. These methods include:

Recruitment through acquaintances: Victims are often recruited by individuals they know, including close friends and relatives. This aligns with recruitment trends observed in neighbouring countries like Myanmar and Cambodia. Additionally, victims within the compounds may themselves become recruiters, further perpetuating the cycle of exploitation (“Laos, a centre for scam networks”, 2023). (pg.5)

Collaboration with local trafficking groups: Traffickers often collaborate with local trafficking groups or brokers from the victims’ source countries. These groups are responsible for enticing locals and facilitating their journey to the destination country, employing similar tactics as seen in Myanmar and Cambodia (“Laos, a centre for scam networks”, 2023). (pp.5-6)

Utilisation of social media: Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, WeChat, and WhatsApp are utilised to advertise fake job opportunities with enticing promises of high salaries and employee benefits.” (pg.6)

(Source: Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) – [HRC Briefing: Uncovering the spread of Human Trafficking for Online Fraud into Laos and Dubai](#), July 2024, pp.5-6, last accessed 5 August 2025)

This 2024 report published by the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) noted:

“[...]Laos has emerged as a notable trafficking hotspot, particularly in connection with movements through Thailand. Notably, Thailand remains a significant transit country for victims trafficked into compounds within Laos, as evidenced by the trafficking routes outlined in the International Organization for Migration’s situational analysis as seen in figure 1 (IOM, 2024). A rising concern also centres around the increasing instances of human trafficking from Vietnam into Laos’ Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) (“More actions needed”, 2023) (pg.5)

[...]Anecdotal evidence as well as media reports also suggests Vietnam to be a growing key source country (“More actions needed”, 2023). (pg.9)

[...]As a trafficking destination and a scam hotspot, Dubai is flooded with scammers and victims from North Africa and Southeast Asia, a lot of whom arrived in Dubai as “migrant workers” (Browning, 2024). The home countries of trafficking victims include but are not limited to Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Nigeria (see figure 10). (pg.13)

(Source: Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) – [HRC Briefing: Uncovering the spread of Human Trafficking for Online Fraud into Laos and Dubai](#), July 2024, pp.5-9-13, last accessed 11 August 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report describes the ways in which traffickers use digital means to recruit victims:

“Organized crime syndicates operating within Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Southeast Asia – particularly in the Golden Triangle SEZ at the intersection of the Burmese, Thai, and Lao borders – exploit Vietnamese nationals through deceptive recruitment and in sex trafficking. Traffickers increasingly use the Internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. Men often entice young women and girls with online dating relationships, persuade them to move abroad, then exploit them in forced labor or sex trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

The same report notes the prevalence of labor and sex trafficking in/near online operations:

“Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Authorities reported knowledge of at least 10,000 Vietnamese nationals ostensibly working in casinos and gaming businesses in Burma – industries which frequently disguised online scam operations – though the true number of Vietnamese nationals exploited in these operations is likely much higher.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

In a January 2024 report, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime documents a 2022 Cambodian government cyber fraud enforcement that provides evidence on Vietnamese victims from online/technology-facilitated trafficking activities:

“Similarly to the experience of authorities in the Philippines, in September 2022, Cambodian law enforcement authorities executed a series of sweeping raids across multiple suspected illegal online gambling and cyberfraud compounds in Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh, confirming evidence relating to illegal gambling, money laundering, human trafficking and illegal confinement, torture, and prostitution. According to officials, victims included many skilled workers with information technology expertise, among others, who had been lured into the country through social media advertisements promising high-paying jobs at casinos and hotels who were ultimately deceived and trafficked into heavily guarded compounds for forced criminality – namely perpetrating cryptocurrency-based romance and investment scams. Thousands of victims rescued under the operation included nationals of Bangladesh, China, India, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Taiwan PoC, Thailand, Russia, and Viet Nam. Authorities also seized more than 8,000 mobile phones, 804 computers, and confiscated numerous passports and weapons.(pg.25)

[...] Fraud Park 1 is another venue characterized by confirmed incidents of unlicensed online casinos, cyberfraud, and forced labor located within Sihanoukville’s ‘Chinatown’ compound.⁷¹ It was developed by Dong Lecheng and his Yunnan Jincheng Group, and while the project was reportedly sold off to ‘sub-owners’ in 2018,⁷² units within the Fraud Park 1 buildings are well-documented as having been rented to companies running a range of online gambling and cyberfraud operations.^{73, 74} Among them, K99 Group, which had developed several properties in the compound, was reported in October 2022 by Vietnamese state-owned media to have lured 65 Vietnamese nationals into the compound and forced them carry out cyberfraud following initial promises of high paying, legitimate employment.^{75”}(pg.75)

71 Discussions with regional law enforcement authorities, 2023.
72 Khmer Times, August 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501137150/yunnan-jingcheng-group-co-ltdstrongly-deny-charges-of-human-trafficking-fraud-cyber-fraud/> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]
73 In October 2021, following a request from the Indonesian embassy, Cambodian police rescued 41 Indonesian nationals from Jinshui Park from forced labour conditions.
74 Beijing Communist Youth League, Beijing Youth Daily Newspaper, 2022. Accessed at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20230321033531/> and <https://freewechat.com/a/MjM5NzUyNjc0MA==/2650557728/1> [Note: The webpages referred to in this citation are no longer available]
75 VietnamPlus, Viet Nam News Agency. Ministry of Information and Communications. October 28, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.vietnamplus.vn/kien-giang-tiep-nhan-them-cong-dan-vietnam-tro-ve-tu-campuchia/825994.vnp>

(Source: United Nations on Drugs and Crime, [Casinos, Money Laundering, Underground Banking, and Transnational Organized Crime in East and Southeast Asia: A Hidden and Accelerating Threat](#), January 2024, pp.25-75)

Regarding the situation of trafficking victims in these scam operations across South-East Asian countries, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2023 expressed its concern over the overall lack of information provided by the Vietnamese government:

“The Committee is also concerned by the overall lack of information provided by the State party on victims of trafficking, including on those trafficked for forced labour or criminality in scam compounds across South-East Asia, on investigations, prosecutions, convictions, penalties for the perpetrators, as well as on measures to ensure that victims are protected and provided with reparations (art. 5).”

(Source: UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of Viet Nam](#), 27 December 2023, pg.8, last accessed 11 August 2025)

10. How do authorities in Vietnam identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking?

From the sources consulted, no information could be found on how the Vietnamese authorities identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking.

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, explained that:

“[...]D]istinguishing between smuggling and trafficking can be complex in practice. It may be difficult for authorities to accurately assess an individual’s circumstances, particularly where evidence is limited or where exploitation emerges over time. Formal recognition as a victim of trafficking typically requires investigation and assessment by the relevant law enforcement authorities. In some cases, individuals who have been smuggled may initially be treated as administrative or immigration offenders rather than victims of trafficking. This may affect their access to protection and support services.”

(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“Vietnam’s legal framework has historically merged smuggling and trafficking; while the 2015 Criminal Code and 2024 Anti-Trafficking Law enhanced definitions and protections, procedural practices still struggle to distinguish between the two. Identification under the new guidelines from Decree 162/2025/ND-CP, especially for overseas victims (article 9) and repatriated victims (article 10), should involve specialized training and clear procedures. Many cases begin as “irregular migration” before meeting trafficking indicators (debt bondage, coercion, forced criminality). The multi-ministry approval process and local capacity gaps hinder timely recognition and response. Interpreting these legal guidelines into practice remains challenging.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

Section 3. Risk factors and Vulnerability

Cross reference with:

- Section 2 (Routes and Actors)
- Section 3.2 (Debt and Economic Risk)
- Section 3.4 (Return-specific Risks)

3.1 Demographic and Structural Vulnerability

1. Are there specific demographic groups (e.g., by nationality, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic background) that are particularly vulnerable to smuggling or trafficking?

Local news reports from Ho Chi Minh City report that the city’s Department for Health has identified a rise in trafficking among men:

“[...]“Human trafficking is not only happening abroad but is taking place right here in HCM City and other major urban areas. Previously, victims were mainly women and children, but today the proportion of male victims is increasing,” he said.

One of the biggest challenges, according to Tuấn Anh, is that many male victims prefer to remain anonymous and avoid contact with authorities, making it difficult to verify cases and provide timely support.

Tuấn Anh also warned that when criminal networks are no longer able to exploit victims for labour, they may turn to more dangerous forms of trafficking, including illegal organ trading.

“This means anyone could potentially become a victim,” he said.[...]”

(Source: Vietnam News – [More men become victims of human trafficking in HCM City](#), 19 December 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to a 2025 report by Blue Dragon, the victims of trafficking in Vietnam have historically been more likely to be female and from minority ethnic groups. However, the same report notes that the proportion of victims of trafficking who are male and/or from the majority Kinh ethnic group has been growing, with young males being the most likely to be subject to forced criminality:

“Gender, age and ethnicity intersections

Previously understood trends about the gender, age and ethnicity of trafficking victims do not apply to forced criminality, making this new data very important to understanding the nature of victimisation for this particular form of exploitation

Between 2022 and 2024, a thirteen-fold increase was noted in the number of male victims, from 5 in 2022 to 68 in 2024. The proportion of male to female victims stood at 83.1% to 16.2%.

Of the male victims, 77 (71.3%) were adults, while 19 (17.6%) were children between 15 and 18. Of the female victims, 14 (66.7%) were adults, while 7 (33.4%) were children between 14 and 18.

The data indicates that the group most vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality is adult males. This finding is corroborated by Blue Dragon’s data of over 300 victims rescued from forced criminality from 2022 to 2024, which finds that 82.8% of victims were male, and those between 18 and 39 were most vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality.²⁹ This finding is also consistent with other reporting on forced criminality in Vietnam and elsewhere, which indicates that adult men make up the majority of trafficking victims in Southeast Asia.³⁰

While the number of female victims is small compared to male victims, it is not negligible. Although this particular dataset does not show dual exploitation, most female victims of forced criminality assisted by Blue Dragon report having also been exploited for commercial sex within the compounds. Female victims are therefore vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation,

including sexual abuse. It is also notable that the court documents recognise that one of the victims was transgender – the first time such information has been recorded in a court ruling.

Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups. The Kinh, as the majority ethnic group, represents 85.3% of Vietnam’s population, while the country’s 53 ethnic minority groups comprise 14.7% of the total population.³¹

Historically, trafficking in all its forms has disproportionately affected Vietnam’s ethnic minorities, especially women and girls. This, however, is not the observed pattern within forced criminality. Data shows that Kinh people, who make up the majority of the Vietnamese population, also make up the majority of victims of forced criminality, 85 cases (65.4%). Only 24 (27.7%) victims belong to four different ethnic minorities. Of the four ethnic minorities, the Thai account for the largest share of victims at 18.5%. There is no information on the ethnic origin of 9 (6.9%) victims. This trend indicates that traffickers are now exploiting economic hardship and job insecurity across a much wider demographic.

Findings pertaining to the disproportionate vulnerability of Kinh and Thai victims are mirrored in the data about victims rescued by Blue Dragon between 2022 and 2024, which shows that 54.4% of victims of forced criminality were Kinh while 18.2% were Thai.³²

An important factor to examine is the vulnerability of each ethnic group based on their population size, as Vietnam’s ethnic groups make up only a small percentage of the country’s population. As per this dataset, Thai and J’rai are both 13 times more vulnerable to forced criminality than the Kinh, while the Dao and the H’mong are 3.3 and 1.4 times more vulnerable than the Kinh, respectively.³³ It is important to note, however, that all the J’rai people were trafficked as a group by the same traffickers, thus this may not be representative of the true vulnerability of this community.”

²⁹ Le, Wyndham, and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’
³⁰ See for example Freedom Collaborative, ‘Freedom Collaborative Data Spotlight on Trafficking of forced criminality’, accessed 19 June 2025, <https://data.freedomcollaborative.org/trafficking-for-forced-criminality/>
³¹ General Statistics Office (GSO), ‘Completed Results of the 2019 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census’ (GSO, 2020), www.gso.gov.vn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ket-qua-toan-bo-Tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-2019.pdf [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]
³² Le, Wyndham, and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’.
³³ These calculations are based on the 2019 census.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp.22-25, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that children and ethnic minorities are particularly overrepresented in official trafficking statistics. The report also identified the Hmong ethnic minority group as particularly vulnerable to being trafficked to China for forced marriages. However, the report noted that the number of trafficking victims from the majority Kinh community has increased:

“The government lacked a reliable mechanism to consolidate statistics on the total number of victims identified and assisted; therefore, the government’s reported victim identification and protection data may have been duplicative or in some cases undercounted, as the government did not report how many victims it referred to NGOs. The government identified 500 victims in 2024 – 310 females, 190 males, and 236 children – compared with identifying 311 victims in 2023 – 195 females, 116 males, and 146 children. All identified victims were Vietnamese, and the government did not provide data disaggregated by form of exploitation, compared with reporting 176 victims exploited in labor trafficking and 40 victims of “sexual exploitation” in 2023; some of the victims of “sexual exploitation” reported in prior years may not have been victims of trafficking as defined by international law. Furthermore, the government likely included victims of unspecified forms of trafficking in their reported data, such as “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” which were inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law. Identified victims included 169 members of ethnic minority communities, or 34 percent of the total victims identified. Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 15 percent of Vietnam’s population. The government did not formally identify any foreign national trafficking victims for the third consecutive year.[...]

Trafficking affects all communities. [...] A previous study indicated 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam were members of ethnic minority communities; however, NGOs report an increasing number of Kinh ethnic majority members exploited in forced labor, especially in online scams. Government estimates suggest 78 percent of known trafficking victims in 2024 were Kinh ethnic majority members. Other reports suggest many children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking, with children from rural and vulnerable communities at particularly high risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in street hawking and begging in major urban centers and urban family homes. Adults are also at risk of forced labor in the garment industry. Reports indicate traffickers exploit women and girls domestically in Vietnam in sex trafficking in massage parlors, karaoke bars, and hotels. Observers claim many sex trafficking cases are unreported because of social stigma and victims’ fear of possible repercussions by authorities. Domestically, traffickers often create and exploit personal, trusting relationships with potential victims before isolating and exploiting them in sex or labor trafficking in karaoke bars, massage parlors, and restaurants. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse travel to Vietnam to exploit children; many of the perpetrators reportedly originate from elsewhere in Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Environmental impacts causing displacement, including extreme heat, saltwater intrusion, and drought, force an estimated 24,000 people to leave the Mekong Delta region every year, increasing trafficking risks due to livelihood loss.[...]

Traffickers in border villages reportedly lure Vietnamese women and girls, particularly from the Hmong ethnic minority group, to China for forced marriages that often involve sex trafficking and/or forced labor.”

(Source: US Department of State (USDOS) – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

As reported in the DFAT’s 2025 country information report, according to in-country sources consulted in 2023, groups particularly vulnerable to trafficking include women and girls, ethnic minorities (particularly the Hmong), young people and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, the report also notes that trafficking is not limited to these groups:

“[...] 3.140 In-country sources, speaking in October 2023, said women and girls were most likely to be trafficked, usually for forced marriage, although men and boys were trafficked, too, usually for forced labour or forced criminality. Ethnic minorities face the greatest risk of human trafficking: according to international NGO analysis, ethnic minorities are three times more likely to be trafficked than Kinh (relative to their population, the Hmong are most affected). Victims of human trafficking tend to be economically vulnerable, possess limited education and young (international NGO analysis found the average age of victims in 2021 was 19.2). Most originate from mountainous regions along Vietnam’s northern border with China and the southern Mekong River Delta region. Nevertheless, human trafficking is not specific to ethnic minorities and the poor, and victims have included educated young students and recent graduates from middle-class backgrounds, including Kinh.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.48, last accessed 25 June 2025)

Authors Dr Daniel Silverstone⁵⁸, and Dr Hai Thanh Luong⁵⁹, noted in their 2024 research article that:

“[...]Finally, the trafficking narrative that gained most credence was the one associated with young-orphaned children being captured from the streets of Hanoi only to be relocated to worse conditions in London. This led to the British state investing in the support and construction of refuges for returning trafficking victims and support for charities who provide them, despite the safeguarding risks they then presented. The refuges then laid unused (Cabinet Office et al., 2020; HOFFM 2019).[...]”

(Source: Silverstone D, Luong HT via Springer – Special Issue of International Criminology: [‘Misleading the World?’](#)

⁵⁸ Director of Liverpool Centre for Advanced Policing Studies at Liverpool John Moores University
⁵⁹ Lecturer in criminology (Assistant Professor) at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University

Reassessing the International Impact of the British Modern Slavery Agenda: Vietnam, 17 December 2024, no page number)

As reported in a 2024 report by Blue Dragon, trafficking is increasingly impacting men and boys in Vietnam:

“[...] New victim profiles
Gender as a factor of vulnerability to trafficking is also changing, with the new forms of trafficking disproportionately impacting men and boys. The Vietnamese government statistics from 2011–2020 found that 90% of victims identified were female.¹⁹ In 2018 and 2019, 93% of the victims Blue Dragon assisted were women or girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but that percentage has been declining since 2020. Blue Dragon rescued 98 male trafficking victims between 2020 and 2022.

2022 saw a sharp increase of men and boys who were targeted by human traffickers. Blue Dragon rescued 51 men and boys from labour exploitation in Cambodia and assisted an additional 92 victims of labour exploitation on the streets of Hanoi.²⁰ Among the male victims assisted through Blue Dragon’s rescue work, 49% were trafficked into forced criminality in online scamming centres in Cambodia. For the international rescues, male victims made up 22% of the total rescues — a higher percentage than any previous year. If we add the street boys and young men who fell victim to labour exploitation within Vietnam, the percentage of male victims rescued by Blue Dragon in 2022 rises to 40%.(pg.13)

The increase in male victims has been recorded by other agencies supporting victims and was recently recognised by the Justice Committee of the Vietnamese National Assembly in an assessment conducted as part of a review of ten years’ implementation of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control.²¹(pg.14)

[...] While women and girls continue to represent the majority of victims of trafficking Blue Dragon assists, the impacts of the pandemic have fuelled a surge in the number of men and boys becoming victims of labour exploitation. The reasons for this, once more, are multifaceted and rooted in both socioeconomic and cultural factors. The increase in hardship levels due to the economic impacts following Covid-19 is driving vulnerability among men and boys, as a larger number of them are in urgent need to earn an income. The cultural expectation that males must bear the responsibility to financially provide for their family makes them more prone to migrate in search of employment, which further drives their risk of falling victim to exploitation.”(pg.15)

¹⁹ Ministry of Public Security, 3 June 2021, ‘Summary of 09 years implementation of Law on human trafficking prevention and combat 2011, Hanoi, Vietnam, p.18.
²⁰ Blue Dragon Blue Dragon data from April 2022 to January 2023. Note that an additional 75 boys met on the streets of Hanoi during that period did not provide enough information to conclude if they showed indicators of trafficking. Therefore, this number can be considered a minimum.
²¹ Bao Yen – Pham Thang, 8 May 2023, TỘI PHẠM MUA BÁN NGƯỜI TRONG NƯỚC GIA TĂNG VÀ NGÀY CÀNG CÓ NHIỀU NẠN NHÂN LÀ NAM GIỚI (The crime of human trafficking is increasing within the country, and more male victims), Cổng thông tin điện tử Quốc hội Nước cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt nam (Electronic news of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam), <https://quochoi.vn/tintuc/Pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-quoc-hoi.aspx?ItemID=75558>, accessed on May 10, 2023.

(Source: Blue Dragon – **Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions**, March 2024, pp.13-15, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, noted that:

“Certain groups of children are more vulnerable to exploitation in the context of migration. The survey for children and young people indicated that children with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to exploitation in the context of migration. Lower wealth made children who migrated more vulnerable to emotional violence, while children from ethnic minority groups were more likely to experience physical violence (particularly H’Mong children). Children living in rural areas were more likely to experience wage exploitation, and girls experienced more frequent sexual exploitation. Children who did not make the decision to migrate were more likely to experience exploitation, and children with lower education and wealth and ethnic minority status were less likely to make the choice to migrate.

Key informants also highlighted that education, rurality and ethnicity are risk factors for child trafficking, and that these are interlinked with poverty.⁷ Additional family characteristics that increase children’s risk of trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration include being from a single-parent household, being a child who remains behind when parents migrate, being a child who has migrated with parents, and living in a household in which family violence is present.⁸ In these circumstances, children are at increased risk of neglect and seek to escape their home circumstances.

The internet is increasingly being used for the facilitation of child trafficking. With children having greater access to social media, this provides a new platform through which recruiters can approach, befriend, groom, deceive and subsequently traffic children.⁹”

7 Interview with an IO, Feb 25 2022; KII with an NGO. Feb 15 2022.
8 Interview with an IO Feb 25 2022
9 Interview with an IO, Mar 8, 2022; KII with Government, Mar 21 2022

(Source: UNICEF – Case Study, Migration and Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation, [Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 6 July 2025)

A report published in November 2021 by NGO Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation analysed data of 1,633 victims of trafficking assisted by Blue Dragon between 2005 and 13 June 2021. The report does not specifically address any intergenerational risks of trafficking. The data analysed showed that:

“Ethnic minority people are over three times more likely than Kinh people to be a victim of trafficking.

H’mong people are most at-risk of being trafficked if population size is taken into account. A total of 334 rescued victims (20%) in the dataset were H’mong, indicating that H’mong people are 14 times more likely than Kinh people to be victims of trafficking.

The majority of victims are from either mountainous regions along Vietnam’s northern border with China or southern Vietnam’s Mekong River Delta region.

Victims of sexual exploitation (commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriages and surrogacy) originated from all over Vietnam. In the Mekong River Delta, the majority of victims were trafficked into sexual exploitation, particularly forced marriages in China. Trafficking victims from northern mountainous provinces and central coastal areas were exposed to a broader set of exploitative practices.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [What makes people vulnerable to trafficking?](#), November 2021, pg.1, last accessed 20 June 2025)

2. How well understood is smuggling and trafficking in Vietnam?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam suggests that victims of trafficking often feel they will be penalised for immigration offences, and government agencies may not distinguish between smuggling and trafficking. Trafficking victims are described as often having a poor understanding of their rights, although the report does not comment specifically on their awareness of the difference between smuggling and trafficking:

“Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities, many Vietnamese victims chose not to report their exploitation to government officials – which left these victims without access to most or all protection services. Observers reported that in the past authorities penalized victims exploited in online scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked; furthermore, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential Vietnamese labor trafficking victims – apprehended during joint law enforcement actions against

online scam operations – solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in online scam operations and did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens. NGOs noted a hesitancy among some provinces with limited resources to identify potential victims returning from abroad because funding for support services came directly from provincial budgets rather than a central fund, which created a conflict of interest for provinces with limited resources. [...]

Observers reported many labor trafficking victims did not fully understand their rights and how to access support services, hindering timely identification and access to legal assistance and other protection services.”

(Source: US Department of State (USDOS) – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The NGO Blue Dragon highlighted in its 2025 report on forced criminality that many male victims of trafficking who had been lured abroad by fake job offers refuse to accept that they are the victims of trafficking:

“[...]Most male survivors of forced criminality consider themselves as having been tricked into unfortunate situations of labour malpractice rather than victims of organised crimes who rightfully need assistance and care. Many also feel shame and guilt for having put their families under extreme financial stress – especially in cases where they were released upon the payment of a ransom. They frequently feel ashamed of having undertaken criminal acts scamming their compatriots and other unsuspecting people, as well as “survivors guilt” for being free and unable to help others inside scam compounds.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pg. 70, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, government awareness campaigns on trafficking have been ineffective in preventing transnational trafficking, although there is no specific mention of awareness of the distinction between smuggling and trafficking.

“[...]The government conducted awareness campaigns at the national, provincial, and district levels targeting school-aged children and the public, many in partnership with NGOs; some campaigns focused on raising awareness around online scam operations. Officials reported awareness campaigns over the past 10 years had been uncoordinated and ineffective in preventing human trafficking, particularly transnational trafficking.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report 2024](#), June 2024, last accessed 30 May 2025)

In this 2022 article, and in examining the trafficking of Vietnamese nationals to the UK, Chung Pham⁶⁰ noted the following:

“[...]3.1. Matters of Definition of Trafficking and Victim Support
 [...]In the Essex tragedy that created a shock-wave in the UK (and Vietnam) in October 2019 when the bodies of 39 Vietnamese nationals were found in a lorry as they were transported into the country from abroad, a high-profile figure of authority in Vietnam was very much in denial that these people could be considered victims of human trafficking. This figure was the head of Public Security in Nghe An—the province that accounts for the majority of the unfortunate lives lost in that lorry—and his analysis was simple: “These people paid to go abroad for work, nobody paid up to one billion Vietnam dong to be trafficked” (Nguyen 2019). Nguyen’s opinion demonstrates how it can be difficult for personnel in public security bodies to recognise how labour journeys which are initially consensual may become coercive en route, hence their frequent failure to recognise and support victims.(pg.5)

60 Short Biography of Dr. Chung Pham can be accessed here: https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2147415?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name

Nguyen’s view was not solely his own; he represents the general sentiment of law enforcement and of the general public, in Vietnam, on this. This may explain why none of the three people in the above cases studied actively came forward to seek help even in their most desperate moments—Hoang Nguyen when having his leg broken in the West Midlands by the gangs when he tried to run away, Thanh Tran’s running back to the gangs even after having previously been beaten up by them during his captive, and Thuong Bui after running away from being forced to work as a sex slave. In the conversations with the author, all three people admitted they believed that the situation was their own fault, coming to this country illegally as well as owing money back home and so it was their duty to perform whatever work assigned to them—however traumatic and dangerous the nature of that work—in hoping the debt would be paid one day, and they would be working as a free labourer and that they could start saving from there. None of them was able to tell when that would be.”(pp.5-6)

(Nguyen 2019) Nguyen, Cau. 2019. Genral Cau: “Nobody paid a billion dong to be trafficked”. In Zing News. Edited by Hoai Thu. Hanoi: Zing News. O’Connell Davidson, Julia. 2013. Troubling freedom: Migration, debt, and modern slavery. Migration Studies 1: 176–95.

(Source: Social Sciences, Author Chung Pham – [Combatting the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK](#), 2023, 26 December 2022, pp.5-6, last accessed 1 August 2025)

In examining the trafficking of Vietnamese nationals to the UK, Dr Chung Pham⁶¹ a Vietnam and Anti-Trafficking Specialist for Locate International, a UK Charity, noted in a 2022 article that:

“[...]Such lack of support and disregard for victims upon their return to the country, as well as the general disbelief that these people are victims, because their departure from the country was consensual and that they paid for their journey, was one of the reasons these victims would not seek help from authorities when they are in the UK. This is partly because the victims themselves hold the same belief as those in Vietnam and they did not know or did not believe that they were the victims “because I chose to come here”, said Hoang Nguyen. Nguyen said the reason he did not come forward to seek help from authorities when he was assaulted in the West Midlands was because he feared that he would then be deported to Vietnam and that was the last thing he wanted. He had to work to earn money as so much had been invested in his journey to the UK. The situation was similar to that of Thanh Tran who feared deportation so much that he would abscond from the safe house that he was sent to and ran back to his ‘keepers’ regardless of the maltreatment he experienced when being with them previously. For these people, any slim hope of remaining in the UK, to earn some money to recover at least the cost for their journey, would be worth holding onto.”(pp.6-7)

(Tran 2019) Tran, Van. 2019. Victim Support in Hai Phong. Hanoi: Tien Phong

(Source: Social Sciences, Author Chung Pham – [Combatting the Trafficking of Vietnamese Nationals to Britain: Cooperative Challenges for Vietnam and the UK](#), 26 December 2022, pp.6-7, last accessed 1 August 2025)

In this 2021 assessment, USAID explained that:

“[...]General awareness, behavior and attitudes
Despite the government objective of raising awareness, there have been no studies conducted on the general awareness or knowledge level of various populations understanding about human trafficking. The government develops communications activities based on priorities determined by geographical areas where human trafficking cases are identified, and the focus is on priorities provinces and populations. There are no national studies on knowledge and behavior for planning and implementing communications activities. In a behavior-change communications assessment in the Mekong delta, IOM found that awareness of the terms was high, but that ‘women in the area generally had low awareness of the risks of internal trafficking, exploitation, or forced labor when seeking work, particularly through informal channels.’ (IOM, 2013). In that assessment, many women were found to go to Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding industrial zones based on personal contacts, and many had no contract and left their homes not knowing the name of the factory they would be working for (IOM, 2013).”

(Source: USAID: [Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – Situational Analysis Report](#), pg.21, 2021)

61 Short Biography of Dr. Chung Pham can be accessed here: https://sciprofiles.com/profile/2147415?utm_source=mdpi.com&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=avatar_name

3. How well understood are the realities of emigrating and related risks such as smuggling, trafficking etc?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“[...]limited awareness of trafficking risks in certain communities, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may contribute to vulnerability. These factors are not inherently linked to religious or traditional practices but may interact with cultural expectations around migration and family responsibility.”

(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“[...]Vietnamese culture is the culture of what we call ‘*saving face*’. Everybody wants to save face and always wants to present the best version of themselves and be proud with the family or with the community. And that does not help in terms of trafficking[...] Because that would make the victims returning did not want to kind of admit that they’re a victim of any kind. Of course, before they set foot on a bus or a lorry from the other end, that is consensual because they know that they are going so-and-so for work, or they’ve been promised to have work somewhere. So that is the agreement that’s made between them and their family and the people who are taking them. The deception is only when they arrive at this end, there’s no such work. So in that sense, yes. At this end of the globe, it is a victim, but at the other end, they still believe that, yeah, it’s the labor contract that did not end very well. So that’s why, when they go back, they don’t want-- even the family themselves don’t want to present to the community that they are so naive, and they are the-- think that they’re so stupid in terms of giving all the stranger all the money and giving this stranger their son and daughter as well, and now you ended up being like this. So naturally, a lot of them don’t want to admit that. This has been discussed in huge [number] of articles and journal articles and literature in Vietnam, where people talk about it. It is changing these days. The families started reporting, and victims started asking for support because of the social stigma these days, because all the awareness and people trying to raise awareness by social media in particular, that actually works. People start seeing the people who return from abroad unsuccessful and have no money and still have this huge amount of debt that’s left from their journey that they paid for. And the people start kind of recognizing that there’s something that these people experience, that they did not experience, which never happened in the past.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

According to the NGO Blue Dragon report, a lack of digital literacy in Vietnam increases the ability of traffickers to recruit potential victims of forced criminality over the internet, particularly through the use of fraudulent job postings:

“The digital landscape has fundamentally reshaped the risks of human trafficking, granting traffickers unprecedented access to anyone through social media platforms, messaging apps and other online spaces. While digital platforms offer opportunities for finding employment and social and professional connections, they have become one of the primary tools for traffickers to exploit individuals through deceptive recruitment tactics. Digital platforms act as a force multiplier for traffickers by enabling them to efficiently maximise their reach and profits.

The high rate of online recruitment, as well as in all other forms of human trafficking in Vietnam, highlights the urgent need to enhance digital safety amongst groups vulnerable to trafficking in the country.

To effectively combat online recruitment risks, digital literacy initiatives must be integrated into broader anti-trafficking prevention strategies, equipping people with the skills needed to verify job postings, identify red flags in recruitment messages, and understand personal privacy to safeguard personal information. By combining practical skills training with tools to assess digital recruitment and legal, legitimate alternatives, the likelihood of individuals falling victim to deceptive exploitation schemes can be reduced.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pg. 87, last accessed 23 February 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

[...]The government, in partnership with NGOs, conducted awareness campaigns at the national, provincial, and district levels targeting vulnerable populations and the broader public; some campaigns focused on raising awareness around online scam operations.[...]

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The Times reported in August 2025 that the social media accounts run by traffickers often post deceptive content on social media which glamourises being smuggled into the UK and attracts more trafficking victims. The report highlighted the disparity between trafficking victims’ perceptions of life in the UK and the reality:

“Vietnamese accounts on TikTok have popularised this portion of the journey [across the English channel to the UK]. Dozens of videos from smugglers and migrants in the camps, on beaches and arriving in British cities are accessible on the platform. The Home Office said Vietnamese smugglers used “coded messages” on social media and even “offered discounts to those who film their journey so the footage can be used as promotional material”.

But Pham said he had been “misled by social media”. He called the journey “traumatising”, having been on three boats that capsized. “It’s the boundary between life and death,” he said. “I was shaking with fear — I thought we might capsize and die.” For Thuy, who was a teenager when he travelled to northern France, the journey had been arranged at a higher cost. “I didn’t know how I would travel. I was young [and] I only knew that my family paid for the safest route. I was taken [in the back of] a lorry.”

This is the most desired route, despite the Essex tragedy and a higher price of about £10,000. Some described it as the “premium route”.[]

Dozens of interviewees said the most dangerous part of the journey was life in the UK, where migrants face fierce job competition and exploitation by Vietnamese cannabis gangs.

Migrants are often put in temporary hotels, but say they can freely leave. “It’s easy,” Pham said. “My neighbour [from Vietnam] picked me up outside.”

However, Tran warned that going to the UK was “risking your life”, adding: “If the mafia comes and there’s no [cannabis] crop, they’ll beat you, steal your money, kidnap you for ransom ... You cannot leave. You could die and no one would know. I know many Vietnamese friends killed in cannabis farms.””

(Source: The Times – [What I saw on the trafficking route that ships ‘slaves’ to the UK](#), 12 August 2025, last accessed 12 March 2026)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, NGOs have reported that the Vietnamese public is not sufficiently educated on the risks of emigrating to seek work:

[...] MOLISA [Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs] raised awareness on labor laws and safe migration practices among employment services centers and businesses; authorities raised awareness on risks involving job opportunities associated with online scam operations. However, NGO reports indicated Vietnam did not make sufficient efforts to educate the public on the risks inherent to seeking work abroad through unscrupulous labor export companies or vulnerable recruitment channels.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report 2024](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

In March 2024, the UK Home Office launched a social media campaign to deter Vietnamese nationals from coming to the UK:

“Today marks the launch of the latest phase of the government’s global campaign to warn migrants of the consequences of entering the UK illegally.

An increasing proportion of small boat migrants are Vietnamese, and they are 1 of the top 10 nationalities for migrants crossing the Channel illegally.

The latest phase of the campaign, which will begin today (Monday 25 March), will harness social media adverts on Facebook and YouTube to directly target people who may be considering making dangerous and illegal journeys to the UK.

The social media posts emphasise the consequences of travelling to the UK illegally and the dangers people can expect to face, as well as set out the risks of being indebted to and exploited by the people smuggling gangs who profit from facilitating small boat crossings.

Home Secretary James Cleverly said:

This is a powerful campaign which demonstrates first-hand that life for people arriving here illegally is a far cry from the lies they have been sold by the gangs on the other side of the Channel.

Last year, similar work contributed to a 90% reduction in small boat arrivals from Albania, and overall numbers are down by a third, but there is more to do.

Expanding our campaign to Vietnam, another key partner in our work to tackle illegal migration, will help us to save more lives and dent the business model of the criminals who profit from this vile trade. [...]”

(Source: UK Home Office – [International social media campaign launched to stop the boats](#), 25 March 2024)

According to a 2023 country study by ODI, which cites an article by Hoang, migrant workers are often unable to assess the risks of migration due to a lack of pre-departure training and access to information in Vietnamese.

“[...] Hoang (2020) noted that the migrants interviewed could not fully assess the nature and extent of the risks, particularly when their migration was financed by debt, as many had not participated in the formal labour market before migrating and had no access to adequate information when they decided to migrate.

The lack of pre-departure training and information ensures that the vulnerability of migrant workers continues as they reach their destination.⁴⁸ This includes the availability of necessary information in Vietnamese, including contracts, conditions in the destination country, and requirements of the migrant worker, what the fees cover and the visa requirements. While some NGOs have started to fill this gap, their reach is inadequate, and migrant workers can become victims of trafficking because they are not equipped with the necessary skills and information.⁴⁹ Returned migrants are also reluctant to share their experiences, whether because of shame, a sense of failure, or understanding that nothing can be done.”

⁴⁸ Interview with NGO, Vietnam, December 2021; Interview with returned migrant workers, Vietnam December 2021.

⁴⁹ Interview with NGO, Vietnam, December 2021; Interview with returned migrant workers, Vietnam December 2021.

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.41, last accessed 5 June 2025)

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, noted that:

“A key driver of child trafficking is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the risks of migrating alone without a parent or caregiver amongst children.¹⁰ One hundred percent of children who migrated without a parent/caregiver in the survey experienced some form of abuse or labour exploitation. Associations between demographic characteristics and more positive

views towards migration amongst children who had not migrated were examined using the survey data to identify factors which increase risk of future child lone migration, and therefore increase risk of exploitation.”

10 Interview with an NGO, Feb 21 2022.

(Source: UNICEF – [Case Study, Migration and Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation, Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 6 July 2025)

According to an assessment report published in 2021 by USAID:

“[...]General awareness, behavior and attitudes
 [...]Trafficking research related to migration and smuggling found that even when people were aware of potential risks and dangers, they still accepted opportunities from strangers, and that greater awareness about dangers will not stop them from engaging with brokers, agents, facilitators, or potential traffickers (Hynes, 2018a).

A study of 25 government staff reported that communications and awareness activities do not include practical skills on protection against traffickers.‘The most important thing is for people to be able to protect themselves and others, but many awareness campaigns are broad and theoretical and did not provide those necessary skills. People needed specific examples to know how to deal with the situations and awareness campaigns still lack activities which help people improve those skills.’ (Le. 2017).Additionally, it has been determined knowledge and attitudes on human trafficking do not necessarily reduce risk behavior (Hynes, 2018a).According to a study conducted by IOM in a five-province project, nearly half of people interviewed did not feel they were at risk despite having knowledge about trafficking and modern slavery (IOM, 2020).(pg.21)

Over the past 15 years in Vietnam, there have been various organizations managing communications activities and campaigns to counter human trafficking and modern slavery using different approaches. One review of 19 initiatives over the past 20 years, found that most used broad-based mass media and large events, and two worked on raising awareness with the community directly, primarily through leaflets, posters, and awareness-raising sessions. One pilot initiative also included introducing human trafficking into the education system.The review raised, however, that there was little evidence that communications projects have contributed to a reduction in human trafficking. Meaningful results are unclear and limited, and there has been a lack of data collection or evaluation. (Seefar, 2018). Most of the prevention projects reviewed were conducted over ten years ago, and currently trafficking prevention activities by NGOs are mostly included into community-based development and education activities.(pp.21-22)

[...]

- Knowledge of human trafficking trends and behavior is based on official handovers from China and Cambodia and not national data.
- Prevention is based on informing large populations and raising awareness and not on changing behavior,skills, and decision making.
- Participatory, interactive activities are conducted on a small scale with targeted populations, but most communications are broad-based using mass media and do not use technology and mobile platforms.”(pg.22)

(Source: USAID – [Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – Situational Analysis Report](#), pp.21-22, 2021, last accessed 2 August 2025)

4. What specific vulnerabilities and risks factors do Vietnamese labour migrants face in relation to trafficking and re-trafficking, within Vietnam and internationally?

According to the 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, the widespread use of informal networks to find work abroad makes Vietnamese labour migrants vulnerable to exploitation:

“Vietnamese men and women migrate abroad for work informally, including through illicit brokerage networks operated by other Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or through state-owned or state-regulated labor recruitment enterprises. Approximately 158,000 Vietnamese workers went abroad under contracts in 2024 alone; most of these workers went to Japan, Taiwan, ROK, Singapore, and China. Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. High worker-paid recruitment fees pushed many Vietnamese workers to migrate outside legal channels and increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East and Europe – such as the UK and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms. Traffickers reportedly exploit Vietnamese fishermen in labor trafficking in the fishing fleets of countries in the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia and Southeast Asia, including on Taiwan- and Indonesia-flagged vessels; many of these vessels operate under complex ownership and registration arrangements that enable traffickers to evade detection and intervention by law enforcement. The lack of a requirement for labor contracts and use of oral agreements in the fishing industry increases fishermen’s vulnerability to trafficking. Vietnamese traffickers, including two members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service, reportedly exploited Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in Saudi Arabia; the diplomats in this case were recalled and investigated. Some Vietnamese nationals are exploited in forced labor under the auspices of Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program and in agricultural education programs in Israel. Vietnamese nationals endure restricted freedom of movement, travel and identity document confiscation, threats of physical violence, poor living and working conditions, contract irregularities, fraudulent recruitment, and punitive deportation at Chinese national-owned factories affiliated with the Chinese government’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Balkan region. Widespread social stigma against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation or identity increases their vulnerability to trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The same report found that victims of trafficking returning from neighbouring countries may not be identified as victims of trafficking or offered support. The report also mentioned that fear of reprisal and other factors often deter returned trafficking victims from seeking help:

“Authorities reportedly repatriated more than 5,000 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines since 2022. Widespread reports indicated the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking; however, officials acknowledged most of these potential trafficking victims were not screened or identified as victims prior to or following their repatriation, or provided with specialized or long-term services. Authorities provided emergency medical care for many potential victims and coordinated with each individual’s home provinces when conducting repatriations. Border officials reportedly screened some returnees from online scam operations in neighboring Cambodia and Laos. Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities, many Vietnamese victims chose not to report their exploitation to government officials – which left these victims without access to most or all protection services. Observers reported that in the past authorities penalized victims exploited in online scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked; furthermore, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential Vietnamese labor trafficking victims – apprehended during joint law enforcement actions against online scam operations – solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in online scam operations and did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens.

NGOs noted a hesitancy among some provinces with limited resources to identify potential victims returning from abroad because funding for support services came directly from provincial budgets rather than a central fund, which created a conflict of interest for provinces with limited resources.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report, labour migrants who return to Vietnam face difficulties including finding employment, accessing government services and debt:

“[...] Conditions for returnees [...] Returnees – including failed asylum seekers, labour migrants and trafficking victims – may experience reintegration difficulties, although these are not state-imposed. Difficulties may include unemployment or underemployment, challenges accessing government services and, in the case of trafficking victims, social stigma. Some returnees may have accumulated large debts, including to loan sharks, to fund their travel from Vietnam, which they may have difficulty repaying.”

(Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report Vietnam](#)⁶², 19 February 2025, pg.71, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to a 2021 country study by ODI, labour migrants face specific vulnerabilities and risk factors relating to trafficking at all stages of their journey:

“[...]At each part of the journey – from pre-departure, in transit, in the destination country and upon return to Vietnam – migrant workers are vulnerable. Before leaving, among the many factors that influence vulnerability the major challenge arises from a lack of knowledge and inability to access reliable information, as well as the recruitment fees. These factors also influence the migrant workers’ journey. Debt leads migrants to take risks in the destination country in order to earn more. Competition among migrant workers also increases vulnerability in the destination country, as each migrant worker negotiates their own conditions, with limited access to the experience of those that came before them. On return, exploited workers face significant barriers in being recognised as victims or receiving compensation, support and redress.[...]”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.38)

A 2021 Guardian article on trafficking from Vietnam to the UK reported that Vietnamese labour migrants travelling on guest worker visa schemes are vulnerable to being exploited at all stages of the journey, often linked to debt bondage.

“An Observer investigation has found that Serbia and Romania are being used as new gateways to Europe for smuggling and trafficking gangs who are using guest worker visa programmes to transport large numbers of Vietnamese workers into eastern Europe. There they are often exploited in factories and construction sites before some are transported across land borders into the EU and, eventually, to the UK. At all stages along the way, Vietnamese workers are highly likely to fall into forced labour or debt bondage, often charged up to £30,000 for passage to the UK.”

(Source: The Guardian – [revealed: the secret ‘forced labour’ migration route from Vietnam to the UK](#), 25 December 2021, last accessed 3 July 2025)

62 The original link to this report is no longer active; therefore, Asylos has provided a hyperlink to a version available on [ecoi.net](#)

5. What pathways exist for regulated migration from Vietnam, and how accessible are they to at-risk groups?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylös for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“[...]Vietnam manages licensed overseas labor programs and bilateral agreements, with the 2022 Law on Vietnamese Workers Abroad tightening fees and protections. Yet, at-risk groups like rural poor, ethnic minorities, and low-educated youth face barriers. High fees, reliance on unlicensed brokers, and conflicting rules (e.g., Japan) lead many to irregular routes. Regulated pathways coexist with exploitative practices; debt and information gaps are key. Authorities push reforms, but training and complaint systems are weak, causing people to start legally but fall into exploitation or bypass channels, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.”

Relating to the point of conflicting rules in Japan, Dr Hai Luong provided the following additional information via written communication on 15 April 2026:

“In Japan, which hosts one of the largest Vietnamese labour populations, labour-migration programmes are designed so that workers do not pay high recruitment fees, with employers expected to bear most of the costs. In practice, these rules apply mainly inside Japan. They are difficult to enforce on recruitment agencies operating in Vietnam, meaning workers often still incur large upfront debts to access Japanese jobs. Combined with differing rules across visa schemes, these high costs and uncertainties can push some migrants toward irregular routes or to overstaying to repay loans, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylös, 26 March 2026)

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, commented that:

“[...]There is a peculiar nexus. In a sense the government is colluding, they are supporting overseas work schemes as there is not enough employment in Vietnam, and Vietnam benefits from remittances, but not all work agencies are legitimate.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Vietnamese men and women migrate abroad for work informally, including through illicit brokerage networks operated by other Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or through state-owned or state-regulated labor recruitment enterprises. Approximately 158,000 Vietnamese workers went abroad under contracts in 2024 alone; most of these workers went to Japan, Taiwan, ROK, Singapore, and China. Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. High worker-paid recruitment fees pushed many Vietnamese workers to migrate outside legal channels and increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East and Europe – such as the UK and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms. Traffickers reportedly exploit Vietnamese fishermen in labor trafficking in the fishing fleets of countries in the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia and Southeast Asia, including on Taiwan- and Indonesia-flagged vessels; many of these vessels operate under complex ownership and registration arrangements that enable traffickers to evade detection and intervention by law enforcement. The lack of a requirement for labor contracts and use of oral agreements in the fishing industry increases fishermen’s vulnerability to trafficking. Vietnamese traffickers, including two members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service, reportedly exploited Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in Saudi Arabia; the diplomats in this case were recalled and investigated. Some Vietnamese nationals are exploited in forced labor under the auspices of Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program and in agricultural education

programs in Israel. Vietnamese nationals endure restricted freedom of movement, travel and identity document confiscation, threats of physical violence, poor living and working conditions, contract irregularities, fraudulent recruitment, and punitive deportation at Chinese national-owned factories affiliated with the Chinese government’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Balkan region.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 16 March 2026)

In this 2024 report, the author Mimi Vu who is a co-founder of VISLA and Raise Partners, a social and environmental impact and ESG consulting practice in Vietnam, analysed:

“The Policy of Vietnam on Labour Migration

Meanwhile, Vietnam has made exporting workers the centerpiece of its economic plan, negotiating bilateral labour export programmes with EU countries such as Germany and Hungary. The government has also registered and approved hundreds of recruitment companies in Vietnam to implement labour supply contracts for Vietnamese workers who then register with the Vietnamese Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB). As of 2020, 421 Vietnamese labour brokers were licensed to provide services to send Vietnamese workers abroad to countries such as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, and Portugal, among many others.³

According to official DOLAB figures, the number of Vietnamese migrant workers in European countries remains low relative to those in East Asia. However, many Vietnamese migrant workers go through unofficial or independent recruitment programmes. These higher numbers – in the thousands – are reflected in the D-visas (labour visas) issued each year by European embassies and consulates. This convergence of a constant and growing supply of Vietnamese migrants seeking work overseas; high demand for migrant labour in Europe; and an opaque, poorly-regulated labour migration process creates a perfect storm for migrant exploitation, human trafficking, and modern slavery. (pg.4)

Legal Loopholes

Unscrupulous labour brokers will use legal labour export programmes to advertise themselves as the only way for Vietnamese workers to migrate abroad. The misinformation they provide is reinforced through word-of-mouth in local communities, and there are no sustained community-based information campaigns to counter this narrative. Without closer regulation of labour brokers and comprehensive labour migration policies between Vietnam and Germany that recognise and address risks, it is very easy for brokers to manipulate legal labour programmes and opportunities to entrap and exploit Vietnamese migrant workers who are trying to migrate legally.”(pp.4-5)

³ “Vietnam’s labour exports eye the European market in 2020.” Center for WTO and International Trade-VCCI. 3 February 2020. <https://wtocenter.vn/chuyen-de/15030-vietnams-labour-exports-eye-theeuropean-market-in-2020>

[...]Vulnerable Groups

Female and child migrants are especially vulnerable during this stage of the migration journey, as they are completely at the mercy of the human smuggling networks and their affiliates. At this point, they are no longer viewed as human beings, but more as products with a market value, and human smuggling and organised crime networks exist to generate as much profit as possible wherever they can. In general, women and girls globally are valued less than men as members of society. As a product, however, women and girls are more valuable because there are more ways to exploit them, such as labour and sex, and the exploitation can be systematic or opportunistic depending on who is in control of her journey at that moment and demands of the local market. (pg.5)[...]

Irregular Immigration

Even though there are now several legal labour pathways for Vietnamese migrants to work in Germany, many arrive illegally without working papers and under enormous debt bondage to labour brokers affiliated with the ethnic Vietnamese transnational organised crime and human smuggling networks. The exploitation of these migrants will often continue after they arrive in Germany because there are no standard integration support services in Vietnamese that they can easily access,

so they often have to add to their debt and pay hundreds and sometimes thousands of euros to “xers” for basic services such as registering a mobile phone or finding housing.

The exploitation of legal labour pathways by labour brokers and human smuggling networks is frustrating for employers, visa and law enforcement officials of affected countries, and migrant victims and their families, and is beginning to negatively impact Vietnam’s reputation as a reliable country for migrant labour. The safety of migrant workers is the top priority – they must be able to travel to and work and live in Germany without risk of exploitation. Otherwise, workers, employers, and the German and Vietnamese economies will not benefit from labour migration. Instead, the groups that benefit the most will be criminal gangs and human smugglers who exist to generate as much profit as possible through the exploitation of people and the system.(pg.6) [...]

Migrants and victims of trafficking and exploitation will rarely tell their families the truth about their suffering. In my experience working with trafficking victims in Europe over the last 12 years, they will go to great lengths to hide their suffering and difficult situation from their families because they do not want them to worry and lose face or be shamed. Consequently, knowledge of risks and dangers that migrants face once they leave Vietnam are never transmitted back to the home communities; what families receive in place of the truth is a social-media-tered story of an exciting new life with easy earnings.”(pg.7)

(Source: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Vietnam Office, Author Mimi Vu – [Analysis On Labour Migration From Vietnam To Germany: Protecting Vulnerable And Unskilled Groups](#), October 2024, pp.4-5-6-7, Last accessed 1 August 2025)

In his 2024 book titled ‘The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“[...]Additionally, informal labour recruitment companies play a role in facilitating migration for Vietnamese men and women involved in industries such as construction, fishing, agriculture, mining, logging, and manufacturing.[...]

According to “[humantrafficking.org](#)”, a web resource for combating human trafficking, “Many of these migrants are processed through state-affiliated and private labor export companies which reportedly coerce migrants to sign contracts in languages they cannot read, and charge fees in excess of those allowed by law ... This has forced Vietnamese migrants to incur some of the highest debts among Asian expatriate workers, making them highly vulnerable to debt bondage and forced labor.”²

² <http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/vietnam>

[...]The provinces, in particular, have experienced very high and rising unemployment, encouraging migration to the cities. To relieve the problem, the Vietnamese government encourages unemployed people to participate in overseas labour schemes. These schemes are a good thing in principle, but poor government oversight means that they create an opportunity for organised criminal networks who recruit their victims for trafficking overseas.”

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, Chapter 14, pg.126)

This 2024 report provides an overview of labour migration in the ASEAN region:

“2.1 Legal pathways for temporary labour migration

Across the ASEAN region, legal pathways for temporary labour migration consist of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), bilateral labour agreements and admission policies. ASEAN net countries of origin – Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam – have MOUs with multiple countries of destination in and outside of the ASEAN region (ILO 2023a). Since 2020, at least 15 new MOUs were signed (Table 1).

Table 1⁶³
MOUs signed by ASEAN Member States since 2020

Date	MOU	Content
June 2020	Viet Nam and Japan	Special visa for Vietnamese migrant workers in Japan
March 2022	Viet Nam and Malaysia	Recruitment, employment and repatriation of workers
March 2022	Viet Nam and Australia	Support for Vietnamese citizens to participate in the Australian Agriculture Visa Programme
June 2022	Viet Nam and Japan	Special visa for Vietnamese migrant workers in Japan

[...](pg.3)

The Risks and Rewards study that the ILO and the International Organization for Migration conducted in 2017 (ILO 2017b) assessed the outcomes of migration in the ASEAN region for 1,808 migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam. More than half of them (56 per cent) were in a regular situation, with 44 per cent thus in an irregular situation. The study found that migration outcomes appear to be heavily dependent upon how effectively labour migration policies are implemented for specific migration corridors. In other words, most positive outcomes are achieved when migrant workers are provided with opportunities to enhance their job skills, avoid debt, receive the minimum wage and find gainful employment upon return.[...](pg.7)

In Viet Nam, the Law on Contract-Based Vietnamese Overseas Workers 69/2020/QH14 (Law 69) was adopted in 2020 and came into force in January 2022. Important changes introduced in the law include:

- the removal of the obligation for migrant workers to pay service fees in addition to brokerage commission to public employment services;
- if part or all of the service fee is covered by employers or foreign receivers, then workers will only pay for any remaining amount required under the law;* and payment of brokerage commissions to the counterpart recruitment agency, if any, by workers is eliminated;
- the ability for migrant workers to unilaterally liquidate a contract in the event of threats, sexual harassment, maltreatment or forced labour; X inclusion of definitions for discrimination and forced labour that are in line with ILO Conventions No. 111 and No. 29;**
- a provision for legal aid in cases of abuse, violence or discrimination while working abroad;
- specific wording about gender equality in the stated goals;
- prohibition on deceitful advertising for the purpose of organizing trafficking in persons, abusing recruitment activities to illegally collect fees and charging brokerage fees, backed up with a sanction of revocation of recruitment agency license for violation of these prohibitions; and
- predeparture training must include information on forced labour, trafficking in persons prevention, gender equality, sexual abuse and gender-based violence prevention skills.” (pp.11-12)

Note: *=The fee permitted is still exceptionally high, equivalent to three months’ wages in a destination country.
**=Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). Source: TRIANGLE in ASEAN.

(Source: International Labour Organization (ILO) – [Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN](#), Thematic background paper for the 16th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, 2024, pp.3-4-7-12, last accessed 1 August 2025)

⁶³ August 2025) as recreated by Asylos for readability, information presented is only relevant to Vietnam.

The 2023 Al Jazeera article ‘Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province’ reports on Vietnam’s state-supported migration policies, outlining how government initiatives have facilitated overseas employment, particularly through formal labour export programs.

“[...] The Vietnamese government adopted the promotion of migration labour as a policy. In 1980, the post-war and cash-strapped communist government in Hanoi adopted a policy of actively encouraging and sending Vietnamese people to friendly countries in the then-Soviet Union as migrant labour.

That was just five years after the end of the war, and the initiative helped to alleviate unemployment domestically and brought remittances back to grateful relatives in Vietnam.

Almost three decades on, in 2009, Vietnam’s then-Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung implemented a “labour export” policy known as Programme 71, which focused on alleviating poverty in 62 districts in 20 provinces, including Nghe An.

The policy offered incentives, such as low-interest loans and state-funded training, to facilitate Vietnamese travelling overseas to work in countries such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Macau, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The majority of Vietnamese labour migrants come from the north and north central region of the country - where Nghe An is located, and according to a Nghe An provincial state media report in March, remittances attributed to Vietnamese working on contracts overseas were valued at half a billion dollars annually for the province.

Such inflows of cash have contributed to putting Vietnam in 10th place among the largest remittance-receiving countries in the world.

And for five consecutive years to 2016, Nghe An sent more migrant workers abroad than any other locality in Vietnam, according to a study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

But the IOM report also said gaps in regulatory oversight of labour recruitment agencies, coupled with limited administrative and criminal law enforcement, allowed unethical recruitment practices to thrive, putting migrant workers at risk of forced labour and human trafficking.”

(Source: Al Jazeera – [Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province](#), 20 July 2023. Last accessed: 15 June 2025)

The UNODC noted in 2019:

“XII.10.2 Unlawful recruitment of workers

Offences relating to the recruitment of workers from Viet Nam may be relevant in some instances of smuggling and trafficking. Viet Nam regulates the placement of its citizens in overseas positions through the Law on Vietnamese Guest Workers of 2006. Enterprises providing these services must be licensed and are prohibited from certain acts including:

- Sending workers to areas, sectors, occupations or jobs banned under Vietnamese regulations or by the host nation;
- Tricking Vietnamese guest workers to stay in foreign countries in contravention of the law.⁴⁴⁶

Violating these regulations can result in businesses having their license suspended or revoked.⁴⁴⁷ Viet Nam’s Law on Sending Vietnamese Labourers to Work Overseas of 2005 further prohibits enterprises from taking advantage of overseas work placement arrangements to facilitate unlawful migration of Vietnamese citizens, amongst other prohibited

acts.⁴⁴⁸ Various administrative sanctions are available for violations of these prohibitions including fines of between VND 15,000,000 and VND 20,000,000 and the suspension of business’ licenses to send Vietnamese workers overseas.^{449”}

⁴⁴⁶ Article 7 Law on Vietnamese Guest Workers of 2006.
⁴⁴⁷ Articles 14 and 15 Law on Vietnamese Guest Workers.
⁴⁴⁸ Article 4 Law on Sending Vietnamese Laborers to Work Overseas.
⁴⁴⁹ Article 26 Law on Sending Vietnamese Laborers to Work Overseas

(Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – [Criminalisation of Smuggling of Migrants in ASEAN Member States](#), 2019, pg.164, last accessed 27 March 2025)

6. What percentage of migrants from Vietnam who are exploited abroad travelled through regulated means such as visa?

A report published in 2023 by Al Jazeera on Nghe An, Vietnam, states:

[...] “Many leave Nghe An to work around the world through formal routes - either through brokerage services or their own networks - many also talk openly about their intention to migrate and work illegally overseas. [...]

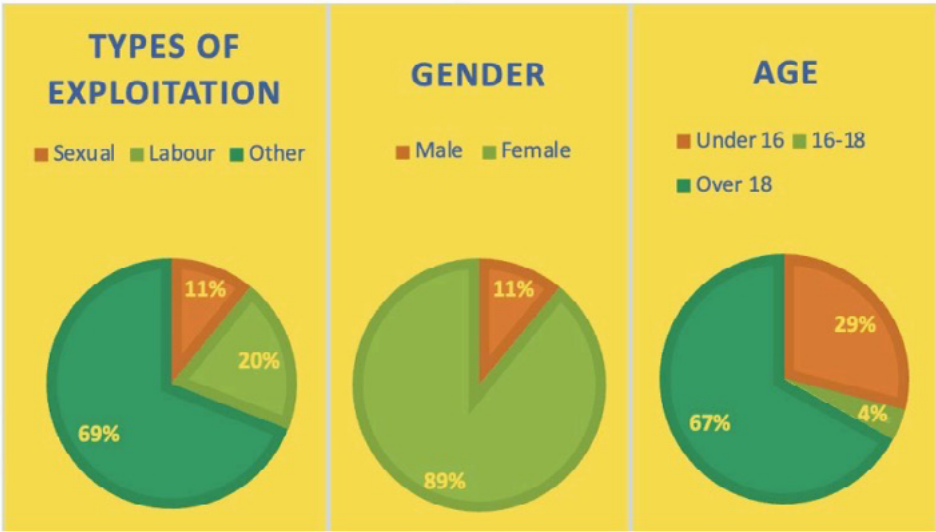
Their routes involve initially entering countries as tourists or claiming to visit relatives or, in more extreme cases, through fake marriages. Once in the intended country, they stay on as undocumented workers.” [...]

(Source: Al Jazeera – [Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province](#), 20 July 2023. Last accessed: 14 June 2025)

In this 2021 ODI report, it was noted that:

“4 Labour Migration Cycle –Primary Corridors

Vietnam is currently estimated to have 560,000 workers in 43 countries, although the actual number, including irregular migration, is probably far higher (ILO, 2021a). Most of the official statistics on human trafficking from Vietnam focus on sexual exploitation (see, for example, Blue Dragon (2021)). Accordingly, official data indicates that 85% of human trafficking victims are women, although forced labour primarily targets men and boys (Blue Dragon, 2021). In 2017, the IOM reviewed the state of labour migration, and found that between 2012 and 2016, women made up just less than a third of migrants on fixed-term contracts, most of whom were from north central Nghe An and northern provinces (IOM/MFA, 2017). In 2021, MOLISA received and identified 110 trafficking victims, of whom 104 are Vietnamese, six are foreigners, with different forms of exploitation, gender and age (see below).



Source: MOLISA, 2021 (pp.25-26)

The main corridors for labour migration are from Vietnam to Japan, Korea and Taiwan, which are generally seen to be more reliable because of the formal recruitment process, but this is not necessarily the case. A study of labour exploitation among labour migrants from two provinces in Vietnam – Thai Binh and Ha Tinh, which are known for their high concentration of migrant workers – to Japan and Taiwan found that 27% of migrant workers experienced at least one form of restricted freedom, such as having their identity documents confiscated, or being unable to leave the workplace (Zhang et al., 2021). This was higher in Taiwan (31.18%) than in Japan (17.81%) (Zhang et al., 2021). Fish farms had the highest likelihood of forced labour, followed by the apparel/ textile industry, construction work and then manufacturing, which is the largest employer. Jobs in the health sector and food processing were found to have the lowest level of forced labour (Zhang et al., 2021).

Other destinations in the ASEAN region include Thailand and Myanmar; China; and Indonesia and Malaysia.¹¹ Vietnam also sends migrant workers to the Middle East, the former Eastern Bloc countries and Western Europe, but these destinations are not explored here. Although accurate numbers are difficult to establish, particularly when irregular migration is prevalent, the following estimates were produced by MOLISA in March 2019 (ILO, 2021a).

Table 1
Number of Vietnamese labour migrants in main destination countries

Destination	Number of Vietnamese labour migrants present
Taiwan	170,000
Japan	148,000
South Korea	50,000
Malaysia	50,000
Thailand	50,000

Source: MOLISA (2019) (pp.26-27)

¹¹ Because Indonesia and Malaysia will be the focus of phase 2 case studies, they are not examined here.

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), pp.26-27, July 2023. Last accessed: 11 July 2025)

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, noted that:

“A key driver of child trafficking is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the risks of migrating alone without a parent or caregiver amongst children.¹⁰ One hundred percent of children who migrated without a parent/caregiver in the survey experienced some form of abuse or labour exploitation. Associations between demographic characteristics and more positive views towards migration amongst children who had not migrated were examined using the survey data to identify factors which increase risk of future child lone migration, and therefore increase risk of exploitation.”

¹⁰ Interview with an NGO, Feb 21 2022.

(Source: UNICEF — [Case Study, Migration and Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation, Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 6 July 2025)

3.2 Economic and Debt-related Risk factors

Cross reference with:

- Section 2 (Routes and Actors)
- Section 3.2 (Debt and Economic Risk)
- Section 3.4 (Return-specific Risks)
- Section 5.2 (Social Protection Gaps)
- Section 5.3 (Poverty and Access to Healthcare)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)

7. What is the prevalence of debt bondage among trafficked persons in Vietnam?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]Vietnamese men and women migrate abroad for work informally, including through illicit brokerage networks operated by other Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or through state-owned or state-regulated labor recruitment enterprises. Approximately 158,000 Vietnamese workers went abroad under contracts in 2024 alone; most of these workers went to Japan, Taiwan, ROK, Singapore, and China. Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. High worker-paid recruitment fees pushed many Vietnamese workers to migrate outside legal channels and increased their vulnerability to trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

In his book titled ‘*The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees*’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“[...]According to “[humantrafficking.org](#)”, a web resource for combating human trafficking, “Many of these migrants are processed through state-affiliated and private labor export companies which reportedly coerce migrants to sign contracts in languages they cannot read, and charge fees in excess of those allowed by law ... This has forced Vietnamese migrants to incur some of the highest debts among Asian expatriate workers, making them highly vulnerable to debt bondage and forced labor.”² Traffickers, loan sharks and migration brokers form networks engaged in exploitation for labour. In recent years, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth, although this has led to a highly unequal distribution of wealth across the country. Despite this growth, Vietnam remains fundamentally one of the world’s poorest nations. The country’s GDP per capita stands at \$3756, placing it at 116th position globally among all countries.³ While the official poverty line for urban

households is set at \$24 per month, a considerable 20.7 percent of households fall below this line.⁴ However, there are also millions of households that are not officially classified as “poor” but still face constant financial struggles, often resorting to taking on significant debts over time. This challenging financial situation has contributed to the alarming rise of illegal lending, commonly known as “loan-sharking,” which has become an epidemic.[...]

The number of criminal cases referred to is a drop in the ocean, given the sheer scale of this issue. Only a very small number of high-profile cases that have reached political attention are pursued, and the risk of being prosecuted for illegal lending is virtually zero. It is not possible for the authorities to effectively deal with illegal lending, which generates debt traps and vicious methods of debt collection, because this would collapse the economy of the vast majority of households in the country.[...]

A key technique used by traffickers is called “debt bondage”. It can begin with the target being taken to a large city and taken shopping or when a brokerage fee is charged for taking the victim abroad. Huge inflated fees for “services” of this kind are then used to pressure the victim into exploitative work in order to enable him/her to pay off the debt and the cost of travel, accommodation, food, negotiating a workplace etc.²⁵ According to CEOP, the “level of debt attributed to Vietnamese children trafficked to the UK was identified in two cases as £17,000 and £20,000. The girl who stated she had a £17,000 debt was told she would have to work two years in a cannabis factory to pay off this debt, which demonstrates the extent of the exploitation considering the risks, isolation and time spent working at these venues levied against the high turnover by these criminal enterprises.”²⁶ A report by STATT Consulting stated: “Vietnamese migrant workers, particularly in Western countries, often face multiple forms of exploitation. Interest-based debt bondage occurs when workers take out loans to pay recruitment fees, but interest rates are so high that they can never repay the debt. The debt continues to grow over time, making it nearly impossible for workers to escape the cycle of exploitation. False debt bondage occurs when some employers create false debts, claiming that workers owe them money for various expenses like food or housing. These debts are often inflated, and the workers are not provided with any documentation to prove that the debt exists. The confiscation of identity and travel documents by employers may also leave them with no way to leave the country or seek help. This is illegal, but it is common in industries like domestic work and agriculture, sectors where STATT has seen online advertisements for Vietnamese workers sky-rocket in 2023.”²⁷ Typically, both children and adults who fall victim to trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation are taken from their home country, such as Vietnam, and transported to their destination country, including various European nations like Russia, Germany, or France, before finally reaching the UK.²⁸

2 <http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/vietnam> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

3 World Bank, GDP Per Capita, 2023; United Nations Statistics Division – National Accounts – Basic Data Selection, [un.org](https://data.un.org), 2023

4 “Vietnam sees 20.7 drop in poverty levels”, Vietnam Net 25 September 2013; for a more detailed analysis of household debt and the relationship between formal and informal debt see <https://www.seacen.org/publications/RStudies/2018/RP102/8-VietnamHouseholddebt.pdf> [...]

25 Young Woman Get Death Penalty for Drug Trafficking”, Tui Tre News, 21 June 2012; Annuska Derks, “Bonded Labour in Southeast Asia: Introduction”. Asian Journal of Social Science, 38(4). 2010, p. 839-852.

26 Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), The trafficking of women and children from Vietnam, Report, Hanoi 2011; see also <https://hopeforjustice.org/news/2018/06/expanding-our-anti-trafficking-work-into-vietnam/> (13 June 2018) [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

27 <https://statt.net/insights/forced-labour-and-vietnamese-debt-bondage/#::~:~:text=Vietnamese%20migrant%20workers%2C%20particularly%20in,can%20never%20repay%20the%20debt> (2023)

28 UNHCR, Refworld, “2012 Trafficking human persons – Vietnam”

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, Chapter 14, pg.126)

According to a 2023 report by ODI, debt bondage has increased due to challenges in finding suitable recruiters.

“Difficulties in identifying a suitable recruiter, either through lack of knowledge or the need to rely on cheaper options, has increased the level of debt bondage, as aspiring workers can be deceived and overcharged, particularly given the lack of reliable information on the migration process. When migrants go into debt to finance their travel, or arrange travel to pay off existing debt, they may be forced to work overseas until the debt is paid.⁴⁷ In addition, migrants with fewer resources are

more likely to travel irregularly than seek out recruitment agencies charging high fees.”
 (Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.40, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A 2023 Al Jazeera article on smuggling and trafficking in Vietnam’s Nghe An province highlights debt bondage as a common form of control by organised crime groups.

“[...]Vietnamese-led organised crime gangs have also made Vietnam a top source country for the smuggling and trafficking of people into Europe, according to an article from 2020 in the Forced Migration Review journal.

The debts incurred by people taking such journeys are used by the gangs as leverage to control migrants who are often forced to work in exploitative situations.”

(Source: Al Jazeera – [Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province](#), 20 July 2023, last accessed 3 July 2025)

According to the DFAT’s 2022 country information report, trafficking victims in Vietnam are likely to be in debt to their traffickers.

“3.88 Trafficking victims are likely to have their documents confiscated and be unable to leave their place of detention without a bodyguard. They will likely have a large debt with high interest rates that they are told they must pay back to the traffickers. It may take years to pay the debt and the situation may be worse if they are trafficked to wealthy countries with high living costs. Escape can be high risk and some women have experienced injury trying to escape, for example jumping from windows of multi-storey buildings.”(pg.23)

[...]“3.105 Moneylending is commonly linked to people trafficking. People are expected to pay money at each stage of the journey and are then held in servitude with the threat of violence where they owe money. Victims of trafficking may be used as recruiters for new victims to pay off their debts.” (pg.26)

(Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report Vietnam](#), 11 January 2022, pp.23-26, last accessed 30 May 2025)

Similarly, a 2020 report by IOM noted a pattern of indebtedness and debt bondage among migrant workers due to fees charged during the recruitment process.

“Due to mounting debts incurred to cover costs and fees during the recruitment process, migrant workers often had little option but to continue the process to repay their debt. In some cases, the only option to cover migration costs was to borrow from banks or mortgage family assets, while others saw recruitment fees and costs deducted from salaries during employment. Thus, not only did a pattern of indebtedness and debt bondage emerge, so did one of deceptive recruitment.”

(Source: IOM – [Vulnerabilities and risks of exploitation encountered by Vietnamese migrant workers: A qualitative study of returnees’ labour migration experiences](#), 2020, pg.45, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A 2019 report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery International and Pacific Links Foundation, explains that debt bondage is a major driver of exploitation among Vietnamese trafficking victims in Europe:

“[...]10 Debt burden and debt bondage increase the risk of exploitation in transit countries.

The system of debt bondage is prevalent amongst Vietnamese victims of trafficking in Europe. The cost of travelling to Europe typically ranges between \$10,000 USD and \$40,000 USD. Funds for travel are commonly borrowed, or family property is given as collateral. Smugglers demand interest on borrowed money, and the amounts owed can rise quickly. If debt lies with the remaining family in Vietnam, this can be used as a way to pressure and control the victim. The risk of economic exploitation through debt owed to the smuggler is significant because victims and potential victims do not wish their family to lose their home or be in danger. Migrants commonly acquire informal work throughout their journey to pay off such debt and enable

them to continue moving.[...]"

(Source: ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery and Pacific Links Foundation – [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pg.11, last accessed 3 July 2025)

8. What is the relationship between migration-related debt and vulnerability to exploitation and/or re-trafficking in Vietnam?

In his 2024 book titled ‘The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“[...]Re-trafficking by the same or other criminal gangs is a real risk, as discussed further below. This is due to the fact that traffickers and illegal moneylending gangs exist in a corrupt relationship with the police, and migration agents have such relations with the border police. The location of all individuals in the country is recorded in household registration, and details about all individuals with ID cards are in a national database. For these reasons, and based on personal experience, the possibility of coming across one’s trafficker is not necessarily slight, especially taking into account that keeping track of their victims is an essential element of their business model. Persons returning to Vietnam reveal themselves at several points. The first is to border guards when entering the country, the second is to the authorities when registering in a local area, and the third is when earning and living and registering on the national database as taxpayers. All of these have the potential to reveal a person’s presence to criminals, given the extensive corruption of police and other authorities in Vietnam. Access to these databases does not require special influence; it can be based on the corruption of low-level officials.[...]”

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, Chapter 14, pg.126)

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Country Information Report on Vietnam, published in December 2019, described how many returnees had high levels of debt from funding their travel out of Vietnam, and that indebtedness is reportedly lower in people living in irregular migration hotspots (such as Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces):

“[...] Conditions for returnees [...]

Many returnees have high levels of debt from funding their travel out of Vietnam. Sources in Vietnam have reported cases of moneylenders taking borrowers’ houses or land as repayment, or borrowers having to flee loan sharks when they are unable to repay their loans (see Security Situation). Anecdotally, indebtedness is reportedly lower among people living in irregular migration hotspots (such as Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces), as low or no-interest loans are generally organised within the community. Those who travel from outside of these provinces typically have fewer connections and thus tend to borrow from external lending groups who generally demand high interest rates.”

(Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) — [DFAT Country Information Report Vietnam](#), 13 December 2019, last accessed 12 May 2025)

According to the 2023 report on ‘Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province’:

“[...]Vietnamese-led organised crime gangs have also made Vietnam a top source country for the smuggling and trafficking of people into Europe, according to an article from 2020 in the Forced Migration Review journal.

The debts incurred by people taking such journeys are used by the gangs as leverage to control migrants who are often forced to work in exploitative situations.”

(Source: Al Jazeera – [Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province](#), 20 July 2023. Last accessed: 14 June 2025)

This 2023 ODI report noted that:

“[...]While it is a choice to migrate for work, several factors influence that choice, and affect migrants’ ability to exercise agency. At each stage – from pre-departure, on the journey, in the destination country and upon return to Vietnam – migrant workers are vulnerable. Prior to their departure, there are many factors that influence vulnerability, but the major challenge arises from a lack of knowledge and inability to access reliable information, as well as the fees charged by recruiters. These factors also influence the journey of migrant workers. Debt results in migrants taking risks in the destination country in order to earn more. Competition among migrant workers also increases vulnerability in the destination country, as other migrant workers are equally vulnerable and trying to negotiate better conditions. On return, exploited workers face significant barriers in being recognised as victims or receiving compensation, support and redress.

Vietnamese migrant workers are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They assume the risk of migrating for work, and tend to deal with the exploitation themselves rather than reporting it to the authorities. This arises from vulnerabilities they experience directly, such as high fees charged by recruitment agencies, indebtedness, lack of information and irregular status (in some cases). Vulnerability is also a result of the lack of support services, difficulties in investigating cases and the lack of incentive to report them.[...]”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), pg.9, July 2023. Last accessed: 11 July 2025)

In this 2019 research by CORAM International, it was noted that:

“Findings also suggest that debt bondage is used by employers to coerce victims into remaining in exploitative work. In some cases, victims were required to work off the costs associated with their journey or living arrangements. In other cases, employers paid an advance to a child or young person’s family, placing them in a situation of debt bonded labour from the outset. A young woman who was promised a job in the entertainment industry but was trafficked to Malaysia for the purposes of sex work, explained that her mother had to refund her flight costs in order to secure her release:

“Afterwards, I could not tolerate it anymore, so I told mom I would go home. I did not tell her why I wanted to go home, that I did not want to work abroad anymore. I guess my mom understood, so she told me she would pay for any amount of money as long as I could go home.”⁸⁴

Given the economic vulnerability which pushes children and young people into trafficking situations in the first place, respondents explained that in many cases victims (and families) were unable to obtain the money necessary to pay off traffickers. As a young girl who was trafficked in the garment industry recalled:

“I asked my parents after 2 months and said I wanted to come home. My parents tried to soothe me and said: ‘continue the job because we already used the money for another purpose – try to finish 12 months.’”⁸⁵

Even where debt bondage is not employed, children and young people may be compelled to stay in exploitative arrangements due to their desperate economic circumstances. A young woman trafficked in the garment industry, recalled how after departing from her trafficking situation, she ultimately decided to return:

Q. After one year was it easy to leave? (pg.54)
There were no difficulties – they gave me money and drove me back home but they also lured me back and promised a higher salary. They promised I could stop working earlier but it was just talk and I knew when I went back it would be the same and I would have to work even on Sunday. But I did accept the offer because I thought - no pain no gain and maybe it would be fruitful, so I committed to that household business for three years. It was a mixture of sadness and happiness but the anxiety and sadness overwhelmed...

Q. Did conditions improve? Or was it the same as the first year throughout?

My resilience improved – the conditions were the same but I knew my goal was to support my family and improve my skills to become independent, so I kept moving, kept suffering.⁸⁶

The case above may begin to explain seemingly contradictory findings about the voluntary way that children and young people were found to enter and leave exploitative relationships. Where children and their families lack viable alternatives they are more likely to stay in an exploitative situation, regardless of the harmful conditions to which they are subjected. This is also consistent with the finding that economic vulnerability is by far the most important factor influencing a child’s likelihood of experiencing trafficking.” (pg.55)

⁸⁴ Individual interview, you woman trafficked to work in a bar in Malaysia, Tay Ninh province, 10 Jan 2018.

⁸⁵ Individual interview, young woman with experiences of child trafficking, Hue Province, 8 October 2017.

⁸⁶ Individual interview, young woman with experiences of child trafficking, Hue Province, 8 October 2017

(Source: Coram International – [Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam](#), June 2019, pp.54-55, last accessed 16 July 2025)

9. Is there any evidence of the profile of loan sharks and their ties to traffickers?

The Times reported in August 2025 note that family members of trafficking victims often borrow money from loan sharks to pay traffickers:

“[...]Families gamble on sending young relatives abroad in the belief they will send back wages equivalent to the entire household working in Vietnam. When it works, traditional wooden houses are transformed into modern mansions.

To get there, though, migrants in search of a better life have to risk death, slavery and their relatives becoming indebted to ruthless loan sharks.

[...]

Le Tran*, an undocumented worker in London, said that, before being trafficked to four cannabis farms in the UK, he had been encouraged by relatives to leave Vietnam to “help family”. They collectively raised £6,000 with savings and funds borrowed from loan sharks to pay a smuggler from their village.”

(Source: The Times – [What I saw on the trafficking route that ships ‘slaves’ to the UK](#), 12 August 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report notes:

“[...]State-licensed private labor recruitment firms, in particular those affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly continued to charge some workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allowed, making them vulnerable to debt-based coercion.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report, illegal moneylending is commonly linked to trafficking:

“[...]3.178 In-country sources reported that loans from illegal moneylenders were often used to repay gambling debts or purchase ‘migration packages’ to third countries; with respect to the latter, migration agents were behind these loans in some cases. Illegal moneylending is also often linked to human trafficking.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country information report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.55, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A 2025 report by the BBC on the case of a Vietnamese man being trafficked to the UK notes that illegal moneylenders often work with trafficking gangs to force people into labour if they are unable to repay their debt:

“[...]With a lack of reputable lenders to borrow money from, people in Vietnam often turn to loan sharks who charge high interest rates. These loan sharks work with trafficking gangs, who will force people into working against their will if the debts go unpaid. When Nam’s father became ill with lung cancer, his family borrowed the equivalent of £186,564 from a loan shark. Nam and his sister were both forced by gangs to go abroad to work to repay the debt.”

(Source: BBC – [Trafficked to a cannabis farm over family’s debt](#), 6 March 2025, last accessed 30 May 2025)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 country information note on illegal moneylending in Vietnam includes an excerpt from the Electronic Immigration Network website on the close link between loan sharks and trafficking. This has been cited rather than the original source as it is more recent:

“8.6.1 A 2019 article on the Electronic Immigration Network website notes that: ‘...Loan sharks are closely connected to trafficking victims and often act as migration brokers. Traffickers frequently take advantage of debt bondage to control their victims, as trafficked person are lured with promises of economic opportunity. Traffickers also threaten families back home to ensure the victims continue to cooperate.’³⁶”

³⁶ EIN, [Vietnam’s Human Trafficking Problem Is Too Big to Ignore](#), 12 November 2019

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country policy and information note: fear of illegal moneylenders](#), Vietnam, February 2025, last accessed 11 July 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“State-licensed private labor recruitment firms, in particular those affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly continued to charge some workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allowed, making them vulnerable to debt-based coercion.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 11 July 2025)

The Global Organised Crime Index 2021 report on Vietnam notes:

“[...] criminal groups involved in human-trafficking and human-smuggling operations are known to provide financial services, or ‘shark loans’, to victims.”

(Source: Global Organised Crime Index – [Country profile: Vietnam](#), 2021, last accessed 11 July 2025)

10. Does having an outstanding debt to traffickers or money lenders increase the risk factors of further exploitation or re-trafficking within, to or from Vietnam?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“[...]The second thing is the debt, dealing with her debt. So if she, for example, went into debt to go to Europe or the UK and became a victim of trafficking and sent back, there’s no way to clear that debt[...] And especially if she borrowed money from black market money lender or someone connected to organized crime, that’s where you get the risk built into that, because one, she still has to pay back the debt, or two, she’s so worried about the potential perceived threat of not repaying the debt that she would be more likely to seek to go abroad again, right, one, to get out of the sphere of influence of the moneylender

and two, make enough money to try and repay the debt. Those two. I always say prevention is protection. It’s a lack of focus on prevention of trafficking in the first place beyond awareness-raising campaigns, instead of really getting to the root causes, [debt] is one that impacts the risk of someone getting re-trafficked or re-exploited because they’re still in the same conditions that they were beforehand, only worse[...]

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted:

“[...]State-licensed private labor recruitment firms, in particular those affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly continued to charge some workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allowed, making them vulnerable to debt-based coercion. Border officials reportedly prevented more than 500 individuals from traveling abroad to potentially exploitative situations in 2024.

Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. High worker-paid recruitment fees pushed many Vietnamese workers to migrate outside legal channels and increased their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East and Europe – such as the UK and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The Electronic Immigration Network article titled ‘*Vietnam’s Human Trafficking Problem Is Too Big to Ignore*’, originally published in November 2019, and referenced by the UK Home Office in its CPIN on ‘Fear of illegal moneylenders’, noted:

“8.6.1 A 2019 article on the Electronic Immigration Network website notes that: ‘...Loan sharks are closely connected to trafficking victims and often act as migration brokers. Traffickers frequently take advantage of debt bondage to control their victims, as trafficked person are lured with promises of economic opportunity. Traffickers also threaten families back home to ensure the victims continue to cooperate.’³⁶”

36 EIN, [Vietnam’s Human Trafficking Problem Is Too Big to Ignore](#), 12 November 2019

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Fear of illegal moneylenders \[Version 3.0\]](#), February 2025, pg.18, last accessed: 12 April 2025)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report:

“3.177 There is a potential for reprisals for unpaid debts, particularly where the creditor is an organised criminal syndicate. According to in-country sources, speaking in October 2023, reprisals might be carried out by individuals hired by creditors to exert pressure on debtors, rather than by the creditors’ themselves (some loan sharks had established legitimate debt collection companies to pursue unpaid debts). Reprisals can take various forms, ranging from psychological pressure and public embarrassment to intimidation and violence, although in-country sources said violence was not typically used. Specific reprisals may include property damage, asset seizures, playing of loud music outside debtors’ homes, and sending funeral wreaths to their homes or workplaces. While the use of violence was not common, the disruption to a debtor’s life – and associated psychological pressures – was sometime acute. In-country sources reported instances of creditors or their contractors moving into a debtor’s home, including eating their food, until the debt was repaid in part or in full. Debtors’ family members may also face verbal and physical harassment and threats.

3.178 In-country sources reported that loans from illegal moneylenders were often used to repay gambling debts or purchase ‘migration packages’ to third countries; with respect to the latter, migration agents were behind these loans in some

cases. Illegal moneylending is also often linked to human trafficking. Demand for illegal moneylending services is thought to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic disruptions. (pg.55)

3.182 In practice, debtors may be reluctant to report to the police, including due to feelings of shame and, where the creditor is a criminal syndicate, fears of reprisal; in-country sources reported in October 2023 that, unless physical violence was involved, most debtors did not report to the police. Irrespective, the police may be unable to investigate and prosecute a loan shark because there is typically no written evidence of a loan. This is particularly true in recent years: much loan sharking activity moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic and the debtor may not know the identity of the creditor.” (pg.56)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade — [DFAT Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.55-56, last accessed 25 June 2025)

The 2023 TiP report also noted:

“[...]Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

In their 2024 joint report, specifically within the UK, Centre for Social Justice and Justice and Care noted:

“[...]we see it through Vietnamese children who are in cannabis grows and are forced to work in the cannabis grows, to pay off a debt and usually a debt from either their family or back in Vietnam, or paying for their journey to the UK[...].... where they’re in cannabis grows and, again, are forced to pay a debt, which there’s never an end to that debt” Barnardo’s practitioners

(Source: Centre for Social Justice and Justice and Care — [Criminal Exploitation: Modern Slavery by Another Name](#), February 2024, pg.30, last accessed 13 June 2025)

11. What are the key material and economic factors that may impact vulnerability to destitution and re-trafficking?

An article titled ‘Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023, (Case study in Ha Giang province)’, published in September 2024, stated that:

“[...]Upon returning to the community, the victims face many difficulties, notably lack of employment and unstable income. Some victims, because they do not have jobs, after being trafficked, returning to the other side of the border illegally to find work. This brings many risks, including the risk of re-trafficking.”

(Source: Journal Of Ethnic Studies – [Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023 \(Case study in Ha Giang province\)](#), 30 September 2024, last accessed 29 May 2025)

This briefing document presents the consolidated learnings from an anti-trafficking programme by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery between 2019 and 2020 in northern Vietnam and led by implementation partners Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation and the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance. The briefing notes that:

“[...]Findings from the survivor database analysis emphasize that situations of poverty, exclusion, and disadvantage are critical drivers of vulnerability to trafficking. The majority of trafficking victims in Vietnam (across both labor and sex trafficking cases) are from regions characterized by high rates of poverty and unemployment, a lack of access to healthcare, education, housing, water and sanitation services, and disconnected from information and communication networks.”

(Source: Global Fund To End Modern Slavery – [Anti-Trafficking Programming in Northern Vietnam](#), 2021, pg.5)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 CPIN ‘Vietnam: Trafficking’ noted that:

“[...]9.5.4 [...]Funds for travel are commonly borrowed, or family property is given as collateral. Smugglers demand interest on borrowed money, and the amounts owed can rise quickly. If debt lies with the remaining family in Vietnam, this can be used as a way to pressure and control the victim. The risk of economic exploitation through debt owed to the smuggler is significant because victims and potential victims do not wish their family to lose their home or be in danger. Migrants commonly acquire informal work throughout their journey to pay off such debt and enable them to continue moving.”⁴⁷ (pg.21)

⁴⁷ ECPAT UK et al, Precarious Journeys – Mapping vulnerabilities of victims..., (page 11), 2019

[...]11.1.1 [...] The challenge is the support system, according to law they are eligible for support but in reality, they don’t get much. Once they go back to Vietnam they are supposed to provide travel support to go back home once home they are supposed to get economic support. Some provinces state that some support is only offered to survivors who are from a poor household. They have to have the victim certificate for long term support and for some support, they need to be in poor household.”⁶⁹ (pg.28)

⁶⁹ UK Home Office, HO FFM report (annex D- Hagar International), September 2019

[...]13.2.2 [...]‘In practice, women who are single come under what in-country sources call ‘intense pressure’ to marry. One source described being single as ‘odd’. The SBS Cultural Atlas notes that family support is so central to Vietnamese culture that the idea of living alone or without family can be ‘intimidating’. This pressure is likely to be from families but may also be on a societal or community level. In country-sources told DFAT that many women are ‘afraid’ of being divorced due to societal and cultural factors. ‘Divorce is possible but stigmatised. In-country sources told DFAT that this stigma is changing for younger people, who are more open to divorce, but DFAT assesses that the stigma is strong for most Vietnamese women. That stigma can result in family pressure and shame, but can also have economic consequences. [...]”(pg.38)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note: Vietnam: Trafficking, February 2025](#), pp.21-28-38, last accessed 6 August 2025)

In its 2024 report titled ‘*Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam*’, Blue Dragon observed changes in risk for different ethnicities, based on its service provision for trafficking victims up to 2022:

“[...]Vietnamese ethnic minority communities experience higher poverty and disadvantage levels than their majority Kinh peers. Higher illiteracy and income poverty rates, cultural traditions of child marriage, and poorer access to essential public services such as healthcare, schooling, and infrastructure make ethnic minority people, and especially women and girls, more vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation.[...]”

²⁵ Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, November 2021, What makes victims vulnerable to human trafficking? Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam, Hanoi, Vietnam.

²⁶ Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, July 2021, Human Trafficking and Traffickers in Vietnam. An analysis of the nature of trafficking and the profile of traffickers in Vietnam based on information from court cases, Hanoi, Vietnam.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.16)

A UNICEF report published in April 2023 stated that certain factors increased children’s vulnerability to exploitation in the context of migration, including disability, lower wealth, lower education, ethnicity and rurality:

“[...]Executive summary[...]

[...] 1.2.1 Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration beyond poverty[...]

(Source: UNICEF – [Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 12 May 2025)

3.3 Family, Community, and Intergenerational Risk Factors

12. Is there evidence of the possible complicity of parents, other family members or caregivers in arranging or consenting to the smuggling or trafficking of children, unaccompanied minors or adult family members?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained:

“[...]there are other situations where, for example, I met a couple of young men at Vietnam City, the old Vietnamese migrant camp in northern France a few years ago. They were cousins, and they were on their way to the UK because one of the boys’ fathers had gone to the UK many years before, worked in a nail salon, didn’t have papers or anything like that, would still managed to send money home and everything, and then decided he wanted to retire and just come back to Vietnam. So he went back to Vietnam. But then he said to his son and his nephew, *“Hey, you should go to the UK.”* And the problem is that this man went many years earlier. So for this later version of organized crime getting involved with I think he went in the early ‘90s, mid ‘90s. So it was a different time.

And the cost was less expensive, and you didn’t have the control of the routes and mixed in with cannabis growing and all the other business lines of the transnational organized crime groups. It wasn’t there yet. It was just more people smuggling, right? And so that was the dad’s experience. So for him, he was like, *“Oh, son, nephew, you should go too.”* So these young men, I think they were very young, 18, 19 years old, were on their way over, and they were miserable. They were in the middle of the forest. It had already been a couple months. They had to go through Russia and all this. And they were extremely at risk for further exploitation once they got to the UK because it’s a different time, right? So you see things like that as well where they think because some relative left beforehand, and it was a different time, they had a different experience. It’s the same way how it is now. Same thing happened to a young woman. She was only 17 when I met her in the camp. Her sister had gone several years earlier to the UK. And so the parents said, *“Okay. Daughter, you should go too. Follow your sister.”* But she took this crazy route. The broker took her to Korea and then went through China, and then she had to go through all these things. And I said to her, I was like, *“If your parents knew what you had to go through, do you think they would have sent you?”* And she said, *“No. Absolutely not.”* She’s like, *“I hate this so much.”* And she was 17. And even though she-- we didn’t have a long time to talk to her because we were in the migrant camp. But even though she didn’t talk about her experiences, she was a single girl who’s 17 years old traveling by herself at the mercy of all these men. When we were leaving, we gave her a hug. She started crying and just held onto us and wouldn’t let go, right? And it’s not a leap to think about what possibly could have happened to her during this very long, crazy journey that she had to take, right? So these are that kind of thing that I’ve seen. I think with the-- as for the stigma for the child, I think it’s less about the stigma because, again, a lot of times they don’t even know what’s happening to their parents. Parents don’t tell them the truth. It’s more about growing up as what we call *‘bare branch’*. These kids grow up without parents because the parents are off. And so it’s not their parents as their primary caretaker. It’s usually the grandparents who are elderly, like an auntie or an uncle or a cousin or someone else who’s not the primary parent.[...]”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

The NGO Blue Dragon report in 2025 noted that:

“We can consider the recruiters of victims of forced scamming as either “Known people” or “Unknown people”. By “Known people”, we mean acquaintances, friends, family members and neighbours. By “Unknown people”, we mean friend of a friend, strangers and victims recruited via the internet through online job advertisements.

Similar to other forms of human trafficking, most victims of forced criminality knew their traffickers, with 84 (64.6%) victims being deceived by people known to them. Meanwhile, 44 (33.8%) victims were deceived by “Unknown people”. For two victims, this information is missing.

Among Kinh victims, 51 (60%) were deceived by “Known people” while among the ethnic minority victims, this figure was 28 (77.8%) people. This suggests that traffickers exploit pre existing trust or relationships within close social circles across all ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Further, from the group of victims who were deceived by “Known people”, 73.8% were deceived by people from either the same commune, village, district or province, indicating that traffickers tend to look for victims from within their own social and economic circles and rely on familiarity when identifying victims.

When considered along with the demographic data, it can be inferred that traffickers of forced criminality come from similar backgrounds as their victims and are primarily exploiting social and friendship networks.

TABLE 13
Relationship of victim to their trafficker

Categories	Trafficker relation	Number of victims
Known people	Acquaintance	26
	Family	13
	Friend	44
	Neighbour	1
Unknown people	Friend's friend	2
	Online job offer	39
	Stranger	3
Unknown		2
Total		130

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 43-44, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including children who were homeless – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, parents and family members can be complicit in the trafficking of adults and children in forced labour.

“Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including unhoused children – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report 2024](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁶⁴, titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham noted that mostly women, were trafficked to China for forced marriage or commercial sexual exploitation.

64 See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal, at: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

“The recruiters are very often known to their victims. In fact, 62 per cent of the victims (123 out of 199 victims) knew their traffickers prior to the trafficking situation: as boyfriends, work colleagues, fellow villagers, or extended family members. The recruitment role is often fulfilled by people from similar backgrounds who may have friends or relatives in China who ask them to find wives for them. Twenty per cent of the recruiters in the dataset were people who worked in China or women married to Chinese men who knew someone who persuaded them to take Vietnamese women and girls to China. The majority of the other traffickers with no criminal background had acquaintances, friends, or relatives working or living in China.(pg.38)

[...]

Table 2
Means of recruitment of victims (pg.40)

How the victim knew the trafficker	No of victims	% of total
Met on internet/ via phone	67	33.7%
Boyfriend/friend/acquaintance/classmate/neighbour	67	33.7%
Someone from the same district	43	21.6%
Relative, family member	10	5.0%
Work colleague	3	1.5%
Unconfirmed	1	0.5%
Other (marriage broker, fortune teller)	8	4.0%
Total	199	100%

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review⁶⁵, issue 18, 2022, pp.38-40, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A report by NGO Blue Dragon, published in July 2021 , analysed data from 102 human trafficking court cases (a combination of 59 that it had been involved in and 53 Supreme Court cases, time period not specified) which included a total of 199 victims and 236 traffickers. Of these cases, 10 victims (5.02%) were trafficked by a relative. The report states:

“In this data, the number of people trafficked by family members is relatively low, however Blue Dragon knows that it can be more difficult to prosecute cases that involve family as the victim is often hesitant to provide a statement against a family member. Thus, the low figure here may not be an accurate representation of how many victims are trafficked by family members.

In this data, 10 victims were trafficked by their relatives or family members, including three infants... One mother in Nghe An was sentenced to prison. The other two mothers were not considered traffickers and not prosecuted.

⁶⁵ This article is part of a larger journal, The Anti-Trafficking Review, but the link directs to the web version of this specific article.

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

Excluding the three babies, the other seven victims were trafficked by their cousin, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, i.e. more distant relatives. In one case, the police could not prove that a direct relative (a sibling) was involved in selling her younger sister.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Human Trafficking and Traffickers in Vietnam](#), July 2021, pg.10, last accessed 3 July 2025)

13. How do cultural norms, traditions, or family structures contribute to intergenerational trafficking risk factors in Vietnam?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“[...] I think the kind of work that I have mostly seen, I don’t know if it fits the category, but very often the initial financial problem arose for the parents, then the son or daughter were trafficked as a way of mitigating these problems. If parents are absent that increases the risk for children especially. There are no prevalence figures in a strict sense, but there is evidence of familial cycles. In October 2019, 39 Vietnamese migrants were found dead inside a sealed refrigerated lorry in Grays, Essex, having suffocated during an illegal journey to the UK. Most had paid large sums to smuggling networks after being promised work, commonly in nail bars or low-paid manual jobs, and many were already trapped in debt bondage. The case exposed highly organised transnational trafficking routes linking Vietnam, mainland Europe and the UK, and several organisers were later convicted of manslaughter and trafficking offences. It has since become a stark reference point for the extreme risks faced by Vietnamese migrants, illustrating how apparent “*consent*” to travel is often shaped by coercion, deception and debt, and why survivors may remain vulnerable to exploitation or re-trafficking. Adult children try to solve a parent’s problem. There is intergenerational vulnerability, no clear category as such.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“So two things[...] it’s not necessarily intergenerational trafficking. I would say it’s more relative trafficking. So I’ll give you an example. One of the victims of the Essex 39 was a young man, 25 years old, from Nghe An Province.[...] After he passed away, the brother still wanted to earn money to support the family. And so he went with a labour broker and went into debt of many, many thousands and is now floating around somewhere in Manchester and Brighton, not being able to send money back home. So [the] third time is a charm. The sister who and they’re not the poorest of the poor. None of these victims are the poorest of the poor, but they’re just in a debt cycle where they overborrow, and they have no savings, and there’s some sort of crisis. In this case, one of the parents got sick, and so they went into debt to pay for the healthcare. So then the sister said, “*Okay, who else can go? My husband can go.*” So now she was looking for opportunities to try and somehow get her husband to the UK or to Australia in the hopes of trying to make money. And that is what we see because it’s not a, “*Okay, well, after 10 years, the child*” it’s immediate. It’s that quick. So it’s not necessarily parent-child, but it’s the person’s sibling, the person’s cousin [...]”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

A study published in the Journal of Social Change in 2020, based on interviews with 19 villagers in a remote community of Vietnam found that there was a connection between parents consenting to send their child away to work and the tradition of gender inequality:

“[...] The researchers also investigated if the parents’ decision to allow the young girls to earn money for the family had any connection with the tradition of gender inequality... The participants’ answers were quite revealing and are linked to human trafficking. When asked if in a critical situation that required one of the children, a son or a daughter, to stop schooling, which

one would the participant select. Fifteen participants (80%) believed that boys should stay in school to achieve good futures, extend the family lineage to keep the family tradition alive, and look after their parents in their old age. Many participants believed that a girl does not need to study so much as “she will get married and belong to her husband’s family.” [...] All 19 participants, directly and indirectly, admitted that favoring boys over girls is a cultural norm, and “the gender inequality culture still strongly exists in the community.”

(Source: Nguyen, B. N., & Gordon, M. – [Human trafficking and gender inequality in remote communities of Central Vietnam](#), 2020, last accessed 8 July 2025)

Debbie Beadle from ECPAT UK, when interviewed for the Asylos 2020 report, said that children with family members who had gone to work in Europe wanted to follow them, due to ignorance about the risk of exploitation:

“[...] So when we went to one area in the Nghe An region, then at school, we asked how many of the children had family members that had gone to work in Europe, and almost all of them put their hands up. And when we asked them what they wanted to do, they were like, “Oh, I want to follow. I want to go to Europe and find work.” So lots don’t even know what they’re going to face on the journey or that they may be exploited, but they’re prepared to do it. They won’t necessarily see it as trafficking or exploiting.”

(Source: Debbie Beadle, interview record, 20 November 2019)

(Source: Asylos – [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking, trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking](#), 6 May 2020, pg.126, last accessed 6 August 2025)

A report published in 2020 by the IOM on Vietnamese migrant workers found that social expectations, peer pressure, gendered family roles and the notion of migration as a rite of passage, were drivers of labour migration (which may be linked to risk of forced labour or human trafficking):

“[...]Drivers of and Alternatives to Migration[...]

[...] Social networks and peer pressure were also mentioned by respondents as driving desires to migrate. Some respondents wanted to follow the migration paths of family or friends. Others were motivated by easing financial burdens on their families, commonly felt by men migrants. Gender norms and roles in Viet Nam, whereby men earn family incomes while women take on family duties, appear to be a contributing factor. (pg.13)

Linked to peer pressure is the notion that migration is expected, even a rite of passage, with children even preparing for departure when in school (learning a language common in a potential destination). Respondents said it was a rite of passage in Nghe An province to such an extent, that local labour market limitations may no longer be the primary driver to migrate for work.” (pp.13-14)

(Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) – [Vulnerabilities and risks of exploitation encountered by Vietnamese migrant workers – A qualitative study of returnees’ experience](#), 2020, pp.13-14, last accessed 12 May 2025)

According to a March 2019 joint report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery International and Pacific Links Foundation, cultural norms around respect for elders can leave Vietnamese children vulnerable to the harmful intentions of adults:

“[...] Vietnamese children are generally taught cultural norms around respecting their elders and are therefore less likely to ask questions of adults they believe to be charged with their ‘care’. This leaves children vulnerable to the harmful intentions of adults.”

(Source: ECPAT UK/Anti-Slavery International/Pacific Links Foundation – [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pg.15, last accessed 12 May 2025)

14. Are there any traditional or religious practices that increase vulnerability to trafficking across generations?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“Socio-economic and cultural factors may contribute to vulnerability. These include strong family obligations, expectations to financially support relatives, and migration as a perceived pathway to economic advancement. In some cases, informal community networks or personal connections facilitate migration opportunities, which may expose individuals to exploitation[...]. Additionally, limited awareness of trafficking risks in certain communities, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may contribute to vulnerability. These factors are not inherently linked to religious or traditional practices but may interact with cultural expectations around migration and family responsibility.”

(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

The DFAT in ‘Country Information Report Vietnam’ published on 19th February 2025, stated that as of October 2023, child marriage was still prevalent, especially among the Hmong community, where a cultural practice known as ‘bride-napping’ still occurred:

“[...] 3.118 [...] [I]n October 2023, 14.6 per cent of women between 20 and 24 years of age reported marrying before they turned 18, with higher rates recorded in rural and ethnic minority communities. The Hmong – at 57.7 per cent – had the highest prevalence. In-country Hmong sources, speaking in October 2023, said early marriage was ‘endemic’ in their community (many Hmong girls married at 14 or 15 years of age). A cultural practice known as ‘bride-napping’ occurs within the Hmong community. Hmong boys – often with the help of their friends and family – abduct girls and detain them for three days, during which time the girl is expected to decide whether she will marry her abductor. Refusal to marry may lead to violence. The practice is illegal and there have been some prosecutions according to in-country Hmong sources, mostly of mature-aged men. In-country Hmong sources reported that bridenapping was less frequent today, although still occurred, and, where it did, was rarely reported. The practice of bride-napping is specific to the Hmong.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 19 February 2025, pg.44, last accessed 8 July 2025)

An article published by the NGO Plan International in July 2024, stated:

“[...] In the Northern Midlands and mountainous areas of Vietnam, 19% of women aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18. In Hà Giang, a city located in the northern part of Vietnam, due to the prevalence of bride-kidnapping, many girls become child brides before reaching adulthood and have to let go of studies and promising futures.”

(Source: Plan International, [Bride-Kidnapping Pushed a 12-Year-Old Girl into Darkness Desperate to Flee Her Living Nightmare](#), 17 July 2024, last accessed 8 July 2025)

15. Are there specific regions or communities in Vietnam where intergenerational trafficking is more prevalent due to poverty or marginalisation?

The September 2025 Blue Dragon report on trafficking into forced criminality noted:

“[...]Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 54% of all victims Blue Dragon assisted and 75% of victims whose cases were successfully prosecuted were ethnic minority people. Vietnamese ethnic minority communities experience higher poverty and disadvantage levels than their majority Kinh peers. Higher illiteracy and income poverty rates, cultural traditions of child marriage, and poorer access to essential public services such as healthcare, schooling and infrastructure make ethnic minority people, especially women and girls, more vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. While ethnic minority people continue to be overrepresented in human trafficking statistics, the rise in forced criminality is resulting in historically high numbers of Kinh victims. [34] [35]

Although victims trafficked of forced criminality and other forms of exploitation have similar education levels, a key factor behind the rising number of Kinh victims may be their fluency in the Kinh language, which is the mainstream Vietnamese language. Victims in online scam compounds are forced to create social media accounts and use scripted messages to defraud others. This work does not necessarily require formal education – only basic phone and typing skills. The socioeconomic situation and language of Kinh people make it more likely that they’ll be both targeted by scams and recruited to carry them out. In contrast, ethnic minorities frequently face language barriers, as many speak their native tongues in daily life and have lower proficiency in Kinh Vietnamese. It is also likely that Kinh people are overrepresented in this court case dataset as they tend to have more resources to be able to pay a ransom for release from the compounds as well as the resources and language skills to participate in investigation procedures and complete a successful court case. (pg.26)

Further, the gender and ethnicity intersection shows that Kinh males are six times as vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality as Kinh females, while Thai males are twice as vulnerable compared to females.” (pg.27)

- 34 Luong Le and Caitlin Wyndham, ‘[What Makes People Vulnerable to Human Trafficking? Profile of Victims of Human Trafficking in Vietnam](#)’ (Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, November 2021)
- 35 Luong Le and Caitlin Wyndham, ‘Human Trafficking & Traffickers in Vietnam – [An Analysis of the Nature of Trafficking and the Profile of Traffickers in Vietnam Based on Information from Court Cases.](#)’ (Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, July 2021)

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding Light on the Trafficking of Vietnamese People into Forced Criminality](#), September 2025, pp.26–227, last accessed: 07 March 2026)

The DFAT, in ‘Country Information Report Vietnam’ published on 19th February 2025, cited reports that traffickers could be family members, and that poverty and the risk of bride-napping, for example among Hmong women, could lead people to engage traffickers directly:

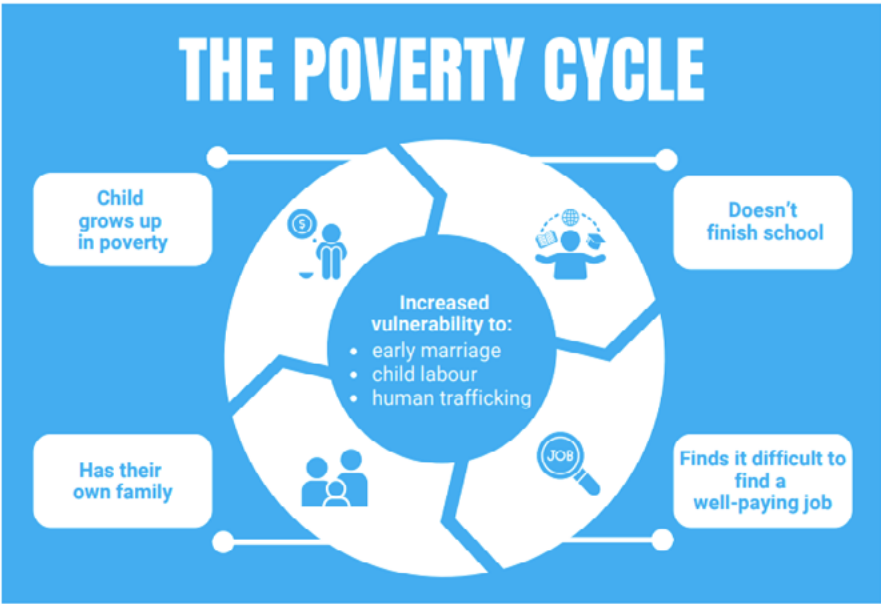
“[...] 3.143 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that traffickers were often known to the victim, including partners, family members and neighbours. In many cases, victims will directly engage traffickers for work or marriage opportunities. Speaking in relation to Hmong women, in-country sources said the prospect of marriage in China (to where most Hmong women were trafficked) was more appealing than living in poverty and potentially being subjected to bride-napping. Most traffickers, like victims, are from ethnic minority communities. In-country sources said some traffickers were as young as 18.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 19 February 2025, pg.49, last accessed 12 May 2025)

In this 2024 illustration, Blue Dragon noted that:

“[...]We know that people are more likely to experience human trafficking if they live in poverty and lack an education. We also know that people are more likely to become traffickers if they have not completed schooling.

Blue Dragon’s analysis of trafficking in Vietnam shows that 93% of traffickers and 90% of victims were illiterate or had left school before Grade 12.



(Source: Blue Dragon – [Education: The Key To Transforming Lives](#), October 2024, no age number available, last accessed 9 July 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that children from rural and underserved communities have increased vulnerabilities to trafficking:

“[...]Trafficking Profile[...]

[...]Within the country, ongoing pandemic-related unemployment and other socio-economic stressors increased vulnerabilities to trafficking, particularly for women and children in rural areas and among ethnic minorities.[...] A previous study indicated 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam were members of ethnic minority communities; however, NGOs report an increasing number of Kinh ethnic majority members trafficked into forced labor. Other reports suggest many children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking, with children from rural and underserved communities at particularly high risk.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 12 May 2025)

A UNICEF report published in April 2023 stated that certain factors increased children’s vulnerability to exploitation in the context of migration, including disability, economic disadvantage, lower education, ethnicity and rurality:

“[...]Executive summary[...]

[...] 1.2.1 Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration beyond poverty
 Certain groups of children are more vulnerable to exploitation in the context of migration. The survey for children and young people indicated that children with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to exploitation in the context of migration. Lower wealth made children who migrated more vulnerable to emotional violence, while children from ethnic minority groups were more likely to experience physical violence (particularly H’Mong children). Children living in rural areas were more likely to experience wage exploitation, and girls experienced more frequent sexual exploitation. Children who did not make the decision to migrate were more likely to experience exploitation, and children with lower education and wealth and ethnic minority status were less likely to make the choice to migrate. Key informants also highlighted that education, rurality and ethnicity are risk factors for child trafficking, and that these are interlinked with poverty.^{7”}

⁷ Interview with an IO, Feb 25 2022; KII with an NGO. Feb 15 2022.

(Source: UNICEF – [Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 12 May 2025)

The Vietnam Human Rights Network’s Report on Human Rights in Vietnam for the period of 2021 to May 2022, published in June 2022, stated that:

“[...] Victims of human trafficking in China are mainly from ethnic minorities living in remote villages of the provinces along the China-Vietnam borders. Because of their poverty, the victims are lured to China by traffickers to find jobs. Upon arrival, the victims are sold to peasant families to become domestic laborers or forced to marry older men; some are forced into prostitution.”

(Source: Vietnam Human Rights Network – [Report on Human Rights in Vietnam 2021-2022](#), 24 June 2022, pg.13, last accessed 8 July 2025)

3.4 Risk Factors of Children of Trafficking Survivors

16. Is there any information available on the risk factors of children being trafficked if they return to Vietnam with a parent/guardian or caregiver who was trafficked?

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, found that being from a single parent family and being a child who has migrated with parents are factors which increase children’s risk of trafficking and exploitation:

“[...]Executive Summary[...]

[...] 1.2.1 Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration beyond poverty

[...] Additional family characteristics that increase children’s risk of trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration include being from a single-parent household, being a child who remains behind when parents migrate, being a child who has migrated with parents, and living in a household in which family violence is present. In these circumstances, children are at increased risk of neglect and seek to escape their home circumstances.”(pg.7)

[...] Reduced parental care has also been evidenced as a risk for child trafficking; previous research on child trafficking in Viet Nam found that children from single parent households and households in which the head was not a parent were at increased risk of experiencing an indicator of child trafficking.⁸³ (pg.23)

[...]

⁸³ K. Apland and E. Yarrow, Casting Light in the Shadows – Child and Youth Migration, Exploitation and Trafficking in Viet Nam’, Coram International, 2019, p.44.”

(Source: UNICEF – [Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pp.7-23, last accessed 8 July 2025)

17. What are the key potential vulnerabilities and risk factors faced by children whose parents/guardians or caregivers were trafficked?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, report noted that:

“[...]The government maintained an NRM approved in 2014, but some local officials’ unfamiliarity with anti-trafficking protocol and policies, insufficient interjurisdictional cooperation, and limited social worker capacity continued to hinder its systematic and effective implementation.[...]

The government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, also previously stated that front-line workers including social workers were poorly trained to support trafficking victims and address child protection issues:

“[...] The government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 12 May 2025)

A 2024 report submission by a South Korean NGO to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, on the situation of “marriage migrants”, described the difficulties faced by the children of married migrant women who return to Vietnam:

“Married migrant women who return to Vietnam face significant financial burdens due to child support and livelihood expenses, difficulties in legally dissolving their marriages, and community stigma. In addition, children of returnees are often unaware that they have legal documents to stay in Vietnam as foreigners, and their passports and visas expire, preventing them from attending school or accessing healthcare. Returning women and their children often end up as marginalized groups in Vietnamese society, facing economic poverty, unstable residency status for their children, and lack of access to healthcare.”³

³ Vietnam Plus.(2019). Workshop seeks to support women, children in Vietnamese-Korean marriage breakups. Retrieved from: <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/workshop-seeks-to-support-women-children-in-vietnamesekorean-marriage-breakups/165400.vnp> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

(Source: KOCUN – Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy – [Vietnam CEDAW; 89th Session of the CEDAW Working Group](#); NGO Report Submission By: Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN), 2024, pg.3, last accessed 12 May 2025)

The Vietnamese government’s report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, dated 3 August 2023, stated that there were about 235,000 social workers supporting women and children, including human trafficking returnees:

“[...] 76. [...] The pool of professional and semi-professional social workers (about 235,000 people) has played a crucial role in supporting women and children subject to violence and sexual abuse and who are human trafficking returnees. They have also provided advice, counselling and support on domestic violence prevention and control.”

(Source: Government of Vietnam (published by CEDAW) – [Ninth periodic report submitted by Viet Nam under article 18 of the Convention](#), due in 2019 [CEDAW/C/VNM/9], 3 August 2023, last accessed 12 May 2025)

A report published in 2023 by ODI in partnership with ASEANACT and funded by the Australian Government (DFAT), stated that if victims do not report to the police on their return, they do not receive government support. It states that trauma and lack of support can lead to repeat migration:

“[...] If a victim returns on their own, referred to as ‘self-return’, and does not report to the police, there is no formal identification of their status, on which government support depends. As a result, few victims receive support from the government on their return[...] Loss of livelihoods because of trauma and lack of support can lead to repeat migration, despite the risks, as there is still a need to earn an income.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), 30 July 2023, pg.44, last accessed 12 May 2025)

In April 2022, Anti-Trafficking Review published an article on the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls for sexual exploitation in China, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam. The study stated that due to widely held stigmatising beliefs about trafficked women, many refuse to be officially identified as victims of human trafficking:

“[...] A commonly held belief in Vietnam is that women victims of trafficking are lazy, have poor morals, and choose to make easy money as sex workers, and therefore should take responsibility for being trafficked. Twenty-four per cent of grassroots officials (52/220 people) who attended Blue Dragon’s anti-trafficking training held this belief prior to the workshops.

This widespread perception leads to stigma and feelings of shame over the experience of being trafficked. Blue Dragon’s work with hundreds of survivors has revealed that many refuse to be officially identified as victims of human trafficking or give untrue information to police and social workers about being drugged or kidnapped.”

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), April 2022, last accessed 8 July 2025)

The DFAT, in ‘Country Information Report Vietnam’ from 2022 stated that the process of registering a child in a new locale can be lengthy and difficult:

“[...] A child cannot be registered without household registration documents and an identity card. It is possible to re-register in a new locale after moving, but this process can be lengthy and difficult, which deters some people.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report Vietnam \(para 5.23\)](#), 11 January 2022, last accessed 12 May 2025)

18. Does childhood trauma contribute to the vulnerabilities to trafficking among children of survivors? If so, how?

A report published by UNICEF in April 2023 stated the relationship between violence and trauma within the family and child migration and exploitation:

“[...] Violence and trauma within the family can be a contributing factor in children’s decision to migrate, putting them at risk of exploitation. In Viet Nam, for example “many child victims of sexual exploitation report being driven from their homes due to physical violence, family and household dysfunction, drug abuse and domestic violence and are forced to migrate to another region of Viet Nam to start a new life.”⁸²

⁸² Loan, L. H, Thanh, V. T. L, & Maternowska, M. C., Applying the child-centred and integrated framework for violence prevention: A case study on physical violence in Viet Nam, Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, 13:sup1, 2018, p 43. DOI: 10.1080/17450128.2018.1476749.

(Source: UNICEF – [Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.23, last accessed 8 July 2025)

A paper published in July 2019 on post-trafficking stressors for young trafficking survivors in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, stated that psychological or psychosocial problems resulting from children’s past trafficking experiences may exacerbate the risk of re-trafficking:

“[...] The analysis of data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicate that children and young adults are the groups most vulnerable to re-trafficking , especially in circumstances where family support is absent or there are difficulties or abuse at home. Psychological or psychosocial problems resulting from children’s trafficking experiences may exacerbate this risk [...]”

(Source: Nodzenski. M. et al – [Post-trafficking stressors: The influence of hopes, fears and expectations on the mental health of young trafficking survivors in the Greater Mekong Sub-region](#), 1 July 2019, last accessed 12 May 2025)

19. Are the children of trafficked parents more vulnerable to being exploited and/or re-trafficked in Vietnam? If so, why?

A 2025 article by the BBC on the case of a Vietnamese man being trafficked to the UK notes that illegal moneylenders often work with trafficking gangs to force people into labour if they are unable to repay their debt, the article did not comment on the effect that this may have on the children of trafficked parents:

“[...]With a lack of reputable lenders to borrow money from, people in Vietnam often turn to loan sharks who charge high interest rates. These loan sharks work with trafficking gangs, who will force people into working against their will if the debts go unpaid. When Nam’s father became ill with lung cancer, his family borrowed the equivalent of £186,564 from a loan shark. Nam and his sister were both forced by gangs to go abroad to work to repay the debt.”

(Source: BBC – [Trafficked to a cannabis farm over family’s debt](#), 6 March 2025, last accessed 30 May 2025)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 country policy and information note on illegal moneylending in Vietnam includes an excerpt from the Electronic Immigration Network website on the close link between loan sharks and trafficking, which describes how traffickers threaten victims’ families back home:

“8.6.1 A 2019 article on the Electronic Immigration Network website notes that: ‘...Loan sharks are closely connected to trafficking victims and often act as migration brokers. Traffickers frequently take advantage of debt bondage to control their victims, as trafficked person are lured with promises of economic opportunity. Traffickers also threaten families back home to ensure the victims continue to cooperate.’³⁶”

³⁶ EIN, [Vietnam’s Human Trafficking Problem Is Too Big to Ignore](#), 12 November 2019

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country policy and information note: fear of illegal moneylenders](#), Vietnam, February 2025, last accessed 11 July 2025)

20. What is the relationship between social support for parents/guardians or caregivers and the risk factors of child trafficking?

The Vietnam Human Rights Network’s Report on Human Rights in Vietnam for the period of 2021 to May 2022, published in June 2022, stated that various government policies have created poverty, which is the primary cause for the sexual exploitation of women and children:

“[...] The direct and primary cause for Vietnamese women and children being lured into sex slavery, domestically and transnationally, is the poverty created by the current government’s unjust social policies. This sad situation has significantly expanded since Vietnam chose to follow the ill-conceived open trade practice that facilitates corruption among government workers and criminals’ illegal activities. In addition, ill-planned urbanization, the expropriation of farmland, and the government’s inability to create jobs have resulted in great socio-economic difficulties for families who have had to flock to urban areas or emigrate abroad in search of ways to earn a living.

[...] As with the plight of young girls deceived and sold into prostitution, the primary cause of selling brides to foreign men has been the poverty brought on by the government’s unjust social policies.”

(Source: Vietnam Human Rights Network – [Report on Human Rights in Vietnam 2021-2022](#), 24 June 2022, pg.15, last accessed 8 July 2025)

21. What evidence exists, if any, of intergenerational trafficking in Vietnam or the risk factors of this?

From the sources consulted, no statistics could be found within the timeframe on the prevalence of intergenerational trafficking, i.e. cases where the children of trafficking victims have experienced trauma or have themselves been trafficked. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

The NGO Barnardos published the following case study regarding a child who had been trafficked to the UK, on its undated webpage titled '*real life stories*'. The child was trafficked together with her mother, but they were separated on the journey:

"[...] In Vietnam, Linh lived with her mother and three younger siblings, their father had gone to find work but had not returned. The family lived and slept in one room, and struggled financially, often going without food. Linh went with her mother to the nearest town several hours away to look for some work. They met a man who told them he could find them work. That night, Linh and her mother were loaded into a lorry; it was dark and she describes feeling scared. At points, the van would stop and people would be taken off. At some point, Linh fell asleep and when she awoke, she couldn't find her mother[...]

Since Linh has been in the UK, she has been held captive in premises and made to cook and clean for others, and more recently she has been made to work for long hours with no pay or protective equipment at a nail bar in a local town. She has been beaten and is not allowed to move freely within the premises without permission from the adult males there. She says rice and bottled water are delivered every couple of days and she is told that the work she is doing is paying off her debt to be brought to the UK[...] Linh has been told that if she does not pay back her debt, her family in Vietnam will be harmed, and that if she tries to escape she will be found and killed."

(Source: Barnardos – [Linh's story](#), undated, last accessed 8 July 2025)

3.5 Programs and Interventions Addressing Intergenerational Trafficking

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.4 (Return-specific Risks)
- Section 5 (Access to Support and Protection)
- Section 6 (Reintegration Support)

22. Are there any government or NGO programs specifically providing support to parents/guardians or caregivers and children and/or targeting the needs, risks and vulnerabilities of the children of trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

A report published in 2024 by Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN) stated that One-Stop Service Offices (OSSOs) had been launched in 2021 to facilitate the reintegration of returning migrant women, stating that the scale of the project is not enough to cover all regions in Vietnam⁶⁶:

"Vietnam recently showed its effort by launching One-Stop Service Office (OSSO)⁵ in 2021 in several regions to facilitate sustainable reintegration of returning migrant women as a part of the project "Strengthening Vietnamese capacity for sustainable reintegration of returning women migrants and their households in Vietnam" implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with the Women's Union of Vietnam. However, the scale of the project is not enough to cover all the regions and its performance should be well monitored."

⁵ Vietnam Plus.(2021).One-stop service office for returning migrant women opens in Hai Phong. Retrieved from: <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/onestop-service-office-for-returning-migrant-women-opens-in-hai-phong/200071.vnp>

⁶⁶ The One-Stop Service Offices (OSSO) project has a [Facebook page](#) which has not been consulted as it is in Vietnamese.

(Source: KOCUN – Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy – Vietnam CEDAW; [89th Session of the CEDAW Working Group](#); NGO Report Submission By: Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy (KOCUN), 2024, pg.3, last accessed 12 May 2025)

The Vietnamese government’s report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, published 27 April 2023, detailed forms of support through the “peaceful house” model, stating that 1,800 women and children had been provided with medical assistance relating to consequences of human trafficking. The time period is not given, but the report refers to 2019-2022:

“18[...]*“trusted community addresses”, “Peaceful House” provide comprehensive assistance (shelter, necessities, psychological assistance, legal assistance, knowledge, skills, etc.) to women and children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, victims of human trafficking who returned home, so that they can have temporary accommodations, can get rehabilitated and reintegrate into the community. These models have received and assisted about 400 victims of human trafficking to return home; some 1,800 women and children to have medical checks and treatment relating to consequences caused by human trafficking; nearly 3,400 people to get psychological counseling and treatment.”*

(Source: Government of Vietnam (published by UN Human Rights Committee) – [Fourth periodic report submitted by Viet Nam under article 40 of the Covenant](#), due in 2023 [3 April 2023] [CCPR/C/VNM/4], 27 April 2023, pg.16 (Footnote 18), last accessed 12 May 2025)

An article published by the Center for Women and Development (CWD) in March 2022 stated that the ‘Peace House Shelter’ project, which it manages and operates, provides comprehensive services to both mothers and children in its care, including supporting children to attend school without interruption:

“By 2018, the Peace House Shelter had its third branch opened in Can Tho city. [...] After 14 years of operation, Peace House Shelter has welcomed and aided 1,444 victims coming from 55 provinces/ cities and 17 ethnic minority areas.

[...] 100% of victims are provided with psychosocial counseling (16 visits/person on average), followed by legal support services (7 visits/person on average) to ensure the rights of child-rearing and property division, empowerment activities through the provision of life skills [...] More than 90% of children are promptly supported to attend school without interruption (except in cases where schools are unsafe for children).”

(Source: Center for Women and Development – [The model of Peace House Shelter: connection & support for victims of gender-based violence](#), 8 March 2022, last accessed 31 May 2025)

The United Nations Network on Migration published a summary of the “One-Stop Service Offices” (OSSO) project in January 2022, which stated that OSSOs were established to deliver support to returnee migrant women and also offered services to their children:

“Geographic scope: [...] Viet Nam: Ha Noi city, Hai Duong province, Hai Phong city, Hau Giang province, Can Tho city

[...] Viet Nam Women’s Union (VWU) with technical support from IOM Viet Nam established the One-Stop Service Offices (OSSOs) to deliver the support services to returned migrant women[...] OSSOs provide a variety of counselling, information and referral services to migrant women to support their legal, vocational and employment challenges as well as meet their psychological and health needs. OSSOs also provide services to children of migrant women by addressing their legal status issues and enhancing their access to schooling and health care system.”

(Source: UN Network on Migration – [Repository of Practices: Strengthening Vietnamese capacity for sustainable reintegration of returned migrant women and their households in Viet Nam through the establishment of and delivery of support by the “One-Stop Service Offices”](#), 31 January 2022, last accessed 29 May 2025)

A December 2021 article published by Vietnam Women’s Union stated that after over a year of operation, the OSSO project had provided counselling for more than 400 returning migrant women. The article also mentions another project developed in partnership with the IOM, however no further information on this from other sources could be found in the timeframe:

“The One Stop Service Office (OSSO), established in 5 pilot cities and provinces to support repatriated migrant women, is considered as one of the effective models run by the VWU [Vietnam Women’s Union] and presented at this Workshop. After over a year of operation, the OSSO Office has provided counseling [sic] for more than 400 repatriated migrant women with nearly 2,000 turns of receptions.

[...] Currently, the VWU and IOM are developing the phase 2 of the project “An integrated and multi - dimensional approach to support migrant women and their children in 6 provinces of Vietnam” proposed to KOICA [Korea International Cooperation Agency] for funding.”

(Source: Vietnam Women’s Union – [Vietnam – Korea discuss effective models and practices to support migrant women](#), 31 December 2021, last accessed 29 May 2025)

23. What psychological and social support is available to mitigate the intergenerational risk of trafficking?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, commented that:

“Number one is that there is a huge gap in prevention. The policy just focuses on victim identification and compensation/ victim support, but like I said, it’s not comprehensive enough and it’s not long enough. Initial support of like three to six months is not enough. I’m sorry, it’s really not. And there are not enough organizations, whether it’s state organizations or NGOs that are available to provide the support.

So one is that there is that lack of comprehensive integration support, really comprehensive integration support that focuses on long-term support and integration for the woman, especially from an economic and social integration perspective.[...] I always say prevention is protection. It’s a lack of focus on prevention of trafficking in the first place beyond awareness-raising campaigns, instead of really getting to the root causes, is one that impacts the risk of someone getting re-trafficked or re-exploited because they’re still in the same conditions that they were beforehand, only worse[...].”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, noted that:

“[...] [T]he community-based or intervention program[...] into the human trafficking[...] that’s mostly controlled by the state. It’s only one of two charities that is given the kind of power to [that] kind of work in that sector. So it’s very tightly, neatly controlled by the state. So whether a community program or not, it’s all initiated by the state.[...]”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

The 2019 Coram International report stated that shelters offered survivors a wide range of services, but community-based services were much less available. It stated that in most cases, service providers at shelters did not develop long-term personalised care plans for survivors:

“[...] 7.6. Experiences of services [...] [...] In addition to providing accommodation, and meeting survivors’ basic needs, shelters often offered beneficiaries emotional/psychological support, including counselling; legal advice or representation; basic education; vocational training and referrals to specialised medical and psychological services. By contrast, community-based services were found to be much less available. Whilst the majority of service providers at shelters did report that beneficiaries’ needs are assessed, often with a focus on determining prospects for reintegration, in the majority of cases a long-term personalised care plan which addresses risks of re-victimisation, stigma and marginalisation does not appear to be developed. Rather, where follow up support is provided, shelter-based services tend to refer beneficiaries to available community-based support services when their stay in the institution has ended [...]”

(Source: Coram International – [Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam](#), June 2019, pg.67, last accessed 12 May 2025)

The French NGO Planète Enfants & Développement, which has operated a programme to support, care and social reintegration for children who are victims or at risk of exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam since 2023, state in an undated article on their website:

“[...] A large proportion of victims [of trafficking in Vietnam] are excluded from care mechanisms: migrants, children exploited by their families, children between 16 and 18 years of age.”

(Source: Planète Enfants & Développement, [Protecting child victims of trafficking](#), undated, last accessed 8 July 2025)

24. Are there any interventions aimed at reducing the risk of children being trafficked in Vietnam?

A brief published by the NGO Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation in October 2024, stated that the NGO had assisted 6000+ children to return to school. The document stated:

“Blue Dragon’s analysis of trafficking in Vietnam shows that 93% of traffickers and 90% of victims were illiterate or had left school before Grade 12...

“Back to school” campaigns in remote ethnic minority communities actively seek out children who have quit school early or are at risk of leaving. We offer practical assistance for families to get their kids back to school. 70% of children who are offered assistance return to school; and 95% are still in school 12 months later.

A multidisciplinary team of social workers, psychologists, teachers and lawyers work together to assess children’s needs and deal with the barriers keeping them out of school.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Education: the key to transforming lives](#), October 2024, last accessed 20 June 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that the government conducted trafficking awareness campaigns which targeted school-aged children and the public:

“[...]Prevention[...]

[...] The government conducted awareness campaigns at the national, provincial, and district levels targeting school-aged children and the public, many in partnership with NGOs; some campaigns focused on raising awareness around online scam operations.”

[Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 12 May 2025)

The French NGO Planète Enfants & Développement, in an undated article on their website, describes its program to children who are victims or at risk of exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam:

“[...] From 2023 onwards, Planète Enfants & Développement will be working in Ho Chi Minh City and Phan Thiet to provide support, care and social reintegration for children who are victims or at risk of exploitation and trafficking, as well as raising awareness of this phenomenon among families and training partners.

[...] we train social workers and provide them with regular coaching to ensure the follow-up of around 120 families over 3 years. They are thus equipped to identify - within partner charity schools, hostels and social centers - families with children who are victims or at risk of being trafficked and exploited, and to offer them psycho-social follow-up for 6 to 12 months in order to prevent or put an end to these situations.”

(Source: Planète Enfants & Développement, [Protecting child victims of trafficking](#), undated, last accessed 8 July 2025)

The Vietnamese government’s report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, dated 3 August 2023, stated that there is a national hotline (MOLISA) for child protection and human trafficking prevention:

“[...] 117. [...] [C]harity houses and peace houses are supporting returning women and children of human trafficking, giving them reliable addresses and temporary community shelters. The national hotline for child protection of MOLISA was established and is operated 24/7 to support and protect children; this is also the hotline for human trafficking prevention and combat.”

(Source: Government of Vietnam (published by CEDAW) – [Ninth periodic report submitted by Viet Nam under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2019 \[CEDAW/C/VNM/9\]](#), 3 August 2023, last accessed 12 May 2025)

A report by the NGO Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, published in September 2021, detailed a campaign to address the sharp increase in the number of children not returning to school after COVID closures. The report covered the program's operation from 2020-2021 in the northern mountainous provinces of Dien Bien and Ha Giang, where the majority of the population are from ethnic minority communities. The report noted:

“[W]e have observed that vulnerability to trafficking—both as a victim and as a perpetrator—correlates with poverty and illiteracy. This observation has been corroborated through our research into the profiles of traffickers and victims of trafficking... In light of [...] the likelihood that COVID-related economic hardship will continue to force children out of education, Blue Dragon will continue to conduct these campaigns twice a year: after the Lunar New Year holiday and at the beginning of each school year. We have shared this model with the provincial Departments of Education, and are currently advocating for its wide adoption by the Department of Education in other vulnerable provinces.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Back to School: Collaborative and holistic campaigns to prevent child trafficking](#), September 2021, pp.1-7, last accessed 20 June 2025)

25. Are there any interventions aimed at reducing the risk factors to children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within, to or from Vietnam?

In the sources consulted, no information could be found within the timeframe on interventions aimed specifically towards children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked.

26. Are there community-based initiatives to break the cycle of trafficking across generations in Vietnam? If so, can you share any examples of promising community-based practice?

In the sources consulted, no information could be found within the timeframe on community-based initiatives to break the cycle of trafficking across generations in Vietnam.

3.6 Stigma, Re-trafficking and Return-specific Risk Factors

Cross reference with:

- Section 4 (State Protection and Criminal Justice)
- Section 5 (Access to Support, Shelter, Healthcare)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)
- Section 7 (COVID-19 Impact on Support)

27. What are the state and societal attitudes towards returnees in Vietnam, particularly those perceived as ‘losing face’?⁶⁷

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“I am not sure the concept of ‘*saving face*,’ I can understand that is ‘*Mất Mặt*’ in Vietnamese. It relates to the social stigma and community perception. In Vietnamese cultural context, maintaining reputation and avoiding shame (“*saving face*”) is closely linked to family honour, social standing and community perception.”

(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“[...]And then there’s also the perceived stigma, which is almost as effective as the actual external stigma. Because as a country, we’re a culture that operates on ‘*losing face*’ and ‘*saving face*’. Just the thought of losing face is enough for us to change the way we behave because you want to avoid losing face. You want to avoid your family being shamed[...] So it’s not the act of shaming. It’s the fear of being shamed [that] also influences behavior[...] It’s like the real threats versus perceived threats, the perceived threats from organized crime and black market moneylenders, whatever else is enough already. And you can’t say, “*Oh, no, but they’re not real.*” They’re very real. They’re real in the person’s mind and in their culture, so therefore, it’s real. So this is often[...] also for men who are coming back from Europe and the UK because they “*failed*” at being successful going abroad. And this is also after a period of years, they return. They have nothing to show for it, nothing at all except shame.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 19 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“[...]Vietnamese culture is the culture of what we call ‘*saving face*’. Everybody wants to save face and always wants to present the best version of themselves and be proud with the family or with the community. And that does not help in terms of trafficking[...] Because that would make the victims returning did not want to kind of admit that they’re a victim of any kind. [...]”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

⁶⁷ Note: in our initial draft of the research questions, we included: “What are the state and societal attitudes towards returnees in Vietnam, particularly those perceived as ‘Westernised’?” However, based on the desk research and interviews conducted for this report, we found that the term ‘Westernised’ did not adequately reflect the Vietnamese context as it did with our 2017 report on Afghanistan: Young male ‘Westernised’ returnees to Kabul, available at: <https://www.asylos.eu/strategic-research-afghanistan>. Instead, ‘saving face’ emerged as a more relevant concept, as highlighted by both members of the project’s steering committee and the experts interviewed.

According to Blue Dragon’s 2025 report, many male trafficking victims do not regard themselves as being victims of a crime or in need of support. They may also refuse assistance due to economic pressures:

“Most male survivors of forced criminality consider themselves as having been tricked into unfortunate situations of labour malpractice rather than victims of organised crimes who rightfully need assistance and care. Many also feel shame and guilt for having put their families under extreme financial stress – especially in cases where they were released upon the payment of a ransom. They frequently feel ashamed of having undertaken criminal acts scamming their compatriots and other unsuspecting people, as well as “survivors guilt” for being free and unable to help others inside scam compounds.

Blue Dragon social workers also find that many survivors refuse long-term assistance due to the urgent need to find a job to pay back debts incurred by survivors and their family members. These debts incurred during the forced scamming experience are most often in addition to their already precarious socioeconomic standing, which is what drives them to find employment in the first place.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 70-71, last accessed 10 March 2026)

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in its 2025 report, provided the following information:

“[...]3.147 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that victims of human trafficking, particularly women, faced social stigma when returning to their communities (‘people think you are a bad person’). Victim blaming was common, especially for women. According to in-country sources, women with lived experience of human trafficking often did not feel accepted and supported, including by their families, and some subsequently returned to shelters. As a result, victims may choose not to self-identify and seek support services. Under the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024), stigmatising or discriminating against human trafficking of victims is prohibited.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.50, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

28. Is information available on how the stigma of trafficking impacts young people’s ability to reintegrate into society in Vietnam?

No information could be found on this question from the sources consulted.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), provides information about returnees to Vietnam:

“[...]5.52 Returnees – including failed asylum seekers, labour migrants and trafficking victims – may experience reintegration difficulties, although these are not state-imposed. Difficulties may include unemployment or underemployment, challenges accessing government services and, in the case of trafficking victims, social stigma. Some returnees may have accumulated large debts, including to loan sharks, to fund their travel from Vietnam, which they may have difficulty repaying. The experiences described in this paragraph are not uniform: some returnees, including failed asylum applicants, report making smooth transitions. In-country sources reported in October 2024 that, should they need it, returnees could seek support from Migrant Resource Centres managed by the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, although the scope of these services was opaque.”

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.69, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

The Australian Government’s Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Country Report for 2022, also stated:

“3.147 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that victims of human trafficking, particularly women, faced social stigma when returning to their communities (‘people think you are a bad person’). Victim blaming was common, especially for women. According to in-country sources, women with lived experience of human trafficking often did not feel accepted and supported, including by their families, and some subsequently returned to shelters. As a result, victims may choose not to self-identify and seek support services. Under the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024), stigmatising or discriminating against human trafficking of victims is prohibited.

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – [DFAT Country Information Report](#); Vietnam, 19 February 2025, pg.50, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Vietnam noted:

“[...]’ ... There are a range of negative outcomes evidenced for child trafficking victims and children who have experienced exploitation in the context of migration. Children working within factories and other labour settings are at risk of physical injury and exposure to hazardous working conditions that are detrimental to physical and mental health and development. Children who are trafficked for sex work are at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy and experience of physical violence. Research indicates that victims of child trafficking also have a high prevalence of mental health problems and low wellbeing. They also experience stigma on their return home after being trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonour upon their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatised by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally.”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#), February 2025, pg.34, last accessed: 6 April 2025)

29. Is there any known stigma towards or negative perceptions of trafficking survivors?

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, highlighted the following case:

“So the stigma that these [...]victims have with them, the perception from their family, friends, and community, that has always been the case. Like I said to you, I explained the part of the culture is *saving face*. The family as well don’t want to acknowledge any failure. So like, “*Okay. I’m spending this amount of money. We borrow it from everywhere for you to go abroad to work and earn money and bring something back to the family, but you came back now empty-handed, being labeled as a victim.*”

[...] I want to bring [up] this case of a Vietnamese person in the UK. [...] He was brought to this country as promised to do some construction work because I conducted a lengthy interview with his family members, with his parents, and his mom. So he’s from a very, very poor family. The family said that they came and they said that there’s construction work in the UK. So the family just agreed to borrow money from everywhere and send him abroad. He arrived in the UK, and he waited for three months. And when they arrived in the UK, these human smuggling networks would have a place for them to stay. I call it the ‘*holding*’ or ‘*sorting center*’, where they sought out, “*Okay, these people came here and have paid the debt for the journey already,*” then they have a bit more freedom of movement, and they would be working whatever of their choice. The people have not paid any money yet. They are, I mean, in debt. [...]. So he actually falls in the second category.

So after waiting for three months in that sorting center somewhere in London, he was then sent to work, and it was a cannabis factory. Two weeks into working in the cannabis factory, [...] he was arrested and he was detained in a local prison for being investigated for cannabis production. So after being in prison[...]but I don’t think he was there for long before he actually took his own life. It’s a very sad case. And I read all the paper[s] related to him and could see that he was because once he’s in, he felt that his dream was crumbled. His dream of changing life and being able to provide for the family and assist the family has all crumbled. He just could not face it. So what can you do now? Because you’re in prison waiting for the trial. You have a huge

amount of debt left behind. You have a family there. You can't face any of that. You won't be able to get the money to pay the debt. [...]he just might find it's difficult to face his own family and his community. So he made this phone call to his mother from prison. And he said, *"I hope everybody's okay. I'm fine at this end."* So he did not even tell the family that he's in trouble or anything. And at the end of the conversation, he said to his mom, *"I want to go home."* So that's when people reach [...] the point where they are exhausted of what they've been through that long journey from Vietnam to here. It is post-Russian war as well. So you have to go a different route. So exhausted [from] the journey and constantly being fearful for whether you will arrive or you'll be dead along the journey, right? [...]But nothing is more grim than that. So yeah, that's the outcome. And it's really difficult to deal [with], for me in particular, because I have to speak to the family. I have to deliver the bad news. I have to kind of arrange everything for him to be able to repatriate him from here to the family. And at this moment in time, I'm still representing the family because there's an inquest that's going to be heard at some point down the line. So to show that the pressure that they face is real, [...] Some people won't be able to face it. [...]. And cases of people who won't be able to face it, you won't hear in the media. Like this case in particular, absolutely zero report, A, because the case is still-- the inquest is still lingering and still going on. Only the people who work inside the network, like myself, would be able to know what's going on, but it's harrowing. So, from what I could share is that [the] pressure they face is real[...]. [T]hey have to face the family. They have to face the community, and face everybody else when they return."

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

The UK Home Office's 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Unaccompanied children in Vietnam noted:

"[...]There are a range of negative outcomes evidenced for child trafficking victims and children who have experienced exploitation in the context of migration. Children working within factories and other labour settings are at risk of physical injury and exposure to hazardous working conditions that are detrimental to physical and mental health and development. Children who are trafficked for sex work are at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy and experience of physical violence. Research indicates that victims of child trafficking also have a high prevalence of mental health problems and low wellbeing. They also experience stigma on their return home after being trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonour upon their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatised by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally. (pg.34)

[...]15. Return and reintegration

15.1 Returnees [...]

15.1.2 The 2022 DFAT report noted:

[...]trafficking victims face social stigma and discrimination, and may experience difficulty in accessing appropriate trauma counselling services outside of large cities.[...]" (pg.47)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#), February 2025, pp.34-47, last accessed 6 April 2025)

30. How do threats towards family members or the returnee impact vulnerabilities to re-trafficking upon return to Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, highlighted a case of a middle-aged male who was returned to Vietnam, and re-trafficked back into the UK years later:

“So re-trafficking is not common in that sense. I’ve not kind of come across so many cases or spoke[n] to people, the professionals[...] in the field who say that that’s something prevalent in the country. But there was just this one case that I came across, which I myself would identify as re-trafficking. So he was a middle-aged male from Vietnam. Came to the UK, did pay the huge amount for [the] human trafficking network came to the UK. Did not have the work that they promised. Were put into work in a cannabis farm. He was then arrested by the authorities here, then he was deported back to Vietnam. After he returned to Vietnam, the original amount of debt from the previous journey was still there, lingering above his head and his family. And that is when the vulnerable factor that you can see [...]is there. He was then approached by the same human smuggling network to offer [...]to take him back to the UK. Although he did not disclose to me whether or not there’s any threat that [was] made towards him and his family, with their suggestion that if he comes back to this country again, there will be work and he’ll be able to pay back the debt. So that’s why when we look at human trafficking or human smuggling networks, we say we need to look at people who are getting a bit smarter. They don’t actually always use hard strategies like threat and force. Use of force and that sort of thing. They use a kind of soft strategy. So they would approach his family in saying, “Yeah, bring you back to work,” and that sort of thing. But deep down is that they wanted to get the debt back, but they knew that there’s no way he could pay that debt, and his family has nothing. So he was brought back to this country also, smuggled in. And then he was in here for [...] at least four or five years before he was arrested again, and then deported to Vietnam. I spoke to both him and his wife. I spoke to them not because I was trying to do [...]research about human trafficking, but I was actually trying to investigate the case of a separate case of a Vietnamese in this country who actually shared the same household with him. That’s when I got to interview him. And that’s how I came across his story. And I was like, “Actually, [...]soft tactics [are being used] by the human trafficking network to bring him back [to] this country and make him [...] work another four years because they wanted the money back.” So I said to him and his wife at the end of my interview, and I said, “*So you came here twice. They brought you here twice, made you [...]work in the cannabis factories and things. Did you bring that back or manage to send any money back to the wife to pay any other debt that occurred after?*” And he said his wife was sit[ting] in the interview with me as well, the two of them. I interviewed both of them at the same time. And his wife was laughing. And she said, “Yep. After more than 10 years, both the first time and the second time, he came back [with] absolutely nothing.” And both of us were just working our backside off in the last 15 years in order to pay all his debt. It’s not the money that [is] earned from the UK. And I asked him, I said, “*What’s wrong with the time you work in the UK in the factory? I’m sure that they’re not giving you any money to pay back.*” He said, “Well, they took it directly.” And in another word, it’s like debt is taken directly from his labour. So cases like that. It’s not heard in the media[...]

[T]he timeline is between 2004 up until 2016. So the first time he came for a period of time, arrested, deported, came back to Vietnam for a few years[...]

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“So threats, yes, but it doesn’t have to be an actual threat. Just the specter of the threat is enough to influence. That fear, that sort of abstract fear is enough to push people to try and go abroad again. It’s the fear of not being able to repay the debt and not being able to repay the debt, especially if you’ve borrowed money from a loan shark or black market money lender. The fear of what they could do is enough to push you. So they don’t actually have to make a direct threat to the person or the family members. It’s just the threat of the threat is enough.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“[...] there might be enormous amounts of interest on the initial amount borrowed, it never disappeared. If the person stops working for the exploiter, and say[s] they are in the UK, then basically the debt is in the eye of the beholder, and they will try to extract money from the families as well. It’s clear that traffickers and loan sharks in a network will seek to locate anybody who has returned. It’s a population control mechanism of the authorities that makes this a significant risk. a) existing debts (real or imagined) b) general economic vulnerability c) difficult access to services, d) threats to family. If individuals pass through the regular border control systems (forcibly or voluntarily), there is a chance their presence will be known to traffickers. If they register using the household registration system, the same applies.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

31. How do economic conditions in Vietnam impact the vulnerabilities to re-trafficking for returning migrants?

The UK Home Office noted in its 2025 Vietnam ‘trafficking’ CPIN, that: :

9.5.5 The IOM report ‘Vulnerabilities and risks of exploitation encountered by Vietnamese migrant workers – a qualitative study of returnees’ labour migration experiences’, published in 2021 noted that: ‘Due to mounting debts incurred to cover costs and fees during the recruitment process, migrant workers often had little option but to continue the process to repay their debt. In some cases, the only option to cover migration costs was to borrow from banks or mortgage family assets, while others saw recruitment fees and costs deducted from salaries during employment. Thus, not only did a pattern of indebtedness and debt bondage emerge, so did one of deceptive recruitment.’⁴⁸”(pg.21)

⁴⁸ IOM, Vulnerabilities and Risks of Exploitation Encountered by Vietnamese... (page 45), 2021

[...]

9.5.7 The 2023 ODI report stated that: ‘Extortionate fees of up to USD 30,000 (equivalent to AUD52,000) [approx. £24,00050] to get to countries in Western Europe put migrants at risk, and often in forced labour conditions to repay the debts incurred for the migration.’⁵¹”(pg.21-22)

⁵¹ ODI, Labour migrants’ vulnerability ... An analysis of Vietnam (page 37), 30 July 2023

[...]

12.3.7 When asked about what might happen if a return victim of trafficking had unpaid debts to their traffickers, the same interlocutor opined: ‘...I think obviously the main risk is risk of re-trafficking and the exploitation, and they will have to pay off that debt, or their family will have to. So I think what we’ve identified is that there is a little pressure from their family as well to pay off that debt. So if they went back to family, that would be something of concern and shame if they hadn’t paid off the debt. So I think it’s worse for people in Vietnam, this is one of the strongest risks because most of them have a debt that they have to pay off.’¹¹² (pg.37)

¹¹² Asylös and ARC Foundation, Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking... (page 207), 6 May 2020

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note: Vietnam: Trafficking](#), February 2025, pp.8-21-22-37, last accessed 5 August 2025)

The UK Home’s 2025 country information note on illegal moneylending in Vietnam includes an excerpt from the Electronic Immigration Network website on the close link between loan sharks and trafficking. This has been cited rather than the original source as it is more recent:

“[...]8.6 Links to trafficking

8.6.1[...] Loan sharks are closely connected to trafficking victims and often act as migration brokers. Traffickers frequently take advantage of debt bondage to control their victims, as trafficked persons are lured with promises of economic opportunity. Traffickers also threaten families back home to ensure the victims continue to cooperate. [...]”

“[...] Victims of trafficking may be used as recruiters for new victims to pay off their debts. [...]”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note: Vietnam: Fear of Illegal Moneylenders](#), February 2025, pg.18. Last accessed: 21 April 2025)

An article titled ‘*Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023, (Case study in Ha Giang province)*’, published in September 2024, stated that:

“[...]The number of victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking is 3,090 people, of which, mainly women and children (accounting for over 90%), the majority are ethnic minorities (accounting for over 80%), often concentrating in rural and mountainous areas, especially remote areas, most of whom have difficult economic circumstances... Upon returning to the community, the victims face many difficulties, notably lack of employment and unstable income. Some victims, because they do not have jobs, after being trafficked, returning to the other side of the border illegally to find work. This brings many risks, including the risk of re-trafficking.”

(Source: Journal Of Ethnic Studies – [Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023 \(Case study in Ha Giang province\)](#), 30 September 2024, last accessed 29 May 2025)

In this 2019 research by CORAM International, this case was noted:

“[...]Even where debt bondage is not employed, children and young people may be compelled to stay in exploitative arrangements due to their desperate economic circumstances. A young woman trafficked in the garment industry, recalled how after departing from her trafficking situation, she ultimately decided to return:

Q. After one year was it easy to leave? (pg.54)

There were no difficulties – they gave me money and drove me back home but they also lured me back and promised a higher salary. They promised I could stop working earlier but it was just talk and I knew when I went back it would be the same and I would have to work even on Sunday. But I did accept the offer because I thought – no pain no gain and maybe it would be fruitful, so I committed to that household business for three years. It was a mixture of sadness and happiness but the anxiety and sadness overwhelmed...

Q. Did conditions improve? Or was it the same as the first year throughout?

My resilience improved – the conditions were the same but I knew my goal was to support my family and improve my skills to become independent, so I kept moving, kept suffering.⁸⁶

The case above may begin to explain seemingly contradictory findings about the voluntary way that children and young people were found to enter and leave exploitative relationships. Where children and their families lack viable alternatives they are more likely to stay in an exploitative situation, regardless of the harmful conditions to which they are subjected. This is also consistent with the finding that economic vulnerability is by far the most important factor influencing a child’s likelihood of experiencing trafficking.” (pg.55)

84 Individual interview, you woman trafficked to work in a bar in Malaysia, Tay Ninh province, 10 Jan 2018

85 Individual interview, young woman with experiences of child trafficking, Hue Province, 8 October 2017

86 Individual interview, young woman with experiences of child trafficking, Hue Province, 8 October 2017

(Source: Coram International – [Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam](#), June 2019, pp.54-55, last accessed 16 July 2025)

32. What efforts has the government made to improve the identification and protection of individuals who have experienced trafficking upon their return? What measures (legal or social) exist to prevent re-trafficking?

Legal

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...] The government continued to implement its anti-trafficking NAP for 2021-2025; the government reported reviewing, but not yet updating, its NAP for after 2025. The government allocated 14.7 billion VND (\$576,923) across several ministries for trafficking prevention efforts and for the implementation of the NAP, compared with allocating 18.4 billion VND (\$722,135) in 2023. The government held public mid-term assessments of the NAP in 2023 and monitored and evaluated progress against the plan through internal weekly, monthly, and semi-annual reports. The government, in partnership with NGOs, conducted awareness campaigns at the national, provincial, and district levels targeting vulnerable populations and the broader public; some campaigns focused on raising awareness around online scam operations. The government, in partnership with an international organization, released research on transnational migration and trafficking trends. MOLISA, with donor funding, operated a 24-hour hotline for victims of crime, including trafficking; operation of the hotline was transferred to the Ministry of Health in March 2025 following the abolition of MOLISA. The hotline retained translators who could speak English and several ethnic minority languages. The hotline received 1,920 calls, compared with 1,781 in 2023, and it received 64 trafficking referrals involving 75 victims; it referred 59 victims to the police, 18 victims to MOLISA, seven to the border guard, and 48 victims to NGOs. The 2024 anti-trafficking law mandated the creation of a trafficking specific hotline.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 16 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted increased efforts to protect trafficking victims. However, it also pointed to challenges and issues in the victim identification process:

“[...]The government demonstrated slightly increased efforts to protect victims. The government identified 311 victims – 195 females, 116 males, and 146 children – compared with identifying 255 victims – 102 females, 153 males, and 74 children – in 2022. All identified victims were Vietnamese, including 176 labor trafficking victims and 40 victims of “sexual exploitation,” compared with 195 victims exploited in labor trafficking and 14 victims of “sexual exploitation” in 2022, respectively; some of the victims of “sexual exploitation” reported each year may not have been trafficking victims according to the definition under international law. Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified. NGO reports indicate the government identified at least five victims from online scam operations; however, this represents a fraction of the total number of potential victims the government did not take steps to identify. Eighty victims were members of ethnic minority communities, compared with 89 victims in 2022. Ninetyfive individuals were victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, which in prior years included “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” neither of which were consistent with the definition of trafficking under international law, compared with 46 such individuals in 2022.”

[...]Authorities did not report formally identifying any victims during the more than 28,500 inspections conducted at establishments at high risk of sex trafficking, compared with more than 32,000 inspections and identifying two sex trafficking victims in 2022. Staterun media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which

authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not report on the status of the potential victims, nor whether authorities screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, authorities may have penalized some unidentified trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. According to one observer, authorities reportedly threatened and harassed survivors of labor trafficking in labor export companies, and their families, to intimidate them from sharing their experiences.

[...]Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, many Vietnamese victims chose not to initiate the formal identification process – which left them without access to most protection services.[...]

The same report noted that:

[...]The government used victim identification criteria disseminated by the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking (COMMIT), along with its own victim identification procedures approved in 2014. The government continued using survey forms, developed in partnership with an international organization, for border guards to screen Vietnamese adults and children for trafficking indicators at border crossings. However, authorities did not consistently or proactively use the COMMIT criteria or their own procedures to screen for trafficking indicators among key vulnerable populations in all regions, including individuals in commercial sex, individuals transiting border stations, workers in the fishing and seafood processing industries, migrant workers returning from abroad, child laborers, or individuals fleeing online scam operations in neighboring countries. The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services. The MOLISA Department of Social Vices Prevention continued to develop a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars. The government reported further revising the screening toolkit; however, for the second year, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period.[...]

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 16 February 2026)

The same report also noted a policy issued in 2021 aimed at addressing confusion over the application of Article 150, which criminalised labour and sex trafficking of adults to cases involving young people aged 16 and 17:

[...]Inconsistent with international law, Article 150 applied to children between the ages of 16 and 17 years old and required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a sex trafficking crime; it therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. Civil society observers previously reported this led to confusion among the courts on how to handle cases involving 16- and 17-year-old children, particularly for cases involving labor trafficking, and that it precluded child-centered best practices in such cases. In an effort to address this concern, in 2021, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) issued a new policy outlining child-centered procedures for the investigation of trafficking crimes committed against persons younger than the age of 18; this was the first government-issued guidance instructing law enforcement to handle trafficking cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds as child trafficking cases.[...]

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 16 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, listed the legal assistance and protective services provided to trafficking victims involved in investigations and prosecutions:

[...] Vietnamese law guaranteed trafficking victims legal assistance and protective services, including the right to legal representation; the law did not require victims to be present at or testify in person in court and allowed audio- or video-

recorded testimonies. The MPS [Ministry of Public Security] increased the number of child-friendly investigation rooms from 33 to 45 at the provincial level. The government provided legal aid to 50 victims, compared with 41 victims in 2022. The law also entitled trafficking victims to compensation and restitution in trafficking cases; the government did not provide complete data on this entitlement but reported provincial cases concluded with compensation and restitution orders ranging from two to 140 million VND (\$82-\$5,771), compared with three to 45 million VND (\$124-\$1,855) in 2022.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, provided an overview of Vietnam’s protection of trafficking victims:

“Protection

[...]

A lack of capacity, personnel, and resources likely hindered law enforcement, border guard, and other officials’ ability to consistently and proactively screen for trafficking victims. In the past, civil society groups reported Vietnamese victims feared reprisals from authorities for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and international observers reported government officials often blamed Vietnamese citizens for their exploitative conditions abroad or suggested victims inflated abuses to avoid immigration violations. Authorities did not report formally identifying any victims during the more than 28,500 inspections conducted at establishments at high risk of sex trafficking, compared with more than 32,000 inspections and identifying two sex trafficking victims in 2022. State-run media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not report on the status of the potential victims, nor whether authorities screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, authorities may have penalized some unidentified trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. According to one observer, authorities reportedly threatened and harassed survivors of labor trafficking in labor export companies, and their families, to intimidate them from sharing their experiences.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

This Blue Dragon report, dated March 2024, pointed out the legal and practical challenges of victim verification, particularly during the COVID-19 period:

“The Vietnamese government’s official figures as reported in the US State Department Trafficking in Persons reports do not show an increase between 2018 and 2021. However, this is largely due to legal and practical challenges and barriers in formally verifying victims and reporting data, particularly during Covid-19 when victims returning from cross-border trafficking were taken straight to quarantine before any investigation or verification processes could be undertaken.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.11, last accessed: 30 June 2025)

A 2023 ODI report noted the enactment of the National Plan of Action, emphasising the importance of verification and identification in combating human trafficking:

“[...]In February 2021, the government enacted a new National Plan of Action (NPA) on preventing and combating human trafficking in the 2021-2025 period, with a vision to 2030, building on three previous plans. With responsibility for implementation placed on all relevant ministries, agencies and local authorities, the new plan includes a broader range of target groups for communication campaigns, giving priority to people in remote areas, and from ethnic minorities. Reception, verification, identification, rescue, protection of and support for victims of trafficking are viewed as equally important to combating and preventing trafficking, a shift highlighted in the plan’s overall objective. Enhanced collaboration among the relevant ministries is promoted and the plan advocates a victim-centred approach with policies and laws related to human trafficking regularly reviewed and revised for internal coherence and consistency, compatibility with regional and international laws, and alignment with developments in counter-trafficking work.[...]"

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), p.g.21, 30 July 2023, last accessed: 6 April 2025)

The 2023 report published by the ODI noted:

“5.4 Upon return

Even if they are victims of trafficking and are ‘rescued’ and returned, there is limited government support. In addition, there are challenges for law enforcement to investigate cases of labour trafficking, such as unclear legal provisions on forced labour and human trafficking and obtaining evidence of exploitation from the destination country. [...] (pg.43)

While the legislation and policy discussed above may present challenges for law enforcement agencies to respond adequately to human trafficking, there are several other problems with implementing the legal and policy response. Nguyen et al. (2020) argue that limitations of law enforcement in detecting and preventing trafficking undermines improvements in legislation. There are reports that unless there is irrefutable evidence, a case is likely to be dropped by law enforcement.⁵⁶ In addition, there is inconsistent application of the law, limitations in the capacity of law enforcement, and difficulty in pursuing cases swiftly.” (pg.44)

⁵⁶ Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), pp-43-44, 30 July 2023, last accessed 2 July 2025)

The 2023 report published by the ODI noted:

“Vietnam still imposes administrative penalties for those who work in the sex industry and some provinces may impose fines who may have migrated irregularly, which may include victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and labour exploitation who have not been officially identified as such.⁷ As a result, victims and returned trafficking victims have avoided reporting offences.[...]”

7 Ref. Decision 150/2005/NĐ-CP dated 12/12/2005 in the field of public order and public security. While Vietnam has not enacted a provision of non-criminalisation of victims for violations committed under their status of victims, practitioners have shared that most identified victims will be not fined for their violations such as illegal border crossing. For those who cannot prove or provide any information/ evidence that they are TIP victims, they may under risk of being fined as there is no consistent guidance from central agencies.

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, last accessed 2 July 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, included protection measures for Vietnamese overseas workers:

“In January 2022, the government began its implementation of Law 69 and its related policies, approved in previous years, which prohibited charging contract-based Vietnamese overseas workers certain brokerage fees and service charges and expanded their protections, including the right to unilaterally terminate a contract. Observers reported government officials lacked adequate training to support the law’s implementation. Some destination countries’ individual labor recruitment regulations, at times, conflicted with these reforms; for example, Japan passed a regulation in 2021 affirming that Vietnamese workers were still required to pay service fees to participate in work programs there. Vietnamese labor recruitment firms, in particular those affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly continued to charge some workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allowed, making them vulnerable to debt-based coercion. In December 2022, the government issued a directive to increase protections for Vietnamese overseas workers and directed agencies to ensure policies regarding overseas workers were consistent with international standards and to build a database to track overseas workers.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

In this March 2022 report, titled *‘Implementation of the non-punishment principle for victims of human trafficking in ASEAN Member States’*, it was noted that:

“[...] Examples were also offered of Vietnamese victims of trafficking into cannabis cultivation facing criminalization; indeed, trafficking of Vietnamese citizens into criminal activity has been well-documented.¹³⁹ A 2014 report on exploitation in criminal activities in Europe offered insight into Viet Nam as a key source country for victims of trafficking, including children.¹⁴⁰ The prosecution of Vietnamese trafficking victims in the United Kingdom was the focus of the landmark decision in the case of European Court of Human Rights of *V.C.L and A.N. v The United Kingdom* [...]”

¹³⁹ Trafficking for Forced Criminal Activities and Begging in Europe: Exploratory Study and Good Practices (AntiSlavery International, 2014) 50, 57

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Viet Nam is the single largest source country for child trafficking into the UK, with Vietnamese gangs trafficking children as low-cost labour. Of the 308 children reportedly arrested for cannabis cultivation in the UK between 2011 and 2014, 245 were Vietnamese nationals, or 79.5% of the total number of foreign children arrested for such offences, many of whom are likely to have been victims of trafficking. Trafficking for Forced Criminal Activities and Begging in Europe: Exploratory Study and Good Practices (Anti-Slavery International, 2014) 17-19.

(Source: McAdam, M – [Implementation of the non-punishment principle for victims of human trafficking in ASEAN member states’](#). Bangkok: ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking, March 2022, pg.104, last accessed 19 June 2025)

Vietnam’s Law on Children provides:

“[...]Article 88. The Ministry of Public Security

1. To assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union Central Committee, the Vietnam Women’s Union Central Committee and law enforcement agencies in, guiding and organizing the application of measures to prevent and stop acts of violence, exploitation, sexual abuse and trafficking of children and crimes related to children.[...]”

(Source: ILO NATLEX – [Law on Children \(Law No. No. 102/2016/QH13\)](#), (PDF of Unofficial English Translation), no page number, last accessed 5 August 2025)

Social

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]Observers noted the quality of care provided to trafficking victims varied widely depending on geography, a victim’s circumstance, and the strength of local civil society; NGOs reported the support victims received was often inadequate, especially in remote and poorer provinces where local governments provided the initial support budget.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

Authors of this August 2025 research article, Ribka Kristanti Soegiharto and Ludi Madu,⁶⁸ noted that:

“[...]Therefore, the Government of Vietnam has adopted various protection policies for victims, which include rescuing victims, establishing policies to provide support, and providing rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation services. However, the victim protection strategies, which include rescue, provision of rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation services, do not appear in the form of regulations but directly involve collaborative actions between the Government of Vietnam and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). (pg.30)

⁶⁸ Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Yogyakarta – Indonesia

[...]the Government of Vietnam has adopted various protection policies for victims, which include rescuing victims, establishing policies to provide support, and providing rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation services. However, the victim protection strategies, which include rescue, provision of rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation services, do not appear in the form of regulations but directly involve collaborative actions between the Government of Vietnam and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).[...] (pg.30)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also critical in filling the service gap that the government cannot reach. Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation and Hagar International provide safe housing, psychosocial support, life skills training, and legal aid. These programs are designed to help victims recover from trauma and prevent re-trafficking.[...] (pp.31-32)

Table 469:
Human Trafficking Victims Protection Policy

No.	Non-state Actors/NGOs	Focus Handling	Government Collaboration
1.	Blue Dragon Foundation	Victim rescue, rehabilitation (psychological support, education, and skills), and prevention of human trafficking (Blue Dragon Annual Report).	Ministry of Manpower, Invalidity and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Ministry of Public Security (MPS).
2.	Pacific Links Foundation	Empowerment of education and improvement of economic capabilities for the vulnerable (prevention of human trafficking) (PALS Annual Report).	The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and Manpower, Invalidity, and Social Affairs (MOLISA).
3.	Hagar Vietnam	Trauma recovery services and social and economic reintegration assistance for victims of human trafficking and violence (Hagar Impact Report).	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Manpower, Incapacitation, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and Provincial Authorities: Education, Health, People’s Committee, Police.

Source: Processed by the author from various sources

(Source: Nation State: Journal of International Studies⁷⁰ – **Vietnamese Government’s Policy Strategies to Address Human Trafficking (2017–2021)**, pp.30-31-32, last accessed 1 August 2025)

In this IOM news article, published in September 2024, the agency noted:

“Prevention:

- In June-July 2023, the Ministry of Information and Communications led a national campaign to heighten awareness about identifying and preventing online scams.
- Vietnamese embassies actively collaborate with local authorities to clarify information, strengthen inspections of labor employing establishments, and prevent illegal immigration.

69 Note: Table was recreated by Asylos for readability and accessibility

70 More about this journal, can be accessed here: <https://jurnal.amikom.ac.id/index.php/nsjis/about>

- The Ministry of Public Security proactively monitors closed Facebook groups and other social media for suspicious behavior, increasing border patrols to intercept potential victims.[...]"

(Source: IOM – [Youths are empowered to lead a national movement to combat human trafficking and drive for transformative change](#), 26 September 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

In this news article titled ‘*Youths are empowered to lead a national movement to combat human trafficking and drive for transformative change*’, published in September 2024, IOM reported that:

“[...] More than 200 young students from several universities and colleges in Ha Noi and young changemakers, as part of IOM’s Youth-led initiatives for safe migration and human trafficking prevention programme, joined the “Dialogue with Leaders: Women and Youth actively leading communication efforts to prevent human trafficking” to exchange ideas with leaders from Government agencies, international organizations and private sector to call for comprehensive actions to empower youths to act to tackle human trafficking.

This is the first time such a dialogue has been organized by the Viet Nam Central Women Union and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the UK Government. The dialogue is part of Viet Nam’s National Day Against Trafficking in Persons, which runs from 1 July to 30 September 2024. Together with other UN agencies in Viet Nam, IOM Viet Nam aims to underscore the importance of inclusive and focused efforts to protect children and young people, including addressing risk and vulnerability, enhancing resilience, and strengthening the protection of children in the context of trafficking in persons.

[...] According to IOM Chief of Mission Ms Park Mi-Hyung, Viet Nam’s steering efforts to effectively promote safe migration and human trafficking prevention, especially the nation’s effort to finalize the revised 2011 Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat, are remarkable milestones for Viet Nam and show the nation’s commitment to tackle this crime. This law revision will establish a stronger foundation for addressing the increasingly complex trends in trafficking in persons, which are exacerbated by socio-economic challenges.[...]

In the opening remark of the event, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ms Pauline Tamesis, stated: “While we are working closely with each other to effectively tackle the challenges posed by human trafficking, we need to engage youth in crafting their key advocacy messages for human trafficking prevention campaigns. We need to act now to create an even more supportive environment for youth-led advocacy, driving social and behavioural change, and assist them to realize their full potential by delivering on the promise of migration.

“Taking action against illegal migration and human trafficking continues to be a top priority for the UK Government. We are committed to working more closely with Viet Nam to combat human trafficking, particularly by boosting capacity building, raising awareness, information-sharing, prosecuting the criminals involved, and protecting vulnerable people. We hope to spread the message to raise people’s awareness about the risks involved in illegal migration and careful consideration of their options when contemplating a migration path to protect themselves and the future welfare of their families,” British Ambassador to Viet Nam, H.E. Iain Frew stated.”

(Source: IOM – [Youths are empowered to lead a national movement to combat human trafficking and drive for transformative change](#), 26 September 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

This article titled ‘*Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023, (Case study in Ha Giang province)*’, published in September 2024, stated that:

“According to a report by the Ministry of Public Security, in the 5 years (2012-2017), there were approximately more than 3,000 victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking, of which 90% of victims were trafficked to China. The number of victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking is 3,090 people, of which, mainly women and children (accounting for over 90%), the majority are ethnic minorities (accounting for over 80%), often concentrating in rural and mountainous areas, especially remote areas, most of whom have difficult economic circumstances... Upon returning to the

community, the victims face many difficulties, notably lack of employment and unstable income. Some victims, because they do not have jobs, after being trafficked, returning to the other side of the border illegally to find work. This brings many risks, including the risk of re-trafficking.”

(Source: Journal Of Ethnic Studies – [Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023 \(Case study in Ha Giang province\)](#), 30 September 2024, last accessed 29 May 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, provided the following overview of prevention in Vietnam:

“Prevention

The government slightly increased efforts to prevent trafficking. The government’s Steering Committee on Combatting Crimes (steering committee) led Vietnam’s anti-trafficking efforts. The government’s interagency working group, which included government agencies that operated in the provinces, supervised anti-trafficking efforts in the provinces and coordinated with the steering committee. Observers reported that an increasingly strict project review process and widespread bureaucratic caution caused by an ongoing anti-corruption campaign had resulted in delayed approvals for both foreign funded and domestic projects in all sectors, including some anti-trafficking activities. Observers previously reported decreased interagency cooperation and prioritization of anti-trafficking efforts, which resulted in increased bureaucratic hurdles after the reassignment of anti-trafficking coordination to a different office in the MPS. The government continued to implement its anti-trafficking NAP for 2021-2025. The government allocated 18.4 billion VND (\$758,450) to its trafficking prevention efforts and for the implementation of the NAP, compared with allocating 14.5 billion VND (\$597,692) in 2022. The government held public mid-term assessments of the NAP and monitored and evaluated progress against the plan through internal weekly, monthly, and semi-annual reports. The government conducted awareness campaigns at the national, provincial, and district levels targeting school-aged children and the public, many in partnership with NGOs; some campaigns focused on raising awareness around online scam operations. Officials reported awareness campaigns over the past 10 years had been uncoordinated and ineffective in preventing human trafficking, particularly transnational trafficking. MPS collected trafficking data from 20 government agencies, ministries, and departments on a quarterly basis and reported the data biannually and made marginal efforts to standardize TIP data collection templates for provincial authorities. Observers noted mixed results with these efforts, citing delays in implementation and ambiguous roles and responsibilities for data collection. The government, in partnership with international organizations and a foreign government, researched and released reports, publicly and internally, on multiple trafficking-related topics.[...]”

“[...]The government continued implementation of Law 69 and its related policies which prohibited charging contract-based Vietnamese overseas workers certain fees and expanded their protections, including the right to unilaterally terminate a contract; however, the law permitted recruitment agencies to continue charging worker-paid recruitment fees. Although observers reported that since its passage Law 69 had overall reduced the cost of worker-paid recruitment fees, government officials lacked adequate training to support the law’s implementation and the government lacked a formal system to receive worker complaints. The government issued new regulations promoting workers’ protection establishing ceilings for certain fees and minimum benefits for migrant workers in some destination countries. Some destination countries’ individual labor recruitment regulations, at times, conflicted with Law 69; for example, Japan passed a regulation in 2021 affirming that Vietnamese workers were still required to pay service fees to participate in work programs there. State-licensed private labor recruitment firms, in particular those affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly continued to charge some workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allowed, making them vulnerable to debt-based coercion. The government issued additional implementing guidance assigning roles and responsibilities for a 2022 directive which increased protections for Vietnamese overseas workers, directed agencies to ensure policies regarding overseas workers were consistent with international standards, and to build a database to track overseas workers.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

33. Is the effectiveness of preventative measures monitored? If so, how?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government held public mid-term assessments of the NAP in 2023 and monitored and evaluated progress against the plan through internal weekly, monthly, and semi-annual reports.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 18 April 2026)

This news article by La Strada International reports that the Trump Administration’s downsizing eliminated over 1,300 State Department positions, leaving the TIP Office with less than half its staff, delaying the TIP Report, and forcing several USAID-funded anti-trafficking initiatives to shut down:

“As part of a [major downsizing plan](#), the Trump Administration has eliminated 1,353 State Department positions and reduced its Washington-based staff by about 15%, which seems an attack on federal employees and federal government agencies. Long regarded as a key actor in the global fight against human trafficking, the US Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, known as the TIP Office is now facing severe cuts.[...]”

The TIP Office, which has operated for over 25 years with bipartisan support, is now left with less than half of its staff, and its future hangs in the balance. The Office oversees the allocation of tens of millions of dollars annually to international organisations and NGOs, working on prevention, prosecution, and victim support.

Every year, the TIP Office publishes the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, grading every country globally on the issue. This year’s TIP Report, expected to be published by 30 June, remains mysteriously delayed, raising concerns about whether it will be released at all and or whether the TIP Office can continue the report and its overall operation, as only a fraction of its staff members remain. The report-writing staff of the office was cut from 31 to 9 persons.

Moreover, the TIP heroes, who were expected to come to the United States for release of the TIP report, had all of their trips cancelled.

Earlier this year, in May, the administration also disbanded a specialised unit at the Department of Justice that investigated transnational organised crime, including human trafficking networks. Operations of the unit will be halted until at least September.

Cuts to USAID-funded victim support and anti-trafficking programmes in Europe have already forced several initiatives to shut down. The elimination of the TIP Office threatens to multiply these effects.”

(Source: La Strada International – [Is This The End of the Tip Office? Uncertainty Amid Severe Cuts](#), 28 July 2025, last accessed 2 August 2025)

The Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Surya Deva conducted a visit to Viet Nam from 6 to 15 November 2023:

“I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Surya Deva, visited Viet Nam from 6 to 15 November 2023 at the invitation of the Government.

2. The Special Rapporteur visited Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and the Provinces of Ha Tinh and Ben Tre and met with representatives of the central and provincial governments, United Nations agencies, development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses and universities.

[...]

4. The key objectives of the visit were to gain a first-hand understanding of the realization of the right to development in Viet Nam and to identify ongoing challenges, with a view to formulating practical recommendations for the Government, businesses and other stakeholders who are working towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting the realization of the right to development in the country. The Special Rapporteur was especially interested in learning more about how governments at all levels ensured the active, free and meaningful participation of people in development policies and programmes, what policies and measures were in place to address intersectional inequalities and discriminations and how the Government had been approaching economic development amid the triple planetary crisis.

5. In the light of the broad scope of the mandate and the short time frame of a country visit, it was necessary to limit the scope of the visit and to focus on the implementation of the right to development in only a few thematic areas. The Special Rapporteur regrets that time constraints did not permit him to assess the full spectrum of the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right to development in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the Paris Agreement. Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur believes that fruitful lessons can be drawn from the areas that he was able to look into and that his conclusions and recommendations will serve to assist the Government and other stakeholders in improving their work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the rest of the post-2015 development agenda, as set out in the above-mentioned policy documents, in a manner compliant with all human rights, including the right to development.

6. The Special Rapporteur paid special attention to the gender dimension, considering the special developmental challenges faced by women and girls. He also focused on the situation of the most disadvantaged sections of society and, mindful of article 1 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, paid particular attention to the challenges faced by persons belonging to minority groups, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities in participating in, contributing to and enjoying economic, social, cultural and political development.”

(Source: HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights) (published on ecoi.net) – [Visit to Viet Nam Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development](#), Surya Deva, 8 July 2024, pg.2, last accessed 5 August 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]The government held public mid-term assessments of the NAP and monitored and evaluated progress against the plan through internal weekly, monthly, and semi-annual reports.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

In this news article, Reuters reports that the U.S. State Department upgraded Vietnam’s ranking in the 2024 Trafficking in Persons report for “overall increased efforts,” despite citing failures to investigate officials complicit in trafficking and rights group allegations that Hanoi withheld and misrepresented information, including in a case involving a Vietnamese girl’s death in Saudi Arabia:

“WASHINGTON, June 24 (Reuters) - The U.S. State Department on Monday boosted Vietnam’s ranking in a human-trafficking report, even as it cited concerns that the Southeast Asian country had failed to investigate government officials complicit in trafficking crimes.

A [rights group last week accused Hanoi](#) of giving misleading information and attempting to cover up trafficking cases involving officials in its communication with U.S. officials over the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report.

Washington removed Vietnam from a watch list in the 2024 report, citing “overall increased efforts” on trafficking, including submitting an anti-trafficking law to the legislature for review, increasing prosecutions and assisting more victims.

But the U.S. report published on Monday cited a series of areas where Vietnam fell short of minimum standards, including its handling of human trafficking in which government officials were complicit.[...]

The cases came to light after a Vietnamese girl taken to work in Saudi Arabia as a minor died after alleged abuse by her employer.

The prior TIP report downgrades, which can lead to sanctions, added an awkward note to U.S.-Vietnam relations. Washington has sought stronger ties with Hanoi to counter China, formally upgrading the relationship last year.

Asked if strategic concerns played a role in the decision to upgrade Vietnam, Dyer said officials make “the most objective assessment that we can” when it comes to the TIP rankings.

The U.S. upgraded Vietnam in the report last year in part because it had initiated criminal procedures against the two officials in the Saudi Arabia case.

This year’s TIP report said the investigation had been closed and the diplomat reinstated in a government post.

“The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human-trafficking crimes,” the report added.

Vietnam’s embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The report also upgraded several other countries for improvements in anti-trafficking efforts. Brunei and Sudan were downgraded to Tier 3.

Vietnam’s ranking was being closely watched after rights group Project88 released a report, based on official Vietnamese documents it obtained showing an effort to undermine the U.S. [report](#), including by withholding information about the case in Saudi Arabia.”

(Source: Reuters – [US upgrades Vietnam in human-trafficking report despite concerns](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

34. Are there any legal protections for returning labour migrants to prevent re-trafficking?

In this 2023 ODI report it was noted that:

“5.4 Upon return

On return to Vietnam, migrant workers remain vulnerable. Even if they are victims of trafficking and are ‘rescued’ and returned, there is limited government support. In addition, there are challenges for law enforcement to investigate cases of labour trafficking, such as unclear legal provisions on forced labour and human trafficking and obtaining evidence of exploitation from the destination country. (p.g43)

It takes a long time to obtain government support as returnees or migrants need to be formally identified as victims, which is a complicated process. An individual is typically only identified as a victim of trafficking when criminal justice proceedings are initiated. This is difficult when the perpetrator is an employer in a destination country, which is beyond the jurisdiction of Vietnamese law enforcement agencies, and when labour migration becomes trafficking in countries where no offences are identified. Even if trafficking is identified, it is extremely difficult to conduct investigations, collect evidence and pursue prosecutions in the destination country. While the process is underway, potential victims are unable to access shelter and support, which undermines their reintegration.⁵⁵ If a victim returns on their own, referred to as ‘selfreturn’, and does not report to the police, there is no formal identification of their status, on which government support depends. As a result, few victims receive support from the government on their return.[...] (pp.43-33)

Few victims report exploitation when they return to Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020). This is partly a result of distrust of the authorities, and also the limited level of support provided. The time taken to process a case, plus a lack of understanding of how to report their case, also determines whether or not to report exploitation. The social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labour exploitation from reporting their case (Huber et al., 2019). In addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their family. Moreover, because migrant workers want to seek employment abroad, and may have gone into debt to finance their travel, they are less likely to complain.

While the legislation and policy discussed above may present challenges for law enforcement agencies to respond adequately to human trafficking, there are several other problems with implementing the legal and policy response. Nguyen et al. (2020) argue that limitations of law enforcement in detecting and preventing trafficking undermines improvements in legislation. There are reports that unless there is irrefutable evidence, a case is likely to be dropped by law enforcement.⁵⁶ In addition, there is inconsistent application of the law, limitations in the capacity of law enforcement, and difficulty in pursuing cases swiftly. As a result, the response has been heavily focused on security, in particular border-control and defence initiatives, and mostly focused on trafficking into sexual exploitation rather than labour exploitation.” (pg.44)

⁵⁵ Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

⁵⁶ Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), pp.43-44, July 2023. Last accessed: 11 July 2025)

The 2025 UK Home Office CPIN, ‘ Vietnam: Trafficking’ mentions a 2019 report ‘Precarious Journeys’ which notes:

“[...] 12.3 Re-trafficking risk factors

12.3.1 [...]If victims have spoken to the police and/or still owe a debt to their traffickers, they are likely to be at risk of re-trafficking or reprisals from their traffickers and/or the Vietnamese authorities. There is limited support available in Vietnam for returned victims, leaving them at risk of being re-trafficked or even becoming a trafficker themselves.”(pp.25-36)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note: Vietnam: Trafficking](#), February 2025, pp.35-36)

35. Is information available on cases of individuals or groups who were trafficked, returned, and then re-exploited or re-trafficked?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“Yeah, so I am aware of the details of cases where re-trafficking has occurred and this is also in publicly available country information. The links in society, when they come back they don’t have a job, they are maybe in an area that is not their home area and in some cases they can’t contact their families and don’t have economic means.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, noted that:

“So re-trafficking is not common in that sense. I’ve not kind of come across so many cases or spoken to people, the professionals[] in the field who say that that’s something prevalent in the country. But there was just this one case that I came across, which I myself would identify as re-trafficking. So he was a middle-aged male from Vietnam. Came to the UK, did pay the huge amount for [the] human trafficking network came to the UK. Did not have the work that they promised. Were put into work in a cannabis farm. He was then arrested by the authorities here, then he was deported back to Vietnam. After he returned to Vietnam, the original amount of debt from the previous journey was still there, lingering above his head and his family. And that is when the vulnerable factor that you can see is there. He was then approached by the same human smuggling network to offer to take him back to the UK. Although he did not disclose to me whether or not there’s any threat that [was] made towards him and his family, with their suggestion that if he comes back to this country again, there will be work and he’ll be able to pay back the debt. So that’s why when we look at human trafficking or human smuggling networks, we say we need to look at people who are getting a bit smarter. They don’t actually always use hard strategies like threat and force. Use of force and that sort of thing. They use a kind of soft strategy. So they would approach his family in saying, “Yeah, bring you back to work,” and that sort of thing. But deep down is that they wanted to get the debt back, but they knew that there’s no way he could pay that debt, and his family has nothing. So he was brought back to this country also, smuggled in. And then he was in here for, must be at least four or five years before he was arrested again, and then deported to Vietnam. I spoke to both him and his wife. I spoke to them not because I was trying to do research about human trafficking, but I was actually trying to investigate the case of a separate case of a Vietnamese in this country who actually shared the same household with him. That’s when I got to interview him. And that’s how I came across his story. And I was like, “Actually, [...] soft tactics [are being used] by the human trafficking network to bring him back to this country and make him work another four years because they wanted the money back.” So I said to him and his wife at the end of my interview, and I said, “So you came here twice. They brought you here twice, made you work in the cannabis factories and things. Did you bring that back or manage to send any money back to the wife to pay any other debt that occurred after?” And he said his wife was sitting in the interview with me as well, the two of them. I interviewed both of them at the same time. And his wife was laughing. And she said, “*Yep. After more than 10 years, both the first time and the second time, he came back [with] absolutely nothing.*” And both of us were just working our backside off in the last 15 years in order to pay all his debt. It’s not the money that is earned from the UK. And I asked him, I said, “What’s wrong with the time you work in the UK in the factory? I’m sure that they’re not giving you any money to pay back.” He said, “*Well, they took it directly.*” And in another word, it’s like debt is taken directly from his labour. So cases like that. It’s not heard in the media[...]

[T]he timeline is between 2004 up until 2016. So the first time he came for a period of time, arrested, deported, came back to Vietnam for a few years[...]

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

In this 2024 academic article, a Lecturer at Northumbria Law School and PhD holder in Law from Queen Mary, University of London. Dr Maja Grundler noted this case:

“[...]As Kelly notes, ‘effective re-integration programmes’ will ‘address issues of housing, education, health, employment, substance abuse, and trauma’ and the lack of such assistance ‘plays an important part in re-trafficking’.”⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Kelly, *Journeys of Jeopardy: A Review of Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe* (IOM, 2002) 39 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs_11_2002.pdf accessed 29 April 2020

(Source: Maja Grundler (Publisher: Oxford University Press) – [The Locus of Persecution Reconsidered: Risk of Re-Trafficking, Cumulative Harm, and Failure of State Protection](#), 15 May 2024, pg.452, last accessed 17 July 2027)

OHCHR explains in 2023 that Thailand is being used as a transit point in human trafficking operations, as people are moved from one scam operation to another:

“[...]Thailand is increasingly a transit country for these operations. People travel into Thailand before being moved by their traffickers over the border to a neighbouring State, while in other contexts trafficked persons transit through Thailand as they are moved from one scam operation to another (for example, citizens of Viet Nam were first trafficked into Myanmar and from there re-trafficked to Cambodia via Thailand).”

¹⁶ All ASEAN States are party to the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol and also to the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP).
¹⁷ OHCHR, 2022. End of Mission Statement. United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn, Phnom Penh, 26 August.

(Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR – [Online Scam Operations And Trafficking Into Forced Criminality In Southeast Asia: Recommendations For A Human Rights Response](#), August 2023, pg.7, last accessed 18 June 2025)

A study supported by ASEAN-ACT and authored by international law expert Dr Marika McAdam noted in a 2022 report:

“[...]Prosecution of victims-turned-trafficker: Examples were offered of victims trafficked from Viet Nam to other countries, such as Malaysia or China, who learn routes and make contacts, and so return to Viet Nam as traffickers. In such cases, State respondents explained that they will be prosecuted where evidence can be achieved to prove their involvement in trafficking. Non-state actors also offered examples of victims-turned traffickers; in one case a victim was allowed to return to Viet Nam if she recruited another victim in her place, and was sentenced to three years imprisonment for doing so. Another example involved a victim of trafficking for organ removal subsequently recruiting others to sell their organs too.

(Source: Australian Aid, Author: Dr Marika McAdam – [Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Victims of Human Trafficking in ASEAN Member States](#), pg.105, 23 April 2022, last accessed)

In its report titled ‘*Re-trafficking: The Current State of Play*’, published in November 2021, the University of Nottingham drew on data collected by the Poppy Project and the Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline to highlight findings on re-trafficking and re-exploitation of modern slavery victims including Vietnamese:

“Prevalence data was not requested from survey respondents. However, the Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline was able to quantify the number of cases of re-trafficking and re-exploitation encountered. Between May 2017 and June 2021 7,027 cases were opened, assessed and classified as modern slavery situations. Of these there were 25 cases (<0.5% of total modern slavery cases) in which there were concerns that a potential victim was being re-trafficked, in 15 cases (<0.5% of total modern slavery cases) potential victims were known/reported to be re-trafficked and in one case (0.01% of modern slavery cases) a potential victim had already been re-trafficked and there were fears of a further re-trafficking situation. In addition, three cases (0.04% of modern slavery cases) of ‘reexploitation’ were reported where the exploitation hadn’t ceased despite the potential victim engaging with interventions such as the NRM.

Survey respondents were able to comment on the patterns and profiles of survivors who had experienced re-trafficking, based on their experiences of directly supporting survivors and referred to individuals from specific nationalities they had interacted with. No respondents offered comments on the timeframes included in relation to an individual being re-trafficked and when this was most likely to occur but did comment on the nationalities, ages and types of exploitation they had seen when an individual had experienced being re-trafficked. Reported nationalities of those who had been re-trafficked included [...]Vietnamese,[...]. Examples of re-trafficking shared referred to forced labour, criminal and sexual exploitation and domestic servitude with the recognition that the initial trafficking event may have been for a different form of trafficking.[...]

From the respondents’ answers this report is unable to comment on the actual prevalence of re-trafficking in relation to the nationalities, ages, genders, trafficking types or factors that respondents have presented in relation to re-trafficking. This is because the survey did not ask respondents for absolute numbers of survivors in each profile they presented.”
(Source: The University of Nottingham – [Re-trafficking: The current state of play](#), November 2021, pg.14, last accessed 17 July 2025)

36. What factors contribute to the risk of further exploitation and/or re-trafficking among survivors in Vietnam?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“[...] If someone is returned they usually don’t have resources, and this is one of the key factors that leads to trafficking in the first place, so there is considerable risk that they will be subject to the same pressure, ensnared by loan sharks, especially if they have lost livelihoods and homes. They may be identified again by original traffickers. This is downplayed by the Home Office, but I don’t understand. Even if a person is going back to a big city such as Hanoi, if you are not registered with the authorities you cannot access any help from the authorities. Once you are on the databases there is a process of corruption whereby the traffickers will pay the authorities to get access to the information. The National Tax database is open access and wouldn’t even require corruption. There have been cases where the police have informed the traffickers that the individual has been returned. I came across one case where a woman had been trafficked twice already and each time subject to rapes, and the HO argument was that ‘you have already experienced it, so you will manage again’. It is astounding they tried to argue in this way. Re-trafficking is a serious risk to be sure. In my opinion, the Vietnamese authorities put in place rules and regulations to appease the international community, but their interest in actually dealing with it is limited, and they don’t receive enough support from authorities to mitigate risks.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“[...]And that internal shame then is an influence on them not seeking mental health. First of all, they would probably not acknowledge that they have mental health issues because especially if you’re a man in this culture and across the world, but especially in traditional patriarchal societies where mental health in men is not talked about. It’s not a thing. It’s a sign of weakness. You have that barrier already, that generic general stigma that’s found everywhere. Add on top of that, the failure to be successful. And so adding that on there. And then on top of that, the extraordinary effort that they would have to go through in order to seek out help, right, in addition to what I said before about trying to get the residency card and the social health insurance, all that. So add all that on top of it. Their priority is not to seek mental health treatment, but to earn money. And in, say, like trying to be successful. They failed at all these things. And this is where it influences their risk of being exploited and/or trafficked again[...]

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 19 November 2025)

The September 2025 Blue Dragon report noted:

“These poverty statistics indicate that traffickers are targeting regions where economic disadvantage is high and people are struggling to find jobs, or alternatively, that people desperate for jobs are more likely to fall victim to the false job offers advertised and promised by traffickers. Regardless, it is clear that poverty is the core driving factor behind this form of exploitation, as is the case for all other forms of exploitation in Vietnam.”^[40](pg.28)

40 Le and Wyndham, ‘Beyond Need and Greed’. Le, Wyndham and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’.

As reported in Chapter II, 98% of victims of forced criminality were targeted through fake job offers, clearly indicating that the majority of those trafficked into scam compounds left their homes in search of jobs. Data further shows that 65% of victims are Kinh and 83.1% are male. Both of these indicators are a departure from other forms of trafficking in Vietnam, which traditionally disproportionately affected women and ethnic minority people. While traffickers have always exploited economic hardship and job insecurity amongst the ethnic minority groups, the high number of Kinh male victims suggests that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, traffickers are exploiting vulnerabilities across a much wider demographic in Vietnam. People migrating in search of better economic opportunities are in a position both psychologically and economically to fall victim to the traffickers’ false promises. ^[61]

The explanation for these changed demographics can be traced to Vietnam’s current economic situation. The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread job losses, affecting millions of people and severely impacting industries that typically provide employment to low-income workers. This, as well as stricter border controls and a fence constructed along the Vietnam-China border, made informal migration to China more difficult and forced individuals to explore other destinations in the region.^[62] The National Statistics Office (NSO, formerly General Statistics Office (GSO)) reports that the majority of workers in Vietnam still accept informal jobs with little security or a guaranteed labour contract.^[63] The informal economy is far more significant in the country than the formal economy. NSO notes that this situation of informal labour became particularly acute during 2020–2021, amid the severe economic impacts of the pandemic, and that the country has still not fully recovered. ^[64]” (pg.74)

61 Dinh, et al ‘Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia’ , Journal of Human Trafficking 7, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 14–34, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2019.1650527>
62 More about the economic fallouts of the pandemic can be read here - Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, ‘Human Trafficking in Post-COVID Vietnam’ (Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, March 2024), <https://www.bluedragon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Human-trafficking-in-postCovid-Vietnam.pdf> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]
63 GSO, ‘Overall Situation of Workers in Informal Employment in Vietnam’
64 GSO, ‘Overall Situation of Workers in Informal Employment in Vietnam’ (GSO, 2023)

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding Light on the Trafficking of Vietnamese People into Forced Criminality](#), September 2025, pp.28-74, last accessed: 07 March 2026)

An article titled ‘Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023, (Case study in Ha Giang province)’, published in September 2024, stated that:

“[...]The number of victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking is 3,090 people, of which, mainly women and children (accounting for over 90%), the majority are ethnic minorities (accounting for over 80%), often concentrating in rural and mountainous areas, especially remote areas, most of whom have difficult economic circumstances... Upon returning to the community, the victims face many difficulties, notably lack of employment and unstable income. Some victims, because they do not have jobs, after being trafficked, returning to the other side of the border illegally to find work. This brings many risks, including the risk of re-trafficking.”

(Source: Journal Of Ethnic Studies – [Livelihood Support For Trafficking Women Returned In The Period Of 2019-2023 \(Case study in Ha Giang province\)](#), 30 September 2024, last accessed 29 May 2025)

In her 2025 book titled ‘*Irregular Migration, Refugee Status and the Law Protection from Dangerous Migratory Journeys*’, Lecturer at Northumbria Law School and PhD holder in Law from Queen Mary, University of London. Dr Maja Grundler, noted this:

“[...]HC concerned a man trafficked from Vietnam to Serbia, where he performed forced labour in a factory. The UT found that he had ‘no family support, few educational or vocational skills’, and had experienced trauma, all of which would not only put him at risk of re-trafficking, but also prelude an IPA.[1]71 LVC concerned another Vietnamese man who was trafficked for cannabis cultivation. The tribunal found that he ‘faced a real risk of trafficking wherever he lived in Vietnam [...] because the cumulative impact of his personal characteristics rendered him especially vulnerable’, mentioning, in particular, lack of family support, education and employment prospects, as well as his poor mental health.[2]”

[1] HC (n 44) [42]-[43] and [48]
 [2] LVC (n 45) [8]; emphasis in original; see also JV (n 34) [27]

(Source: Maja Grundler (Publisher: Routledge) – [Irregular Migration, Refugee Status and the Law Protection from Dangerous Migratory Journeys](#), August 29, 2025, pg.71)

37. What is the impact of family rejection or lack of support systems on the safety of trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

A household survey carried out in 2019 by Coram International evidenced child victims of trafficking’s experience of rejection by members of their own families when they returned:

[...] 7.2. [...] Challenges with reintegration [...] [...] In some cases, respondents described being rejected by members of their own families: “From the moment I returned home I felt my father was distant from me – that he didn’t love me the way he did before.”⁹⁷ ... “When I was in China, I was afraid I would never have the chance to meet my parents again... I just wanted to see my parents. But when I came back and saw my parents’ attitude toward me, I thought – if I knew they would be like that I would rather have stayed in China. My father’s attitude changed and because of that I am very sad.”⁹⁸ A stakeholder from Dak Lak province explained that this is not a unique experience: “When trafficked children return home, their families often scold and curse them, blame the victims... I witnessed a girl crying and running to hug her mother, but the mother pushed her, and scolded her.”⁹⁹ Indeed, several respondents emphasised that whilst significant effort has been devoted to sensitising communities about the risks associated with trafficking, there is a need for sensitisation and awareness raising with families and communities to promote victims’ successful reintegration.[...]”

⁹⁷ Individual interview, young woman with child trafficking experiences, Lao Cai Province, 29 November 2017
⁹⁸ Individual interview, young woman with child trafficking experiences, Lao Cai Province, 28 November 2017
⁹⁹ Individual interview, Department of Social Evils Prevention, Dak Lak Province, 7 January 2018

(Source: Coram International – [Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam](#), June 2019, pg.60, last accessed 11 August 2025)

38. What role does the relationship between a trafficker and their victim play in increasing vulnerability to exploitation and/or re-trafficking?

From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on what role the relationship between a trafficker and their victim plays in increasing vulnerability to exploitation and/or re-trafficking. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

71 IPA stands for internal protection alternative the full case references are: HC v SSHD [2021] UKUT (IAC) PA/05060/2019 and SSHD v LVC [2021] UKUT (IAC) PA/06804/2019.

This study published in June 2022 by Xiaochen Liang⁷², noted that:

“[...]Finally, based on Kelly’s conducive context theory, this article’s third research question explores the social conditions and social networks that open the door to marriage trafficking and prevent victims from exiting the trafficking situation. The interviews show that social networks tolerate or even support trafficked marriage, since locals perceive the institution of marriage as legitimate, private, and out of the public’s control in character. Such conducive social contexts facilitate the occurrence of trafficking and create additional barriers for victims to exit a trafficking situation. This research provides a pioneering study of important, but less researched, actors in the marriage trafficking sites: middlemen, ordinary villagers, and village women’s federations. Middlemen in the same village are the main actors with connections to the marriage traffickers. Their economic and emotional motivations promote their support of marriage trafficking, and the source of their emotional motivation is the recognition of the necessity of marriage and their sympathy for unmarried male villagers. Ordinary villagers are also influenced by marriage as a social norm. Although villagers have a general knowledge of the marriage trafficking taking place, they are either apathetic or morally tolerant of the crime; some do not condemn the traffickers and buyers; some even watched women being sold or lent money to the buyers to facilitate the purchase out of pity. Despite their knowledge of marriage trafficking, the villagers rarely report the crimes. Many villagers even monitor the trafficked women’s actions to stop their escape attempts. One of the main reasons for the general apathy and non-reporting is the universal belief that the institution of marriage involves the private but not the public sphere; thus, there is neither the need nor the duty to intervene. [...]”

(Source: National Library of Medicine (Liang X) – [Marriage Trafficking: Demand, Exploitation, and Conducive Contexts—A Study in China–Vietnam Border Areas](#), June 2022, last accessed 16 March 2026)

The previous Asylos 2020 report '*Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking*' identified the following on the possible situations that occur once the trafficking survivor has returned home.

“When victims go home they often don’t go through the government system and then they get re-trafficked. Some cases we know are re-trafficked straight away when they get back to the airport in Vietnam or back to their families. Protection is loose and not strong. Many victims become traffickers and they come back and bring more victims for the traffickers.[...] (pg.115)

(Source: Hoa Nguyen – [interview record](#), 21 October 2019)

[...]

I think obviously the main risk is risk of re-trafficking and the exploitation, and they will have to pay off that debt, or their family will have to. So I think what we’ve identified is that there is a little pressure from their family as well to pay off that debt. So if they went back to family, that would be something of concern and shame if they hadn’t paid off the debt. So I think it’s worse for people in Vietnam, this is one of the strongest risks because most of them have a debt that they have to pay off.”(pg.207)

(Source: Interview with Debbie Beadle from ECPAT UK, 20 November 2019)

(Source: Asylos – [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking](#), 6 May 2020, pp.115-207)

39. Do traffickers in Vietnam target individuals who have previously been trafficked? If so, how?

From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on whether or not traffickers in Vietnam target individuals who have previously been trafficked. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

72 Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

A 2022 study supported by ASEAN-ACT and authored by international law expert Dr Marika McAdam noted:

“[...]Prosecution of victims-turned-trafficker: Examples were offered of victims trafficked from Viet Nam to other countries, such as Malaysia or China, who learn routes and make contacts, and so return to Viet Nam as traffickers. In such cases, State respondents explained that they will be prosecuted where evidence can be achieved to prove their involvement in trafficking. Non-state actors also offered examples of victims-turnedtraffickers; in one case a victim was allowed to return to Viet Nam if she recruited another victim in her place, and was sentenced to three years imprisonment for doing so. Another example involved a victim of trafficking for organ removal subsequently recruiting others to sell their organs too.”

(Source: Australian Aid, Author: Dr Marika McAdam – [Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Victims of Human Trafficking in ASEAN Member States](#), pg.105, 23 April 2022, last accessed 11 July 2025)

The previous Asylos 2020 report '*Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking report*' noted that trafficking survivors often owe a debt and that could lead to a risk of re-trafficking.

“If victims have spoken to the police and/or still owe a debt to their traffickers, they are likely to be at risk of re-trafficking or reprisals from their traffickers and/or the Vietnamese authorities. There is limited support available in Vietnam for returned victims, leaving them at risk of being re-trafficked or even becoming a trafficker themselves.”

(Source: ECPAT UK/Anti-Slavery/Pacific Links Foundation, [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019)

(Source: Asylos – [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking](#), 6 May 2020, pg.116, last accessed 6 August 2025)

40. How do levels of education and vocational skills impact survivors’ risk factors of re-trafficking or further exploitation?

In September 2025 Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation published a report based on primary data on victims of forced criminality and their traffickers from 21 court cases between 2022 and 2024 in Vietnam, noting:

[...]Only seven (21.2%) had completed high school prior to the trial, while nine others studied beyond primary school but did not finish secondary school. Finally, one trafficker finished primary school while three others had between two to four years of education but did not finish primary school.

Female traffickers had 8.33 years of education on average, while male traffickers had 6.33 years of education.” (pg.38)

“[...]This socioeconomic data indicates that these low-level traffickers come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many are former victims of human trafficking, have low levels of education, work informal jobs or are unemployed, are the breadwinners of their families and have been in conflict with the law. Therefore, the decision to engage in trafficking appears intricately linked to livelihood pressures for traffickers, particularly for those responsible for supporting families and those who were former victims of trafficking themselves.” (pg.42)

(Source, Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Scamming to Survive: shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025 last accessed 9 March 2026, pg.38-42)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes that:

“[...]Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

In their 2025 report, the DFAT noted that:

“[...]Victims of human trafficking tend to [...]possess limited education and young (international NGO analysis found the average age of victims in 2021 was 19.2). [...] Nevertheless, human trafficking is not specific to ethnic minorities and the poor, and victims have included educated young students and recent graduates from middle-class backgrounds, including Kinh.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pp.43-48, last accessed 13 April 2025)

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, noted that:

“[...]Low levels of education and a lack of easily accessible vocational training is a barrier to children accessing safe, legal employment. Children are forced to seek employment in lower skilled jobs in informal industries, which puts them at higher risk of exploitation. However, some businesses are providing training to young people to enable them to secure non-exploitative, legal employment.”²⁸

²⁸ Interview with business leader, Feb 28 2022

(Source: UNICEF – Case Study, [Migration and Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation, Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 6 July 2025)

41. What is the relationship between health issues (physical and/or mental, diagnosed and or undiagnosed) and vulnerability to exploitation and/or re-trafficking in Vietnam?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“[...]And that internal shame then is an influence on them not seeking mental health. First of all, they would probably not acknowledge that they have mental health issues because especially if you’re a man in this culture and across the world, but especially in traditional patriarchal societies where mental health in men is not talked about. It’s not a thing. It’s a sign of weakness. You have that barrier already, that generic general stigma that’s found everywhere. Add on top of that, the failure to be successful. And so adding that on there. And then on top of that, the extraordinary effort that they would have to go through in order to seek out help, right, in addition to what I said before about trying to get the residency card and the social health insurance, all that. So add all that on top of it. Their priority is not to seek mental health treatment, but to earn money. And in, say,[...] like trying to be successful. They failed at all these things. And this is where it influences their risk of being exploited and/or trafficked again[...].”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Vietnam noted:

“[...]’ ... There are a range of negative outcomes evidenced for child trafficking victims and children who have experienced exploitation in the context of migration. Children working within factories and other labour settings are at risk of physical injury and exposure to hazardous working conditions that are detrimental to physical and mental health and development. Children who are trafficked for sex work are at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy and experience of physical violence. Research indicates that victims of child trafficking also have a high prevalence of mental health problems and low wellbeing. They also experience stigma on their return home after being trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonour upon their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatised by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally.”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#), para 11.4.2, pg.34, February 2025, last accessed 14 February 2026)

The 2025 DFAT Country Information Report mentioned the following:

“[...]3.146 The Government of Vietnam and CSOs rescue and repatriate victims trafficked to other countries and, once returned to Vietnam, provide services to support their social reintegration, in accordance with the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024). Available services include a national hotline, safe housing, financial assistance, medical support, mental health counselling, vocational training, internships, job placements and legal aid. Vietnam’s Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, in partnership with CSOs, and the Vietnam Women’s Union operate dedicated shelters for women and children human trafficking victims, although these are few. DFAT is aware of at least one such shelter in northwest Vietnam, near the border with China. Returnees identified by Vietnamese law enforcement as victims are referred to shelters, which accommodate both short- and long-term residents and provide counselling, training and job placements, among other services. Shelters also monitor victims once they have returned to their communities, including through visits. In-country sources said support services for male victims of trafficking were lacking in comparison.” (pp.45-50)

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.49-50, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

3.7 Gender, Age, and Identity-specific Risk

Forms of Exploitation

42. What are the common forms of exploitation faced by trafficking victims in Vietnam (e.g., forced labour, sexual exploitation, exploitation faced by trafficking victims, including children)?

According to the 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, the Vietnamese government has provided statistical breakdowns on trafficking investigations, which show that both forced labour and sex trafficking occurs in Vietnam. The report also noted some of the more common forms of exploitation of trafficking victims domestically. These include street hawking and begging, forced labour in the garment industry, and sex trafficking in establishments such as massage parlours, karaoke bars, and hotels:

“The government provided data disaggregated by sex or labor trafficking for investigations for the first time. In 2024, the government investigated 237 suspected traffickers in 91 cases – nine cases for sex trafficking, 29 for labor trafficking, and 53 for unspecified forms of exploitation. This data could not be wholly compared to 2023 data, which was not disaggregated between sex and labor trafficking and included overall numbers of both new and ongoing investigations (investigations of 365 suspected traffickers in 147 cases). Authorities continued investigating 218 suspected traffickers in 72 cases opened in previous reporting periods. Authorities did not provide prosecution or conviction data disaggregated by sex or labor trafficking and did not provide sufficient information to determine whether data involving unspecified forms of exploitation met the definition of trafficking according to international law. The government prosecuted 291 alleged traffickers in 2024, compared

with prosecuting 198 alleged traffickers in 2023. Courts convicted 246 traffickers, compared with convicting 198 traffickers in 2023. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. Authorities did not vigorously prosecute previous claims of labor trafficking in state-owned or licensed labor export companies.[...]

“State-run media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not issue data on the status of the potential victims nor whether authorities consistently screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services.[...]

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam, and traffickers exploit victims from Vietnam abroad. Sixty-nine percent of workers are employed in the informal economy where labor laws are not effectively enforced, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including children who were homeless – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases. A previous study indicated 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam were members of ethnic minority communities; however, NGOs report an increasing number of Kinh ethnic majority members exploited in forced labor, especially in online scams. Government estimates suggest 78 percent of known trafficking victims in 2024 were Kinh ethnic majority members. Other reports suggest many children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking, with children from rural and vulnerable communities at particularly high risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in street hawking and begging in major urban centers and urban family homes. Adults are also at risk of forced labor in the garment industry. Reports indicate traffickers exploit women and girls domestically in Vietnam in sex trafficking in massage parlors, karaoke bars, and hotels. Observers claim many sex trafficking cases are unreported because of social stigma and victims’ fear of possible repercussions by authorities. Domestically, traffickers often create and exploit personal, trusting relationships with potential victims before isolating and exploiting them in sex or labor trafficking in karaoke bars, massage parlors, and restaurants. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse travel to Vietnam to exploit children; many of the perpetrators reportedly originate from elsewhere in Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Environmental impacts causing displacement, including extreme heat, saltwater intrusion, and drought, force an estimated 24,000 people to leave the Mekong Delta region every year, increasing trafficking risks due to livelihood loss.”

(Source: US Department of State (USDOS) – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report, there is a growing trend of Vietnamese victims being trafficked for forced labour in online scam centres in Myanmar and Cambodia.

“[...] 3.142 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that growing numbers of victims were trafficked into forced labour in online scam centres(‘scam factories’) in Myanmar and, in particular, Cambodia’s Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone. Victims are typically lured through online advertisements and, once in-country, have their passports confiscated and are forced to perpetrate various forms of online fraud. According to in-country sources, victims were forced to work long hours against their will, recruit others, and subjected to confinement, violent assault and sexual exploitation; they could only leave by paying a ransom or if they were sold on. Escape can be high-risk (compounds are heavily guarded), and some victims have experienced serious injury by jumping from windows of multi-storey buildings in their attempts to escape. Vietnam has sought to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries as part of its counter-human trafficking efforts; in December 2023, it formally committed to jointly fight human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime with Cambodia and Laos. According to the US Department of State, between mid-2022 and June 2024, Vietnam rescued and repatriated 4,100 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam centres in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and the Philippines.” (pp.48-49)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.48-49, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to the US Department of State’s 2024 report on trafficking, trafficking victims in Vietnam commonly face forced labour in a range of industries, forced criminality and sex trafficking.

“Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East, and Europe – such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms. [...] Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines.[...] Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to commercial sex establishments on the borders of the PRC, Cambodia, and Laos, or elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report 2024](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to a 2024 report by Blue Dragon, child victims in Vietnam are exploited in forced labour.

“In light of these reports, Blue Dragon has been collecting and recording relevant information from children to determine their trafficking status since April 2022. Between then and January 2023, a total of 120 boys and girls Blue Dragon’s outreach team met on the streets had been forced into exploitation. This represents 60% of the young people Blue Dragon met on the streets during said period, and 84% of these were child victims. The forms of exploitation include forced labour in construction, restaurants, and bars, and in small-scale manufacturing.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions](#), March 2024, pg.18, last accessed 30 May 2025)

The 2024 Freedom House annual report on Vietnam states that trafficking victims in Vietnam face forced labour:

“Vietnamese migrant workers are vulnerable to recruitment for forced labor abroad in a variety of industries, and debt bondage has been prevalent in recent years. Enforcement of legal safeguards against child labor and exploitative or hazardous working conditions remains poor.”

(Source: Freedom House – [Freedom in the World 2024: Vietnam](#), 2024, last accessed 3 July 2025)

Men and Boys

43. What are the primary industries in which men and boys are trafficked in Vietnam?

According to a 2025 report by Blue Dragon, men and boys are more likely than women and girls to be trafficked and forced to work in scam centres in neighbouring countries:

“Previously understood trends about the gender, age and ethnicity of trafficking victims do not apply to forced criminality, making this new data very important to understanding the nature of victimisation for this particular form of exploitation.

Between 2022 and 2024, a thirteen-fold increase was noted in the number of male victims, from 5 in 2022 to 68 in 2024. The proportion of male to female victims stood at 83.1% to 16.2%.

Of the male victims, 77 (71.3%) were adults, while 19 (17.6%) were children between 15 and 18. Of the female victims, 14 (66.7%) were adults, while 7 (33.4%) were children between 14 and 18.

The data indicates that the group most vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality is adult males. This finding is corroborated by Blue Dragon’s data of over 300 victims rescued from forced criminality from 2022 to 2024, which finds that 82.8% of victims were male, and those between 18 and 39 were most vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality.²⁹ This finding is also consistent with other reporting on forced criminality in Vietnam and elsewhere, which indicates that adult men make up the majority of trafficking victims in Southeast Asia.”³⁰

29 Le, Wyndham, and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’
30 See for example Freedom Collaborative, ‘Freedom Collaborative Data Spotlight on Trafficking of forced criminality’, accessed 19 June 2025, <https://data.freedomcollaborative.org/trafficking-for-forced-criminality/>

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 22-23, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that men and boys are increasingly common victims of trafficking and forced labour in online scam operations:

“Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations.”

(Source: US Department of State (USDOS) – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to a 2024 report by Blue Dragon, men and boys are increasingly trafficked into forced criminality in online scamming centres:

“2022 saw a sharp increase of men and boys who were targeted by human traffickers. Blue Dragon rescued 51 men and boys from labour exploitation in Cambodia and assisted an additional 92 victims of labour exploitation on the streets of Hanoi.²⁰ Among the male victims assisted through Blue Dragon’s rescue work, 49% were trafficked into forced criminality in online scamming centres in Cambodia. For the international rescues, male victims made up 22% of the total rescues – a higher percentage than any previous year. If we add the street boys and young men who fell victim to labour exploitation within Vietnam, the percentage of male victims rescued by Blue Dragon in 2022 rises to 40%.”

“[...] In 2022, Blue Dragon rescued 62 Vietnamese victims from these compounds in collaboration with the authorities. [...] Importantly, of these 62 victims, 77% were men and boys, a pattern that seems to be confirmed among other victims assisted by authorities.”

20 Blue Dragon Blue Dragon data from April 2022 to January 2023. Note that an additional 75 boys met on the streets of Hanoi during that period did not provide enough information to conclude if they showed indicators of trafficking. Therefore, this number can be considered a minimum.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions](#), March 2024, pp.13-24, last accessed 25 June 2025)

This is corroborated by the US Department of State’s 2024 report on trafficking, which states that men are deceived by false promises of employment abroad, often in online scam operations:

“[...]Traffickers continue to take advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad, often in online scam operations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

The same report also highlights the trafficking of Vietnamese men in the maritime industry internationally:

“[...]There are increasing reports of Vietnamese labor trafficking victims in Taiwan, continental Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and in Pacific maritime industries, including on Indonesian and Taiwanese fishing vessels operating under complex ownership and registration arrangements that enable traffickers to evade detection and intervention by law enforcement. The lack of a requirement for labor contracts and use of oral agreements in the fishing industry increases fishermen’s vulnerability to trafficking. Labor brokers exploit fishermen in labor trafficking by forcing them to involuntarily work on fishing vessels.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 3 July 2025)

A 2021 article published in the '*International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*', explores how governmental and nongovernmental actors perceive victims of human trafficking in Vietnam, authors Oanh Nguyen⁷³ and Toi Lee⁷⁴, noted that:

“[...]Several police interviewees described boys as trafficked victims in sex tourism. Some criminal groups collect boys who are runaways, homeless, panhandlers or wanderers to exploit their labour by selling newspaper or chewing gums, polishing shoes and even selling sex to foreigners. Bodyguards from the gangs follow whatever these boys do. One official illustrated that the link between trafficked boys and domestic child sex tourism is growing in Vietnam:

Today, Vietnam attracts millions of foreign tourists, as well as tens of millions of domestic tourists yearly. The more widespread and lucrative the tourism industry becomes, the more danger children enlarge when it [the tourism industry] diversifies the forms of tourism services, including sex tourism which attracts more and more foreigners to travel to Vietnam to enjoy paid sex from children. In some big cities/provinces, traffickers kidnap children to sell to this tourism. Boys are also kidnapped for this purpose. It’s extremely aggressive and reckless. Due to the increasing demand for sex with children from foreigners, they [traffickers] ignore their own conscience and conduct abductions for money. [Interviewee 13]

Indeed, sex tourism still seems to be an unfamiliar problem for Vietnamese police. Other interviewees reported that many police do not recognise boys as sexually abused by acquaintances, neighbours or stepfathers, who may bring them to cafe shops, massage parlours or hotels to bargain with foreign tourists. These activities are hidden in communities. Therefore, it is difficult to identify this problem unless functional agencies have enough knowledge, experience, skills and techniques to identify. Another senior official described the current challenges to find trafficked boys in sex tourism, stating:

I [police] fear an explosion of sex tourism in our country in coming times... I have found many indicators of child sex trafficking, including male victims... Many boys on the streets have been forced to provide sexual entertainment for tourists, but we haven’t known how to address these issues. [Interviewee 11]”

(Source: Nguyen, O. and Le, T. Published on International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy – [Perceptions of Governmental and Nongovernmental Actors of Human Trafficking Victims: The Case of Vietnam](#), pg.131, 2021)

A 2021 article by the Guardian highlights construction sites, factories, nail bars, restaurants and cannabis farms as sectors in which Vietnamese victims are exploited in Europe. The article includes several interviews with male victims:

“[...] An Observer investigation has found that Serbia and Romania are being used as new gateways to Europe for smuggling and trafficking gangs who are using guest worker visa programmes to transport large numbers of Vietnamese workers into eastern Europe. There they are often exploited in factories and construction sites before some are transported across land borders into the EU and, eventually, to the UK.[...]”

73 People’s Police Academy
74 People’s Police Academy

“[...] Tuan* travelled from Vietnam to Serbia on a guest worker visa after seeing an ad on Facebook promising well-paid work in a German-owned tyre factory. He ended up at Linglong.

“When I arrived I found that the factory was basically buying Vietnamese workers and when you got there you had to do whatever they told you to do,” he said.

[...] In 2019, the death of 39 Vietnamese migrants in a lorry container highlighted the dangers that many face when attempting to reach the UK. Those who do arrive safely are often forced to pay off their debts in nail bars, restaurants and cannabis farms, with Vietnamese people one of the largest groups of modern slavery victims in the UK year after year.[...]

[...] Once in the UK, and with thousands of pounds of debt, Vietnamese people become one of the most vulnerable groups to be trafficked into forced labour, debt bondage and sexual exploitation. Official Home Office figures show that Vietnamese were the third largest national group to be identified as victims of modern slavery. There were 653 Vietnamese people confirmed as victims of slavery in 2020, with the majority discovered in cannabis farms and nail bars.”

(Source: The Guardian – [Revealed: the secret ‘forced labour’ migration route from Vietnam to the UK](#), 25 December 2021, last accessed 3 July 2025)

44. How do the experiences of trafficked men and boys differ from those of women and girls in Vietnam?

According to Blue Dragon’s 2025 report into forced criminality, the previous lack of awareness of male trafficking victims poses new and unanticipated challenges in supporting them. The report also noted that female trafficking victims tend to be subject to more complex forms of exploitation (often including sexual abuse):

“Male survivors

The emergence of male victims in large numbers has caught Vietnam’s trafficking protection system by surprise, including civil society partners. For example, Vietnam lacks specialised shelters for male survivors. All victims of trafficking, including males, are entitled to emergency support in general social protection centres. However, most of these centres serve a range of different groups – including the elderly, orphans and people with disabilities – and most do not have any specialised training or services for assisting victims of trauma. Much of the survivor protection system is tailored towards assisting women and girls, as they have traditionally made up the vast majority of victims of trafficking.

Male survivors of forced criminality also present other challenges to existing systems. Blue Dragon social workers and psychologists have found that male survivors are less able to express emotional turmoil and accept psychological assistance. This is a result of a combination of factors: the cultural silence around pain and suffering of men; the inability of men to acknowledge their victimhood and accept psychological help; feelings of shame, guilt and fear arising out of their involvement in criminal acts; and for many the burden of being the breadwinner of their family. Blue Dragon’s data shows that a higher number of male survivors of forced criminality, 69%, refuse post-rescue assistance compared to 56% of male survivors of other forms of exploitation.⁵⁶ The comparison is even more stark when male survivors of forced criminality are compared with female survivors of gendered forms of exploitation (forced marriage and commercial sexual exploitation), of whom only 20% refuse long-term assistance.⁵⁷

Experts from Blue Dragon report that awareness of psychological wellbeing is especially low amongst Vietnamese men. Gendered cultural teachings about manhood in Vietnam encourage stoicism, resulting in silence around men’s feelings and suffering. As a result, men find it more difficult to recognise themselves as victims and express painful and difficult feelings. Further, men are not used to or skilled in taking care of their mental health and therefore do not seek or accept psychological care even upon experiencing traumatic events. Most male survivors of forced criminality consider themselves as having been tricked into unfortunate situations of labour malpractice rather than victims of organised crimes who rightfully need assistance and care. Many also feel shame and guilt for having put their families under extreme financial stress – especially in cases where they were released upon the payment of a ransom. They frequently feel ashamed of having undertaken criminal

acts scamming their compatriots and other unsuspecting people, as well as “survivors guilt” for being free and unable to help others inside scam compounds.

Blue Dragon social workers also find that many survivors refuse long-term assistance due to the urgent need to find a job to pay back debts incurred by survivors and their family members. These debts incurred during the forced scamming experience are most often in addition to their already precarious socioeconomic standing, which is what drives them to find employment in the first place.

Female survivors
 Female survivors of forced criminality also tend to present differently from female survivors of other forms of exploitation. As female victims commonly suffer multiple forms of exploitation in the compounds, such as commercial sex and scamming, the violence and trauma inflicted on them may be more complex. Blue Dragon’s evidence shows that the trend of refusing assistance is also true for female survivors of forced criminality, with almost as many female survivors as male refusing post-rescue assistance. Among the 69 female survivors of forced criminality rescued by Blue Dragon since 2022, 68% have refused further assistance.

In addition to jeopardising the immediate physical and psychological integrity of survivors, the extreme violence perpetrated inside scam compounds poses challenges to their rescue and has implications for the survivors’ long-term recovery and the provision of reintegration services. The shift in the demographic of victims from female to male adds to these challenges, and difficulties in the provision of long-term care are significant even where service providers such as Blue Dragon can pivot their services and financial and human resources to address the changing needs of survivors. In a survivor’s journey towards recovery, rescue is only the first step, and a lack of long-term rehabilitation services can increase the likelihood of re-victimisation.”

56 These findings are based on Blue Dragon’s entire dataset of 604 male victims of which 347 are victims of forced criminality and 257 are victims of other forms of exploitation.
57 These findings are based on Blue Dragon’s entire dataset of 1,610 female victims of gendered crimes including forced marriage, commercial sex and trafficking for surrogacy.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 69-71, last accessed 13 March 2026)

In her 2025 book titled ‘*Irregular Migration, Refugee Status and the Law Protection from Dangerous Migratory Journeys*’, Lecturer at Northumbria Law School and PhD holder in Law from Queen Mary, University of London. Dr Maja Grundler, noted this:

“[...]the claimant in the 2019 case of BT, a Vietnamese man trafficked for forced labour, was found to be vulnerable to re-trafficking and granted refugee status. ^[1] The tribunal found that ‘[t]he trafficking came about because of his extreme vulnerability which was brought about by poverty, loss of land, mental health problems and family responsibilities to name but a few of the circumstances’.^[2] Similarly, in the 2022 case of TVD,^[3] the appeal of a gay man trafficked for sexual exploitation was allowed on asylum grounds, with the First-Tier Tribunal having found him to have a range of vulnerability indicators, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), no support network in Vietnam, limited practical skills, stigma and lack of access to material or financial support.”

^[1] BT v SSHD [2019] UKUT (IAC) PA/07306/2017.
^[2] *ibid* [38]; emphasis added.
^[3] TVD v SSHD [2022] UKUT (IAC) PA/00252/2020.

(Source: Maja Grundler (Publisher: Routledge) – [Irregular Migration, Refugee Status and the Law Protection from Dangerous Migratory Journeys](#), August 29, 2025, pg.69)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Adults are also at risk of forced labor in the garment industry. Reports indicate traffickers exploit women and girls domestically in Vietnam in sex trafficking in massage parlors, karaoke bars, and hotels.[...] Traffickers in border villages reportedly lure Vietnamese women and girls, particularly from the Hmong ethnic minority group, to China for forced marriages that often involve sex trafficking and/or forced labor. There are past reports of Vietnamese women and girls in forced childbearing, including cases in which traffickers lure them to China with false job offers, abduct them at the border, and transfer them to unregulated hospital facilities, where they are subjected to forcible artificial insemination and confined until they give birth. Vietnamese women and girls are reportedly vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking at “girl bars” – entertainment sites advertising paid “accompaniment” services often involving sex acts with young women and girls – in urban areas in Japan. [...] Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

Blue Dragon, in a March 2024 report titled ‘*Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions*’, noted this:

“NEW VICTIM PROFILES

Gender as a factor of vulnerability to trafficking is also changing, with the new forms of trafficking disproportionately impacting men and boys. The Vietnamese government statistics from 2011–2020 found that 90% of victims identified were female.¹⁹ In 2018 and 2019, 93% of the victims Blue Dragon assisted were women or girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but that percentage has been declining since 2020. Blue Dragon rescued 98 male trafficking victims between 2020 and 2022. (pg.13)

2022 saw a sharp increase of men and boys who were targeted by human traffickers. Blue Dragon rescued 51 men and boys from labour exploitation in Cambodia and assisted an additional 92 victims of labour exploitation on the streets of Hanoi.²⁰ Among the male victims assisted through Blue Dragon’s rescue work, 49% were trafficked into forced criminality in online scamming centres in Cambodia. For the international rescues, male victims made up 22% of the total rescues – a higher percentage than any previous year. If we add the street boys and young men who fell victim to labour exploitation within Vietnam, the percentage of male victims rescued by Blue Dragon in 2022 rises to 40%.” (pg.13)

¹⁹ Ministry of Public Security, 3 June 2021, ‘Summary of 09 years implementation of Law on human trafficking prevention and combat 2011, Hanoi, Vietnam, p.18.

²⁰ Blue Dragon Blue Dragon data from April 2022 to January 2023. Note that an additional 75 boys met on the streets of Hanoi during that period did not provide enough information to conclude if they showed indicators of trafficking. Therefore, this number can be considered a minimum.

[...]

Human trafficking is a highly gendered crime, with males and females facing different vulnerabilities to different forms of trafficking and gendered impacts of the exploitation experience. While men and boys are predominantly targeted for labour exploitation, women and girls are vulnerable to all forms of exploitation, and especially to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Most of the female victims assisted by Blue Dragon prior to the pandemic came from ethnic minority communities and had been trafficked into forced marriages and/or commercial sexual exploitation in China.[...]

The context, however, has now changed. While women and girls continue to represent the majority of victims of trafficking Blue Dragon assists, the impacts of the pandemic have fuelled a surge in the number of men and boys becoming victims of labour exploitation. The reasons for this, once more, are multifaceted and rooted in both socioeconomic and cultural factors. The increase in hardship levels due to the economic impacts following Covid-19 is driving vulnerability among men and boys, as a larger number of them are in urgent need to earn an income. The cultural expectation that males must bear

the responsibility to financially provide for their family makes them more prone to migrate in search of employment, which further drives their risk of falling victim to exploitation. [...] (pg.15)

As discussed in the section on gender vulnerability above, women and girls continue to be highly vulnerable, but as males tend to bear the primary responsibility for earning income, with increased economic vulnerability more men and boys are leaving home in search of jobs and becoming at risk.

Importantly, 26% of the victims of human trafficking Blue Dragon rescued from Cambodia in 2022 were underage, with boys under 18 representing 19% of the total number of victims, and girls under 18 making up 6% of the total victims. However, considering gendered vulnerability of children, the risk for girls falling victim to trafficking to Cambodia is similar to that of boys: 28% of female victims and 25% of male victims were underage.” (pg.25)

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions](#), March 2024, pp.13-14-25, last accessed 1 August 2025)

A 2020 report by the UNODC reported that Vietnamese women and girls were being kidnapped for marriages in neighbouring countries, and these types of marriages can sometimes lead to trafficking:

“[...] Vietnamese stakeholders mentioned that men from neighbouring countries travel to Viet Nam to buy wives. There are also some examples in the data in which the husband’s family arranged the marriage or “bought” their son a wife because he was not likely to be successful in the normal marriage market, for example, owing to mental health issues or other handicaps. In such cases, the bride is also required to assume the role of caretaker in the household... These types of marriages, and the context under which they were entered into, can create situations of vulnerability that can lead to abusive, forced or exploitative marriages and sometimes even trafficking in persons.”

(Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – [Interlinkages between Trafficking in Persons and Marriage](#), 7 October 2020, pg.34, last accessed 10 July 2025)

45. What are the key profiles (individuals or groups, ethnicity, gender, age etc) of traffickers who exploit men and boys in Vietnam? If groups, do they have any particular names and/or identities (e.g known as Mafia or a particular gang etc) or distinguishing features (e.g tattoos)?

A 2025 report by Blue Dragon, which profiled those involved in trafficking into forced criminality based on prosecution records, suggested that traffickers into forced criminality are most commonly males aged 18-25 from the majority Kinh ethnic group, but that victims came from multiple ethnic groups. The report also noted that that those involved in trafficking victims into forced criminality were from all six of Vietnam’s regions, but that traffickers were especially likely to come from the Central Highlands and Mekong Delta regions:

“Age, gender and ethnic intersections

[...]

A total of 79% of prosecuted traffickers were male, while 21% were female.

The age of the traffickers ranged between 17 and 52. The age of four traffickers is not included in the court documents, three traffickers were 17 years old and 36 were adults. The 18 to 25 demographic was the most prominent, with 21 (48.4%) traffickers belonging to this age group, while 11 (25.6%) belonged to the 26 to 40 demographic.

Traffickers belonged to the following ethnic groups: Kinh, Thai, Dao, H’mong, Khmer and Nung. Kinh was the most common ethnicity, with 35 (81.4%) traffickers belonging to this ethnic majority group; and eight (18.6%) traffickers belonged to the five different ethnic minority groups.

Province of origin

From 2022 to 2024, there was a steady increase in the number of provinces traffickers originated from. In 2022, traffickers came from six different provinces, in 2023 this increased to 10 and to 12 in 2024. In total, traffickers originated from 19 different provinces over the reporting period.

These 19 provinces represent just under one-third of Vietnam’s 63 provinces. The data shows that traffickers originated from all of Vietnam’s six regions.

Two regions, the Central Highlands (Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Gia Lai and Kon Tum provinces) and the Mekong River Delta (Tien Giang, An Giang, Bac Lieu, Hau Giang and Dong Thap provinces) contributed 21 (48.8%) traffickers. As seen in the maps below (Figures 2, 3), these two regions have relatively low GDP per capita and significantly higher levels of informal labour and high outmigration. This indicates that a large number of people work in unstable and poorly regulated sectors and regularly migrate out of the region to access income opportunities.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 31-33, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to a 2025 report by the DFAT, most traffickers are from ethnic minority backgrounds and can be young:

“3.143 [...] Most traffickers, like victims, are from ethnic minority communities. In-country sources said some traffickers were as young as 18”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.49, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to the Global Organised Crime Index’s 2023 report on Vietnam:

“Mafia-style groups in Vietnam are involved in human trafficking, arms trafficking and drug trafficking, often operating alongside legitimate enterprises in the hospitality sector. They use increasingly sophisticated techniques to engage in non-attributable markets and have been reported to engage in extortion.”

(Source: Global Organised Crime Index – [Country profile – Vietnam, 2023](#), last accessed 11 July 2025)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁷⁵, titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham noted that Vietnamese traffickers are often from similar backgrounds to victims, in terms of ethnicity, education and socioeconomic status. The report analyses the profile of traffickers in cases of cross-border trafficking to China, mostly of women and girls:

“Discussion

[...]The primary message emerging from our analysis is that, at least for this type of trafficking, traffickers and victims share many similarities. Over 60 per cent of both traffickers and their victims are from ethnic minority groups, especially H’mong. The H’mong are the poorest and most disadvantaged ethnic group in Vietnam, who tend to live in mountainous areas with infertile agricultural land and minimal access to government services.[16] Illiteracy, distance from town centres, complicated bureaucratic requirements, and poverty mean that many H’mong children are not registered at birth, or, if identity papers are lost, adults do not renew them.[17] As a result, H’mong people have limited opportunities to generate income, lack social safety nets, and largely rely on subsistence farming combined with labour migration. Many families lack savings or access to government assistance if illnesses or other shocks occur in the family. Due to all these disadvantages, H’mong people are very vulnerable to both trafficking victimisation and perpetration. Analysis of the Blue Dragon database of over 1,600 victims indicates that H’mong people are fourteen times more likely to be trafficked than the Kinh Vietnamese majority people.[18] The same is true for traffickers, with H’mong people more vulnerable to perpetrating human trafficking. (pg.44)

75 See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal at: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

Likewise, in the court database, 65 percent of the prosecuted traffickers are ethnic minority people, while they make up only 15 per cent of the population. This could indicate that ethnic minority people are more likely to be prosecuted than the Kinh majority. But it is likely that the frontline recruiters are more easily arrested because they are the only people the victims know in the trafficking chain and are easier for the police to locate and arrest. (pp.44-45)

This means that the traffickers are very likely to be poor and disadvantaged prior to their crimes, as evidenced by the information about traffickers’ occupations contained in the court documents. Of 236 traffickers, one was a factory worker, two were hairdressers, and one was an office worker for a small company. The remaining 232 were unemployed, worked on a home farm, or in low-wage, casual jobs. Almost all were from rural areas. In 2018, the average national yearly income per capita was approximately VND 58,500,000 or USD 2,540,[19] while in rural areas it was VND 35,880,000 (USD 1,558)[20](pg.45)

In addition, both traffickers and their victims have relatively low education levels and come from the same region, and in many cases even from the same village. This illustrates the important role of informal networks among ethnic minority communities such as the H’mong, who are present on both sides of the border with extended families both in China and Vietnam.[21]” (pg.45)

16 Mekong Development Research Institute, 54 Ethnic Groups: Why the difference?, Hanoi, 2018; T D Lo et al., Multidimensional Poverty in Vietnam: Reducing poverty in all its dimensions to ensure a good quality life for all (Summary Report), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and UN Development Program, Hanoi, 2018

17 Blue Dragon experience working with communities. See also J van der Straaten and N Pairaudeau, *Unregistered Children Project. Vietnam Report*, Plan International, Manila (ESARO)/Hanoi, 1999.

18 L T H Le and C Wyndham, What Makes People Vulnerable to Human Trafficking?, Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, Hanoi, 2021, <https://www.bluedragon.org/profile-of-victims-of-human-trafficking-in-vietnam> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

19 The World Bank, ‘GDP Per Capita (current US\$) – Vietnam’, World Bank, retrieved on 27 May 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=VN>

20 P Lien, ‘Tăng nhanh thu nhập bình quân đầu người/năm ở nông thôn’, dangcongsan, 12 May 2020, <https://dangcongsan.vn/kinh-te/tang-nhanh-thu-nhap-binh-quan-dau-nguoi-nam-o-nong-thon-554604.html>

21 See for example, J Lemoine, ‘What is the Actual Number of the (H)mong in the World’, Hmong Studies Journal, vol. 6, 2005, pp. 1–8.

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review, Issue 18, 2022, pp.44-45, last accessed 25 June 2025)

The 2021 Global Organised Crime Index’s report included Vietnam in the following list:

“High criminality – low resilience (57 countries)” (pg.107)

The same report, ranked Vietnam’s criminal actors as:

COUNTRY	CRIMINAL ACTORS (AVERAGE)	MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	CRIMINAL NETWORKS	STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	FOREIGN ACTORS
37. BRAZIL	6.50	7.5	6.5	8.5	3.5
37. PERU	6.50	6.0	8.0	7.0	5.0
37. VIETNAM	6.50	6.0	7.0	7.0	6.0

(pg.165)”

(Source: Global Organised Crime Index – [Global Organized Crime Index 2021](#), 8 September 2021, pp.107-165, last accessed 11 August 2025)

A 2019 report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery International and Pacific Links Foundation highlights the role of some factions of the Vietnamese diaspora in trafficking:

“Diaspora networks can provide important and safe links for new Vietnamese migrants without legal status seeking work and opportunities. The same networks can also heighten risks of exploitation through informal employment or possible links to criminal networks. Within Vietnamese diaspora communities across Europe, there are engrained hierarchies and internal divisions, often based on socio-economic status. Some factions are involved in aspects of criminality, including human trafficking.”

(Source: ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery and Pacific Links Foundation – [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pg.12, last accessed 3 July 2025)

46. Are there specific means or methods of recruitment used to traffic men and boys in Vietnam? If so, what is the modus operandi of traffickers?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

The 2025 Blue Dragon report into trafficking victims into forced criminality noted that:

“How were the victims deceived?

We can consider the recruiters of victims of forced scamming as either “Known people” or “Unknown people”. By “Known people”, we mean acquaintances, friends, family members and neighbours. By “Unknown people”, we mean friend of a friend, strangers and victims recruited via the internet through online job advertisements.

Similar to other forms of human trafficking, most victims of forced criminality knew their traffickers, with 84 (64.6%) victims being deceived by people known to them. Meanwhile, 44 (33.8%) victims were deceived by “Unknown people”. For two victims, this information is missing.

Among Kinh victims, 51 (60%) were deceived by “Known people” while among the ethnic minority victims, this figure was 28 (77.8%) people. This suggests that traffickers exploit preexisting trust or relationships within close social circles across all ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Further, from the group of victims who were deceived by “Known people”, 73.8% were deceived by people from either the same commune, village, district or province, indicating that traffickers tend to look for victims from within their own social and economic circles and rely on familiarity when identifying victims.

When considered along with the demographic data, it can be inferred that traffickers of forced criminality come from similar backgrounds as their victims and are primarily exploiting social and friendship networks.

Previous Blue Dragon reports have noted that the most common reason Vietnamese victims leave home and become vulnerable to trafficking is the promise of a job.⁴³ This hypothesis is especially true in the case of forced criminality: 128 (98.5%) victims were recruited through fake job offers, while two were recruited for illegal organ donation in Cambodia in return for money.

Of the victims trafficked to Cambodia, 71 (85.5%) victims were told that the prospective jobs were in Cambodia, while 10 (12%) were told that the prospective jobs were in Vietnam. A similar pattern was seen in the case of Laos, where 36 (90%) victims were offered jobs in Laos and 4 (10%) were offered jobs within Vietnam. In contrast, for victims trafficked to Myanmar,

all seven were told that the prospective offers were in Thailand, possibly because applicants may be more suspicious of job offers in Myanmar due to the ongoing conflict.

Online recruitment

An important issue worth discussing is the role of digital technology in facilitating the trafficking of people of forced criminality in Vietnam. The basic data is presented here and further discussed in later sections of this report. At the start of 2025, 79.8 million individuals were using the internet in Vietnam, and online penetration stood at 79.1%. Social media users, where most digital recruitment happens, totalled 72.7 million people, or 73.3% of the population. This is one of the highest rates of internet use in the world.⁴⁴

These court cases indicate that online deception is the second most commonly used recruitment method into forced scamming. A total of 39 (30%) victims were deceived via online platforms, all of whom were trafficked to Cambodia. Further, of the 39 deceived over the internet, 37 (94.9%) were deceived through job offers. Victims typically saw job advertisements in Facebook groups or personal posts, commented to express interest, and were then contacted by traffickers.”

43 Le, Wyndham and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’. Le and Wyndham, ‘Beyond Need and Greed’

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 43-48, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The DFAT’s 2025 Country Information Report for Vietnam details specific means of control and methods of recruitment in the context of trafficking for forced labour in online scam centres. Although the gender of victims is not specified in the excerpt, the known prevalence of male victims in this industry suggests this modus operandi applies to the trafficking of men:

“3.142 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that growing numbers of victims were trafficked into forced labour in online scam centres(‘scam factories’) in Myanmar and, in particular, Cambodia’s Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone. Victims are typically lured through online advertisements and, once in-country, have their passports confiscated and are forced to perpetrate various forms of online fraud. According to in-country sources, victims were forced to work long hours against their will, recruit others, and subjected to confinement, violent assault and sexual exploitation; they could only leave by paying a ransom or if they were sold on. Escape can be high-risk (compounds are heavily guarded), and some victims have experienced serious injury by jumping from windows of multi-storey buildings in their attempts to escape.”(pp.48-49)

(Source: Australian Government, Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country information report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.48-49, last accessed 3 July 2025)

Similarly, according to the US Department of State’s 2024 TIP report, it was noted that:

“Traffickers continue to take advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad, often in online scam operations”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

A case study in Blue Dragon’s 2024 report on human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam highlights the use of online job adverts to traffic young people, including boys:

“Trinh is one of those boys. His family lived in severe hardship and was barely able to afford food. Trinh, aged 16, wanted to help and had already contemplated leaving school to find work. An advertisement he saw on Facebook in February 2022 was the final push.

The advertisement was convincing: “Online marketing. Only computing skills required. On-the-job training will be provided by the company.” The job was in Cambodia, and it offered a monthly salary of up to 25,000,000 VND (\$1,007 US). The figure — more than five times the average monthly salary in Vietnam — caught the teenager’s attention. That wage would mean

the end of his family’s struggles. Trinh messaged the account right away. A few hours later, he was on a bus from his home in southern Vietnam to Cambodia.

Once there, Trinh was taken to a casino in the city of Sihanoukville and forced to commit cyber fraud. He was made to set up multiple social media accounts for fake commercial sites and financial investment platforms. Through those accounts he had to befriend and provide fraudulent advice to unsuspecting customers with the aim of tricking them into gambling or ‘investing’ their money. Trinh had to entice at least five people every month. When he could not meet that target the teenager was beaten with metal rods, whipped with cables, and left to starve for several days. But what terrified Trinh the most were the threats. His traffickers insisted that if he stopped being profitable, he would be killed. ”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam: New trends in trafficking in persons, and solution-oriented interventions](#), March 2024, pg.27, last accessed 25 June 2025)

47. Are there any specific motivations for traffickers to recruit victims? (Profit and/or financial return, offsetting debts, other benefits? Etc)

According to a 2019 report by ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery and Pacific Links Foundation, brokers involved in trafficking are motivated by financial return.

“The brokers earn significant amounts of money from this business, thus there is an incentive to continue deceiving individuals who are seeking work opportunities abroad. Many communities are unaware of safe migration routes, so there is a large market for traffickers to exploit.”

(Source: ECPAT UK, Anti-Slavery and Pacific Links Foundation – [Precarious Journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#), 7 March 2019, pg.48, last accessed 3 July 2025)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁷⁶, titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham noted traffickers involved in recruitment of victims are often opportunistic and primarily motivated by economic need:

“Thus, in Vietnam, prosecuted traffickers are primarily poor, ethnic minority people, with low education, unstable economic situations, and living in remote, rural areas. They are primarily targeting young women from the same ethnic group living in their local areas. It is clear that economic need is the main motivation that drives these recruiters to the crime of trafficking. The role of these recruiters is simple, as they only need to transport the victim to the border area. All other stages of the crimes are taken care of by brokers on the other side of the border. The fact that the traffickers and victims are usually close acquaintances and from the same ethnic group means that gaining victims’ trust is easy.”(pp.45-46)

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – [What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#), Anti-Trafficking Review, issue 18, 2022, pp.45-46, last accessed 25 June 2025)

48. Does identification depend on self-reporting, and are there barriers to self-reporting - e.g. stigma, victims not understanding their experience as one of trafficking?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 provided some context:

“[...]I mean, because sex trafficking has been recognized for longer than labor trafficking, and trafficking of women and girls is something that is something that the Vietnamese government openly deals with[...]. It’s so much more visible, especially

76 See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal, here: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

with Cambodia, China, Malaysia, and the Asia region countries. Whereas most of the whatever’s going on in Europe is mainly more focused on labor trafficking, right, and labor exploitation. So the government does have a lot of policies and frameworks around support for women, female victims of sex trafficking regionally when they come back. Whereas labor trafficking, it’s something that was only recently recognized,[...]. It’s just within the last 10 years, very, very recent. So there’s not much, by the way, of official recognition of labor trafficking as a form of trafficking and also then the needed support to go along with that recognition, support for victims after they return. And also, it’s not helped by the fact that if you do have victims of labor trafficking, for example, in the UK, most of the time, if they’re recognized by the UK or other European countries, they end up staying, right, because then they get leave to remain, and they don’t return home to Vietnam. Whereas if you have victims of labor trafficking in Europe, in the UK but then are deported back to Vietnam, they’re not recognized as victims of labor trafficking because they’ve been deported back to Vietnam because, for example, the UK doesn’t recognize them. They’ve denied their claim as a victim of trafficking, modern slavery[...]. So when they return to Vietnam, they return officially as illegal immigrants, deportees, right, not as victims.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, similarly noted that:

“[...]Vietnamese culture is the culture of what we call ‘*saving face*’. Everybody wants to save face and always wants to present the best version of themselves and be proud with the family or with the community. And that does not help in terms of trafficking, isn’t it? Because that would make the victims returning did not want to kind of admit that they’re a victim of any kind. Of course, before they set foot on a bus or a lorry from the other end, that is consensual because they know that they are going so-and-so for work, or they’ve been promised to have work somewhere. So that is the agreement that’s made between them and their family and the people who are taking them. The deception is only when they arrive at this end, there’s no such work. So in that sense, yes. At this end of the globe, it is a victim, but at the other end, they still believe that[...] it’s the labor contract that did not end very well. So that’s why, when they go back, [...]even the family themselves don’t want to present to the community that they are so naive, and they [...] think that they’re so stupid in terms of giving [...] [a] stranger all the money and giving this stranger [to] their son and daughter as well, and now you ended up being like this. So naturally, a lot of them don’t want to admit that. This has been discussed in huge [number] of articles and journal articles and literature in Vietnam, where people talk about it. It is changing these days. The families started reporting, and victims started asking for support because of the social stigma these days, because all the awareness and people trying to raise awareness by social media in particular, that actually works. People start seeing the people who return from abroad unsuccessful and have no money and still have this huge amount of debt that’s left from their journey that they paid for. And the people start kind of recognizing that there’s something that these people experience, that they did not experience, which never happened in the past.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

According to Blue Dragon’s 2025 report, many male victims trafficked into forced criminality do not regard themselves as being victims of a crime or in need of support. They may also refuse assistance due to economic pressures:

“Most male survivors of forced criminality consider themselves as having been tricked into unfortunate situations of labour malpractice rather than victims of organised crimes who rightfully need assistance and care. Many also feel shame and guilt for having put their families under extreme financial stress – especially in cases where they were released upon the payment of a ransom. They frequently feel ashamed of having undertaken criminal acts scamming their compatriots and other unsuspecting people, as well as “survivors guilt” for being free and unable to help others inside scam compounds. Blue Dragon social workers also find that many survivors refuse long-term assistance due to the urgent need to find a job to pay back debts incurred by survivors and their family members. These debts incurred during the forced scamming experience are most often in addition to their already precarious socioeconomic standing, which is what drives them to find employment in the first place.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 70-71, last accessed 16 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report documented that:

“[...]The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. The government maintained an NRM approved in 2014, but some local officials’ unfamiliarity with anti-trafficking protocol and policies, insufficient interjurisdictional cooperation, and limited social worker capacity continued to hinder its systematic and effective implementation. Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services.[...]”

Authorities reportedly repatriated more than 5,000 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam operations in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines since 2022. Widespread reports indicated the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking; however, officials acknowledged most of these potential trafficking victims were not screened or identified as victims prior to or following their repatriation, or provided with specialized or long-term services.[...]

Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities, many Vietnamese victims chose not to report their exploitation to government officials – which left these victims without access to most or all protection services. Observers reported that in the past authorities penalized victims exploited in online scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked; furthermore, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential Vietnamese labor trafficking victims – apprehended during joint law enforcement actions against online scam operations – solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

According to the DFAT’s 2025 country information report:

“3.147 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that victims of human trafficking, particularly women, faced social stigma when returning to their communities (‘people think you are a bad person’). Victim blaming was common, especially for women. According to in-country sources, women with lived experience of human trafficking often did not feel accepted and supported, including by their families, and some subsequently returned to shelters. As a result, victims may choose not to self-identify and seek support services. Under the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024), stigmatising or discriminating against human trafficking of victims is prohibited.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – [DFAT Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.50, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to the US Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report, fear of reprisal and economic hardship are common barriers to self-reporting:

“Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, many Vietnamese victims chose not to initiate the formal identification process – which left them without access to most protection services.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to a 2023 country study by ODI, there are several barriers to self-reporting including distrust of the authorities, limited support, lack of understanding and social stigma:

“Few victims report exploitation when they return to Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020). This is partly a result of distrust of the authorities, and also the limited level of support provided. The time taken to process a case, plus a lack of understanding of how to report their case, also determines whether or not to report exploitation. The social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labour exploitation from reporting their case (Huber et al., 2019). In addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their family. Moreover, because migrant workers want to seek employment abroad, and may have gone into debt to finance their travel, they are less likely to complain.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.44, last accessed 5 June 2025)

Children and Age Disputes

49. Are there documented cases of children (e.g. who have been returned due to having no immigration status/ who have claimed asylum/who have claimed to have been trafficked) who are misidentified as adults overseas and returned to Vietnam? If so, what support has been provided?

No information could be found on documented cases of children who had been returned due to having no immigration status/who have claimed asylum/who have claimed to have been trafficked, who are misidentified as adults overseas and returned to Vietnam. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained:

“I have worked on cases in the UK where they have been misidentified,[...]adults misidentified as minors and working with adults who were previously misidentified[...]. So by the time they came back to Vietnam or were [returned] there were no established support services for them[...].”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, noted that:

“[...]with the UK context in particular, I have not seen any of the cases being misidentified in that way because the UK has a very, very, very clear procedure to support underage migrants [...] legal or illegal. And they’re often given the benefit of the doubt in the UK in particular. So I’ve not seen any of the Vietnamese minors being returned from [the] UK to Vietnam because they are misdiagnosed in terms of age.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

Two cases were noted, in this July 2024 research published by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre and carried out by University College London’s Everyday Disasters and Violences Research Group at UCL’s Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction (PI), in collaboration with UCL’s Human Trafficking, Smuggling and Exploitation Research Group at UCL’s Department of Security and Crime Science (Co-I) and ECPAT UK (Co-I):

“[...]Chim* [2019 EWCA 1395] is a young man from Vietnam who arrived in the UK on 8 September 2015. When he arrived, he was found by police in the back of a lorry along with 15 other men, six of whom were also Vietnamese. Immigration authorities who assessed Chim’s* age assessed him as over 18. He was then detained in the Dover Immigration Removal Centre and then Brook House in Sussex, with a view to him being returned to Vietnam as soon as emergency travel documents

were issued. After meeting with a solicitor, he was referred by an NGO first responder to the NRM as a potential child victim of trafficking. His solicitor wrote a letter to the Home Office evidencing that Chim* had been trafficked from Vietnam. The letter asked that he be released from detention as he had been improperly age assessed. In addition, his solicitor argued that he was also at serious risk of re-trafficking unless his release included provisions which minimised those risks from occurring. She stated that Chim* “may still be under the control of his traffickers and will be vulnerable to their threats and coercion when he is released from immigration detention” (p. 20). In particular, it was highlighted that “he should be released into safe and secure accommodation, to be provided by the local authority, West Sussex County Council (“the Council”), for assessment and services under sections 17 and 20 of the Children Act 1989; that a multi-agency meeting should be arranged; and that his case should be referred to the Kent police and the Human Trafficking Team of the Metropolitan Police.” (p. 2).

Chim* was granted temporary admission on the condition that he reside at a specific address in south London. No protective orders were put into place in advance of his release. Immediately upon release, Chim* went missing and has not been seen by anyone or been in contact with his lawyers since. The police investigated his whereabouts but without success. It is believed that Chim* was re-trafficked. As a result of Chim’s* case, a domestic court found, for the first time, a breach of the duty to protect potential victims of trafficking under Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The claim centred on the breaches of the Secretary of State for failing to take reasonable steps to protect Chim* in circumstances where she knew, or ought to have known, that there was a credible suspicion that he was a trafficking victim at risk of being re-trafficked. This ruling is significant as it establishes domestically the duty owed to potential child victims of human trafficking. However, just a year after Chim’s* case, another prominent case involving another Vietnamese boy occurred. Shropshire Child C arrived in the UK in 2016, was indicated by his lawyer of being at heightened risk of trafficking. When he was placed in foster care, he did not receive adequate protections from re-trafficking, immediately went missing, and was found dead in 2016. These cases highlight the lack of respect for the positive obligations of the state to protect children from being re-trafficked when they knew or should have known they were potential victims at risk of further exploitation. Given these obligations, it can reasonably be argued that the government failed to meet these obligations for unaccompanied children accommodated in the child hotels who went missing if they were re-trafficked, particularly those identified as potential victims.”

(Source: The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre PEC – [Behind Closed Doors: A Storytelling Legal and Empirical Analysis of Human Trafficking Risks in Home Office Hotels Compared to Other Accommodation for Unaccompanied Children and Young People Seeking Asylum in the UK](#), 17 July 2024, pp.28-29)

In this 2024 news story, the UK Home Office announced that the first charter flight to Vietnam since 2022 had taken place on 24 July 2024, carrying ‘foreign criminal and immigration offenders.’ The story didn’t contain details of those returned:

“Forty six foreign criminals and immigration offenders have been returned to Vietnam and Timor-Leste on a groundbreaking charter flight.[...]

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said:

“Today’s flight shows the government is taking quick and decisive action to secure our borders and return those with no right to be here.

We thank the governments of Vietnam and Timor-Leste for their co-operation, without which this could never have happened. Our strong diplomatic bonds with other countries have never been more crucial to our mission to bring order back into the asylum and immigration system, tackling irregular migration, and making sure the rules are properly respected and enforced.”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Criminals and immigration offenders removed on charter flight](#), 25 July 2024, last accessed 15 July 2025)

In the same research, the following case was documented:

“[...]Ronia drew attention to situations where traffickers had forced children to claim to be adults by threatening to harm their parents. This way, traffickers had managed to coerce the child into labour exploitation as it was easier for them to disappear from the adult accommodation than it would have been to go missing from more supervised care arrangements:

So there was one example of a Vietnamese boy /.../the trafficker had said that they had their parents and if they didn’t come and say that they were an adult, move out of care, and then disappear, and start working for them, then they would get their parents. So they sent them documentation to prove that they were older. Case workers didn’t even question it/.../ they were deemed an adult and sent to London.

Ronia, F:+/-50-, 01.10.2024, NGO Staff supporting unaccompanied children seeking asylum”

(Source: The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre — [Behind Closed Doors: A Storytelling Legal and Empirical Analysis of Human Trafficking Risks in Home Office Hotels Compared to Other Accommodation for Unaccompanied Children and Young People Seeking Asylum in the UK](#), 17 July 2024, pg.42)

50. How does the government of Vietnam coordinate with other governments in cases of age disputed individuals abroad? What support is available for such cases?

In a new report, published in July 2025, by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI), the Chief Inspector noted the following cases in the UK Home Office’s age assessment process:

“[...]
Triage[...]
5.72 In another example, a Vietnamese national was initially given the benefit of the doubt at the first triage that took place in the waiting area. The CIO and social worker commented on his “soft face”, which they said was consistent with his claimed age of 17. However, his “developedshoulders” and “huge hands” cast doubt for them, as did a “tiny bit of stubble” that they noticed when they asked him to raise his chin. The CIO and social worker told inspectorsafterwards that Vietnamese young people were typically difficult to assess because they “didnot have the same ageing process”, and “did not show signs of ageing”. When asked where theevidence for this was, they said that it was knowledge gained through their own experience. The social worker said, “It is just genetics”, but was unable to support this with evidence.

5.73 Social workers subsequently advised the CIO that they had significant doubts relating tothe Vietnamese boy’s age (particularly because of his hands being “well developed”) and recommended that he be interviewed. While he was waiting for his interview, another IO(who did not introduce themselves to the young person) came out of the interview room andapproached him, gesturing for him to stand up and take his coat off, asking him again his age.This was done without explanation. The IO then left him waiting to be invited for interview,which was a short while later.(pg.33)

5.74 In a further example, a young female Vietnamese national had been directed to wait in the family section of the waiting room. The CIO and a social worker conducted the triage, which was cursory. The staff asked her to remove her hat and commented on her neckline. Theyspoke between themselves about her while in front of her, without engaging her. She appeared frightened and withdrawn and nothing was done to reassure her. They reiterated to inspectors that Vietnamese women did not show signs of ageing and that they disputed her claimed age, so she went on to have an interview.”(pp.34-35)

(Source: Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) – [An inspection of the Home Office’s use of age assessments July 2024 – February 2025](#), 23 July 2025, pp.34-35, last accessed 5 August 2025)

In a written statement to the Parliament in July 2025, Dame Angela Eagle, the Minister of State for Border Security and Asylum, shared the following update:

“Statement

In the Immigration White Paper, published on 12 May, we undertook to improve the robustness of the age assessment process, including exploring scientific and technological methods to ensure that adults entering the asylum or immigration system are not wrongly identified as children, or vice versa. I wish to update the House on that work today.

Accurately assessing the age of individuals is an incredibly complex and difficult task, and the Home Office has spent a number of years analysing which scientific and technological methods would best assist the current process, including looking at the role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology can play. Since coming into office, this Government has commissioned further tests and analysis to determine the most promising methods to pursue further.

Based on this work, we have concluded that the most cost-effective option to pursue is likely to be Facial Age Estimation, whereby AI technology – trained on millions of images where an individual’s age is verifiable– is able to produce an age estimate with a known degree of accuracy for an individual whose age is unknown or disputed.

In a situation where those involved in the age assessment process are unsure whether an individual is aged over or under 18, or do not accept the age an individual is claiming to be, Facial Age Estimation offers a potentially rapid and simple means to test their judgements against the estimates produced by the technology.

The quality of this technology has improved rapidly, and is continuing to evolve and improve as it becomes more widely adopted by online retailers, social media websites and other companies to conduct online age verification tests.

Early assessments suggest that Facial Age Estimation could produce workable results much quicker than other potential methods of scientific or technological age assessment, such as bone X-rays or MRI scans, but at a fraction of the cost, and with no requirement for a physical medical procedure or accompanying medical supervision.

I have therefore commissioned further work to test and trial this technology, with testing due to begin later this year, and I have commenced a procurement process which has involved market engagement with an Invite to Tender to be launched in early August, so that – subject to the results of further testing and assurance – Facial Age Estimation could be fully integrated into the current age assessment system over the course of 2026.[...]”

(Source: UK Parliament – [Age assessment checks](#) – ICIBI report, 22 July 2025)

In a news story published in April 2024 by the UK Government, an agreement between Vietnam and the UK was mentioned, in which the UK and Vietnam made the following commitments:

[...]“The UK has signed an agreement with Vietnam to increase cooperation on tackling illegal migration and stop Vietnamese people risking their lives by crossing the English Channel.

[...]

- continue to facilitate the process for the return of those with no right to remain in the UK”

(Source: UK Government – [UK signs new agreement with Vietnam on illegal migration](#), 18 April 2024)

3.8 Emerging Forms of Exploitation

Cross reference with:

- Section 2 (Actors and Recruitment Methods)
- Section 3.4 (Re-trafficking Risk)
- Section 4 (State Protection for Male Survivors)
- Section 5.3 (Mental Health and Stigma)
- Section 6 (Reintegration Support for Male Survivors)

51. Are there any new or emerging forms of trafficking and how are these affecting different demographic groups in Vietnam?

The 2025 Blue Dragon report notes that the trafficking of Vietnamese people to online scam centres in neighbouring countries has increased substantially in recent years and represents a relatively new form of trafficking. It also notes that the increase in this form of trafficking has been linked to an increase in the number of male victims of trafficking:

“[...]The change in the status of countries like Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar from countries of origin for victims of trafficking into destination countries has had a significant impact on the Vietnamese population.¹² While official statistics on the number of Vietnamese victims sold to online scamming facilities are not available, the 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report by the US Department of State reported that over 5,000 Vietnamese nationals were repatriated by the Vietnamese government from online scam operations in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines since mid-2022. It went on to state that widespread reports indicated that the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labour trafficking.¹³ In addition, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reports that the Vietnamese were the largest number of victims assisted by the organisation in 2023.¹⁴

Forced criminality marks a significant departure from traditional patterns of human trafficking in Vietnam which have historically largely constituted sexual crimes like trafficking for forced marriage and into brothels. However, new evidence shows a rapid shift. According to the IOM, Vietnamese nationals constitute one of the three main countries of origin for victims of trafficking and online scams.¹⁵ Cases of forced criminality in Vietnam were the third most prosecuted form of human trafficking crime between 2022 and 2024, accounting for 19% of documented court cases (21 of 109 total cases). More recently, Vietnamese represented the second largest group of foreign victims (after Chinese) of the over 7,000 people released from scam compounds in Myawaddy, Myanmar, in early 2025.¹⁶

This shift in trafficking dynamics is also reflected in the changing profile of victims. For the first time, male victims surpass the number of female victims and make up 83.1% of Vietnamese victims in the cases of forced criminality analysed in this report. The Border Guard Command reported in March 2025 that prior to 2021, men accounted for only 16% of human trafficking cases, but since 2021, this rate has increased to 64%¹⁷”

¹² International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Situation Analysis on Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia’ (IOM, March 2023), https://roasiapacific.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/2023_03/IOM%20Southeast%20Asia%20Trafficking%20for%20Forced%20Criminality%20Update_March%202023.pdf

¹³ US Department of State, ‘2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam’, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2025-trafficking-in-persons-report/vietnam/>

¹⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2023’ (IOM, 2024), <https://publications.iom.int/books/asia-pacific-migration-data-report-2023> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

¹⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2023’ (IOM, 2024), <https://publications.iom.int/books/asia-pacific-migration-data-report-2023> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

¹⁶ Post Reporters, ‘7,000 Foreigners in Myanmar Await Repatriation’, Bangkok Post, 26 February 2025, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2968651/7-000-foreigners-in-myanmar-await-repatriation>

¹⁷ baochinhphu.vn, ‘Cảnh báo thủ đoạn mua bán người: Nạn nhân bị ép lừa đảo trực tuyến’, baochinhphu.vn, 3 March 2025, <https://baochinhphu.vn/canh-bao-thu-doan-mua-ban-nguoi-nan-nhan-bi-ep-lua-dao-truc-tuyen-102250303092556949.htm>

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pg. 14, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Traffickers exploit tens of thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in online scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near online scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Traffickers are reportedly increasingly using Ho Chi Minh City as a transit point for trafficking. Traffickers lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad to then exploit them in forced criminality in online scam operations. There are at least 10,000 Vietnamese nationals ostensibly working in casinos and gaming businesses in Burma – industries that frequently disguised online scam operations – though the true number of Vietnamese nationals exploited in these operations is almost certainly much higher. Traffickers increasingly use the internet, gaming sites, and social media to lure victims, proliferate trafficking operations, and control victims by restricting their social media access, impersonating them, and spreading disinformation online. Male traffickers sometimes entice young women and girls with online dating relationships, persuade them to move abroad, then exploit them in forced labor or sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to commercial sex establishments on the borders with China, Cambodia, and Laos, or elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe. Traffickers exploit an increasing number of Vietnamese women and girls in sex trafficking in Burma. Traffickers exploit some Vietnamese women who travel abroad for internationally brokered marriages or jobs in restaurants, massage parlors, and karaoke bars – including to Burma, Japan, ROK, Malaysia, China, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Taiwan – in forced labor in domestic service or sex trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁷⁷ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁷⁸ noted in their 2024 journal article:

“6. Nexus Between Cybercrime and Human Trafficking
By examining the recent findings regarding the nexus of pig-butchering and trafficking of persons in the Southeast Asian region (OHCHR 2023; UNODC 2024a, 2024b; USIP 2024), our study also investigates and gauges this new concern in Vietnam. The scheme often begins with a casual conversation initiated by a stranger, who may falsely claim to have obtained the victim’s contact information from a mutual acquaintance. Ultimately, this results in two groups of victims: the laborers subjected to forced work, debt servitude, and severe physical abuse, and the victims of the online financial scams, which the trafficked individuals are coercing. Both of these victims’ scenarios involve working with either traffickers or scammers in their vicious cycle. On the one hand, they will be targeted by traffickers who play an important role in looking for them in various locations across the different countries in the region. On the other hand, scammers manipulate them with enticing promises of high returns, supported by fake images and deceptive portfolios, before trafficking to another country, often Cambodia territories and, to a lesser extent, Laos.

Our current data identify three specific factors explaining why the link between human trafficking and scam-induced criminal activity occurs in Vietnam. Primarily, we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated issues have exerted a significant influence on this trend. Among the various negative impacts of the pandemic, high unemployment and limited job opportunities are the primary factors affecting the economic conditions faced by local people in Vietnam. Consequently, individuals are compelled to seek out opportunities to secure employment and maintain their standard of living while the state grapples with the challenge of rebuilding society. In other words, most laborers often need more financial stability to apply for official migration through registered recruitment agencies, which is time-consuming and expensive. Secondly, amid the pandemic and restricted movements, individuals increasingly turn to social media for job vacancies instead of relying on official reports from state authorities. This is considered one of the main issues leading to the proliferation of ‘simple job, high salary’ advertisements everywhere in cyberspace and on social media platforms. Furthermore, Vietnam lacks educational campaigns and professional skills to better understand the risks of exploitation associated with labor migration, which largely

⁷⁷ School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia
⁷⁸ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

stems from insufficient information dissemination by migration agencies and local authorities during recruitment. Under these disadvantageous circumstances, both scammers and traffickers often exploit them to identify and target potential victims.[...]” (Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective](#), 21 November 2024, pg.11)

U.S. Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes the emerging reporting of labor exploitation in the maritime industries across various continental areas:

“There are increasing reports of Vietnamese labor trafficking victims in Taiwan, continental Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and in Pacific maritime industries, including on Indonesian and Taiwanese fishing vessels operating under complex ownership and registration arrangements that enable traffickers to evade detection and intervention by law enforcement. The lack of a requirement for labor contracts and use of oral agreements in the fishing industry increases fishermen’s vulnerability to trafficking. Labor brokers exploit fishermen in labor trafficking by forcing them to involuntarily work on fishing vessels.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

The same report in 2024 also notes trafficking activities within the Special Economic Zones in Southeast Asia:

“Organized crime syndicates operating within Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Southeast Asia – particularly in the Golden Triangle SEZ at the intersection of the Burmese, Thai, and Lao borders – exploit Vietnamese nationals through deceptive recruitment and in sex trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

Section 4. State Protection and the Criminal Justice System

Cross reference with:

- Section 1 (Legal Definitions and Non-Punishment Provisions)
- Section 2(Corruption among Actors)
- Section 3.4 (Re-trafficking Risk)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)

1. How does Vietnam’s criminal justice system identify and mitigate risks for trafficking survivors at risk of further exploitation and/or re-trafficking?

Article 21 of Decree Number: 162/2025/ND-CP, which details regulations on the *Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024* came into force from July 1, 2025, provides the following guidance:

“[...]Article 21. Legal aid

1. Assistance beneficiaries:

a) Human trafficking victims who are Vietnamese nationals, stateless individuals residing in Vietnam, and accompanying persons under 18 years of age;

b) Individuals under the process to be determined as Vietnamese nationals, stateless individuals residing in Vietnam, and accompanying persons under 18 years of age staying in the same country;

2. Assistance:

a) Legal aid pertaining to issues related to human trafficking cases via legal counseling; legal proceeding; non-proceeding representation, and other legal aids for the purpose of protecting legal rights and benefits of beneficiaries in accordance with legal aid laws.

b) In respect of legal aids provided for individuals under Point c Clause 1 of this Article, legal aids dependent on demands and practical situations of beneficiaries and duration of stay in Vietnam.

3. Agencies that provide assistance:

State-owned legal aid agencies and legal aid organizations have the responsibility to provide legal aid. Procedures for legal aid shall conform to legal aid laws.[...]”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁷⁹ – [Decree, Detailed Regulations On A Number Of Articles And Measures For Implementing The Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Number: 162/2025/ND-CP\)](#), Hanoi, 29 June 2025, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

Clause 1 and 2 of Article 41 of the *Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024*, details legal aid and support:

“[...]Article 41. Legal support and legal aid

1. Victims, persons undergoing victim identification, and individuals under 18 years of age accompanying them shall receive legal support through counseling to prevent re-trafficking, guidance on residence registration, civil status procedures, ID card issuance, and access to support schemes.

2. Victims, persons undergoing victim identification, and individuals under 18 years of age accompanying them shall receive legal aid in accordance with the law on legal aid for matters related to human trafficking cases or incidents.

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁸⁰ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

⁷⁹ Note: This translation is made by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

⁸⁰ Note: This translation is made by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

In this August 2024 report, UNICEF carried out this comparative analysis of international standards and practices against legal provisions of Viet Nam:

“[...]Table 1: Comparative table of international standards and practices against legal provisions of Viet Nam⁸¹

II. COURT STRUCTURE/LAYOUT	
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS/PRACTICES	COMPATIBILITY OF VIETNAMESE LEGAL SYSTEM
5. The court has a waiting area suitable for children and families and allows for separation from defendants and other witnesses in their case.	Partially compatible. Circular 02/2018/TT-TANDTC requires separating under-18 victims from the defendant in specified cases, including when: (1) the victim is a survivor of sexual abuse, violence, or trafficking, (2) the victim is under 10 years old, or (3) the victim requested, or their representative requests and the trial panel deems that the separation is necessary in the best interests of the minor. ⁴² Official Dispatch 13/TANDTC-PC (24 February 2020) contains useful guidance on the arrangement of waiting rooms for minors to wait with their parent(s) or guardian(s) at the courthouse. However, similarly as above, guidance of Official Dispatch 13/TANDTC-PC needs to be incorporated into a legal document to have a binding effect.
III. ACTIONS OF THE COURT, AFTER A COURT APPEARANCE IS SCHEDULED AND PRIOR TO PROCEEDINGS BEGINNING	
7. Cases involving children are expedited, managed efficiently, and completed without undue delay. Time limits for children’s cases are shorter than for adults (right to have the matter determined without delay).	Partially compatible. The Criminal Procedure Code requires prompt and timely settlement of cases involving persons under 18 years of age. ⁴³ More detailed guidance is provided in relevant sub-laws, but only applicable to cases involving minor victims of sexual abuse, violence, and trafficking. Specifically, criminal proceeding conducting bodies shall work in close collaboration to handle cases involving minors who are survivors of sexual abuse, violence or trafficking in a timely manner in the shortest possible period of time. ⁴⁴ The time limit for adjudication of sexual abuse cases involving minors shall be half the regular time limit for cases involving adults. ⁴⁵

⁴² Circular 02/2018/TT-TANDTC, Article 10, clause 1
⁴³ Criminal Procedure Code, Article 414, clause 7.
⁴⁴ Joint Circular 06/2018/TTLT-VKSNDTC-TANDTC-BCA-BTP-BLDTBXH, Article 13.
⁴⁵ Resolution 06/2019/NQ-HDTP, Article 7, clause 1

(Source: UNICEF – [Report Formative Evaluation of Family and Juvenile Courts in Viet Nam](#), August 2024, pg.33, last accessed 5 August 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

⁸¹ Table was recreated by Asylos for accessibility

“[...]Article 150 of the penal code criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking of adults and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment and fines of 20 million to 100 million Vietnamese dong (VND) (\$824 to \$4,122) [£644.002 - £3,2233] [...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

This UNICEF 2023 report noted that:

“[...]5.3 Social Work Services for Victims/Witnesses of Crime under the Law in VietNam
 [...]The Law on Children 2016, as a central law on children’s rights, recognizes that children (under 16 years old) as victims are those with special circumstances and need specific mechanisms for protection, support and assistance throughout proceedings. Accordingly, children with special circumstances (including as victims of abuse or trafficked) are supported with counseling, psychotherapy and other child protection services as prescribed. The law requires child protection to be provided at three levels: prevention, support and intervention, and it must ensure effective coordination across all levels and sectors in formulating and organizing the implementation of policies, law, legislation and provision of child protection services (Article 47). On that basis, the law and Decree No. 56/2017/ND-CP specify support and interventions in cases children are abused or at risk of violence, exploitation, abandonment or are in special circumstances, more specifically with case management activities with basic guidelines for interventions and support. [...] (pg.74)

“6 Conclusions and recommendations for Vietnam
 [...]In Viet Nam’s legal and policy system, there are provisions on rehabilitating lawbreakers and supporting victims of abuse, violence, exploitation and trafficking, especially minors. However, there are no clear and specific regulations on social work in the justice system, specifically no regulations on the position, role, function, responsibility and authority of social workers, leading to limitations in professional service development as well as ensuring the process of supporting those in need. In addition, regulations on supporting and assisting individuals within the criminal system are scattered and fragmented through different legal documents. Notably, currently, the quality and quantity of social workers and service providers in the criminal justice field is limited. This also affects the building of regulations for development of professional social work services in legal and other fields.” (pg.78)

(Source: Australian Government | UNICEF Viet Nam | Supreme People’s Procuracy – [Legal Review Report On Social Work In The Criminal Justice System](#), Hanoi 2023 (pp.74-78, last accessed 5 August 2025)

Article 36 of the Penal Code, mentions:

“[...]Article 36. Legal aid

1. Victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again and legal aid to register residence and civil status, receive supports, claim compensation, participate in judicial proceedings and carry out other legal procedures related to human trafficking cases.[...]

(Source: ILO – [Law on the Prevention of and Combat against Human Trafficking \(No. 66/2011/QH12\)](#), March 2011, pg.22, last accessed 11 August 2025)

2. Are there any gaps in law enforcement’s approach to combating smuggling and trafficking? If so, what are they?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) led the government’s investigative efforts, and the Supreme People’s Procuracy led the government’s prosecution efforts. The government worked with foreign governments by engaging in anti-trafficking dialogues, sharing information, and cooperating on trafficking investigations. Prosecutors often used other laws, including relating to migrant smuggling, to prosecute transnational trafficking crimes, reportedly due to inadequate resources or capacity to collect evidence from overseas. The government coordinated with foreign governments to investigate and interdict some online scam operations exploiting Vietnamese victims hosted abroad. In the past, officials noted the extraction, storage, and analysis of digital evidence, combined with ambiguities surrounding its permissibility in court proceedings, hindered the government’s ability to combat internet-facilitated trafficking crimes. Authorities reported difficulties prosecuting and adjudicating trafficking cases in border provinces due to limited capacity in rural areas. Authorities reported investigations and prosecutions of potential trafficking allegations were sometimes hindered by insufficient cooperation with neighboring countries and authorities’ difficulty in adapting to changing victim profiles linked to labor trafficking in online scam operations. The government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, provincial and district level officials, and other front-line workers.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]Authorities reported difficulties prosecuting and adjudicating trafficking cases in border provinces due to limited capacity in rural areas. Authorities reported investigations and prosecutions of potential trafficking allegations were sometimes hindered by insufficient cooperation with neighboring countries and authorities’ difficulty in adapting to changing victim profiles linked to labor trafficking in online scam operations. Officials reported frontline border guards’ limited capacity and lack of experience in identifying trafficking crimes hindered prosecution efforts. To address these gaps, the government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, provincial and district level officials, and other front-line workers. In 2023, the Supreme People’s Court, in conjunction with foreign donors, established two trafficking case precedents, a legal tool by which the court can provide guidance on complex issues for reference in future prosecutions; these precedents related to domestic labor trafficking of male victims and cases involving forced marriage with potential indicators of sex or labor trafficking. MPS reportedly took steps to monitor traffickers’ online efforts to recruit and exploit victims.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 19 June 2025)

This study, published in 2020, which explores challenges in identifying victims of sex trafficking, noted that:

“Regarding limited knowledge, the majority of participants recognize international ST, but are rarely aware of domestic trafficking. There was only one case of domestic trafficking identified and investigated by the Haiduong police. As some interviewees from this department noted, police might mistake internal ST for other crimes, such as illegal detention or prostitution. This finding supports the evidence in the work of Irwin and Irwin (2017), implying that while the majority of Tasmanian police clearly understand HT, some of them conflate HT with people smuggling.”

(Source: Oanh Nguyen, Toan Quang Le & Hai Thanh Luong, Published on Journal of Crime and Justice – [Police failure in identifying victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation: an empirical study in Vietnam](#), 4 February 2020, pg.514, 2020)

3. What is the conviction rate for human trafficking cases in Vietnam, and how has it changed over the past five years?

The U.S. Department of State provided the following prosecution and conviction rates for 2025, 2024, 2023, 2022, and 2021:

2025

“[...]In 2024, the government investigated 237 suspected traffickers in 91 cases – nine cases for sex trafficking, 29 for labor trafficking, and 53 for unspecified forms of exploitation. This data could not be wholly compared to 2023 data, which was not disaggregated between sex and labor trafficking and included overall numbers of both new and ongoing investigations (investigations of 365 suspected traffickers in 147 cases). Authorities continued investigating 218 suspected traffickers in 72 cases opened in previous reporting periods. Authorities did not provide prosecution or conviction data disaggregated by sex or labor trafficking and did not provide sufficient information to determine whether data involving unspecified forms of exploitation met the definition of trafficking according to international law. The government prosecuted 291 alleged traffickers in 2024, compared with prosecuting 198 alleged traffickers in 2023. Courts convicted 246 traffickers, compared with convicting 198 traffickers in 2023. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. Authorities did not vigorously prosecute previous claims of labor trafficking in state-owned or licensed labor export companies.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

2024

“[...]The government investigated 247 suspected traffickers in 90 cases in 2022, compared with 149 suspected traffickers in 77 cases in 2021. Unlike the previous year, the government did not provide disaggregated sex or labor trafficking data; some of the included data involved unspecified forms of trafficking and some cases initiated in prior years. Authorities did not provide sufficient information to determine if the unspecified forms of trafficking cases met the international law definition of trafficking. Of the 90 cases investigated, 49 cases involved transnational trafficking to the PRC and Cambodia. Prosecutors submitted 55 cases involving 163 alleged traffickers to be considered for prosecution in 2022, compared with 98 cases involving 177 alleged traffickers submitted in 2021. Of these, the Supreme People’s Procuracy (SPP) accepted 54 cases involving 157 alleged traffickers for prosecution, including 29 cases under Article 150 and 25 cases under Article 151; compared with 68 cases – 44 and 24, respectively – involving 120 alleged traffickers in 2021. Courts ultimately accepted 69 cases involving 155 alleged traffickers for full prosecution but only initiated proceedings in 53 cases involving 121 defendants, compared with accepting 66 cases involving 132 alleged traffickers, leading to proceedings in 49 cases involving 94 defendants in 2021. Among the 53 prosecuted cases, courts tried 24 cases involving 65 defendants under Article 150 and 29 cases involving 56 defendants under Article 151, compared with 27 cases involving 51 defendants and 22 cases involving 43 defendants, respectively, in 2021. Courts convicted all 121 defendants under Articles 150 and 151, compared with 94 individuals in 2021. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from less than three years’ to 15-20 years’ imprisonment under Articles 150 and 151, compared with less than three years’ to life imprisonment in 2021.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

2023

“[...]The government investigated 365 suspected traffickers in 147 cases in 2023, compared with 247 suspected traffickers in 90 cases in 2022. The government did not provide disaggregated sex or labor trafficking data and authorities did not provide sufficient information to determine if data involving unspecified forms of exploitation met the definition of trafficking according to international law; some of the data also likely included cases initiated in prior years. Prosecutors submitted 109 cases involving 288 alleged traffickers to be considered for prosecution in 2023, compared with 55 cases involving 163 alleged traffickers submitted in 2022. Of these, the Supreme People’s Procuracy (SPP) accepted 100 cases involving 238 alleged traffickers for prosecution, including 57 cases under Article 150 and 43 cases under Article 151; compared with 54 cases – 29 and 25, respectively – involving 157 alleged traffickers in 2022. Courts accepted 117 cases involving 341 alleged

traffickers for full prosecution but only initiated proceedings in 77 cases involving 198 defendants, compared with accepting 69 cases involving 155 alleged traffickers and initiating proceedings in 53 cases involving 121 defendants in 2022. Among the 198 defendants, courts tried 85 under Article 150 and 113 under Article 151. Courts convicted all 198 defendants, compared with 121 traffickers convicted in 2022. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from a suspended sentence to life imprisonment[...]

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

2022

“[...]The government investigated more alleged traffickers in 2021 but prosecuted and convicted fewer individuals than the prior year. Despite pandemic-related challenges, the government again provided disaggregated law enforcement data by trafficking type. According to MPS, authorities investigated 149 suspected traffickers in 77 cases in 2021 (compared with 144 suspected traffickers investigated in 110 cases in 2020). This figure included seven sex trafficking investigations, three forced labor investigations, and 67 investigations into unspecified exploitation “for the purpose of transferring or receiving money, property, or other material benefit” as defined in penal code Articles 150 and 151 (not disaggregated in 2020). Authorities did not provide sufficient information to determine if the aforementioned 67 cases met international definitional standards of trafficking. The Supreme People’s Procuracy (SPP) submitted 98 cases involving 177 alleged traffickers for prosecution in 2021, compared with 106 cases involving 180 suspects submitted in 2020. Of these, 68 cases involving 120 suspects were accepted for prosecution, including 44 cases under Article 150 and 24 cases under Article 151; this marked a decrease from 102 cases—65 and 37, respectively—involving 161 suspects in 2020. The 68 accepted prosecutions included 14 sex trafficking cases, three forced labor cases, and 51 cases of unspecified exploitation; three cases involved domestic trafficking crimes and 65 were transnational in nature (compared with 79 sex trafficking cases, 18 forced labor cases, and five cases of unspecified exploitation, with five domestic and 97 transnational cases in 2020). Courts ultimately accepted 66 cases featuring 132 alleged traffickers for full prosecution but only initiated proceedings in 49 cases involving 94 defendants (compared with accepting 107 cases involving 175 alleged traffickers, leading to 84 prosecutions of 136 defendants, in 2020). Among the 49 cases prosecuted, courts tried 27 cases involving 51 defendants under Article 150 and 22 cases involving 43 defendants under Article 151 (compared with 60 cases involving 95 defendants and 24 cases involving 136 defendants, respectively, in 2020). Vietnam maintained a high conviction rate and continued to impose strict sentencing for convicted traffickers. The court system convicted all 94 individuals (compared with 136 in 2020) under Articles 150 and 151. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from less than three years’ to life imprisonment under both Articles 150 and 151 (compared with three years’ to 20 years’ imprisonment in 2020.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 19 July 2022, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

2021

“[...]The government increased the number of alleged traffickers charged and prosecuted, but it decreased the number of investigations and convictions of traffickers during the reporting period. Throughout the reporting period, courts were intermittently closed due to the pandemic; however, to ensure that criminal cases—including human trafficking cases—were adjudicated in a timely manner, the Supreme People’s Court directed the courts to schedule trials on the weekends, rent additional space or utilize outdoor locations to hold hearings, and prioritize trials set to expire. Despite these challenges, for the first time, the government provided disaggregated law enforcement data by trafficking type including investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of sex and labor trafficking crimes. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Public Security, authorities investigated 110 cases of human trafficking and arrested 144 suspects of trafficking during the reporting period. This demonstrated a decline in investigations compared with 175 trafficking cases investigated during the previous reporting period. In 2020, the People’s Procuracies (Prosecutor’s Office) charged 180 suspects for alleged human trafficking offenses in 106 cases, compared with 152 suspects in 84 cases in 2019, under Articles 150 or 151. The People’s Procuracies prosecuted 161 alleged traffickers involved in 102 trafficking cases, compared with 156 in 91 cases in 2019. This represented an increase in alleged traffickers charged and prosecuted during the reporting period. Of the 102 trafficking cases prosecuted in 2020, 79 involved sexual exploitation, 18 involved forced labor, and the remaining five cases

involved either sex or labor trafficking. In 2020, the court system convicted 136 individuals (compared with 174 in 2019) among 84 cases under Articles 150 and 151, including 71 cases of “sexual exploitation,” 10 cases of forced labor, and three cases for either sex or labor trafficking. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from less than three years’ to 20 years’ imprisonment under both Articles 150 and 151. Vietnam maintained a high conviction rate and continued to impose strict sentencing for convicted traffickers. Ha Giang provincial officials, a northern border province with trafficking concerns, reported notable increases in human trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions resulting from increased interagency collaboration and NGO technical assistance. Law enforcement authorities reportedly participated in an unspecified number of investigations of regional trafficking cases and other coordination activities through bilateral and regional agreement on an ad hoc basis. The government did not receive extradition requests related to human trafficking cases in 2020.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 1 July 2021, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

4. What are the penalties for individuals convicted of human trafficking in Vietnam? (What is the difference between maximum sentences and actual penalties?)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government increased law enforcement efforts.

Article 150 of the penal code criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking of adults and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment and fines of 20 million to 100 million Vietnamese dong (VND) (\$785 to \$3,925). Article 151 criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking of children younger than the age of 16 and prescribed penalties of seven to 12 years’ imprisonment and fines of 50 million to 200 million VND (\$1,962 to \$7,849). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with other grave crimes, such as rape.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 17 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, outlined the financial penalties and sentences for individuals convicted of human trafficking:

“The government slightly increased law enforcement efforts.

Article 150 of the penal code criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking of adults and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment and fines of 20 million to 100 million Vietnamese dong (VND) (\$824 to \$4,122). Article 151 criminalized labor trafficking and sex trafficking of children younger than the age of 16 and prescribed penalties of seven to 12 years’ imprisonment and fines of 50 million to 200 million VND (\$2,061 to \$8,244). [...] Courts convicted all 198 defendants, compared with 121 traffickers convicted in 2022. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from a suspended sentence to life imprisonment.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam also highlighted changes in sentencing compared to those in 2021:

“Courts convicted all 121 defendants under Articles 150 and 151, compared with 94 individuals in 2021. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from less than three years’ to 15-20 years’ imprisonment under Articles 150 and 151, compared with less than three years’ to life imprisonment in 2021.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

A 2022 report by NGO Blue Dragon noted the average jail time for traffickers.

“The average jail time traffickers are sentenced to is 8.8 years and they are ordered to pay an average \$1,300 US to victims as compensation. It is considered a serious crime with heavy sentences in Vietnam.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking & Traffickers in Vietnam](#), February 2022, last accessed: 02 July 2025)

5. Are there reports of corruption or collusion between law enforcement officials and traffickers/smugglers?

According to the 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. Authorities did not vigorously prosecute previous claims of labor trafficking in state-owned or licensed labor export companies.[...]

In prior years, there were reports of some complicit Vietnamese officials, primarily at commune and village levels, who allegedly facilitated trafficking or exploited victims by accepting bribes from traffickers, overlooking trafficking indicators, and extorting money in exchange for reuniting victims with their families.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

In his 2024 book titled ‘The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees’, Professor Christoph Bluth noted that:

“[...]There is evidence that criminal activity, including gambling, vice (prostitution) and loan-sharking has penetrated senior levels of the police force¹⁴ and even the higher echelons of government.¹⁵ This includes border guards, and there has been a recent case of a high-level border guard receiving substantial bribes from traffickers.¹⁶ The problem is so endemic that it can be encountered in every walk of life,¹⁷ and despite official efforts to combat it, the law enforcement agencies are unable to meaningfully deal with it as even anti-corruption officials accept bribes on a large scale¹⁸ and law enforcement frequently are in collusion with the criminal gangs and profit from their activities.¹⁹ The existence and the nature of high-interest lending and its association with crime rings is highlighted by some cases in which the police has taken action against them.²⁰ But the number of reports of police action against the crime rings on this basis is relatively small in relation to the pervasiveness of this phenomenon that these reports identify, and that has also been reported by small business owners. Given the pervasiveness of loan sharking and debt bondage, and the corrupt links the criminals have with the police, the only reported actions against such criminals are those ordered at a very high level for political reasons.[...]”

14 Thanh Nien News, “Bien Hoa police chief fired for criminal links”, 29 December 2010
15 Tuoitrenews, “Soc Trang’s officials charged with gambling”, 30 December 2011; <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Vietnam-and-the-fight-against-corruption> (4 March 2019); <http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/police-force-is-most-corrupt-vietnam-institution-survey-1928.html>
16 <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/society/20220710/former-vietnam-border-guard-commander-indicted-for-receiving-monthly-salary-totalling-over-820000-from-smuggler/68037.html>
17 <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/12/23/in-vietnam-feeding-the-police-just-a-cost-of-doing-business> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]
18 Pham Du, “Anti-corruption officials take \$3.7 mln in bribes from HCMC hospital director”, VNE Express International, 8 July 2022
19 <http://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/vietnam>
20 <https://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/society/206519/specialist-police-unit-set-up-to-target-loan-sharks-in-binh-thuan.html> (8 August 2018) [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

(Source: Global Research Publications | Christoph Bluth – [The Challenge of Global Migration – Human Rights, Security and Refugees](#), 30 July 2024, pg.126)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, there remain significant concerns about the government’s handling of a case first reported in 2021. In June 2022, the government recalled a labor attaché and another staff member from Saudi Arabia who allegedly directly facilitated the forced labor of several Vietnamese nationals in Saudi Arabia. The government reprimanded and investigated the two officials for potential trafficking crimes in 2022; at an unspecified time during the current reporting period, the government ended the investigation against the labor attaché with no charges, citing a lack of evidence, and reinstated him at MOLISA in the Department of Overseas Labor. The government reported it had ended the investigation against the other diplomat at an unspecified time in 2022.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

The same report stated:

“[...]However, official complicity was a significant concern during the reporting period, including in cases allegedly perpetrated by two members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service. A Vietnamese MFA official reportedly harassed, threatened, and restricted the communication of some of the victims of the aforementioned Saudi Arabia forced labor case after they attempted to request assistance. Some victims escaped and attempted to seek assistance at the Vietnamese Embassy, only to be forcibly returned to the traffickers by the same official. In other instances, after survivors sought shelter with a local organization, the same official reportedly deceived them with promises of repatriation in order to lure them out and then “sell” them to new local employers, who continued to exploit them in forced labor. NGOs and Saudi police conducted the recovery and repatriation of most of the victims—reportedly without any assistance from the Vietnamese government—despite a Vietnamese law mandating the provision of repatriation expenses for all Vietnamese victims subjected to trafficking abroad. An international organization interviewed 10 of the women repatriated from Saudi Arabia and assessed four as victims of human trafficking. Local authorities attempted to request victim compensation from a Vietnam-based representative of one of the sending companies; however, the compensation was only partially paid or not paid at all in some cases. The government reportedly examined, inspected, and administratively sanctioned 10 out of 20 enterprises sending workers to Saudi Arabia, but authorities did not pursue criminal accountability for their role in facilitating trafficking crimes. Authorities also penalized one labor export company for failure to resolve its employees’ salary disputes, which NGO representatives interpreted as government retaliation for its initial attempts to respond to victim allegations with support services. In Vietnam, police reportedly harassed and surveilled the family members of some of these victims, rather than assisting them in an attempt to silence relevant allegations.”

(Source: [US Department of State – 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

According to the 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]In May 2022, courts sentenced two police officers for concealing a trafficking crime and knowingly extorting a trafficker instead of reporting him. In June 2022, the government recalled a labor attaché and another staff member from Saudi Arabia who allegedly directly facilitated the forced labor of several Vietnamese nationals in Saudi Arabia. In January 2023, the government reported initiating criminal procedures against the two officials; the government had previously removed the labor attaché from his position and issued a disciplinary decision.[...]

The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) administered disciplinary actions – including warnings, arrests, and expulsion from the CPV – against numerous current and former Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials, including four high-ranking MFA consular officials, for their role in a long-running bribery scandal involving MFA-chartered repatriation flights during pandemic lockdowns. The MFA officials forced Vietnamese nationals stranded abroad during the pandemic to pay exorbitant repatriation fees – a common source of indebtedness that traffickers were known to exploit.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2023, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

According to the 2022 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]In 2021, a Vietnamese labor attaché in Saudi Arabia and another staff member allegedly directly facilitated the forced labor of several Vietnamese nationals in Saudi Arabia. The government reported initiating an inquiry into the case; the inquiry remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Authorities allowed the diplomat to remain in his post and did not file criminal charges or implement any administrative penalties.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

According to the 2021 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2021, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

6. Does Vietnam provide witness protection or legal assistance for trafficking victims who participate in prosecutions?

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, listed the legal assistance and protective services provided to trafficking victims involved in investigations and prosecutions:

“Vietnamese law guaranteed trafficking victims legal assistance and protective services, including the right to legal representation; the law did not require victims to be present at or testify in person in court and allowed audio- or video-recorded testimonies. The MPS [Ministry of Public Security] increased the number of child-friendly investigation rooms from 33 to 45 at the provincial level. The government provided legal aid to 50 victims, compared with 41 victims in 2022. The law also entitled trafficking victims to compensation and restitution in trafficking cases; the government did not provide complete data on this entitlement but reported provincial cases concluded with compensation and restitution orders ranging from two to 140 million VND (\$82-\$5,771), compared with three to 45 million VND (\$124-\$1,855) in 2022.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

Compared to the 2023 report, changes can be observed in the number of child-friendly investigation rooms at the provincial level, as well as in the amounts of compensation and restitution provided:

“Vietnamese law guaranteed trafficking victims legal assistance and protective services, including the right to legal representation; the law did not require victims to be present at or testify in person in court and allowed audio- or video-recorded testimonies. The MPS [Ministry of Public Security] increased the number of child-friendly investigation rooms from 25 to 33 at the provincial level. The law also entitled trafficking victims to compensation and restitution in trafficking cases; the government did not provide complete data on this entitlement but reported provincial cases concluded with compensation and restitution orders ranging from 3 million to 45 million VND (\$127-\$1,910), compared with 10 million to 100 million VND (\$423-\$4,240) in 2021. The government encouraged trafficking victims to assist in judicial proceedings against traffickers; however, in prior years, NGOs reported victims were hesitant to participate in prosecutions because of fear they would be penalized for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government reported 29 victims participated in investigations or prosecutions.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

In its fourth periodic report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Vietnamese government stated that legal aid was provided in 100% of the cases where it was required:

“Between 2019 and 2021, criminal proceedings were initiated against 191 cases of human trafficking or trafficking in persons under 16 years old (involving 371 criminal defendants). [...] Between 2019 and 2021, 100% of cases requiring legal aid for

victims of human trafficking in difficult financial situations, mostly women and children, were provided with legal aid by province-level Legal Aid Centers free of charge; 96% of these cases required legal aid during the criminal proceedings.”

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee – [Fourth periodic report submitted by Viet Nam under article 40 of the Covenant](#), due in 2023 [3 April 2023] [CCPR/C/VNM/4], 27 April 2023, last accessed: 15 May 2025)

7. Are there formal mechanisms for cross-border cooperation to flag individuals at risk of re-trafficking? If so, what are they and how are those individuals identified?

Article 22 of Decree Number: 162/2025/ND-CP, which details regulations on the *Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024* came into force from July 1, 2025, provides the following guidance:

“[...]Article 22. Support for travel expenses
2. Support mode:
[...]c) Where there are grounds indicating that human trafficking victims and persons under victim determination process who are children may be in danger, including: interview results in which children appear frightened or do not look forward to returning to relatives’ residence; risks of children being subject to retribution, abuse or forced to participate in illegal activities; proof that relatives are perpetrators of children trafficking, children abuse, violation, abandonment or incapable of caring for, raising, protecting children; information living environment and family environment indicating a lack of safety for children and risk of children falling victim to human trafficking again; reports of agencies, organizations pertaining to children’s need for protection at social support facilities or human trafficking victim support facilities, agencies providing assistance have the responsibility to interview the children and gather necessary information in order to evaluate and make decision for the children’s best interests.[...]”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁸² – [Decree, Detailed Regulations On A Number Of Articles And Measures For Implementing The Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Number: 162/2025/ND-CP\)](#), Hanoi, 29 June 2025, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

In this 2021 report, Blue Dragon, noted that:

“[...]In 2015, Chinese authorities recorded a considerable increase in traffickers attempting to smuggle victims through the Thanh Thuy Border Gate. Many of these cases were referred to Blue Dragon for support in victim repatriation and recovery. Though the number of cases in Ha Giang decreased in subsequent years, cases in the province remain high and Blue Dragon has continued to work with the local border guards to support anti-trafficking activities in the region.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking?](#) Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam. Hanoi: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, 2021, pg.13, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

⁸² Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

This 2020 table prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP⁸³ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, outlines, responsibilities of Actors:

“7. Trafficking victim protection in Viet Nam
7.1 Laws and policies on victim protection in Viet Nam
[...]

Table #24
Roles and responsibilities in the identification, referral, and assistance of trafficking victims in Viet Nam

Responsible Actor(s)	Role/Responsibilities
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	Receives trafficking victims and returns them to Viet Nam and supports the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to identify victims. Labor representatives at diplomatic missions abroad provide basic assistance to Vietnamese migrant workers abroad, including those who have been trafficked.
[...]Ministry of Defense (MOD)	Border guards under the Ministry of Defense are tasked with formally identifying victims of trafficking in border areas and providing initial support to trafficking victims.
People’s Committee (and other actors at provincial level)	Receives reports from trafficking victims or others, then reports to DOLISA to receive victims of trafficking. Article 27 of Decree 09 (No. 09/2013/ND-CP) Stipulating in detail a number of articles of the anti-human trafficking law sets out the victim protection responsibilities of the provincial-level People’s Committee, including: its management; guidance at district and commune-level; directing victim support work in localities in accordance with law; allocating funds for victim support work; licencing and oversight of victim support establishments; victim support policy implementation in localities; and reporting to MOLISA. (pp.94-95)

[...]In addition to (and in cooperation with) government agencies in Table #24 above, the Law on Human Trafficking lists the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Information and Communications and other ministries and ministerial-level agencies as responsible for coordinating with the MPS to implement the law. Provincial and community level government agencies, in particular DOLISA, are directly involved in identification, referral, and assistance, including reintegration support. Other stakeholders, according to the Law on Human Trafficking, include the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and its member organizations, who are to participate in activities to support the integration of victims of trafficking (Article 17) and the Women’s Union, which is tasked with prevention activities (Article 18). The Women’s Union is also involved in operating shelters, including for victims

⁸³ This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. A five-year (2016-2021) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional initiative that aims to reduce human trafficking in Asia through activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

7.2 Procedures and guidance on victim identification and referral in Viet Nam

[...]

Inter-Agency Circular 01 sets out procedures for three different categories of victim, depending on the how they come to the attention of authorities, as outlined below.

Vietnamese victims trafficked abroad (Articles 4-5): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) will identify trafficking victims in order for them to be returned home. MPS or the Ministry of Defense (MOD) will then receive trafficking victims or refer to DOLISA for initial support.[...]

When an individual is determined to be a trafficking victim, Article 28 of the Law on Human Trafficking lists documents to be issued, including a “Victim Certificate” issued by the district level People’s Police or the rescuing agency, or written documents issued by the investigating agency, the People’s Procuracy, the People’s Court, or a foreign agency and legalized by a Vietnamese Diplomatic Mission or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Further details on the identification, receipt and repatriation procedures set out in Inter-Agency Circular 01 are set out in Table #25 below.

Table #25⁸⁴

Roles and responsibilities related to the identification, receipt, and repatriation of victims in Viet Nam, as outlined in Inter-Agency Circular 01

Responsible Actor(s)	Role/Responsibilities
Border guard/Coast guard	When a trafficking victim returns home to Viet Nam from abroad on their own, and reports at a border station or is otherwise found by the border guard or coast guard, the border guard or coast guard shall: • Provide temporary shelter and fulfill essential needs of the presumed victim. • Take a statement from the presumed trafficking victim, check papers related to identity, nationality, other information and documents to help identify the victim. • Collect information and documents about the traffickers from the victim to support investigation and prevention. • Send the victim to the Peoples’ Committee of nearest commune. (pg.97)
People’s Committee of the commune, district DOLISA and police department	When a trafficking victim returns from abroad on their own and reports at a police department or the local authority, then the receipt, identification, and provision of assistance for the trafficking victim shall be carried out as if that person is a victim of intra-country trafficking according to Article 6. (pg.98)

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pp.94-95-97-98, last accessed 23 February 2026)

8. Are there examples of successful cooperation between Vietnam and other states to prevent further exploitation and/or re-trafficking?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted Vietnam’s partnerships with other governments and stakeholders in providing training to various local officials:

— “[...]The government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti—

⁸⁴ Note: Table was recreated by Asylos for readability and accessibility

trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, provincial and district level officials, and other front-line workers.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The same report, noted that:

“[...]The government worked with foreign governments by engaging in anti-trafficking dialogues, sharing information, and cooperating on trafficking investigations. Prosecutors often used other laws, including relating to migrant smuggling, to prosecute transnational trafficking crimes, reportedly due to inadequate resources or capacity to collect evidence from overseas. The government coordinated with foreign governments to investigate and interdict some online scam operations exploiting Vietnamese victims hosted abroad. In the past, officials noted the extraction, storage, and analysis of digital evidence, combined with ambiguities surrounding its permissibility in court proceedings, hindered the government’s ability to combat internet-facilitated trafficking crimes. Authorities reported difficulties prosecuting and adjudicating trafficking cases in border provinces due to limited capacity in rural areas. Authorities reported investigations and prosecutions of potential trafficking allegations were sometimes hindered by insufficient cooperation with neighboring countries and authorities’ difficulty in adapting to changing victim profiles linked to labor trafficking in online scam operations. The government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, provincial and district level officials, and other front-line workers.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

In this news article titled ‘*Youths are empowered to lead a national movement to combat human trafficking and drive for transformative change*’, published in September 2024, IOM reported that:

“[...] This is the first time such a dialogue has been organized by the Viet Nam Central Women Union and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the UK Government.

In the opening remark of the event, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Ms Pauline Tamesis, stated: “While we are working closely with each other to effectively tackle the challenges posed by human trafficking, we need to engage youth in crafting their key advocacy messages for human trafficking prevention campaigns. We need to act now to create an even more supportive environment for youth-led advocacy, driving social and behavioural change, and assist them to realize their full potential by delivering on the promise of migration.

“Taking action against illegal migration and human trafficking continues to be a top priority for the UK Government. We are committed to working more closely with Viet Nam to combat human trafficking, particularly by boosting capacity building, raising awareness, information-sharing, prosecuting the criminals involved, and protecting vulnerable people. We hope to spread the message to raise people’s awareness about the risks involved in illegal migration and careful consideration of their options when contemplating a migration path to protect themselves and the future welfare of their families,” British Ambassador to Viet Nam, H.E. Iain Frew stated.”

(Source: IOM – [Youths are empowered to lead a national movement to combat human trafficking and drive for transformative change](#), 26 September 2024, last accessed 18 June 2025)

This ASEAN table published in June 2025 outlines key bilateral and multilateral agreements involving Vietnam that support the non-punishment principle for victims of human trafficking, particularly women and children:

“ Annex 3: Examples of bilateral and sub-regional agreements relevant to nonpunishment⁸⁵

Agreement	Parties	Non-punishment provision
Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (2004)	Cambodia China Lao PDR Myanmar Thailand Viet Nam	III. In the area of Protection, Recovery and Integration: 16. Ensuring that victims identified as victims of trafficking are not held in immigration detention by law enforcement authorities
Agreement between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Bilateral Cooperation for Eliminating Trafficking in Women and Children and Assisting Victims of Trafficking (2005)	Cambodia Viet Nam	Article 2. The Parties recognise that examples of purposes of trafficking in women and children include, but are not limited to, the following: 10. Use in criminal activities. Article 5. Trafficked persons shall be considered victims and not violators or offenders of the immigration law. Therefore, 1. Trafficked women and children shall not be charged and prosecuted for illegal immigration or prostitution 2. Trafficked women and children shall not be detained in an immigration detention centre during the time of waiting the official repatriation process. They shall be put under the care of competent authorities of the Parties. Shelter protection shall be provided to the victims in accordance with the legal regulation of each State.
Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Bilateral Cooperation for Eliminating Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and Assisting Victims of Trafficking (2008)	Thailand Viet Nam	Article 6. “Trafficked women and children shall be considered victims, not violators or offenders of the immigration law. Therefore, 1. Trafficked women and children shall not be prosecuted for illegal entry to the country; 2. Trafficked women and children shall not be detained in an immigration detention centre while waiting for repatriation, but shall be put under the care of the Ministry of Public Security (Vietnam) or the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (Thailand), and shelter and protection shall be provided to the victims according to the policy of each country”

⁸⁵ Note: Table recreated by Asylos for readability purposes.

Agreement	Parties	Non-punishment provision
Agreement between the Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Cooperation in Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Persons and Protection of Victims of Trafficking (2010)	Lao PDR Viet Nam	Article 4(1)(b) “The Parties commit to take appropriate measures to protect victims. The Parties’ competent authorities must ensure the victims safety as follows: Being treated equally and provided with legal support; not detained and/or punished for illegal immigration or any other related administrative offence.”
Agreement between the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Strengthening Cooperation on Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking (2010)	Viet Nam China	Article 2: The two parties shall take appropriate measures to protect the personal safety of the victims. A. The two parties shall not punish acts of victims illegally entering (exiting) their national territories or other illegal acts as an immediate result of being trafficked.
COMMIT Guidelines on Victim Identification and Referral Mechanisms: Common Guidelines for the Greater-Mekong Subregion (2016)	Cambodia China Lao PDR Myanmar Thailand Viet Nam	“Trafficked persons are not, in any circumstances, prosecuted for violations of immigration laws or for activities they are involved in as a direct consequence of their situation as trafficked persons; or held in detention”

(Source: ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), ASEAN, 2 June 2025, pp.94-96, last accessed: 20 June 2025)

The UK Home Office in this news story, titled ‘UK and Vietnam sign agreement to tackle human trafficking’, published on 1 April 2025 stated that:

“The UK and Vietnam are joining forces to clamp down on human trafficking by committing to a joint action plan.

The agreement was signed yesterday, 31 March, at the Border Security Summit on Organised Immigration Crime in London by the Home Secretary Yvette Cooper and Vietnam Minister for Public Security General Luong Tam Quang.

The agreement commits both countries to stop traffickers from exploiting vulnerable people by discouraging dangerous journeys, enhancing information sharing and co-ordinating efforts to disrupt trafficking. It builds on a memorandum of understanding signed by the 2 countries in 2018.”

(Source: The UK Home Office – [UK and Vietnam sign agreement to tackle human trafficking](#), 1 April 2025, last accessed 29 May 2025)

The 2025 DFAT report stated:

“[...]3.142 [...]Vietnam has sought to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries as part of its counter-human trafficking efforts; in December 2023, it formally committed to jointly fight human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime with Cambodia and Laos. According to the US Department of State, between mid-2022 and June 2024, Vietnam rescued and repatriated 4,100 Vietnamese nationals exploited in online scam centres in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos and the Philippines.”

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.48-49, last accessed 29 May 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that Vietnam collaborated with foreign governments to improve anti-trafficking efforts through training, information sharing, and cross-border investigations:

“[...]Some officials and observers reported difficulty investigating and prosecuting cases related to online scam operations in Cambodia involving Vietnamese victims due to a lack of evidence and cooperation from Cambodian authorities; therefore, prosecutors often used other laws, including migrant smuggling, to prosecute trafficking crimes. The government coordinated with officials from the PRC [People’s Republic of China] to arrest and extradite one alleged trafficker. The government worked with foreign governments by engaging in anti-trafficking dialogues, sharing information, conducting trainings, cooperating on trafficking investigations – including with several Lower Mekong countries – and signing a cooperation agreement on combating trafficking with a foreign government. In the past, police noted the extraction, storage, and analysis of digital evidence, combined with ambiguities surrounding its permissibility in court proceedings, hindered the government’s ability to combat Internet-facilitated trafficking crimes. Authorities reported difficulties prosecuting and adjudicating trafficking cases in border provinces due to limited capacity in rural areas. Authorities reported investigations and prosecutions of potential trafficking allegations were sometimes hindered by insufficient cooperation with neighboring countries and authorities’ difficulty in adapting to changing victim profiles linked to labor trafficking in online scam operations. Officials reported frontline border guards’ limited capacity and lack of experience in identifying trafficking crimes hindered prosecution efforts. To address these gaps, the government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guards, prosecutors, judges, provincial and district level officials, and other front-line workers. In 2023, the Supreme People’s Court, in conjunction with foreign donors, established two trafficking case precedents, a legal tool by which the court can provide guidance on complex issues for reference in future prosecutions; these precedents related to domestic labor trafficking of male victims and cases involving forced marriage with potential indicators of sex or labor trafficking. MPS reportedly took steps to monitor traffickers’ online efforts to recruit and exploit victims.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed: 17 April 2025)

Authors Dr Daniel Silverstone (*Director of Liverpool Centre for Advanced Policing Studies at Liverpool John Moores University*), and Dr Hai Thanh Luong (*Lecturer in criminology (Assistant Professor) at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University*), noted in their 2024 research article noted that:

“[...] It is also the case that, in reality, Vietnam is a difficult country for the United Kingdom to effectively co-operate with,²⁹ partly due to its continued use of the death penalty (NPCC, 2023).³⁰ but also because Vietnamese state actors have been implicated in recent trafficking cases. In 2021, public officials were involved in the trafficking and eventual killing of a young Vietnamese women in Saudi Arabia (OHCR, 2021).”

²⁹ On the other hand, there are positive relationships, the UK does fund officers from the National Crime Agency and UK Visa Immigration to work in Vietnam and there has been some important cooperation in criminal investigations especially in 2019.

³⁰ UK police co-operation with overseas countries should be subject to Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) Human Rights Guidance. This document notes: “Particular consideration must be given to the risk of contributing to the use of the death penalty. HMG opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, as a matter of principle. Any risk that assistance provided by HMG may result in the death penalty must be considered with utmost caution” (NPCC 2023;p. 14).

(Source: Silverstone D, Luong HT via Springer – [Special Issue of International Criminology: ‘Misleading the World? Reassessing the International Impact of the British Modern Slavery Agenda: Vietnam](#), 17 December 2024, no page number)

The UN Human Rights Council 2024, reported several multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements involving Vietnam in combating human trafficking:

“Viet Nam fully and responsibly participates in multilateral cooperation frameworks on combatting human trafficking, such as the ASEAN Convention and Action Plan against trafficking in persons, especially women and children; human trafficking preventing mechanisms in the Mekong Subregion; the Bali Process on people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related

transnational crime; and the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Viet Nam also effectively implements bilateral agreements on human trafficking prevention with other countries.”

(Source: HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights) – National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21; Viet Nam [A/HRC/WG.6/46/VNM/1], 22 February 2024, last accessed: 09 May 2025)

In this situation report covering the year of 2024, IOM reported that:

“Vietnam

[...]

- Due to the absence of an official government support scheme for returnees not officially identified as VOTs, IOM Viet Nam plays a crucial role in referring and coordinating collective support between the Government and NGOs through its chairmanship of the Reintegration Network.
- Collaborated with the MOFA to develop a feasibility study for an interagency mechanism to protect Vietnamese in countries in crisis, including potential VOTs.
- Supports prevention efforts through the use of social media and conducting and public outreach to raise awareness.”

(Source: IOM – [IOM’s Regional Situation Report On Trafficking In Persons Into Forced Criminality In Online Scamming Centres In Southeast Asia](#), February 2024, pg.16, last accessed 29 May 2025)

In this 2023 UNODC policy report:

“[...]In September 2022, Viet Nam reported coordinating with Cambodia to organize the repatriation of over 600 Vietnamese nationals who were lured to Cambodia and trafficked for forced criminality.²⁹”

²⁹ INTERPOL, 2022, Operational analysis: Online scams and human trafficking in South East Asia; Viet Nam Plus, 2022, Authorities repatriate over 600 citizens lured to work illegally in Cambodia, 01 September 2022: <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/authorities-repatriate-over-600-citizens-lured-to-work-illegallyin-cambodia/236654.vnp> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

(Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – [Casinos, cyber fraud, and trafficking in persons for forced criminality in Southeast Asia](#), September 2023, pg.10, last accessed 18 June 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, included efforts to improve protections for Vietnamese workers through labor agreements with other countries:

“The government maintained labor migration agreements on Vietnamese workers with 13 governments, including an April 2022 agreement with the ROK [Republic of Korea] on seasonal worker protections. In response to cyber scam operations in Cambodia, the Dong Thap Province Border Guard signed an MOU with the Cambodia Gendarmerie Command of Prey Veng Province Border Guard on crime prevention, including trafficking. [...] The government continued negotiations with the Government of Israel on a labor cooperation agreement; the government did not report an update to negotiations, initiated in a prior reporting period, with the Government of Kuwait. The government also maintained a separate 2017 Memorandum of Cooperation with the Government of Japan to improve protections for Vietnamese participants in Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program amid continued reports of exploitation of Vietnamese workers in the program. In prior years, reports indicated the government did not exercise sufficient oversight of contract and recruitment processes under the auspices of some of these bilateral agreements. Within the country, NGO observers noted an inability to form independent unions continued to constrain the protection of worker’s rights, and restrictions on freedom of expression and association continued to impede some public discourse on key labor and land rights issues related to trafficking vulnerabilities.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed: 22 April 2025)

Section 5. Access to Support, Shelter, and Healthcare

5.1 Shelter and Government Support

Cross reference with:

- Section 4 (State Protection)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)

1. What protection and support mechanisms exist for trafficking victims in Vietnam? And are there any documented cases?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted:

“[...]The government lacked a reliable mechanism to consolidate statistics on the total number of victims identified and assisted; therefore, the government’s reported victim identification and protection data may have been duplicative or in some cases undercounted, as the government did not report how many victims it referred to NGOs. The government identified 500 victims in 2024 – 310 females, 190 males, and 236 children – compared with identifying 311 victims in 2023 – 195 females, 116 males, and 146 children. All identified victims were Vietnamese, and the government did not provide data disaggregated by form of exploitation, compared with reporting 176 victims exploited in labor trafficking and 40 victims of “sexual exploitation” in 2023; some of the victims of “sexual exploitation” reported in prior years may not have been victims of trafficking as defined by international law. Furthermore, the government likely included victims of unspecified forms of trafficking in their reported data, such as “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” which were inconsistent with the definition of trafficking under international law. Identified victims included 169 members of ethnic minority communities, or 34 percent of the total victims identified. Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 15 percent of Vietnam’s population. The government did not formally identify any foreign national trafficking victims for the third consecutive year. Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor and forced criminality in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified.[...]”

“[...]the government maintained an NRM approved in 2014, but some local officials’ unfamiliarity with anti-trafficking protocol and policies, insufficient interjurisdictional cooperation, and limited social worker capacity continued to hinder its systematic and effective implementation. Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services. The 2024 anti-trafficking law, when enacted, would expand many protection services to potential victims, shortening the time between initial identification and service provision under the NRM. The 2024 anti-trafficking law also expanded services available for trafficking victims and mandated a government policy of non-punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government had not implemented this law, nor updated its NRM, by the end of the reporting period. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) Department of Social Vices Prevention continued to develop a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars. The government reported further revising the screening toolkit; however, for the third year, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period and had not provided a timeline for doing so.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The U.S Department of State 2023 Trafficking in Persons report documented that the Vietnamese government increased protection efforts in 2022, identifying 255 victims compared with 126 in 2021, and assisting 252, but continued to lack proactive screening, particularly among high-risk groups and victims of cyber scam operations:

“PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to protect victims. The government identified 255 victims – 102 females, 153 males, and 74 children – compared with identifying 126 victims – 114 females, 12 males, and 45 children – in 2021. All identified victims were Vietnamese, including 195 labor trafficking victims and 14 victims of “sexual exploitation,” compared with 22 victims exploited in labor trafficking and 28 victims of “sexual exploitation” in 2021, respectively; some of the victims of “sexual exploitation” reported each year may not have been trafficking victims according to international standards. The government did not report disaggregated data on victims exploited in forced labor in cyber scam operations. Eighty-nine victims were members of ethnic minority communities, compared with 64 in 2021. Forty-six individuals were victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, which in prior years included “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” without the purpose of exploitation, neither of which was consistent with international law definitions of trafficking, compared with 76 such individuals in 2021. [...] However, authorities did not proactively use the COMMIT criteria or their own procedures to screen for trafficking indicators among key vulnerable populations, including individuals in commercial sex, individuals transiting border stations, workers in the fishing and seafood processing industries, migrant workers returning from abroad, child laborers, or individuals fleeing cyber scam operations in neighboring countries. The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. Due to a lack of capacity, personnel, and resources, law enforcement and other officials likely detained, deported, and arrested some unidentified trafficking victims; border guards reported insufficient staffing at guard stations along the PRC border hindered their ability to adequately screen for trafficking victims. Despite conducting more than 32,000 inspections of the most at-risk establishments for sex trafficking, authorities only identified two sex trafficking victims. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, authorities may have penalized some unidentified trafficking victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) Department of Social Vices Prevention developed a screening toolkit to identify Vietnamese trafficking victims in the country, including individuals in commercial sex and those working in restaurants, karaoke clubs, and bars; however, officials had not finalized the toolkit by the end of the reporting period.

Authorities did not proactively identify victims exploited in cyber scam operations as trafficking victims or provide them with services, including foreign national victims identified in Vietnam, despite widespread reports indicating the majority of individuals recruited for these operations faced conditions indicative of labor trafficking. Observers reported authorities routinely penalized victims exploited in cyber scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in cyber scam operations and also did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens. NGOs noted some provinces’ hesitancy to identify individuals returning from Cambodia as trafficking victims may have been because funding for support services came directly from provincial budgets.

Authorities assisted 252 victims, including 142 men and 110 women and 105 members of ethnic minority groups, compared with assisting 111 victims, including 12 men and 99 women and 64 members of ethnic minority groups in 2021. Unlike in 2021, the government did not identify or assist any foreign national victims. In the past, an NGO reported concern regarding the government’s inadequate identification of foreign national trafficking victims, and the government did not immediately identify trafficking victims coming from a country other than the PRC or Cambodia.

The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims, including other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding and none provided services for men or child victims exclusively. Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated four dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children. The government reported officials placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations. Adult victims could leave the facility or shelter unchaperoned at any time, and officials appointed a guardian for child victims. The

government provided Vietnamese victims with support services that included essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, cultural learning and vocational training, and financial assistance. The government could provide foreign trafficking victims with support services that included essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid. The government provided legal aid to 41 victims, compared with 34 victims in 2021. The government referred 54 victims to NGOs for services (not reported in 2021). An NGO noted the government increased collaboration with NGO representatives to provide legal assistance and victim support. NGOs reported the government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking. The government, in partnership with an NGO, provided training on trafficking victim support services to border province front-line workers. In March 2023, the Ministry of Health ordered all provincial health departments and health care service providers to include anti-trafficking efforts in their operations.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed 19 June 2025)

This 2020 review prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP⁸⁶ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, noted that:

“7.3 Assistance available to trafficking victims in Viet Nam
Minimum standards of care for victims of trafficking are set out in the *Law on Human Trafficking*, as well as *Decree 09, Circular 35 and Circular 84*, detailed above in Table #23. Notably, Circular 35 establishes service quality standards for: receiving and interviewing victims (Article 19), including ensuring a safe and amiable enviro[n]ment; officials appointed suitable for the victims’ genders and ages; non-discrimination of victims on the grounds of nationality, ethnic group, religion, social class, physical condition or gender; and victims informed of location, rules and regulations and other information.¹²⁵

Circular 35 also establishes recovery services and assistance in community reintegration (Article 20), including: the provision of sufficient information about assistance services including legal assistance, and the right to select assistance; psychological counseling by qualified counsellors; and formulation and implementation of assistance and community integration plans according to the ability, needs, strengths of victims and accessible resources, regularly reviewed and involving participating of the victim. Victim assistance service providers are responsible for ensuring these standards are implemented, with oversight from MOLISA (Article 18 of *Circular 35*)

In the initial stages of contact with trafficking victims, support to meet basic needs and travel expenses is provided for in Article 33 of the *Law on Human Trafficking* setting out that “victims may be provided with temporary shelter, clothes, food and other essential personal articles based on practical conditions and the age, gender and health status of victims. Victims who wish to return to their places of residence but cannot afford travel and food expenses may receive support for these expenses.” Article 39(1) further states that Commune-level People’s Committees that receive victims, and police offices, border guard and marine police that rescue them shall provide support to meet essential needs of victims. Further detail of what is entailed by essential needs is outlined in Article 19 of *Decree 09 Stipulating in detail a number of articles of the anti-human trafficking law*.¹²⁶”

¹²⁵ Circular 35, No. 35/2013/TT-BLDTBXH, Guidelines for some articles of the Government’s Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP Dated January 11, 2013, detailing the Law on Prevention of Human Trafficking (2013), Art. 19
¹²⁶ Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP, Stipulating in detail a number of articles of the anti-human trafficking law (2013)

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pg.101, last accessed 27 March 2025)

⁸⁶ This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. A five-year (2016-2021) program, USAID Asia CTIP is a regional initiative that aims to reduce human trafficking in Asia through activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

2. Are there government-supported shelters, medical assistance, and psychological support for victims?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“Well in principle there are some. You have short term shelters, but the number of available places is not great, individuals can stay up to 60 days typically, they will get medical care while in facilities, mental health for three months, health insurance up to a year if not already covered, also possible educational and vocational support. Although these things are gender neutral, in practice they are not available to men really, they are geared to women and children. In practice many don’t access support, because they don’t get a victim certificate, and there is very small scale support. On the whole the level of support is not very adequate to support trafficking victims.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

The US Department of State’s 2025 Trafficking in Person’s report noted:

“[...]Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children. The government reported officials often placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 8 Feb 2026)

The Center for re-integration of ex-prisoners into society (CRES) in its 2025 alternative report, noted that:

“[...]8. The Government is also committed to developing a strong legal framework for combating human trafficking by adoption of a newly amended Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking in November 2024, which is effective from July 1, 2025. This newly amended law aims to address shortcomings of the 2011 law and to align with international commitments, including the ICCPR and the Palermo Protocol. The new law contains many progressive provisions:(pg.3)

- [...]
- Providing clearer regulations on the establishment, operation and supervision of reception centers, supporting facilities and shelters for victims.
- [...].”

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee, Center for Re-Integration of Ex-Prisoners into Society – [NGO report on civil and political rights \(right to life; death penalty; elimination of slavery, servitude and trafficking in persons; access to justice; independence of the judiciary; fair trails\)](#), 20 May 2025, pp.3-4, last accessed 21 July 2025)

The 2025 DFAT report, provides the following information:

“[...]3.146 The Government of Vietnam and CSOs rescue and repatriate victims trafficked to other countries and, once returned to Vietnam, provide services to support their social reintegration, in accordance with the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024). Available services include a national hotline, safe housing, financial assistance, medical support, mental health counselling, vocational training, internships, job placements and legal aid. Vietnam’s Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, in partnership with CSOs, and the Vietnam Women’s Union operate dedicated shelters for women and children human trafficking victims, although these are few. DFAT is aware of at least one such shelter in northwest Vietnam, near the border with China. Returnees identified by Vietnamese law enforcement as victims are referred to shelters, which accommodate both short- and long-term residents and provide counselling, training and job placements, among other services. Shelters also monitor victims once they have returned to their communities, including through visits. In-country sources said support services for male victims of trafficking were lacking in comparison.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.49-50, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that there are several government-supported shelters for trafficking victims that formally provide medical, psychological and economic support. However, there are differences based on where the victim is based and observers have noted that the quality of support and care as well as the training of the support staff appear to be inadequate:

“The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated four dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children. The government reported officials placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations. [...] The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, cultural learning and vocational training, and financial assistance. [...] Observers noted the quality of care provided to trafficking victims varied widely depending on geography, a victim’s circumstance, and the strength of local civil society; NGOs reported the support victims received was often inadequate, especially in remote and poorer provinces where local governments provided the initial support budget. [...] Observers reported concern the government did not have minimum quality standards for protection services administered by service providers. [...] The government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State — [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 20 January 2025)

A 2020 academic article on the support given by Inter-agency cooperation in Vietnam to trafficking victims, mentioned the types of support provided:

“Government agencies have supported around 60% of identified victims [...]. Some effective support programmes were established during the last decade [...]. Take self-help group model for example. This model was developed by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs and sponsored by the International Organization of Migration in 2008. The operation of self-help groups is effective in providing psychological and reintegration support. However, up to now, only 102 women and 10 men in total were identified and assisted [...]. Therefore, support for returned victims is an important government priority under national policies [...]. The purpose of victim support is to help trafficking victims recover from physical and psychological problems, assist them in social reintegration, and protect them from being re-trafficked.

The support provided to disadvantaged trafficked victims includes short-term allowance, physical and psychological support, legal aid, educational and vocational training, and financial assistance.”

(Source: Thanh Hung Tran & Tien Hoang Le & Thi Phuong Diep Tran – [Support Trafficking Victims through Inter-Agency Cooperation in Vietnam: Achievements and Limitations](#), 9 June 2020, pp.322-324)

The same academic article noted that:

“Before returning to homes, victims can also be sent to shelters that provide a safe and secure environment, necessary care, and support. Government budget or external funding covers the payment for these services. However, only small number of official identified victims could receive those support (Police officer 3, Social welfare staff 1). This approach is consistent with information mentioned in a government report (MOLISA 2014). Interviewees clearly explained: Many victims came from other provinces. When we [police officers] or border guards found them, we would ask DOLISA or the VWU to keep them in temporary shelters. Our province then contacted their areas [anti-trafficking actors of victims’ localities] and their families to return them. Our area paid for a living allowance when they stayed here. (Police officer 3) In our province, all victims were paid for food and travel tickets when they returned to their home. For example, victims received from 20,000 to 40,000 VND per day for food [from USD 1–2], standard travelling tickets or transport renting. If they had to stay here, they got 20,000 to 40,000 VND per day for food and 300,000 VND [about USD 15] for essential items. (Social welfare staff 3) The payment for living and travelling expenses depends on national policies and provincial allocation. Due to the limited government budget, the support for a living allowance in the shelter is not more than 60 days (Police officer 1; Social welfare staff 3). In some victim support centres, which are sponsored by international organisations,6 trafficked persons can receive higher living expenses. If the individuals have not fully recovered from their trafficking experience, they might be allowed to stay in the centres for

a longer period. For instance, the “Open House” in An Giang can support female victims for up to 24 months (Social welfare staff 1; Women’s union 1).”

(Source: Thanh Hung Tran & Tien Hoang Le & Thi Phuong Diep Tran – [Support Trafficking Victims through Inter-Agency Cooperation in Vietnam: Achievements and Limitations](#), 9 June 2020, p.329, last accessed 11 July 2025)

In terms of unaccompanied minors, it is unclear to what extent they are being offered specific assistance by government-sponsored assistance. However, in this undated webpage, the IOM states the unaccompanied minors require additional support:

“Most of these categories – particularly victims of trafficking – may include unaccompanied minors, whose inclusion in a return process requires additional and specific measures and considerations for assistance along with other vulnerable migrants.”

(Source: IOM Viet Nam – [Migrant Integration](#), undated)

3. What role do NGOs and international organisations play in victim protection and support?

In a press release published on December 2025, by UNICEF, the United States Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) shared the conclusion of a four year project to support children, noting:

- “[...]Specialized training on counter-smuggling and trafficking prevention: Developed a comprehensive training curriculum for frontline officers, particularly those stationed at border gates, focused on counter-smuggling and early detection of trafficking victims. These officers serve as the first line of defense against cross-border crime and the first point of contact for migrants and children at risk.[...]

“We are proud to see the specialized curriculum equip 310 border gate officers with essential skills, from document checks and risk assessment to victim identification, while promoting a victim-centered, child-friendly approach. This effort aligns with Viet Nam’s revised Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking,” said Kendra Rinas, IOM Chief of Mission in Viet Nam.[...]”

(Source: UNICEF – [Press Release Viet Nam and Partners Advance Child-Friendly Justice through Four-Year Collaboration](#), 18 December 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children.[...] Systemic delays in the government’s approval of licenses and operations challenged NGOs working in Vietnam, including those working on anti-trafficking activities.

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

This 2023 new post, IOM has committed to continue working with the Vietnamese government and other partners to support trafficking victims:

“IOM will continue to work with MOLISA [The Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs] and other partners to [...] explore and test the reintegration support-service models that could maximize available resources and address the complicated and comprehensive needs of persons in vulnerable situations.”

(Source: International Organization for Migration – [IOM reaffirms support for Viet Nam to combat human trafficking and enhance protections for victims at the mid-term review of National Plan of Action on Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking 2021-2025](#), 9 August 2023)

ODI and Australian Aid produced a country report about Vietnam in July 2023. In this report it described the current situation of NGO and quasi-governmental organisations’ role in victim support in terms of women, children and men.

“There has been an increase in support services provided by nongovernment or quasi-governmental organisations, although as with the legislation, many of these organisations were formed to respond to sex trafficking. While they have expanded to accommodate a wider focus on trafficking, to include labour trafficking, the focus is still mostly on women and children, with very limited support for men.

Additional assistance is available from NGOs, but because this was initially designed to support women and children, whereas victims of labour exploitation are primarily men, specific support for labour trafficking, and particularly support to male victims, is still limited. Loss of livelihoods because of trauma and lack of support can lead to repeat migration, despite the risks, as there is still a need to earn an income.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute and Australian Aid – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.9-44, last accessed 11 August 2025)

In this 2021 post, ASEAN-ACT’s Vietnam Country Manager, Ms. Dang Thi Hanh states the following about the situation of returnees who have returned on their own accord:

“The situation is further complicated by the fact that many victims who return home of their own accord are often not identified as having been trafficked. Ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups often don’t have access to information on what to do. And in all instances, victims need to submit government-issued certificates confirming their eligibility to access legal aid. Imagine, the difficulties for victims who are children and other marginalised groups.”

(Source: Australian Aid and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – Free legal assistance to protect the rights of trafficking victims, 27 July 2021, last accessed 11 August 2025)

The UK Home Office HG-FFM report on a mission that was conducted between 23 February and 1st March 2019 noted:

“There are lots of different NGOs based in Vietnam doing training and assisting victims. In Vietnam it is necessary to obtain permission form the authorities to undertake any such activities.”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission to Vietnam Conducted between 23 February and 1st March 2019](#) Published: 9 September 2019 (annex D- Diplomatic sources), September 2019, last accessed 11 August 2025)

4. [How accessible are protection mechanisms in Vietnam for asylum seekers and undocumented individuals who are also trafficking victims?](#)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, noted that:

“[...]The government did not formally identify any foreign national trafficking victims for the third consecutive year. Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor and forced criminality in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified.[...]

While the government did not identify any foreign national victims, authorities reportedly provided limited assistance services to at least 46 potential foreign national victims. Foreign victims, if identified by the government, were eligible to access medical support, psychological support, and legal aid but were excluded from accessing other long-term support such as travel expense support, vocational training, or an initial financial allowance.[...]

The government did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face retribution or hardship.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

In this 2025 alternative report for the review of ICCPR report of the socialist republic of Vietnam, it was noted that:

“9. A network of reception and support facilities for victims of human trafficking has been established at both central and local levels, along with dozens of provincial social protection centers and safe houses/shelters in the community operated jointly by social organizations and non-governmental organizations (such as the Women’s Union, Blue Dragon, Hagar International). Reception and support centers for foreign and stateless victims of trafficking have also been set up with interpretation and legal assistance services.

10. Despite the above-mentioned progress, Vietnam still faces several challenges:

- The number of shelters (temporary shelters, community safe houses) is still limited and does not cover all regions;
- Financial resources and specialized human resources are insufficient, especially specialists in psychological support and long-term rehabilitation of victims; there is a lack of interpreters and staff trained in providing psychological and legal assistance to foreign victims;
- There is a lack of unified coordination mechanism between local authorities and social organizations in receiving and monitoring victims after they leave reception and support centers;
- There is no long-term mechanism to support foreign victims, particularly regarding their residence, safe repatriation or smoothly living in Vietnam if they cannot return to their home countries.”

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee – [NGO report on civil and political rights \(right to life; death penalty; elimination of slavery, servitude and trafficking in persons; access to justice; independence of the judiciary; fair trials\)](#), 20 May 2025, pg.4, last accessed 21 July 2025)

In the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, it was noted that:

“[...]For the second consecutive year, the government did not identify or assist any foreign national victims. Foreign victims, if identified by the government, were eligible to access essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid, but were excluded from accessing other long-term support such as support for study, vocational training, or an initial financial allowance.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 27 March 2025)

In this 2021 assessment report, USAID noted that:

“[...]Foreign victims are included in the law, but the NPA does not have specific procedures or activities on victim identification of foreigners. The official reports on victim identification do not include foreigners, and it is acknowledged that Vietnam continues to be primarily a source of trafficking rather than a destination country, but border guards and MOLISA staff raise difficulties supporting foreigners trafficked to and through Vietnam due to procedures and language.”

(Source: USAID: [Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – Situational Analysis Report](#), pg.16, 2021)

5. Do returnees, whether forced or voluntary, have access to protection mechanisms?

Clause 1 and 2 of Article 30 of Vietnam’s new Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024, states:

“Article 30. Reception and verification of victims returning from abroad

1. The reception, verification, and support for victims returning from abroad through Vietnamese overseas representative missions shall be carried out as follows:

- a) Vietnamese overseas representative missions shall receive and handle information and documents regarding the victim, coordinate with the competent authority of the Ministry of Public Security to verify the victim’s identity, issue necessary documents, and complete procedures for their return to Vietnam;
- b) Competent authorities of the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of National Defense shall receive the victim, conduct verification, and issue one of the documents or materials confirming victim status as requested by the Vietnamese overseas representative mission under Clause 3, Article 29 of this Law. They shall also provide essential needs support, interpretation services, and medical assistance if necessary, and promptly transfer the victim to the district-level specialized labor, war invalids, and social affairs agency where they are received for support as prescribed in Chapter V of this Law.

If the victim wishes to return to their place of residence, travel expenses shall be provided. If they require health or psychological care or their residence is not identified but they wish to stay, they shall be transferred to a social assistance facility or a victim support facility.

For child victims, the district-level specialized labor, war invalids, and social affairs agency shall notify their relatives to receive them or arrange for their transfer to the relatives’ residence. If the child has no shelter or there are grounds to believe returning to relatives poses a risk, the child shall be transferred to a social assistance facility or a victim support facility.

2. The reception of individuals returning to Vietnam under bilateral international agreements related to human trafficking prevention and combat shall follow the provisions of such agreements.

Competent authorities receiving the individuals shall verify their status within the timeframe specified in Clause 3, Article 27 of this Law, issue the necessary documents under Clause 1, Article 33 of this Law, provide essential needs support, medical assistance, and interpretation services if necessary, and promptly transfer them to the district-level specialized labor, war invalids, and social affairs agency for support under Chapter V of this Law.”

Article 42 of the same Law states:

“Article 42. Travel cost support

Victims, persons undergoing victim identification, and individuals under 18 years of age accompanying them who wish to return to their place of residence shall be provided with support for domestic travel costs, including transportation and meal expenses during transit.”

Clause 1 and 2 of Article 44 of the same Law states:

“Article 44. Support for education, vocational training, counseling, and employment facilitation

- 1. [...]
- 2. Victims returning to their place of residence may be considered for vocational training, counseling, and assistance in obtaining stable employment to support their reintegration.[...]”

Clause 1 and 2 of Article 45 of the same Law states:

“Article 45. Initial hardship allowance and loan assistance

1. Victims returning to their place of residence shall receive a one-time initial hardship allowance.
2. Victims returning to their place of residence who need loans for production or business purposes may be considered for concessional loans from the Social Policy Bank under preferential credit policies in accordance with the law.”

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁸⁷ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

In this 2024 academic article, a Lecturer at Northumbria Law School and PhD holder in Law from Queen Mary, University of London. Dr Maja Grundler noted this case:

“[...]the 2019 case of TSN, a Vietnamese man trafficked to the UK, showed that protection through reintegration support may not be such a straightforward matter after all.⁹² TSN was first trafficked to the UK in 2009 and then removed in 2014. By 2015, he was back in the UK, having once again been trafficked. The Upper Tribunal found that ‘the appellant had received money under the [Facilitated Returns Scheme] on a previous return to Vietnam but this had not assisted him as he had been re-trafficked’, and thus held that he was eligible for refugee status.⁹³ As Kelly notes, ‘effective re-integration programmes’ will ‘address issues of housing, education, health, employment, substance abuse, and trauma’ and the lack of such assistance ‘plays an important part in re-trafficking’.⁹⁴”

⁹² TSN v SSHD [2019] UKUT (IAC) PA/07665/2017.
⁹³ *ibid* para 3.
⁹⁴ Elizabeth Kelly, *Journeys of Jeopardy: A Review of Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe* (IOM, 2002) 39 https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs_11_2002.pdf accessed 29 April 2020.

(Source: Maja Grundler (Publisher: Oxford University Press) – [The Locus of Persecution Reconsidered: Risk of Re-Trafficking, Cumulative Harm, and Failure of State Protection](#), 15 May 2024, pg.452, last accessed 24 June 2024)

The 2023 ODI report stated that there is less support for a trafficking victim that returned on their own.

“If a victim returns on their own, referred to as ‘self-return’, and does not report to the police, there is no formal identification of their status, on which government support depends. As a result, few victims receive support from the government on their return.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute and Australian Aid – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.44, last accessed 11 August 2025)

⁸⁷ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

5.2 Social Security and Welfare

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.2 (Debt and Economic Risk)
- Section 3.4 (Re-trafficking Risks)

6. What social security support is available for women and children who are trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, commented that:

“[t]he short answer is yes, and in theory, this existed a long time ago. But to be honest, from my personal experience, it’s only started working in reality in recent years.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“Yes and no. Yes, but the problem is it’s not enough in terms of comprehensiveness, and it’s not enough in terms of length of time because [of] social security support, that also means integration support. So when the trafficking victim comes back, especially if they’ve been gone for a long time, they need to redo their identity papers and get re-registered [...] so that takes time. And they need help with that, all that administrative stuff. And that’s for them in order to get their national ID, for them to be eligible [to] get their social health insurance card, for them to be able to enroll their kids in school. All of that needs to be done. If they are a victim and this is what you find also, a lot of victims will be born in one province but then have moved to another province, and so they’re not registered anywhere. [...] So then that becomes an issue as well. There’s a lot of admin administrative hurdles that they have to get through that they need support with. If there’s an NGO, [that] can help them with that, that’s great.

However, they need a lot when it comes to social support and integration support. They need job training. They need housing. They need psychosocial therapy for all the trauma they’ve gone through. Not just for them, but also for their children. They need a job. They need support to help them get back not even get back into society, but just be able to cope with everything and really build up their confidence because the psyche of a victim, especially a female victim, is one that is really hard for the current mental health and healthcare system in Vietnam to deal with because we don’t have an advanced mental health system. There’s a lot of social stigma, cultural stigma, and tradition around that. And as a result, the mental healthcare system in Vietnam is very, in general, very underdeveloped. It’s one that focuses on medicating. And it’s one that focuses on kind of like the hard mental health diseases like schizophrenia or bipolar, you know but not more of the less visible trauma, especially one that is so judged[...] So there’s all these things that a female victim, especially if she has a child needs. She needs support circles. She needs [...]a mentor. She needs all of that. That is not available to her.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“Well in principle there are some. You have short term shelters, but the number of available places is not great, individuals can stay up to 60 days typically, they will get medical care while in facilities, mental health for three months, health insurance up to a year if not already covered, also possible educational and vocational support. Although these things are gender neutral, in practice they are not available to men really, they are geared to women and children. In practice many don’t access support,

because they don't get a victim certificate, and there is very small scale support. On the whole the level of support is not very adequate to support trafficking victims."

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

7. Are there any conditional cash transfer programs or welfare benefits for trafficking survivors?

From the sources consulted, no information could be found of any conditional cash transfer programs or welfare benefits for trafficking survivors.

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted:

"[...]The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included shelter, meals, travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, vocational training, and financial assistance. Victims who did not meet a minimum poverty threshold were excluded from some support services, including tuition exemption and financial assistance.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam, 29 September 2025, last accessed: 14 February 2026)

The UK Home Office's 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Vietnam noted:

"[...]11.3.6 The following NGOs/charities provided elements of welfare support and services. This list is not exhaustive:

- Maison Chance Association 'Maison Chance operates in Vietnam to provide help to the very poor, underprivileged children and severely disabled. It also supports other charitable organizations having the same missions and those who are lacking the necessary resources.'
- Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA) Vietnam 'ADRA in Vietnam works with vulnerable communities and people in special needs, so to help improve their opportunities and quality of life.'
- Hue Help Provide shelter for children without parents or children whose parents are unable to care for them.
- Challenge Mission in Asia (CMI Asia) '...support and assist orphaned and abandoned children, adolescent and adult singles, and families. ...we assist with housing, finance and equipping for employment.'"

(Source: UK Home Office – Country Policy and Information Note: trafficking, Vietnam, February 2025)

An academic article published in 2020 notes that support for male victims is limited and only lasts a few days, highlighting the gendered dimension of victim support in Vietnam:

"Moreover, most provinces do not offer any assistance for male victims of trafficking. Recently, a number of trafficked males were officially recognised and rescued (MOLISA 2015), but they received very limited support (Social welfare staff 4). In all the research collection sites, there were no cases in which a male victim had been supported in their recovery at a temporary shelter. Essentially, they only receive minimal assistance to return home, including accommodation and food for a few days, as well as transportation. Participants explained that "males were less vulnerable than females" and "men could reintegrate into communities quickly on their own" (Women's union 4; Social welfare staff 4). There is a gendered dimension to the victim support regime operating in Vietnam, whereby it is easier for women to be recognised as victims of trafficking and receive support, but much more difficult for men."

(Source: Thanh Hung Tran, Tien Hoang Le, Thi Phuong Diep Tran – Support Trafficking Victims through Inter-Agency Cooperation in Vietnam: Achievements and Limitations, Asian Journal of Criminology, June 2020, pg.330, last accessed 11 July 2025)

8. Does a lack of social protection increase the risk factors of re-trafficking for women and children in Vietnam? And what are the key gaps in social protection policies that increase the vulnerability and risk factors to trafficking survivors?

From the sources consulted sufficient information could not be found on whether or not a lack of social protection increases the risk factors of re-trafficking for women and children in Vietnam. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“Women and children returning to low-opportunity areas face debt, unstable income, and stigma, increasing risk of repeat migration and re-recruitment. The 2024 anti-trafficking law offers non-punishment, support, and legal aid, but by the end of 2025, implementation lagged due to a cumbersome NRM, an unfinalized screening toolkit, and limited frontline capacity, especially in rural/border regions. Weak reintegration in housing, education, livelihoods, and trauma care is linked to higher re-trafficking, worsened by tight provincial budgets and minimal support, often conditional on certification. NGO aid helps, but unevenly. Overall, limited social protection and unresolved debts heighten risks, especially for ethnic minority women and adolescent girls in remote areas.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

9. What are the key gaps in social protection policies that increase the vulnerability and risk factors to trafficking survivors?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“[...]the first is short duration and low value of support. The fact that to get any support it depends on formal victim certification, the onus is on police to identify victims. From the point of view of the authorities, they really struggle to identify VoTs, they focus on sexual exploitation, but there is a lot of labour exploitation, which is sometimes illegal, e.g. cannabis farming or online fraud, to acknowledge these issues could create more problems, and young men of 16 and 17 are considered adults in Vietnam. Mental health issues - creates a problem, there are victims who have obtained significant support in the UK and this is not there for them in Vietnam.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“Number one is that there is a huge gap in prevention. The policy just focuses on victim identification and compensation/ victim support, but like I said, it’s not comprehensive enough and it’s not long enough. Initial support of like three to six months is not enough. I’m sorry, it’s really not. And there are not enough organizations, whether it’s state organizations or NGOs that are available to provide the support.

So one is that there is that lack of comprehensive integration support, really comprehensive integration support that focuses on long-term support and integration for the woman, especially from an economic and social integration perspective. The second thing is the debt, dealing with her debt. So if she, for example, went into debt to go to Europe or the UK and became a victim of trafficking and sent back, there’s no way to clear that debt[...] And especially if she borrowed money from black market money lender or someone connected to organized crime, that’s where you get the risk built into that, because one, she still has to pay back the debt, or two, she’s so worried about the potential perceived threat of not repaying the debt that

she would be more likely to seek to go abroad again[...]to get out of the sphere of influence of the moneylender and two, make enough money to try and repay the debt. [...] It's a lack of focus on prevention of trafficking in the first place beyond awareness-raising campaigns, instead of really getting to the root causes, is one that impacts the risk of someone getting re-trafficked or re-exploited because they're still in the same conditions that they were beforehand[...]"

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 202, commented that:

"I think the main gap is the administrations and the paperwork that involve. Even in reality, [on] paper, it set[s] out quite clearly in terms of [...] providing support for victims of human trafficking or suspected victims of human trafficking. From the time they came basically, on a paper, [...]within two days of receiving the report, you should start launching that support straight away [...]. And that's in paper. It looked quite flawless.

But in reality, when you speak to the kind of the people who are actually launching that and assisting the program, and that's when you see that because there's so much paperwork involved, there's a long list for people to tick to verify suspected victim or victim and that sort of thing. And it caused difficulty for the authorities who actually recognize or provide support to these people. Having said that, I think it is changing now. It's changing very fast. So hopefully, by now, it's not like the time when I spoke to the head of the I spoke to[.] The victim of human trafficking or human smuggling [...] in the UK in particular, the biggest number is from that province.[...]

So I spoke to the head of [...] Social Security from Hà Giang province [...]. And the question put to him is, *"What is the gap? And what's the difficulty at the moment to support these people returning to Hà Giang province? And how could they receive the support from you as the local government?"* And he said to me, *"I'm not going to lie to you."* Last year, all the funding, all the funding from the central government sent to my province to support the people who returned from abroad, recognize[d] that victim of human trafficking of suspected victims, all that funding, I had to return back to the central government, untouched." And I said to him *"How? Because you and I both know that victims return from the UK, Hai Phong is the second"*[...] and he said, *"The list of the requirements that the central government has set out for us in order to tick boxes to see where the victim fit in the criteria that in order for them to receive support, we just can't fit them all in. And therefore, they're not recognized as victim[s]. And because after a financial year, if the fund is not used, we have to return [it] to the government."* So that's just an example. Having said that, this conversation happened four years ago. So by now, hopefully, things have changed, [...] I've not spoken to him since. But any change in Vietnam does not happen very quickly, to put it that way, okay."

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

In 2024 the Vietnam Law and Legal Forum, noted challenges and suggests what would need to be done to overcome them:

"[C]hallenges still remain. Converting promises into tangible action demands sustained political will and robust institutional collaboration. Law enforcement agencies, social workers and society must work hand-in-hand to dismantle trafficking networks and provide comprehensive support to survivors. Furthermore, building public awareness and tackling societal stigmas are equally vital in eradicating TIP. In the battle against TIP, knowledge is a potent tool. Improving awareness about the issue is essential for empowering individuals to recognize and report suspected cases. At the same time, informing the public, law enforcement agencies and frontline workers about the signs of trafficking, as well as the rights of victims, can contribute to a more effective response."

(Source: Vietnam Law and Legal Forum – [Vietnam's current legislation against human trafficking: evaluation and proposed amendments](#), 4 January 2024, last accessed 11 August 2025)

10. What is the relationship between access to childcare and women’s reintegration after trafficking in Vietnam?

From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on the relationship between access to childcare and women’s reintegration after trafficking in Vietnam. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

This undated publication published by the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders noted:

“Further, most victims of trafficking, especially women and children, need assistance to reintegrate into their communities and recover from the trauma they experienced. Providing services such as shelter, financial support, counselling, and vocational training not only facilitates their reintegration but also prevents them from being re trafficked or falling into the sex industry or exploitation. Since many rescued trafficked women and children suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, regulations on free, quality medical services and rehabilitation to these trafficked victims is also essential to ease the reintegration process. Child victims of trafficking are particularly vulnerable, and thus it is nescessary for special programmes and services to provide proper care and rehabilitation.”

(Source: United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders and Le Thi Hoa – [Repatriation and reintegration of trafficked victims: The case of Vietnam](#), n.d, pg.49, last accessed 11 August 2025)

5.3 Healthcare and Mental Health

Medical Support

11. What medical support, beyond mental health care, is available for trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Việt Nam News reported on 19 September 2025 that:

“The national telephone hotline for the prevention of human trafficking (111) was inaugurated on September 19 by the Ministry of Health in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Việt Nam.[...]

The hotline also provides legal guidance, responds to queries about victims’ rights, and connects callers with essential services including healthcare, psychological support and social assistance. In emergencies, it acts as a vital bridge, enabling authorities to intervene swiftly and ensure victims’ safety.”

(Source: Việt Nam News — Việt Nam launches national hotline 111 to combat human trafficking, 19 September 2025, last accessed 7 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included shelter, meals, travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, vocational training, and financial assistance”

[...]

“Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 10 February 2026)

The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs of Vietnam (MOLISA) noted in 2023:

“During their stay at social protection establishments, survivors of trafficking are supposed to be provided with support for essential needs including meals and other items for personal hygiene in accordance with the State regulations on social support policies for those residing in social protection centres.”

(Source: MOLISA – [Recommendation of supporting for victims of human trafficking](#), 3 August 2020)

The Nexus Institute issued a report in 2020 with the law articles, detailing the support including medical for trafficking survivors:

“Article 6(3) of the Trafficking Protocol sets out measures to provide for the physical, psychological, and social recovery of trafficking victims, including through:

- (a) appropriate housing;
 - (b) counseling and information in a language they can understand;
 - (c) medical, psychological, and material assistance; and
 - (d) employment, education, and training opportunities (pg.11)
- [...]

Article 34 of the Law on Human Trafficking concerns medical support, stating that: “During their stay at social security or victim support establishments, victims who need healthcare for recovery may.” (pg.99)

(Source: The NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pp.11-99, last accessed 11 August 2025)

12. What are the main barriers to accessing healthcare for trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on the main barriers to accessing healthcare for trafficking survivors in Vietnam. It is important to note that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“So the first thing is that administrative hurdle[...] If they have left Vietnam, and especially if they’ve been gone for a number of years, it’s the registration process after they get back. Which province do they register to? And now, because Vietnam [...] just in July of this year [2025] underwent its largest bureaucratic reorganization since the war where they reduced the number of provinces from 63 to 34 and reduced I think it was, two levels of administration, right, and created new ministries, merged ministries, and so they’re still bureaucratic. They’re working through all of that. So there are delays. It takes time, just from a bureaucracy standpoint. And like I said, the main thing is like, “Where do they register?” They have no ties. They have no home left. What province do they pick, right? They don’t have their birth certificate. They don’t have any papers left. They have no family members, for example. That’s probably initially the biggest hurdle for them because without their national ID card and a registration home in a province, they can’t get their social health insurance card. The second barrier is it depends on what kind of healthcare they’re seeking. Is it mental healthcare? Because of mental healthcare, then there’s a lot of issues with that depending on who they are, depending on what their issues are, depending on what their needs are. Not just from a stigma perspective, but also one of just pure access and also one of availability of the type of care that they require in Vietnam.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 noted that:

“[...]So at that time, when we had a discussion with the other practitioner and researcher, and [...]most of that is down to the complexity. They say that the funding is all handled by the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), an equivalent of the Ministry of Labour[...] But I think limited funding, limited resources, and limited knowledge as well of the people in charge.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted issues around the jurisdiction of different departments and agencies, the government’s process for identifying victims and budgetary issues to be barriers for trafficking survivors in accessing healthcare and other support in Vietnam:

“A lack of jurisdictional clarity between MFA and MOLISA in repatriating and supporting overseas trafficking victims increased risks of delays in victim return and assistance.[...]Observers reported many labor trafficking victims did not fully understand their rights and how to access support services, hindering timely identification and access to legal assistance and other protection services. In addition, observers reported some Vietnamese migrant workers returned without formal victim status certification, which made it difficult for authorities to verify and facilitate access to support and legal assistance. Observers reported concern the government did not have minimum quality standards for protection services administered by service providers. Systemic delays in the government’s approval of licenses and operations challenged NGOs working in Vietnam, including those working on anti-trafficking activities. The government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking.

[...]Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities, many Vietnamese victims chose not to report their exploitation to government officials – which left these victims without access to most or all protection services.[...]

NGOs noted a hesitancy among some provinces with limited resources to identify potential victims returning from abroad because funding for support services came directly from provincial budgets rather than a central fund, which created a conflict of interest for provinces with limited resources.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

In this 2020 article, Thomas Reuters Foundation News noted the challenges of accessing healthcare for trafficking survivors while they are at a shelter:

“When a large group of people enter the shelter, it will be difficult to give them the rights they are entitled to, such as healthcare,” said Tangworamongkon, whose organisation provides free legal aid to migrant workers and victims of trafficking [...]”

(Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation News – [Record number of trafficking victims in Thailand raises concerns over care](#), 6 January 2020)

13. How does household registration impact trafficking survivors’ ability to receive healthcare?

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained:

“So the first thing is that administrative hurdle[...] If they have left Vietnam, and especially if they’ve been gone for a number of years, it’s the registration process after they get back. Which province do they register to? And now, because Vietnam [..] just in July of this year [2025] underwent its largest bureaucratic reorganization since the war where they reduced the number of provinces from 63 to 34 and reduced I think it was, two levels of administration, right, and created new ministries, merged ministries, and so they’re still bureaucratic. They’re working through all of that. So there are delays. It takes time, just from a bureaucracy standpoint. And like I said, the main thing is like, “*Where do they register?*” They have no ties. They have no home left. What province do they pick, right? They don’t have their birth certificate. They don’t have any papers left. They have no family members, for example. That’s probably initially the biggest hurdle for them because without their national ID card and a registration home in a province, they can’t get their social health insurance card. The second barrier is it depends on what kind of healthcare they’re seeking. Is it mental healthcare? Because of mental healthcare, then there’s a lot of issues with that depending on who they are, depending on what their issues are, depending on what their needs are. Not just from a stigma perspective, but also one of just pure access and also one of availability of the type of care that they require in Vietnam.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

IOM published a 2020 report on the situation of Migrant Health in Vietnam. The report noted the following:

“The legal status of migrants can still prove a key determinant to accessing health insurance, developed under the household registration book, meaning those without residential status are unable to purchase voluntary health insurance nor change registered hospital on the health insurance card. In addition, migrants reported a lack of health and social welfare support at destinations.
[...]
A lot of people don’t have health insurance. The main reason is they haven’t got identity cards, they’ve been away from their place for too long or they cannot get ID cards and household registration to register for health insurance.”

(Source: IOM – [Situation Analysis of Migrant Health in Viet Nam](#), 2020, pp. xii -47, Last accessed 11 August 2025)

14. Is there any evidence of the roles poverty and debt play in limiting access to medical and mental health services?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included shelter, meals, travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, vocational training, and financial assistance. Victims who did not meet a minimum poverty threshold were excluded from some support services, including tuition exemption and financial assistance. Observers noted the quality of care provided to trafficking victims varied widely depending on geography, a victim’s circumstance, and the strength of local civil society; NGOs reported the support victims received was often inadequate, especially in remote and poorer provinces where local governments provided the initial support budget.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

A 2024 academic article on ‘Reducing health inequalities in Vietnam: Implications for health in all policy’ described that:

“People in poorer areas are not able to obtain all the healthcare services they need. Meanwhile, the rich have four times greater access to healthcare services as compared to the poor.”

(Source: Nguyen Anh Dang and Thi Phuong Thao Nguyen – [Reducing health inequalities in Vietnam: Implications for health in all policy](#), 4 January 2024, pg.66, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Mekong Plus, a European NGO focused on community development in remote rural areas of Cambodia and Vietnam, mentioned in June 2024 that:

“Vietnamese citizens have reported instances of having to pay bribes, sometimes up to 30% of the total cost of care, to access medical services or receive preferential treatment. This not only creates a financial burden but also erodes trust in the healthcare system and disproportionately affects low-income individuals who are unable to afford these unofficial fees.”

(Source: Mekong Plus – [The State of Healthcare in Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities](#), 25 June 2024, pg.66, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“[...]stigma comes in multiple forms. [...]you have external stigma that is very much felt, especially among victims of sex trafficking, and especially the ones that come back with babies[...], where they’re basically viewed as ‘*bad girls*’, and they’ve now also tainted their families. And so the stigma is not just felt by the girl or the woman, the female victim, but also her family[...] And so the tendency is then to not seek out help because you don’t want to publicize yourself or amplify yourself anymore, but just try [to] hide and live quietly so that you and your family don’t suffer anymore[...]. So you have the lack of access because if you’re especially from a rural area, the effort that you have to make in order to access any sort of mental healthcare is one that is onerous. Just from a logistical standpoint, like how do you physically get to that access? You have to take buses. You have to spend a lot of money on transport just to be able to access this. And then because it’s such a big effort, that is also noticed by your neighbors because everyone lives on top of each other, and we’re a very nosy country, and everyone gossips about each other,[...]. And so all that effort will also be noticed by the neighbors and the community.

[...] And then there’s also the perceived stigma, which is almost as effective as the actual external stigma. Because as a country, we’re a culture that operates on ‘*losing face*’ and ‘*saving face*’. Just the thought of losing face is enough for us to change the way we behave because you want to avoid losing face. You want to avoid your family being shamed[...]. So it’s not the act of shaming. It’s the fear of being shamed [that] also influences behavior[...] It’s like the real threats versus perceived threats, the perceived threats from organized crime and black market moneylenders, whatever else is enough already. And you can’t say, “*Oh, no, but they’re not real.*” They’re very real. They’re real in the person’s mind and in their culture, so therefore, it’s real. So this is often [...] for men who are coming back from Europe and the UK because they “*failed*” at being successful going abroad. And this is also after a period of years, they return. They have nothing to show for it, nothing at all except shame.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 19 November 2025)

15. Are trafficking survivors in Vietnam entitled to free or subsidised healthcare?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included shelter, meals, travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, vocational training, and financial assistance.[...]Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children[...].”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2025 DFAT report, provides the following information:

“Health

2.45 The 2013 Constitution commits the state to provide health insurance for all Vietnamese citizens, and to prioritise healthcare for ethnic minorities and others living in extremely difficult socioeconomic conditions. The public health system includes an extensive grassroots network of primary healthcare delivery.[...]

2.46 Health insurance is compulsory for all Vietnamese citizens. The Government of Vietnam began implementing universal health insurance in 2009, with an initial focus on the poor, near-poor and informally employed. [...]The national health insurance scheme includes contributions from employers and employees. Health insurance may alternatively be obtained through one’s household (rather than employer), which requires contributions from adult household members. In-country sources said health premiums were modest (around VND700,000, or AUD44, annually in October 2023). Poor households, ethnic minorities living in disadvantaged areas of the country, children under the age of six, the elderly (80 years and above) and those on a state pension receive free insurance – they do not pay premiums or medical expenses, including for prescriptions.The Government of Vietnam heavily subsidises premiums for households classified as near-poor, as well as for students and beneficiaries of social assistance programs. People without health insurance can access healthcare but need to pay for expenses in full.(pp.13-14)

2.47 Access to medical services and treatments not covered under the national health insurance scheme require payment. According to in-country sources, as of November 2024, health insurance only paid for medical examinations and treatment services. Preventive services including cervical cancer screening (Pap smears), mammograms, colonoscopies and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) were not funded. In-country sources said out-patient clinics in public hospitals charged for many services. Where out-of-pocket costs applied, these were subsidised and generally affordable according to in-country sources. Out-of-pocket costs are higher in central and provincial-level hospitals; however, so is the level of care provided. Bribes may also need to be paid – PAPI has consistently found that bribes are common in public hospitals. According to the 2023 PAPI, 40 to 80 per cent of public hospital users in 40 provinces reported paying bribes in 2023. Bertelsmann Stiftung, an independent German foundation, reported in 2024 that petty corruption was an ongoing concern in the public healthcare system.(pg.14)

[...]2.53 [...]Access to medical services and treatments not covered under the national health insurance scheme require payment. According to in-country sources, as of November 2024, health insurance only paid for medical examinations and treatment services. Preventive services including cervical cancer screening (Pap smears), mammograms, colonoscopies and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) were not funded. In-country sources said out-patient clinics in public hospitals charged for many services. Where out-of-pocket costs applied, these were subsidised and generally affordable according to in-country sources. Out-of-pocket costs are higher in central and provincial-level hospitals; however, so is the level of care provided. Bribes may also need to be paid – PAPI has consistently found that bribes are common in public hospitals. According to the 2023 PAPI, 40 to 80 per cent of public hospital users in 40 provinces reported paying bribes in 2023. Bertelsmann Stiftung, an independent German foundation, reported in 2024 that petty corruption was an ongoing concern in the public healthcare system.”(pg.15)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.13-14-15, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

Article 39(1) and (2) of Vietnam’s new Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024, states:

“[...]Article 39. Medical support

1. Victims, persons undergoing victim identification, and accompanying individuals under 18 years of age shall receive health checkups upon reception, as well as first aid and emergency care if they sustain injuries or health damage. If they require health recovery care during their stay at social assistance or victim support facilities, they shall be supported with the costs of medical examination and treatment.

2. Victims without health insurance shall be provided support to pay for health insurance during the first year following their confirmation as victims by competent authorities.[...]"

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁸⁸ – [Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Law No. 53/2024/QH15\)](#), Hanoi, 28 November 2024, last accessed 23 February 2026, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

According to Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP of January 11, 2013, detailing a number of articles of the Anti-Trafficking Law:

“Article 20. Medical Support

1. Eligible beneficiaries include victims during their stay at social protection facilities or victim support centers.
2. Medical support includes the costs of medical examinations and treatment.
3. During their stay at social protection facilities or victim support centers, victims receive medical care to restore their health. If a victim becomes seriously ill and needs to be transferred to a medical facility for treatment, the costs of medical examination and treatment at that facility must be covered by the victim or their family.
For victims from poor households, near-poor households, families with preferential policies under the Ordinance on Incentives for People with Meritorious Services to the Revolution, or minors, the victim support center shall cover the cost of medical examination and treatment equivalent to the amount paid by the health insurance fund for corresponding groups. For victims with no relatives, the center shall support medical costs equivalent to the amount paid by the health insurance fund for individuals from poor households.
In cases where the individual has a valid health insurance card, the health insurance fund shall pay for medical expenses according to the provisions of the health insurance law.[...](Asylos Researcher translated from Vietnamese to English using ChatGPT)

ORIGINAL source:

“Điều 20. Hỗ trợ y tế

1. Đối tượng hỗ trợ gồm nạn nhân trong thời gian lưu trú tại cơ sở bảo trợ xã hội hoặc cơ sở hỗ trợ nạn nhân.
2. Chế độ hỗ trợ y tế gồm chi phí khám bệnh và chi phí chữa bệnh.
3. Trong thời gian lưu trú tại cơ sở bảo trợ xã hội hoặc cơ sở hỗ trợ nạn nhân, nạn nhân được chăm sóc y tế để phục hồi sức khỏe. Trường hợp nạn nhân bị ốm nặng phải chuyển đến cơ sở y tế điều trị thì chi phí khám bệnh, chữa bệnh tại cơ sở y tế do nạn nhân hoặc gia đình nạn nhân tự thanh toán.
Đối với nạn nhân thuộc hộ nghèo, hộ cận nghèo, gia đình chính sách theo Pháp lệnh ưu đãi người có công với cách mạng, người chưa thành niên được cơ sở hỗ trợ nạn nhân hỗ trợ chi phí khám bệnh, chữa bệnh theo mức bằng mức quỹ bảo hiểm y tế chi trả cho các đối tượng tương ứng. Đối với nạn nhân không còn thân nhân được cơ sở hỗ trợ chi phí khám bệnh, chữa bệnh theo mức bằng mức quỹ bảo hiểm y tế chi trả cho đối tượng thuộc hộ nghèo.
Trường hợp đối tượng có thẻ bảo hiểm y tế còn thời hạn sử dụng thì được quỹ bảo hiểm y tế chi trả chi phí khám bệnh, chữa bệnh theo quy định của pháp luật về bảo hiểm y tế. [...]"

(Source: NATLEX, International Labour Organisation (ILO) – [Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP of January 11, 2013, detailing a number of articles of the Anti-Trafficking Law.](#), undated, pg.13, last accessed 23 July 2025)

⁸⁸ Note: This translation is made by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THƯ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

16. How do NGOs and international organisations support trafficking survivors’ healthcare needs in Vietnam?

The Blue Dragon Foundation provided the following support to survivors of human trafficking in Vietnam between 2023 and 2024:

“Responding to an unprecedented human trafficking crisis

Human trafficking in Southeast Asia has made headlines across the world. According to the United Nations, hundreds of thousands of people are being held in violent compounds where they are forced to scam money from others online.

Vietnamese communities have been heavily impacted by this form of exploitation and Blue Dragon has been inundated with calls for help from men, women and youth trapped in these compounds. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, Blue Dragon was able to assist 328 victims of human trafficking, reunite them with their loved ones and provide them with psychological and medical care to ensure they can recover.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Annual Report 2023-2024](#), January 2025, pg.11, last accessed: 11 March 2026)

The European Union Agency for Asylum - EUAA in its 2024 report on psychiatry (prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication), noted:

“2.4. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Many people with depression have financial difficulties that prevent them from attending as well as affording the cost of treatment. Faced with this situation, the “Tomorrow Fund” is built to support depressed people who need counselling psychotherapy.⁶¹ (pg.17)

We Bloom is a US NGO with the “desire to empower communities through training, networks, resources and fundraising in the areas of public health and education”. In Vietnam, they focus on mental health, drowning prevention and recovery initiatives.⁶² We Bloom is implementing a “community-based mental health project” to train professionals in diagnosing mental conditions and providing counselling to patients and they run a “school-based counselling strategy” to enhance mental health in children.⁶³ (pg.17)

Beautiful Mind Vietnam was founded in 2015 with a goal to promote mental health well-being in Vietnam. The NGO provides educational articles about mental health and mental health disorders. Moreover, they offer cost-free “peer-consultation” to people having mental health problems through a safe space for them to express their mood. Beautiful Mind Vietnam have also held health workshop and seminars within communities to raise awareness about mental health and guide practice to promote positive mental health.⁶⁴ (pg.17)

BasicNeeds Vietnam was founded in 2010 with a mission to nurture people’s mental health wellbeing and educate people on mental health. They develop training workshops for the public, provide mental services to people in need and collaborate with other organisations to better facilitate the dialogue surrounding mental health.⁶⁵ (pg.17)

The Medical Committee Netherlands Vietnam (MCNV) was established in the Netherlands in 1968 with the goal of supporting health development in Vietnam. MCNV collaborates with the “INGO Global Initiative for Psychiatry and Provincial Health departments to implement community-based mental healthcare in several districts”. They train health workers about mental health skills. The mental health services from these trained health workers could work for “home-based care and counselling” to ensure more people access mental health services.⁶⁶ (pg.18)

In September 2021, the Z Zurich Foundation from Switzerland and UNICEF began a three-year partnership to advance the mental health of children around the world and Vietnam is one of the first countries to get support from this partnership. Their activities focus on providing intervention to build mental health knowledge, enhancing learning and social emotion skills, and improving caregiver and adult support. The materials include information on emotional balance, stress management and problem-solving. There are a variety of teaching methods from storytelling to peer learning and model learning, using a digital platform.⁶⁷ (pg.18)

Recently, the project for men’s mental healthcare called “He talks- Men Don’t Cry Unless They Do” started. The project is sponsored by the Centre for Counselling, Research and Community Development (CoRE), which is an NGO with the mission to improve the quality of mental health of young people and young families.⁶⁸” (pg.18)

61 TuoiTre Online, Mở quỹ hỗ trợ miễn phí cho người trầm cảm đang gặp khó khăn [Open a free support fund for depressed people who are having difficulty], 13 October 2023, [url](#)
62 We Bloom, Our Mission, 2017, [url](#)
63 The Borgen Project, Improving Mental Health in Vietnam, 5 June 2022, [url](#)
64 The Borgen Project, 3 Organizations Improving Mental Health in Vietnam, 15 November 2021, [url](#)
65 The Borgen Project, 3 Organizations Improving Mental Health in Vietnam, 15 November 2021, [url](#)
66 The Borgen Project, 3 Organizations Improving Mental Health in Vietnam, 15 November 2021, [url](#)
67 UNICEF, Vietnam, Quỹ Z Zurich và UNICEF hợp tác nhằm cải thiện sức khỏe tâm thần của trẻ [The Z Zurich Foundation and UNICEF collaborate to improve children’s mental health], 23 September 2021, url 68 YBOX, [Toàn Quốc] Tổ Chức Phi Chính Phủ, Phi Lợi Nhuận CoRE Tuyển Dụng Cộng Tác Viên Truyền Thông Dự Án Sức Khỏe Tâm Thần Nam Giới “He Talks - Men Don’t Cry Unless They Do” Part-time 2023 [[Nationwide] CoRE Non-Governmental, Non-Profit Organization Recruits Communications Collaborators for Men’s Mental Health Project “He Talks - Men Don’t Cry Unless They Do” Part-time 2023], n.d., url

(Source: The European Union Agency for Asylum – [Report on psychiatry \(prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication\)](#), September 2024, pp.17-18, last accessed 6 August 2025)

In this 2023 UNICEF situational analysis report of the rights of persons with disabilities, the agency noted that:

“Conclusions and key recommendations for UN future Programming

[...]Social and Child Protection

“[...]9: Support NCD and MOLISA to raise community awareness (in particular parents and family members of CwD) by undertaking a national campaign on the rights of children, especially protection against any form of abuse, violence or exploitation. This includes awareness on the importance of a nurturing environment for CwD to enable them to develop to their fullest potential.[...]” (pg.45)

(Source: UNDP Vietnam – [Situational Analysis Of The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities](#), Vietnam, Country Brief, 12 March 2023, pg.45, last accessed 6 August 2025)

17. Is there any support for trafficking survivors with cognitive or learning difficulties?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 noted that:

“[...] the issue for any type of disabilities is a social problem, they are usually trafficked for economic challenges they are facing, people with cognitive difficulties would also face difficulties in accessing support.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

In a July 2025 post, the ASEAN-ACT, noted that:

“To mark World Day Against Trafficking on 30 July, three new resources have been launched in Vietnam that put survivors – especially those with disabilities – at the centre of justice. Developed with the support of the Australian Government funded ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program (ASEAN-ACT), these tools focus on legal aid, victim-sensitive court procedures, and disability inclusion. They represent key steps in implementing Vietnam’s new counter-human trafficking law and advancing inclusive, trauma-informed, and rights-based justice systems.”

(Source: Australian Aid | ASEAN -Australia Counter Trafficking – [Vietnam launches new tools to promote inclusive justice for trafficking survivors](#), 28 July 2025, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Mental Health and Psychological Support

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.4 (Health as a Re-trafficking Risk Factor)
- Section 6 (Reintegration)

18. How is mental health perceived in Vietnam, particularly about trafficking survivors?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“[...]Mental health is stigmatized in Vietnam, and individuals face difficulties in accessing employment. You can get everything in principle but in practice it’s difficult, particularly for people who have permanent mental health issues such as Schizophrenia.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Although not specific to trafficking survivors, the 2025 DFAT report provides the following information:

“[...]2.58 Stigma and feelings of shame are barriers to treatment, and some people or their families may deny a mental health problem exists in the first place. Mental illness was considered a form of weakness, particularly in the case of more severe conditions, and in-country sources reported in October 2023 that stigma was greater in rural areas, where there was less awareness and understanding of mental illness compared to urban settings. In-country sources reported stigma was most acute for schizophrenia. Depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder attracted less stigma, as most people did not associate these with mental illness. Young people may be more willing than older people to self-describe as mentally unwell and seek treatment. In-country sources estimated that only 10 per cent of people living with a mental illness sought treatment as of October 2023.

2.59 Mental healthcare services are available to those who need them, regardless of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Distance may be a practical barrier to access for those living in remote areas, and social stigma may encourage people to delay or forego treatment. DFAT assesses there is a low risk of official discrimination and a moderate risk of societal discrimination against people living with mental illness, with those living in cities attracting less stigma and able to access better services.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.16, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

EUAA in its 2024 report on psychiatry (prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication), noted:

“[...]1.2. Stigma surrounding mental health

Cultural attitudes towards mental health is a critical factor in the underdevelopment of psychiatric health services in Vietnam. Many people believe that mental disorders are due to misfortune, and mental illnesses are known as “Benh tam than”, which means madness or severe psychiatric disorders. Moreover, a psychiatrist in Vietnam is called “Bac si tam than”, which means “a doctor who treats madness”. These words indicate that mental health in Vietnam is stigmatised. Individuals suffering from mental illnesses are considered as wild, unpredictable, and dangerous. This prejudice has led to a reluctance to seek help for mental health issues.²⁷ A study found that inadequate licensing for non-medical mental health professionals (such as psychologists and social workers) along with a lack of interest in mental health from higher-level leadership also contributed to the poor development of mental healthcare in Vietnam.²⁸ A private sector adviser notes that low- and middle-income earners

who are in full-time employment are not likely to be willing to take time off work to seek psychological assistance and that social stigma can deter people who could afford additional costs from seeking mental health services.²⁹

27 The Borgen Project, Improving Mental Health in Vietnam, 5 June 2022, [url](#)
28 Dang, H.M., et al., Mental health literacy at the public health level in low and middle income countries: An exploratory mixed methods study in Vietnam, 31 December 2020, [url](#), p. 1
29 Dezan Shira & Associates, Vietnam Briefing, The Mental Healthcare Industry in Vietnam, 18 October 2018, [url](#)

(Source: The European Union Agency for Asylum – [Report on psychiatry \(prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication\)](#), September 2024, pg.12, last accessed 6 August 2025)

19. Is there any known stigma towards or negative perceptions of trafficking survivors with physical or mental health issues tied to their experiences of trafficking?

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, highlighted the following case:

“So the stigma that these [...]victims have with them, the perception from their family, friends, and community, that has always been the case. Like I said to you, I explained the part of the culture is *saving face*. The family as well don’t want to acknowledge any failure. So like, *“Okay. I’m spending this amount of money. We borrow it from everywhere for you to go abroad to work and earn money and bring something back to the family, but you came back now empty-handed, being labeled as a victim.”*

[...] I want to bring [up] this case of a Vietnamese person in the UK. [...] He was brought to this country as promised to do some construction work because I conducted a lengthy interview with his family members, with his parents, and his mom. So he’s from a very, very poor family. The family said that they came and they said that there’s construction work in the UK. So the family just agreed to borrow money from everywhere and send him abroad. He arrived in the UK, and he waited for three months. And when they arrived in the UK, these human smuggling networks would have a place for them to stay. I call it the ‘*holding*’ or ‘*sorting center*’, where they sought out, *“Okay, these people came here and have paid the debt for the journey already,”* then they have a bit more freedom of movement, and they would be working whatever of their choice. The people have not paid any money yet. They are, I mean, in debt. [...]. So he actually falls in the second category.

So after waiting for three months in that sorting center somewhere in London, he was then sent to work, and it was a cannabis factory. Two weeks into working in the cannabis factory, [...] he was arrested and he was detained in a local prison for being investigated for cannabis production. So after being in prison[...]but I don’t think he was there for long before he actually took his own life. It’s a very sad case. And I read all the paper[s] related to him and could see that he was because once he’s in, he felt that his dream was crumbled. His dream of changing life and being able to provide for the family and assist the family has all crumbled. He just could not face it. So what can you do now? Because you’re in prison waiting for the trial. You have a huge amount of debt left behind. You have a family there. You can’t face any of that. You won’t be able to get the money to pay the debt. [...]he just might find it’s difficult to face his own family and his community. So he made this phone call to his mother from prison. And he said, *“I hope everybody’s okay. I’m fine at this end.”* So he did not even tell the family that he’s in trouble or anything. And at the end of the conversation, he said to his mom, *“I want to go home.”* So that’s when people reach [...] the point where they are exhausted of what they’ve been through that long journey from Vietnam to here. It is post-Russian war as well. So you have to go a different route. So exhausted [from] the journey and constantly being fearful for whether you will arrive or you’ll be dead along the journey [...]But nothing is more grim than that. So yeah, that’s the outcome. [...]So to show that the pressure that they face is real, [...] Some people won’t be able to face it. [...]. And cases of people who won’t be able to face it, you won’t hear in the media. Like this case in particular, absolutely zero report [...] because [...]the inquest is still lingering and still going on. Only the people who work inside the network, like myself, would be able to know what’s going on, but it’s harrowing. So, from what I could share is that [the] pressure they face is real[...]. [T]hey have to face the family. They have to face the community, and face everybody else when they return.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Unaccompanied children in Vietnam noted:

“[...]’ ... There are a range of negative outcomes evidenced for child trafficking victims and children who have experienced exploitation in the context of migration. Children working within factories and other labour settings are at risk of physical injury and exposure to hazardous working conditions that are detrimental to physical and mental health and development. Children who are trafficked for sex work are at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as well as pregnancy and experience of physical violence. Research indicates that victims of child trafficking also have a high prevalence of mental health problems and low wellbeing. They also experience stigma on their return home after being trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonour upon their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatised by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally.” (pg.34)

[...]15. Return and reintegration

15.1 Returnees [...]

15.1.2 The 2022 DFAT report noted:

[...]trafficking victims face social stigma and discrimination, and may experience difficulty in accessing appropriate trauma counselling services outside of large cities.[...]”(pg.47)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#), February 2025, pp.34-47, last accessed 6 April 2025)

20. What state/non-state provisions exist for mental health support for trafficking survivors in Vietnam? If available, how accessible and affordable is this and how long can it be provided for? What types of therapy and rehabilitation programs are available for survivors of trafficking?

From the sources consulted, limited information could be found about what type of therapy and rehabilitation programs are available for survivors of trafficking in Vietnam.

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained that:

“Mental-health support for trafficking victims returned to Vietnam is limited in duration, uneven in quality, and difficult to access once short-term assistance ends. In practice, psychosocial support is usually provided for around three months following identification or return, most often through shelters or NGO-run programmes. This initial period may include basic counselling, crisis stabilisation, and informal emotional support, but it rarely amounts to sustained or specialist mental-health care.

Once victims leave shelters or reintegration programmes, situated support largely falls away. Community-based mental-health services are weak, particularly in rural and poorer provinces from which many trafficking victims originate. Follow-up care is inconsistent, referrals are rarely monitored, and victims are often expected to cope independently despite ongoing trauma, debt pressure, and social marginalisation.

A further structural barrier is low mental-health literacy. Many returnees lack the language, concepts, or confidence to recognise symptoms such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, or dissociation as health issues requiring treatment. Psychological distress is frequently normalised as personal weakness or misfortune rather than understood as a consequence of exploitation and trauma, reducing help-seeking behaviour.

State-provided mental-health services remain extremely limited, especially for individuals suffering serious or long-term conditions. Specialist psychiatric care is scarce outside major urban centres, access often depends on formal victim identification or documentation, and services are not tailored to the specific needs of trafficking survivors. As a result, those with severe trauma frequently receive no meaningful treatment at all.

Finally, social disapproval and stigma significantly restrict access to care. Trafficking survivors may face blame, shame, or suspicion within their families and communities, particularly where migration has failed or debts remain unpaid. Fear of being labelled “mentally ill” or morally compromised discourages individuals from seeking help and can lead families to prioritise concealment over care. Taken together, these factors mean that many returned trafficking victims continue to suffer untreated psychological harm well beyond the short period of formal support, increasing vulnerability to isolation, economic precarity, and re-trafficking.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented:

“So few. I know of one, an NGO, and that’s Hagar International, out of Hanoi, that actually has on-staff trauma-informed, trained counselors. But there are not that many. I think it’s like a couple, and they’re based out of Hanoi. And of course, everything is based on funding as well. And they’re trained in a very specific way, they work with sex trafficking victims[...] So very, very specific. And that’s not through the mental health system, but that’s through an NGO[...] So it’s not as if it’s easy to access. You’d have to know the NGO exists. You’d have to be able to qualify for the services[...] So I don’t know if they even support male victims. I’m not sure, but there are very few. There’s another social enterprise in Saigon [...] and they do promote mental health, but they are promoting mental health in the family, in the workplace, in general society. They’re not trained to work with trauma victims[...] So those, honestly, are the only two I know of that have, actually, I wouldn’t even say Tang Yung is even that. I would say Hagar is the only one I know of that has trauma-informed, trained counselors on staff.

Hagar International[...], I don’t know how many counselors are on staff at this moment. They may have reduced because everything is based on funding. If they lose funding, they can’t have people on their payroll. There’s none, I would say, that are qualified to give long-term clinical mental health treatment. I don’t know any organization that is qualified to give long-term. For that, you’d have to go to a health system, in the public health system, and get referrals and have therapy as part of your overall treatment plan. That multidisciplinary treatment process doesn’t exist, really. Or if it does, it’s very, very, very rudimentary, and it’s not accessible, and very little, it does not often include, if at all, mental health treatment that’s non-medical or non-medication-based, like for schizophrenia and bipolar disease and all that. [...]

One other thing I want to mention is only because I dealt with this in a recent appeals case, is there is, on the surface, yes, there is mental health psychiatry available in Vietnam. So oftentimes, the crown or whatever will use the existence of psychiatrists or the existence of a mental health department as proof that there is mental health there are mental health services available for victims. Without going one step further, oftentimes in the next paragraph, as it’s listed, that there’s a lack of quality and availability of the required mental health treatment within the existing healthcare system structure. And that mental healthcare system structure is heavily skewed towards psychiatric care and medication as treatment.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 19 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, noted that:

“[...]They already listed what these people, when they returned [what] they could get. So they support essential travel expenses, number two is medical support. Number three is psychological support. Number four is legal aid. Number five is support for cultural and vocational education. And number six is initial hardship allowance or loan support. So with that alone, you can see that it’s actually listed out quite clearly on the framework[...] But in reality, I don’t know how much of that is going to be implemented[...]”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

The Blue Dragon Foundation provided the following support to survivors of human trafficking in Vietnam between 2023 and 2024:

“[...]:

- 63 trafficking survivors were provided with individual counselling.
- 252 football matches, 148 hiphop classes, 81 art lessons, 19 circus workshops and a weekly running club were organised for disadvantaged children and youth”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Annual Report 2023-2024](#), January 2025, pg.12, last accessed: 11 March 2026)

EUAA in its 2024 report on psychiatry (prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication), noted:

“2.1. Facilities

[...]The mental health system services are provided through a network of state-owned hospitals. There are two national psychiatric hospitals, one in the North and the other in the South.³¹ Mental health services are available at central or at provincial specialised facilities. There are 39 mental hospitals in provinces and cities, and the remaining provinces have psychiatric departments in general hospitals. In the Army, there are two psychiatric departments at the first-level hospital (Military Medical Hospital 103 and Military Medical Hospital 175) and one psychiatric department in the Military Medical Hospital 120 - Military Region 9.³² In the South, besides the Bien Hoa National Psychiatric Hospital II, there is Ho Chi Minh City Mental Hospital, which is also a major mental health facility. Hospitalisation is provided for severe patients in inpatient care, with a total of 6 000 beds nationwide.[...]

One survey in Vietnam indicates that a scarcity of effective mental health services and difficulty in finding the few available quality services results in the underdevelopment of mental health services.³⁵ Although in 2022 the MOH promulgated Circular No.17 with regulations on the duties of commune health stations in mental healthcare,³⁶ there are still not many commune health stations or healthcare centres at the district level that have psychiatric treatment rooms, due to a lack of specialised personnel and facilities, as well as related policies and planning issues. Therefore, people with mental health problems usually need to go to psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric specialities in Level I or Level II healthcare facilities.”³⁷

31 Dezan Shira & Associates, Vietnam Briefing, The Mental Healthcare Industry in Vietnam, 18 October 2018, url

32 Vietnam Internal Medical Magazine, Clinical Research, Sức khỏe tâm thần : Thực trạng, thách thức và những tiến bộ mới trong chẩn đoán và điều trị [Mental health : Current status, challenges and new advances in diagnosis and treatment], 2020, url, pp. 16,17

35 Dang, H. M., et al., Mental health literacy at the public health level in low and middle income countries : An exploratory mixed methods study in Vietnam, 31 December 2020, url, p. 6

36 Vietnam, MOH, Quy định về nhiệm vụ khám bệnh, chữa bệnh tâm thần của cơ sở khám bệnh, chữa bệnh, Số: 17/2022/TT-BYT [Regulations on Duties for Medical Examination and Treatment of Mental Disease of Medical Examination and Treatment Facilities, No.: 17/2022/TT-BYT], 30 December 2022, url 37 Nguyen, T., et al., , Challenges in Integrating Mental Health into Primary Care in Vietnam, 4 October 2019, url, p. 2

(Source: The European Union Agency for Asylum – [Report on psychiatry \(prevalence of psychiatric disorders; access to treatment; cost of treatment and medication\)](#), September 2024, pg.12, last accessed 6 August 2025)

In this undated webpage, Hagar International, noted there services in two In these new provinces in Vietnam, Hagar will provide:

“[...]Counseling and Mental Health Support: Survivors of trafficking often suffer from trauma, anxiety, and depression. Hagar’s trained counselors offer emotional support to help them heal and regain their confidence.[...]”

(Source: Hagar International – [Hagar Expands Care to Two New Provinces in Vietnam](#), undated, last accessed 6 August 2025)

The Blue Dragon Foundation published on its undated webpage, the following assistance it provides to survivors of trafficking:

- “Education and training: ongoing assistance to return to school, university or training.
- Counselling: psychological counselling to recover from trauma, both short term and long term
- Reunion: Assistance to return home and reunite with families.
- Legal support: Legal advocacy and court representation.
- Shelter: Emergency shelter and care for girls and women who have just escaped sex trafficking.
- Health: Medical checks and ongoing care and nutrition to get survivors back to good health.
- Accommodation: Medium to long-term accommodation for trafficking survivors who cannot return to their communities.
- Employment: For adult survivors, assistance to find a job or to establish a secure livelihood.”

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Trafficking Survivors – Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation](#), undated, last accessed 10 March 2026)

21. Are there any known barriers to accessing mental health services for trafficking survivors, particularly women and children? (e.g. referral pathways, financial barriers, stigma etc)

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 noted that:

“Individuals suffering with serious psychological and physical issues might face difficulty in accessing support they would need due to lack of services.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 shared details of a case she worked on:

“So I will give you one example of the difficulties. [...] There was a victim that I was working with in the UK whose parents went off and never returned. And so she was largely raised by her grandmother in a rural area outside of Hanoi. After her grandmother passed away, she was about 18 or 19 years old, [she] was tricked into going to another province to work. She thought she was working at a reception desk in a karaoke bar, but then she was ultimately forced to work as a karaoke bar hostess. And through a whole very unfortunate chain of events, ended up paying or going to debt for a large sum of money because she thought she was going to work in France, and instead was forced into sex work in France and in the UK. Now, if she were deported back to Vietnam, where would she register her? She has no papers anywhere. She was born in a rural area outside of Hanoi City, but she doesn’t have any papers to prove it. She doesn’t have a birth certificate. She has nothing. And not only that, she was raised unofficially by her grandmother, but officially her grandmother wasn’t on as her parents[...]. She also doesn’t have the information of her parents, like what their full names were, where they were born, all that stuff that could also be a paper trail to find out where she is. So she has no proof of residency from where she grew up or in the new province where she went afterwards to work because she was never registered there because she was essentially trafficked there. So she’s provinceless [...]. And so where can she register in order to then receive a national ID and then receive social health insurance[...].

One other thing I want to mention is only because I dealt with this in a recent appeals case, is there is, on the surface, yes, there is mental health psychiatry available in Vietnam. So oftentimes, the Crown or whatever will use the existence of psychiatrists or the existence of a mental health department as proof that there is mental health there are mental health services available for victims. Without going one step further, oftentimes in the next paragraph, as it’s listed, that there’s a lack of quality and availability of the required mental health treatment within the existing healthcare system structure. And that mental healthcare system structure is heavily skewed towards psychiatric care and medication as treatment.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 19 November 2025)

The DFAT 2025 report, provides information on stigma being a barrier to mental health treatment:

“2.56 In-country sources, speaking in October 2023, said mental healthcare services at district health centres and commune health stations were limited, inadequate and some staff lacked the knowledge to treat mental illness, compared to the general quality and accessibility of services in major cities, including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Countrywide, at the time of publication, there were approximately 1,000 psychiatrists and even fewer psychologists (psychotherapy is currently not recognised as official therapy; psychologists are considered ‘technicians’ rather than professionals and can only provide psychological tests). In-country sources said severe conditions generally required in-patient care at provincial- or national-level hospitals, which could pose practical barriers to those living in remote areas.

[...]

2.58 Stigma and feelings of shame are barriers to treatment, and some people or their families may deny a mental health problem exists in the first place. Mental illness was considered a form of weakness, particularly in the case of more severe conditions, and in-country sources reported in October 2023 that stigma was greater in rural areas, where there was less awareness and understanding of mental illness compared to urban settings. In-country sources reported stigma was most acute for schizophrenia. Depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder attracted less stigma, as most people did not associate these with mental illness. Young people may be more willing than older people to self-describe as mentally unwell and seek treatment. In-country sources estimated that only 10 per cent of people living with a mental illness sought treatment as of October 2023.

2.59 Mental healthcare services are available to those who need them, regardless of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Distance may be a practical barrier to access for those living in remote areas, and social stigma may encourage people to delay or forego treatment. DFAT assesses there is a low risk of official discrimination and a moderate risk of societal discrimination against people living with mental illness, with those living in cities attracting less stigma and able to access better services.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report](#); Vietnam, 19 February 2025, pg.16, last accessed 29 May 2025)

Section 6. Reintegration and Opportunities for Returnees

6.1 Return Risks and Initial Reception

1. Do young people who are returned to Vietnam face the risk of forced military conscription, punishment for evasion, or other forms of coercion upon their return?

The 2025 DFAT report, provides information about Vietnam’s military conscription system:

“5.2 [...]Under the Law on Military Service (adopted in 2015, effective from 2016), conscription can be postponed on various grounds, including: poor health and study (tertiary or vocational); where one is the sole earner in a household and has caring responsibilities for family members; has an active-duty sibling; and has been assigned as an official or volunteer to a socioeconomically deprived area of the country. Children or siblings of ‘revolutionary martyrs’ (people who sacrificed themselves for the independence, construction and defence of Vietnam); children of wounded or sick soldiers; people performing civilian tasks considered essential; and officials or volunteers assigned to a socioeconomically deprived area of the country for two years or longer are exempt from conscription. In-country sources said in October 2023 that these exemptions were used frequently. Non-exempt persons may attempt to avoid conscription, including – according to in-country sources – by paying bribes to enlisting officers.

5.3 Where avoidance of conscription is detected by authorities, a financial penalty or prison term may apply, particularly for repeat offenders. Desertion and breach of duty, including employing deceitful methods to evade the discharge of duties, are criminal offences under the Criminal Code (2015); they carry penalties ranging from community service to 12 years’ imprisonment (for serious offences like desertion in wartime and carrying or abandoning weapons and secret documents). DFAT is unable to comment on the prevalence of desertion or avoidance and their consequences outside of the criminal sanctions described above.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report](#); Vietnam, 19 February 2025, pg.62, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

The same report noted:

“Exit and entry procedures

5.41 The 2013 Constitution provides Vietnamese citizens the right to travel freely to, and return from, abroad. The right to exit may be suspended temporarily under certain circumstances, as defined by the Law on Exit and Entry of Vietnamese Citizens (2019), including where a person is suspected of committing a crime; serving a suspended prison sentence or supervised probation; is on parole; is the subject of civil court orders; or has outstanding tax liabilities. People whose exit may influence national defence and security may also be prohibited from leaving Vietnam, as determined by the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Public Security. In-country sources reported in October 2023 that police and immigration officers had to obtain permission to travel abroad.

[...]

5.44 Most people enter and exit Vietnam through official, designated land borders or via approved air and seaports. DFAT understands from in-country sources that land border crossings are easier to pass. Immigration systems at different kinds of borders (land, air, sea) may not necessarily be connected, and officials at land crossings may be more amenable to bribes. Undetected movement across borders is possible using unofficial land crossings. Vietnam’s land borders are vast (over 4,500km) and difficult to police in places, including because of mountainous topography; according to in-country sources, speaking in October 2023, large stretches were unpatrolled, creating opportunities for irregular movement in and out of the country. Such routes are known to be used by human traffickers (the dominant form of irregular departure from Vietnam). DFAT is aware of reports of people irregularly crossing land borders with Laos and Cambodia because they were wanted for crimes and political or other disapproved activities. According to in-country sources, it may also be possible to exit Vietnam using fraudulently obtained genuine passports (see Prevalence of fraud).[...]

5.46 In-country sources, speaking in October 2023, reported a spike in agents and brokers – not all of whom were legal – offering migration services since the COVID-19 pandemic. In-country sources said agents and brokers were advertising their services more aggressively, and that advertisements for these services had increased around the time (March 2022) Australia and Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding Vietnam’s participation in the Australian Agriculture Visa Program.

5.47 DFAT assesses it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a wanted person to depart Vietnam by air, as airport exit procedures are robust and scope for corruption is low. DFAT assesses it would be possible for a wanted person to depart Vietnam by land for a neighbouring country, particularly through irregular means, although this may require a long and arduous journey (depending on the person’s location), evasion of the authorities (not guaranteed) and knowledge of border terrain. Departure from Vietnam using forged or fraudulent documents is possible, although departure in such circumstances by air is highly unlikely: Vietnam Immigration requires air passengers to hold a valid passport, valid airline ticket and access to a third country (by visa or visa exemption), and Vietnam’s passport control systems should detect forged or fraudulent documents (see also Prevalence of fraud).

Conditions for returnees

5.48 The Criminal Code (2015) prohibits ‘organising, coercing [or] instigating illegal emigration for the purpose of opposing the people’s government’ and provides prison terms of between three and 20 years for organisers and participants. At the time of publication, DFAT was not aware of these provisions being used against failed asylum seekers who had returned from Australia.

5.49 Returnees from Australia who were part of a people smuggling venture may be interviewed by authorities on their return to Vietnam. DFAT understands this process generally takes between one and two hours, with a focus on obtaining information about the circumstances of their departure and the organisers of the venture. DFAT was not aware of returnees from Australia being held overnight for this purpose or being mistreated as part of this process. Authorities seek to distinguish between organisers and passengers of people smuggling ventures, and generally consider the latter victims. DFAT understands that returnees who were passengers in a people smuggling venture typically do not face criminal sanction on return, including in cases of multiple illegal departures. At worst, they will receive a fine (Decree 144, promulgated in December 2021, prescribes financial penalties of between VND3 million and VND5 million, or AUD190-315, for crossing national borders without following immigration procedures), although in-country sources reported in October 2024 that this may be waived. [...]

5.50 Returnees, including failed asylum seekers, who departed Vietnam through legal means are not subjected to special treatment or questioning by authorities on their return unless wanted for an outstanding criminal matter in Vietnam; the fact they sought and failed to obtain asylum might not be known and, in any case, seeking asylum abroad is not a criminal offence. According to in-country sources, speaking in October 2023, people of this profile were processed by immigration authorities like anybody else. DFAT is not aware of failed asylum applicants in Australia being mistreated, subjected to special questioning or arrested on their return to Vietnam because they were critical of the party or government while in Australia. Returnees of this profile who continue to criticise the party or government after returning to Vietnam would likely experience official harassment, including monitoring and questioning, and potential arrest and prosecution, including under national security provisions of the Criminal Code (2015). This risk applies to all citizens of Vietnam, not just returnees.

5.51 [...]DFAT is not aware of any failed asylum seekers in Australia being imprisoned on return in such circumstances.

5.52 Returnees – including failed asylum seekers, labour migrants and trafficking victims – may experience reintegration difficulties, although these are not state-imposed. Difficulties may include unemployment or underemployment, challenges accessing government services and, in the case of trafficking victims, social stigma. Some returnees may have accumulated large debts, including to loan sharks, to fund their travel from Vietnam, which they may have difficulty repaying. The experiences described in this paragraph are not uniform: some returnees, including failed asylum applicants, report making smooth transitions. In-country sources reported in October 2024 that, should they need it, returnees could seek support from Migrant Resource Centres managed by the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, although the scope of these services was opaque.

5.53 In-country sources reported in October 2023 that failing to secure asylum abroad did not carry stigma.

Remittances allowed families to build new homes and stimulated local economies. Emigration was very common, culturally accepted and encouraged, including by the Government of Vietnam (on account of the remittances that would flow back to Vietnam). According to in-country sources, failed asylum applicants would not typically encounter official discrimination for failing to secure asylum abroad. DFAT understands from incountry sources that, like anybody else, returnees – including failed asylum seekers – who have spent an extended period of time abroad and may have had their household registration revoked can apply to register their residence at a local residence registration authority (usually the police) or through online government systems to receive government services in that location (Government of Vietnam Circular 56/2021/TT-BCA, adopted in May 2021 pursuant to the Law on Residence (2020), includes a specific application form for Vietnamese nationals returning to Vietnam after residing abroad). Revocation of household registration should not be assumed.

5.54 [...]DFAT is not aware of returnees having citizenship revoked or being denied access to rights available to other Vietnamese citizens.

[...] 5.56 Returnees who have been convicted of a crime abroad and served jail time abroad for that crime face a low risk of prosecution for the same crime in Vietnam (see also Double jeopardy). This includes returnees with criminal records associated with drug importation into another country. The Law on Judicial Records (2009) stipulates that a returnee who has been convicted of a crime abroad will have their conviction recorded in Vietnam; however, this only occurs when the authorities in the country where the offence was committed provide the conviction details to Vietnam under a mutual legal assistance agreement. In such cases, a person with a criminal record in Vietnam may face difficulty in finding employment where police checks are required. DFAT is not aware of returnees with criminal records associated with drug importation into Australia, and who have served jail time in Australia for that crime, being separately prosecuted by Vietnamese courts for the same offence/s. As of October 2023, in-country sources were not aware of returnees who had served prison time for breaking the law in Australia, including for cannabis cultivation, being mistreated or subjected to special questioning on their return to Vietnam, insofar as their crime was not committed in Vietnam.

5.57[...]Returnees who committed criminal offences while in Australia, and completed their sentences in Australia, would generally face a low risk of official discrimination or harassment on their return to Vietnam. Unless they had an organising role for a people smuggling venture, were the subject of an outstanding arrest warrant or were sentenced in absentia, a returnee would face a low risk of arrest.”

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.69, last accessed 29 May 2025)

2. Are there documented cases of returnees being subjected to forced military service, detention, or mistreatment upon arrival in Vietnam for reasons linked to their returnee status?

In this 2025 report titled ‘Alternative Report on The Situation of Trafficking in Persons in Vietnam Articles 2, 7, 8, and 26 of ICCPR’, the following cases were noted:

- “Vang Thi Pang, a Hmong, is a 17-year-old girl from Cao Bang Province, northern Vietnam. She followed her family to Dak Lak Province in the Central Highlands. To work, she moved to Binh Duong Province, where she was tricked by a friend and was sold to Cambodia at an online gambling company near Phnom Penh. Her family in Vietnam reported to the local police in Dak Lak Province but was told to contact Cao Bang Provincial Police (which is more than 800 km away), where she has a household registration. BPSOS volunteers guided her family members to call the TIP Hotline of the police in Vietnam, which told Pang’s family to contact the local government again. Our volunteers referred Pang to Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW) in Cambodia for help; following due process, they called the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh but could not get a reply. A Vietnamese man in Cambodia later helped Pang return to Vietnam. She had to bypass the Vietnamese border control to avoid being fined for “illegally crossing the border,” despite her being a human trafficking victim and only 17 years old. (pg.14)

- In the case of H Nguốt Êban, responding to her family’s call for help, the police in Krông Ana District told her family that “she was stupid, so she deserved that.” They also ignored her family’s request for assistance with the rescue. H Nguốt Êban contacted BPSOS-CAMSA through a family member in Vietnam. When the Cambodian police raided the company, they also rescued more than 20 other victims. H Nguốt Êban was detained for 10 hours at the Vietnamese immigration office at the border crossing because she could not pay the fine. They released her but told her they would send the penalty letter to her local police station.
[...]
- H Nit Nie and her cousin Y O-I Nie (a minor) were both tricked by a childhood friend to join him in Cambodia. Both were forced to work for an online gambling enterprise. Upon returning home, the local authorities publicly shamed them for being trafficked in front of fellow villagers, increasing their vulnerability and exposing them to shaming and discrimination by community members. They were fined 6 million and 4 million VND, respectively by the Immigration Office in Moc Bai, Tay Ninh Province.

Many victims repatriated from Cambodia were fined when they crossed the border back into Vietnam because border control officers did not waive the fines normally levied on those who left Vietnam without following proper procedures. The border control officers disregarded the fact that these victims had been tricked by their traffickers to enter Cambodia illegally. Some returnees, including minors, were detained due to their inability to pay the fines.”(pp.14-15)

(Source: UN Human Rights Committee (Author: BPSOS – Boat People SOS, CAMSA – The Coalition to Abolish Moder-Day Slavery in Asia, MSFJ – Montagnards Stand for Justice) – [Alternative Report on The situation of Trafficking in Persons in Vietnam; Articles 2, 7, 8, and 26 of ICCPR](#), May 2025, pp.14-15, last accessed 21 July 2025)

The DFAT stated in its 2025 report:

“Conditions for returnees
[...]^{5.49} Returnees from Australia who were part of a people smuggling venture may be interviewed by authorities on their return to Vietnam. DFAT understands this process generally takes between one and two hours, with a focus on obtaining information about the circumstances of their departure and the organisers of the venture.DFAT was not aware of returnees from Australia being held overnight for this purpose or being mistreated as part of this process. Authorities seek to distinguish between organisers and passengers of people smuggling ventures, and generally consider the latter victims. DFAT understands that returnees who were passengers in a people smuggling venture typically do not face criminal sanction on return, including in cases of multiple illegal departures. At worst, they will receive a fine (Decree 144, promulgated in December 2021, prescribes financial penalties of between VND3 million and VND5 million, or AUD190-315, for crossing national borders without following immigration procedures), although in-country sources reported in October 2024 that this may be waived.” (pp.70-71)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp. 70-71, last accessed 06 July 2025)

6.2 Support Duration and Conditions

3. What is the length of support provided to victims upon return, and what conditions determine access to this support (e.g., involvement in criminal investigations)? Additionally, what transitional arrangements, if any, are in place once support ends? Can survivors re-enter support once they have left it if they remain vulnerable? (Like re-entering the NRM?)

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented:

“I haven’t come across any cases like this, first we need to [be] aware of the scale of support and scale of need, the need would

be greater than the support, if they are recognised they can get sometimes get access to training, depends on their access which a person needs to be formally identified. I doubt that after the initial stay in the shelter [...]they can re enter.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

According to the 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“[...]Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated four dedicated trafficking shelters for womenTrafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners and children. The government reported officials placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations. Adult victims could leave the facility or shelter unchaperoned at any time, and officials appointed a guardian for child victims.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 2023, last accessed 19 June 2025)

In this 2022, ASEAN Do-No-Harm Guide, Vietnam was highlighted as demonstrating good practice:

“Good practice:⁹⁶

Vietnam Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) manages Social Protection Centres at the local level. Victims of trafficking are allowed to stay at the Centres for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. Both domestic and foreign victims are entitled to four support services: (i) essential needs and travel expenses; (ii) medical support; (iii) psychological support and counselling; and (iv) legal aid. Residents are entitled to tuition waivers and financial support for short-term vocational training. For those who no longer wish to stay at the Centre, they will receive money to cover the cost of meals and transportation to return home (minimum of 70,000 VND or USD3 per person/day). The Centre also offers initial hardship allowance (1,000,000 VND or USD44 per person) for victims from poor households when they return to their home. Vietnam has a 24-month monitoring program that continually assesses the safety and well-being of the victim after returning home. Local authorities will proactively contact the victim and check on the victim’s place of residence to assess the type of support required. The government-run Peace House has an open-door policy for returned victims who face difficulties reintegrating back into their community. Peace House has received some victims back into their shelter/ accommodation for the third time and supported them until they could successfully reintegrate back into their community.”

⁹⁶ Vietnam National Consultation Workshop, 8 November 2021

(Source: ASEAN – [ASEAN Do-No-Harm Guide for Frontline Responders: Safeguarding the Rights of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2021, pg.60, last accessed: 30 May 2025)

This assessment published by USAID in 2021, reported that:

“[...]

- There is no national victim database.
- Identification generally does not include labor or internal trafficking, or men, children, and people who return on their own.
- There is no incentive to be identified with insufficient prosecution, inadequate services, and high levels of stigma.
- Focus on priority provinces limits identification and services to victims.
- Services are provided at the province of residency requiring victims to go to their families, some who may have been complicit in their trafficking or unsafe migration.
- There is no referral network for services and coordination.
- Criteria for most support depends on poverty rather than being victims of crime.
- Capacity for providing services is limited, especially in provinces not considered a priority”

(Source: USAID: [Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – Situational Analysis Report](#), pg.19, 2021)

However, this 2024 report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development, reported that:

[...]55. [...]The Special Rapporteur has, however, received reports that, upon return, victims of trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation often do not receive reintegration support and services, despite having suffered trauma and having paid a heavy price to escape slavery and return to their home country. He was also informed that a large proportion of such victims came from minority communities. (pg.10)

[...] 78. The Special Rapporteur received information about business-related concerns in Viet Nam in relation to trafficking in persons, the exploitation of migrant workers, discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation, occupational health and safety, freedom of association, collective bargaining and environmental pollution.” (pg. 14)

(Source: UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights) (HRC)—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development (sustainable development goals; gender equality; vulnerable or marginalised groups; environmental pollution and climate change; land acquisition; other topics), 8 July 2024, pp.10-14, last accessed: 30 May 2025)

According to the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

[...] A small portion of returnees reportedly accessed government or NGO support services. Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, many Vietnamese victims chose not to initiate the formal identification process – which left them without access to most protection services. Although there were no reports of penalization of returnees during the reporting period, in prior years, observers reported authorities routinely penalized victims exploited in online scam operations for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. NGOs reported Vietnamese diplomatic personnel stationed abroad lacked an understanding of forced labor in online scam operations and did not have adequate resources to identify victims or effectively assist citizens. NGOs noted some provinces’ hesitancy to identify individuals returning from Cambodia or overseas as trafficking victims may have been because funding for support services came directly from provincial budgets rather than a central fund, which created a conflict of interest for provinces with limited resources.”

(Source: US Department of State – [Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 27 March 2025)

The 2023 ODI report stated:

“5.4 Upon return
“On return to Vietnam, migrant workers remain vulnerable. Even if they are victims of trafficking and are ‘rescued’ and returned, there is limited government support. In addition, there are challenges for law enforcement to investigate cases of labour trafficking, such as unclear legal provisions on forced labour and human trafficking and obtaining evidence of exploitation from the destination country.
It takes a long time to obtain government support as returnees or migrants need to be formally identified as victims, which is a complicated process. An individual is typically only identified as a victim of trafficking when criminal justice proceedings are initiated. This is difficult when the perpetrator is an employer in a destination country, which is beyond the jurisdiction of Vietnamese law enforcement agencies, and when labour migration becomes trafficking in countries where no offences are identified. Even if trafficking is identified, it is extremely difficult to conduct investigations, collect evidence and pursue prosecutions in the destination country. While the process is underway, potential victims are unable to access shelter and support, which undermines their reintegration.⁵⁵ If a victim returns on their own, referred to as ‘selfreturn’, and does not report to the police, there is no formal identification of their status, on which government support depends. As a result, few victims receive support from the government on their return.

Additional assistance is available from NGOs, but because this was initially designed to support women and children, whereas victims of labour exploitation are primarily men, specific support for labour trafficking, and particularly support to male

victims, is still limited. Loss of livelihoods because of trauma and lack of support can lead to repeat migration, despite the risks, as there is still a need to earn an income.

Few victims report exploitation when they return to Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2020). This is partly a result of distrust of the authorities, and also the limited level of support provided. The time taken to process a case, plus a lack of understanding of how to report their case, also determines whether or not to report exploitation. The social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labour exploitation from reporting their case (Huber et al., 2019). In addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their family. Moreover, because migrant workers want to seek employment abroad, and may have gone into debt to finance their travel, they are less likely to complain.

While the legislation and policy discussed above may present challenges for law enforcement agencies to respond adequately to human trafficking, there are several other problems with implementing the legal and policy response. Nguyen et al. (2020) argue that limitations of law enforcement in detecting and preventing trafficking undermines improvements in legislation. There are reports that unless there is irrefutable evidence, a case is likely to be dropped by law enforcement.⁵⁵ In addition, there is inconsistent application of the law, limitations in the capacity of law enforcement, and difficulty in pursuing cases swiftly. As a result, the response has been heavily focused on security, in particular border-control and defence initiatives, and mostly focused on trafficking into sexual exploitation rather than labour exploitation.”

55 Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

56 Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

The same report noted that:

“[...]6.2 Non-state protection and support

More support to victims of labour trafficking is available from nonstate actors. There are several NGOs and international organisations active in Vietnam working on TIP. (pg.46)

NGOs offer direct support, which can be important in reintegration and even rescue.

These include:

- Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – which offers short-term shelter, conducts awareness raising on trafficking risks, operates a hotline and rescue service, and an informal migration peersupport group. Blue Dragon also supports children migrating domestically to work in textile industry.
- Hagar International – provides psychosocial support and accommodation for victims if needed.
- Pacific Links Foundation – runs shelters in two provinces to support returned victims with no time limit for stays and conducts awareness raising on trafficking risks and safe migration.
- Center for Women and Development – Vietnam Women’s Union⁶⁰ (quasi-governmental) – run safehouses in Hanoi and Can Tho established for gender-based violence (GBV), which have expanded to include trafficked women and children. Victims can stay for six months and are offered wide-ranging support. VWU is linked to the Border Police, and can refer victims, and with the support of the IOM, also runs One-Stop Service Office (OSSO) in some cities and provinces to support returned migrant women.

The support provided by these organisations was originally focused on sex trafficking and/or domestic violence. While they have expanded to accommodate a wider focus on trafficking, to include labour trafficking, the focus is still mostly on women and children, with very limited support for men. Activities tend to adopt the same model that has been applied to sex trafficking, including shelter, psychosocial support and livelihoods training, without considering more innovative approaches to labour exploitation that are more integrated with society rather than withdrawing victims. In addition, support is limited by funding and capacity constraints, as well as competition for funding among organisations.” (pg.47)

60 While a state sanctioned organisation, it has been included here as it operates somewhat independently

(Source: Overseas Development Institute and Australian Aid – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.44-47)

4. Does support and protection rely on reporting to the authorities and engagement with criminal processes? Or are there other barriers to accessing support and protection?

An academic report identified specific gaps in the 2011 trafficking law, which requires findings by criminal investigation authorities to formally identify victims, leaving a gap in support:

“A particularly problematic feature is the victim identification mechanism outlined in Article 24. It heavily depends on findings by criminal investigative authorities, creating a procedural bottleneck. Victims who are unwilling or unable to cooperate with law enforcement often due to trauma, fear of reprisal, or mistrust may be denied recognition and, consequently, essential services (20). This model diverges sharply from international best practices, which advocate for identification independent of prosecutorial outcomes. Empirical data reflects this implementation gap. Over nine years, 7,356 victims were officially identified, received, or rescued (28). However, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs reported that from June 2013 to June 2019, only 2,961 victims were supported including 2,891 women and 528 minors. Of these, 2,216 received basic services, 1,347 received medical care, 2,105 accessed psychological counselling, 1,003 obtained legal aid, 103 received education or vocational training, 817 were granted hardship allowances, and only 72 received production loans (22). These figures highlight a stark discrepancy between the legal provisions and their real-world realization, underscoring structural deficiencies in outreach, identification, and service delivery. This highlights the challenges faced under the 2011 Law, whereas the 2024 Law expands the scope of support, access to shelters and reintegration, yet in practice, implementation will likely face difficulties due to the stigmatization of victims, who often encounter discrimination that prevents them from accessing such support, as documented in recent studies (29).”

20 Sidun N. Understanding and Combating Human Trafficking: A Psychological Perspective. American Psychologist. 2025;80:787-97

28 Vietnam’s Ministry of Public Security. Report on the 9-Year Implementation of the Law on Prevention and Combating of Human Trafficking 2011. 2020:10. <https://moj.gov.vn/qt/tintuc/Pages/chi-dao-dieuhanh.aspx?ItemID=4075> [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

29 Islam F, Fay S. Intersectional challenges in posttrafficking reintegration of survivor women of trafficking. The International Journal of Human Rights. 2024; 28(10):1777-807

(Source: Nguyen Duy Dzunh – [Victim-Centered Protection in Vietnam’s Anti-Trafficking Law: A Human Rights-Based Assessment](#), 27 October 2025, last accessed 13 March 2026)

According to the 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam, the Vietnamese authorities continue to require a formal declaration before a survivor can be formally recognised as a trafficking victim and access services. The report also noted fear of reprisals and intimidation as potential factors which deter engagement with the authorities and, as a result, access to support:

“[...]Under the 2014 NRM, authorities required victims who were not directly rescued by Vietnamese law enforcement to file a formal declaration to initiate the interagency process to formally confirm their status as a trafficking victim and obtain access to additional services. The 2024 anti-trafficking law, when enacted, would expand many protection services to potential victims, shortening the time between initial identification and service provision under the NRM. The 2024 anti-trafficking law also expanded services available for trafficking victims and mandated a government policy of non-punishment for crimes committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The government had not implemented this law, nor updated its NRM, by the end of the reporting period.[...]

A lack of capacity, personnel, and resources sometimes hindered law enforcement, border guard, and other officials’ ability to consistently and proactively screen for trafficking victims. Observers reported growing government capacity improved some screening efforts. In the past, civil society groups reported Vietnamese victims feared reprisals from Vietnamese authorities

for immigration offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked, and international observers reported government officials often blamed Vietnamese citizens for their exploitative conditions abroad or suggested victims inflated abuses to avoid immigration violations. Authorities did not report formally identifying any trafficking victims during the more than 23,000 inspections conducted at establishments at high risk of sex trafficking in 2024. State-run media reported on multiple law enforcement actions against high-risk establishments during which authorities arrested numerous suspected sex traffickers and reportedly rescued victims; however, the government did not issue data on the status of the potential victims nor whether authorities consistently screened them for trafficking indicators, identified them as trafficking victims, or provided these potential victims with services. Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during these inspections, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. According to one observer, authorities have previously threatened and harassed survivors of labor trafficking in labor export companies, and their families, to intimidate them from sharing their experiences.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 16 March 2026)

According to the US Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report, many victims are left without access to protection services due to their reluctance to report to the authorities:

“Due to the government’s cumbersome victim identification process, which exacerbated economic hardship for survivors and their families, and fears of reprisal and punishment by local authorities for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, many Vietnamese victims chose not to initiate the formal identification process – which left them without access to most protection services.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to a 2023 country study by ODI, government support and protection depends on being formally recognised as a victim of trafficking, which is a long and complicated process in the case of returnees and migrants:

“5.4 Upon return
It takes a long time to obtain government support as returnees or migrants need to be formally identified as victims, which is a complicated process. An individual is typically only identified as a victim of trafficking when criminal justice proceedings are initiated. This is difficult when the perpetrator is an employer in a destination country, which is beyond the jurisdiction of Vietnamese law enforcement agencies, and when labour migration becomes trafficking in countries where no offences are identified. Even if trafficking is identified, it is extremely difficult to conduct investigations, collect evidence and pursue prosecutions in the destination country. While the process is underway, potential victims are unable to access shelter and support, which undermines their reintegration.⁵⁵ If a victim returns on their own, referred to as ‘self-return’, and does not report to the police, there is no formal identification of their status, on which government support depends. As a result, few victims receive support from the government on their return.” (pp.43-44)

⁵⁵ Interview with NGO, Vietnam December 2021

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.43-44, last accessed 5 June 2025)

A 2021 report by Australian Aid and ASEAN notes that access to legal aid depends on victims reporting to the authorities and having a government-issued certificate, which many victims are not able to do:

“The situation is further complicated by the fact that many victims who return home of their own accord are often not identified as having been trafficked. Ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups often don’t have access to information on what to do. And in all instances, victims need to submit government-issued certificates confirming their eligibility to access legal aid. Imagine, the difficulties for victims who are children and other marginalised groups.”

(Source: Australian Aid and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [Free legal assistance to protect the rights of trafficking victims](#), 27 July 2021)

5. Is there short and/or long-term support and protection available?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children. The government reported officials often placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed 8 February 2026)

The US Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report notes that foreign victims of trafficking identified by the government are excluded from long-term support. Assistance provided to trafficking victims by social services lasts up to three months:

“Foreign victims, if identified by the government, were eligible to access essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid, but were excluded from accessing other long-term support such as support for study, vocational training, or an initial financial allowance. The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims, including other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding and none provided services for men or child victims exclusively. Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

An academic article published in 2020 details the extent of support available to victims of trafficking in Vietnam, based on interviews with support staff. Government support is generally short-term, while support provided by international organisations can be more long-term:

“Before returning to homes, victims can also be sent to shelters that provide a safe and secure environment, necessary care, and support. Government budget or external funding covers the payment for these services. However, only small number of official identified victims could receive those support (Police officer 3, Social welfare staff 1). This approach is consistent with information mentioned in a government report (MOLISA 2014). Interviewees clearly explained: Many victims came from other provinces. When we [police officers] or border guards found them, we would ask DOLISA or the VWU to keep them in temporary shelters. Our province then contacted their areas [anti-trafficking actors of victims’ localities] and their families to return them. Our area paid for a living allowance when they stayed here. (Police officer 3) In our province, all victims were paid for food and travel tickets when they returned to their home. For example, victims received from 20,000 to 40,000 VND per day for food [from USD 1–2], standard travelling tickets or transport renting. If they had to stay here, they got 20,000 to 40,000 VND per day for food and 300,000 VND [about USD 15] for essential items. (Social welfare staff 3) The payment for living and travelling expenses depends on national policies and provincial allocation. Due to the limited government budget, the support for a living allowance in the shelter is not more than 60 days (Police officer 1; Social welfare staff 3). In some victim support centres, which are sponsored by international organisations,6 trafficked persons can receive higher living expenses. If the individuals have not fully recovered from their trafficking experience, they might be allowed to stay in the centres for a longer period. For instance, the “Open House” in An Giang can support female victims for up to 24 months (Social welfare staff 1; Women’s union 1).”

(Source: Thanh Hung Tran, Tien Hoang Le, Thi Phuong Diep Tran – [Support Trafficking Victims through Inter-Agency Cooperation in Vietnam: Achievements and Limitations](#), Asian Journal of Criminology, June 2020, pg.329, last accessed 11 July 2025)

6. How long does support last for male survivors?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“In Vietnam, male survivors usually get only short-term, basic aid unless recognized under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Support facilities offer temporary shelter (about three months), meal stipends, and medical aid. No shelters are exclusive to men; most serve women and children. Male survivors are housed separately in mixed facilities. Access to long-term psychosocial or vocational programs depends on local budgets and NGO capacity, which vary from province to province. Challenges include complex victim-certification, inconsistent screening, and limited social worker resources, discouraging men from seeking help and limiting support to short-term solutions. NGOs like Blue Dragon help bridge these gaps, but access is inconsistent and limited. Blue Dragon reports that the number of Vietnamese male victims of scams (in Cambodia, not in the UK) is higher than the number of female victims.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, and had previously worked for Vietnam-based NGO; Pacific Links Foundation commented that:

“We [Pacific Links Foundation] have had so few, it’s becoming a little bit more common now because of the scam centers. So you do have male victims of the scam centers coming back. And they are recognized as victims of trafficking just because it’s much less complicated than those going to Europe or the UK. I know that there are organizations, for example, I think Blue Dragon gives some support, but from what I understand, it is not long-term. There’s no NGO besides Pacific Links Foundation. And that’s very specific, though, for female victims of sex trafficking in their shelter on the Chinese border. So very, very specific. That’s the only entity that I know of that provides long-term support, meaning one to three years kind of thing[...] Everything else is not that long because there’s just not the funding for it. They don’t have any other organizations that have that level of capacity or funding to be able to do that. And on top of that, to follow each returnee. I know that Pacific Links has the contract now to provide support for Vietnamese deportees from the UK.[...] But in terms of [...]long-term care, job training, psychosocial support for male victims, all that. I don’t know if any organization is providing all that right now, especially for male victims.”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims as well as other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding, and none provided specialized or dedicated services for men or child victims. Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2025 DFAT Country Information Report mentioned the following:

“[...]3.146 [...] In-country sources said support services for male victims of trafficking were lacking in comparison.” (pg.50)

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.50, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

6.3 Reintegration Programs

- Cross reference with:
- Section 1 (Legal Definitions and Framework)
 - Section 4 (State Protection and Criminal Justice)
 - Section 6.2 (Support Duration and Conditions)

7. What reintegration support is available for returnees? Whether forced or voluntary?

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Thoi Nguyen who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“[...]Based on my professional experience working with Vietnamese nationals and reviewing asylum-related materials, returnees may face challenges in accessing formal reintegration support. Support mechanisms in Vietnam for trafficking victims are generally administered through the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and affiliated social protection centres. However, access to such support often depends on formal identification as a trafficking victim. In cases where individuals are not formally recognised as victims, including where age was previously disputed, they may receive limited or no targeted assistance upon return. Support, if available, may include short-term accommodation, basic financial assistance, or referral to local authorities, but longer-term reintegration support is often limited and unevenly implemented across regions.”

(Source: Thoi Nguyen, written communication with Asylos, 27 March 2026)

The Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Surya Deva, conducted a visit to Viet Nam from 6 to 15 November 2023. Following that visit, in this report he set out his observations about legal, policy and institutional frameworks concerning selected aspects of the right to development, identifying issues of concern and providing recommendations to ensure inclusive, participatory and sustainable development:

“[...]55. [...]The Special Rapporteur has, however, received reports that, upon return, victims of trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation often do not receive reintegration support and services, despite having suffered trauma and having paid a heavy price to escape slavery and return to their home country. He was also informed that a large proportion of such victims came from minority communities.[...]” (pg.10)

In the same report, the Special Rapporteur made the following recommendation to the Vietnamese government:

“93. The Special Rapporteur urges the adoption of a “whole-of-government approach” to protect the rights of migrant workers and recommends that legal assistance be provided to migrant workers, in collaboration with the relevant agencies of destination countries. He also urges the authorities to provide comprehensive assistance and reintegration services to victims of trafficking in persons and trafficking in persons for purposes of labour exploitation upon their return to Viet Nam.” (pg.16)

(Source: HRC – UN Human Rights Council (formerly UN Commission on Human Rights) [Visit to Viet Nam Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development](#), Surya Deva, 8 July 2024, pp.10-16, last accessed 5 August 2025)

According to ODI’s 2022 thematic brief on Labour Migration in Vietnam, returning migrant workers are left with minimal support and a plethora of problems:

“In Vietnam, returnees need to be formally identified as victims in order to access support services, which in turn requires a perpetrator to be identified. This is difficult when the perpetrator is an employer, and it is further complicated when labour migration turns into trafficking in third countries where these offences were not identified. Even if trafficking is identified in the destination country, conducting investigations, collecting evidence and pursuing prosecutions there is extremely difficult.

In addition, many migrant workers return to Vietnam of their own accord, referred to as “self-rescue”. In these cases, there is no formal identification of their status and hence no support.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour Migration in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam: Migrants’ Vulnerabilities and Capacities across the Labour Migration Cycle](#), December 2022, pg.18. Last accessed: 30 May 2025)

According to a 2023 report by Aljazeera, many trafficking victims become involved in recruiting others as a way to repay debts to their traffickers. This is often the result of limited support systems and a lack of viable alternatives in the provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh – two regions that account for the majority of Vietnamese nationals working illegally or living as undocumented migrants in the UK:

“[...] Some of those operating unlicensed recruitment agencies and organising illegal routes to enter the UK were themselves previously victims of trafficking or had spent time in the UK’s prisons [...]. Brokers with direct knowledge and experience of smuggling and criminal networks were “an important link” in the recruitment chain that funnels Vietnamese people to the UK and Australia to work illegally, including on cannabis farms.

Some migrant workers who returned to Vietnam with experience of smuggling routes have initiated the smuggling of others or found themselves approached by brokers seeking to collaborate in future smuggling operations [...]

They did not set out to become human traffickers or smugglers [...]. But after being the victims of smuggling themselves and finding themselves in debt when their plans had failed, they turned to recoup their losses any way that they could.

“They were people who invested in their journey, but it became a failure, and they were deported and returned home to a big debt [...]. So they had to do something big by getting directly involved [in smuggling networks].”

(Source: Al Jazeera – [Risk, rewards and remittances in Vietnam’s Nghe An province](#), 20 July 2023. Last accessed: 14 June 2025)

8. What are the current reintegration programs in Vietnam for trafficking survivors at the moment? What role, if any, do these play in preventing re-trafficking in Vietnam?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government provided formally identified Vietnamese victims with support services that included shelter, meals, travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, legal aid, vocational training, and financial assistance.

Victims who did not meet a minimum poverty threshold were excluded from some support services, including tuition exemption and financial assistance. Observers noted the quality of care provided to trafficking victims varied widely depending on geography, a victim’s circumstance, and the strength of local civil society; NGOs reported the support victims received was often inadequate, especially in remote and poorer provinces where local governments provided the initial support budget. While the government did not identify any foreign national victims, authorities reportedly provided limited assistance services to at least 46 potential foreign national victims.

Foreign victims, if identified by the government, were eligible to access medical support, psychological support, and legal aid but were excluded from accessing other long-term support such as travel expense support, vocational training, or an initial financial allowance. The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims as well as other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding, and none provided specialized or dedicated services for men or child victims.[...]

In 2024, the government passed a new Juvenile Justice Law, which expanded protection and rehabilitation services for child victims of crime, including human trafficking; the government did not implement the law by the end of the reporting period. Observers reported many labor trafficking victims did not fully understand their rights and how to access support services,

hindering timely identification and access to legal assistance and other protection services. In addition, observers reported some Vietnamese migrant workers returned without formal victim status certification, which made it difficult for authorities to verify and facilitate access to support and legal assistance. Observers reported concern the government did not have minimum quality standards for protection services administered by service providers. Systemic delays in the government’s approval of licenses and operations challenged NGOs working in Vietnam, including those working on anti-trafficking activities. The government lacked adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims, and observers reported front-line workers, judges, teachers, and medical professionals were poorly trained to address child protection issues, including human trafficking.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The UK Home Office’s 2025 Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on Vietnam noted:

“11.3.5 Further information on the NGO support and services available to victims of trafficking can be found at the following:

- Peace House. Peace House is in Hanoi and is managed by the Centre for Women and Development. They mainly help children and women who are affected by domestic violence or are victims of people trafficking. They can provide shelter.
- Pacific Links Foundation is an international NGO who invest ‘...in at-risk youth to prevent trafficking and help trafficking survivors to build new lives’
- Hagar Vietnam is an international NGO in Vietnam which aims to support women and children affected by trauma particularly from domestic violence and trafficking.
- Alliance Anti-Traffic, is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims to protect women and children in Southeast Asia from sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- Blue Dragon, helps children in crisis throughout Vietnam, including those who have been the victims of trafficking.

[...]

11.3.6 The following NGOs/charities provided elements of welfare support and services. This list is not exhaustive:

- Maison Chance Association ‘Maison Chance operates in Vietnam to provide help to the very poor, underprivileged children and severely disabled. It also supports other charitable organizations having the same missions and those who are lacking the necessary resources.’
- Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA) Vietnam ‘ADRA in Vietnam works with vulnerable communities and people in special needs, so to help improve their opportunities and quality of life.’
- Hue Help Provide shelter for children without parents or children whose parents are unable to care for them.
- Challenge Mission in Asia (CMI Asia) ‘...support and assist orphaned and abandoned children, adolescent and adult singles, and families. ...we assist with housing, finance and equipping for employment.’”

(Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note: trafficking, Vietnam](#), February 2025)

The Blue Dragon Foundation provided the following support to survivors of human trafficking in Vietnam between 2023 and 2024:

“328 victims of human trafficking assisted, including:

- [...]
- 89 victims of human trafficking provided with repatriation and reintegration assistance after being rescued by police

1,402 children and young adults enrolled in school and tertiary education, including:

- [...]
- 23 survivors of human trafficking

101 young adults provided with vocational training, including:

- [...]
- 38 survivors of human trafficking

73 young adults assisted in securing employment, including:

- [...]
- 21 survivors of human trafficking

42,202 people trained on children’s rights and the prevention of trafficking, labour exploitation, child marriage and sexual abuse[...]

(Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation – [Annual Report 2023-2024](#), January 2025, pg.11, last accessed: 11 March 2026)

The 2023 ODI report on Labour Migrants’ vulnerability noted that:

“Vietnamese NGOs provide significant support to victims of trafficking and engage in preventive work. However, only a few are licensed to work on counter-trafficking in Vietnam and their remits are strictly regulated. NGOs focused on human trafficking tend to be limited to providing services and working in partnership with the government.”

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), 30 July 2023, pg.25, last accessed 11 August 2025)

9. How does the government identify, support and protect suspected or known male trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims as well as other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding, and none provided specialized or dedicated services for men or child victims.[...]Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance. The government, in partnership with NGOs, operated three dedicated trafficking shelters for women and children. The government reported officials often placed men referred to trafficking shelters in separate accommodations.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

According to the US Department of State’s 2024 report on Trafficking in Vietnam, although the government assists male trafficking victims who are formally identified, there are no social support facilities providing services for men or child victims exclusively:

“[In 2023] authorities assisted 311 victims, including 116 males and 195 females, of whom an unreported number were members of ethnic minority groups [...] The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims, including other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding and none provided services for men or child victims exclusively.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

The report from a 2019 UK Home Office fact-finding mission to Vietnam includes an interview with the Vietnamese Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, detailing the ministry’s role in relation to the identification and protection of trafficking victims, although this is not specific to men:

“[...] Annex D: Notes of meetings w/ sources

Diplomatic sources met on 25 February, 27 February and 1 March 2019, plus information supplied subsequently (pg.36)
[...]
Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), 27 February 2019
[...]

Could you explain the ministry’s role in relation to human trafficking and the services offered?

The prevention and protecting in relation to trafficking, that role lies with Ministry of Public Security (MPS) MOLISA’s role lies in victim support. The process for victim support is that once someone is identified and received, we provide them with support to recover and rehabilitate within society. In the recovery stage, the victim can stay in the shelter. In the shelter we can provide a health and medical check, accommodation and food. If they want to go back to their home area, we can contact a person in their local area to help them return. [...] (pg.78)

“How many government run shelters are there in Vietnam? [...] There are not specific government run shelters for victims of trafficking in Vietnam. They will stay in the same shelters as other needy people. [...] We do not have separate shelters for women / children / men. When they come in they will be assigned a room. Every year the government will assess and provide a report in order to improve the facilities [...]” (pg.80)

(Source: UK Home Office – [Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission to Vietnam, Conducted between 23 February and 1st March 2019](#), 9 September 2019, pp.78-80, last accessed 11 August 2025)

10. Are there any gaps in support and protection for male trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

An anonymous source, who is an expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South Asia whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 commented that:

“Well in principle there are some. You have short term shelters, but the number of available places is not great, individuals can stay up to 60 days typically, they will get medical care while in facilities, mental health for three months, health insurance up to a year if not already covered, also possible educational and vocational support. Although these things are gender neutral, in practice they are not available to men really, they are geared to women and children. In practice many don’t access support, because they don’t get a victim certificate, and there is very small scale support. On the whole the level of support is not very adequate to support trafficking victims.”

(Source: Anonymous source, interview record, 24 November 2025)

According to the 2025 Blue Dragon report, there is a lack of support for the increasing number of male survivors of trafficking into forced criminality in Vietnam. This is in part because much of the support system is tailored towards women and girls, as recognition of trafficking of men and boys has been low until relatively recently; and also because cultural factors and feelings of shame and guilt may make male trafficking survivors unwilling to accept help and support:

“The emergence of male victims in large numbers has caught Vietnam’s trafficking protection system by surprise, including civil society partners. For example, Vietnam lacks specialised shelters for male survivors. All victims of trafficking, including males, are entitled to emergency support in general social protection centres. However, most of these centres serve a range of different groups – including the elderly, orphans and people with disabilities – and most do not have any specialised training or services for assisting victims of trauma. Much of the survivor protection system is tailored towards assisting women and girls, as they have traditionally made up the vast majority of victims of trafficking.

Male survivors of forced criminality also present other challenges to existing systems. Blue Dragon social workers and psychologists have found that male survivors are less able to express emotional turmoil and accept psychological assistance.

This is a result of a combination of factors: the cultural silence around pain and suffering of men; the inability of men to acknowledge their victimhood and accept psychological help; feelings of shame, guilt and fear arising out of their involvement in criminal acts; and for many the burden of being the breadwinner of their family. Blue Dragon’s data shows that a higher number of male survivors of forced criminality, 69%, refuse post-rescue assistance compared to 56% of male survivors of other forms of exploitation.⁵⁶ The comparison is even more stark when male survivors of forced criminality are compared with female survivors of gendered forms of exploitation (forced marriage and commercial sexual exploitation), of whom only 20% refuse long-term assistance.⁵⁷

Experts from Blue Dragon report that awareness of psychological wellbeing is especially low amongst Vietnamese men. Gendered cultural teachings about manhood in Vietnam encourage stoicism, resulting in silence around men’s feelings and suffering. As a result, men find it more difficult to recognise themselves as victims and express painful and difficult feelings. Further, men are not used to or skilled in taking care of their mental health and therefore do not seek or accept psychological care even upon experiencing traumatic events.

Most male survivors of forced criminality consider themselves as having been tricked into unfortunate situations of labour malpractice rather than victims of organised crimes who rightfully need assistance and care. Many also feel shame and guilt for having put their families under extreme financial stress – especially in cases where they were released upon the payment of a ransom. They frequently feel ashamed of having undertaken criminal acts scamming their compatriots and other unsuspecting people, as well as “survivors guilt” for being free and unable to help others inside scam compounds.

Blue Dragon social workers also find that many survivors refuse long-term assistance due to the urgent need to find a job to pay back debts incurred by survivors and their family members. These debts incurred during the forced scamming experience are most often in addition to their already precarious socioeconomic standing, which is what drives them to find employment in the first place.”

⁵⁶ These findings are based on Blue Dragon’s entire dataset of 604 male victims of which 347 are victims of forced criminality and 257 are victims of other forms of exploitation.
⁵⁷ These findings are based on Blue Dragon’s entire dataset of 1,610 female victims of gendered crimes including forced marriage, commercial sex and trafficking for surrogacy.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 69-71, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]The government did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face retribution or hardship.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

As reported in the DFAT’s 2025 country information report, according to in-country sources support services for male trafficking survivors are not sufficient:

“[...] 3.146 [...] Returnees identified by Vietnamese law enforcement as victims are referred to shelters, which accommodate both short- and long-term residents and provide counselling, training and job placements, among other services. Shelters also monitor victims once they have returned to their communities, including through visits. In-country sources said support services for male victims of trafficking were lacking in comparison”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report: Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.50, last accessed 5 June 2025)

The US Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes that foreign victims of trafficking identified by the government are excluded from long-term support. Assistance provided to trafficking victims by social services lasts up to three months:

“[...]Foreign victims, if identified by the government, were eligible to access essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid, but were excluded from accessing other long-term support such as support for study, vocational training, or an initial financial allowance. The government reported 57 out of 425 social support facilities nationwide assisted trafficking victims, including other vulnerable populations; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding and none provided services for men or child victims exclusively. Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed 25 June 2025)

According to a 2023 country study by ODI, support for male victims is limited, owing to the focus of many organisations on sex trafficking and women and child victims:

“There has been an increase in support services provided by nongovernment or quasi-governmental organisations, although as with the legislation, many of these organisations were formed to respond to sex trafficking. While they have expanded to accommodate a wider focus on trafficking, to include labour trafficking, the focus is still mostly on women and children, with very limited support for men. Activities tend to use the model that has been used for victims of sex trafficking, including shelter, psychosocial support and livelihoods training without considering more innovative approaches to labour exploitation that are more integrated with society rather than withdrawing them.” (pp.9-10)

“Additional assistance is available from NGOs, but because this was initially designed to support women and children, whereas victims of labour exploitation are primarily men, specific support for labour trafficking, and particularly support to male victims, is still limited. Loss of livelihoods because of trauma and lack of support can lead to repeat migration, despite the risks, as there is still a need to earn an income.” (pg.44)

(Source: Overseas Development Institute – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pp.10-44, last accessed 5 June 2025)

6.4 Education and Employment

Cross reference with:

- Section 3.4 (Re-trafficking Risk Factors)
- Section 3.5 (Male Survivors)
- Section 4 (Witness Protection)
- Section 5 (Shelters and Healthcare)

11. Do vocational training and employment opportunities exist for young trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), provides information about returnees to Vietnam:

“5.52 Returnees – including failed asylum seekers, labour migrants and trafficking victims – may experience reintegration difficulties, although these are not state-imposed. Difficulties may include unemployment or underemployment, challenges accessing government services and, in the case of trafficking victims, social stigma. Some returnees may have accumulated large debts, including to loan sharks, to fund their travel from Vietnam, which they may have difficulty repaying. The experiences described in this paragraph are not uniform: some returnees, including failed asylum applicants, report making smooth transitions. In-country sources reported in October 2024 that, should they need it, returnees could seek

support from Migrant Resource Centres managed by the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, although the scope of these services was opaque.”

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pg.71, last accessed: 18 June 2025)

Article 24 of Decree Number: 162/2025/ND-CP, which details regulations on the *Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat 2024* came into force from July 1, 2025, provides the following guidance on vocational training for Vietnamese nationals, stateless individuals residing in Vietnam, and accompanying persons under 18 years of age:

“[...]Article 24. Assistance for education, vocational training, and initial allowance

1. Assistance beneficiaries:

Human trafficking victims who are Vietnamese nationals, stateless individuals residing in Vietnam, and accompanying persons under 18 years of age.

2. Assistance:

- a) Victims under Clause 1 of this Article below 18 years of age and accompanying persons under 18 years of age shall, for the duration of stay at social support facilities and human trafficking victim support facilities, be enabled to pursue education;
- b) Victims under Clause 1 of this Article below 18 years of age and accompanying persons under 18 years of age shall, upon returning to community and pursuing further education, be exempted from tuition, course book and studying supply procurement costs for the first school year and the next year in accordance with regulations of the Government on tuition collection and management in education institutions within national education system and policies on studying cost exemption, reduction;
- c) Victims who are Vietnamese nationals or stateless individuals residing in Vietnam shall, upon return to residence, be eligible for a lump-sum allowance equivalent to the minimum region-based salaries according to regulations of the Government applicable on the date on which competent authorities issue notice of confirmation of a human trafficking victim;
- d) Victims who are Vietnamese nationals or stateless individuals residing in Vietnam shall, upon return to residence and pursuing vocational education and training, be eligible for vocational education and training arrangement or a lump-sum assistance of vocational education and training costs. The lump-sum assistance varies by corresponding short-term vocational training costs at local vocational training facilities to a maximum amount prescribed by the Ministry of Finance under regulations on management and use of entry-level training expenditure with less than 3 months in training duration.

3. Agency implementing support:⁸⁹

- a) Social support facilities and human trafficking victim support facilities shall provide assistance in accordance with Point a Clause 2 of this Article;
 - b) Departments of Health shall provide assistance in accordance with Points b, c, and d Clause 2 of this Article.
4. Procedures for providing assistance in education, vocational education and training, and initial lump-sum assistance
- a) Application for assistance in education, vocational education and training, and initial lump-sum assistance
- Application for assistance in education filed by family members of victims under 18 years of age or family members of accompanying persons under 18 years of age; application for assistance in vocational education and training, initial lump-sum assistance filed by victims or family members of victims (if victims are below 18 years of age) using Form No. 7 under Appendix attached hereto.
- b) Handling procedures and time limit:
- Victims or family members of victims shall submit application under Point a Clause 4 of this Article to commune-level People’s Committees of administrative divisions of their residence;
- Chairpersons of commune-level People’s Committees shall, within 3 working days from the date on which they receive the application, send request to authorities affiliated to Departments of Health;
- Within 3 working days from the date on which authorities affiliated to Departments of Health receive adequate request sent

⁸⁹ Note this text,specifically “Agency implementing support:” in clause 3 of Article 24 of the Decree number: 162/2025/ND-CP is a google translation, provided to Asylos, and is cited here for context as the translation on Vietnam Law Library does not translate this point.

by commune-level People’s Committees, authorities affiliated to Departments of Health shall consider and decide (in case of assistance for education, authorities affiliated to Departments of Health shall take charge and cooperate with authorities affiliated to Departments of Education and Training before submitting request to directors of Departments of Health);[...]"

(Source: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, published by Vietnam Law Library⁹⁰ – [Decree, Detailed Regulations On A Number Of Articles And Measures For Implementing The Law On Prevention And Combat Of Human Trafficking, \(Number: 162/2025/ND-CP\)](#), Hanoi, 29 June 2025, Full translation by Vietnam Law Library for a subscription fee)

A report by UNICEF, ‘Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam,’ published in April 2023, noted that:

“[...]Low levels of education and a lack of easily accessible vocational training is a barrier to children accessing safe, legal employment. Children are forced to seek employment in lower skilled jobs in informal industries, which puts them at higher risk of exploitation. However, some businesses are providing training to young people to enable them to secure non-exploitative, legal employment.²⁸”

28 Interview with business leader, Feb 28 2022

(Source: UNICEF – [Case Study, Migration and Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation, Drivers of child trafficking and exploitation in the context of migration in Viet Nam](#), April 2023, pg.7, last accessed 6 July 2025)

In this 2022 research report titled ‘*The Impact of Covid-19 Response Policies on Select Vulnerable Groups in Vietnam*’, the authors Thao Do and Eric Kasper explained that:

“[...]Covid-19 has affected the reintegration process of survivors of trafficking.

Trafficking survivors who have been on vocational training programs have lost their jobs due to the impact of Covid-19, particularly in the tourism, hospitality, and beauty industries. Those who enrolled in school after being rescued faced disruptions when schools were closed (VietnamNews 2021b). According to many NGO staff, psychological support offered to survivors, especially survivors of sexual exploitation, has had to be organised online, which they feel is less effective and has little impact (RPs one and three). Many faced additional challenges obtaining a ‘certificate of victim’⁴, without which they could not receive initial support or other relief packages for victims of trafficking during the Covid period (RP four). Therefore, many survivors have faced compounded hardships because of the Covid response policies, which have made it more difficult to get identified, receive services, heal, and find a foundation from which they can earn a livelihood without excessive risk of exploitation or retrafficking (UNODC 2020).”

4 Victims need to be verified by law enforcement officials by the investigation process in order to be considered as victims of trafficking. The process can take up to two or three years.

(Source: Institute of Development Studies | Do, T. and Kasper, E. – [The Impact of Covid-19 Response Policies on Select Vulnerable Groups in Vietnam](#), May 2022, pg.28, last accessed 5 August 2025)

In the 2022 ASEAN report, the following challenges was reported:

“Challenge:¹⁰⁰

Successful reintegration of victims of trafficking in Vietnam remains challenging. Many victims have limited literacy and do not meet certain requirements to attend vocational training. Some are unable to complete the entire training due to lack of motivation and patience. For others, the duration of the training is too short to allow them to acquire proper skills. Therefore, many victims continue to face difficulties in finding suitable jobs with stable income. This is made more difficult when victims live in remote/rural areas with limited local job opportunities.”

90 Note: This translation is made by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and for reference purposes only. Its copyright is owned by THU’ VIỆN PHÁP LUẬT and protected under Clause 2, Article 14 of the Law on Intellectual Property

(Source: ASEAN – [ASEAN Do-No-Harm Guide for Frontline Responders: Safeguarding the Rights of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#), 2022, pg.63, last accessed: 30 May 2025)

12. Is there any evidence that young returnees face barriers in accessing higher education and vocational training?

Limited information could be found on this question from the sources consulted.

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“I lack the specific database to answer this, but based on the 39 Essex case, many lack stable documentation, complicating school re-enrollment and vocational training. Poor provinces offer limited, short programs poorly linked to labor demand, with inconsistent job placement and mentoring. Stigma and domestic expectations hinder girls and minority youths. Decree 162/2025 supports education and vocational aid for victims, but slow implementation and limited capacity cause disengagement.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

In an webpage article of 26 September 2024 titled ‘Global call for for investment in youth education and equip young changemakers with skills to combat trafficking in persons in the digital age’, IOM Vietnam stated that:

“[...]On the occasion of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons (30 July) 2024, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)’s Chief of Mission in Viet Nam, Ms Park Mi-Hyung, joined the Ambassadors from Australia, the European Union, the U.K. and the U.S and Counsellor from Canada to deliver a joint letter to Vietnamese youths, in which they call more investment in youth education to empower them with knowledge and skills.

Inspired by the letter of President Ho Chi Minh to the youth, the joint letter hopes to inspire the youth to fully unleash their endless power to confront immediate threats of human trafficking and inspire them to lead a global movement for transformative change.

This is also a chance to shine a spotlight on children – who represent a significant proportion of trafficking victims worldwide, with girls affected most of all. According to UNODC, an average of one in three victims of human trafficking globally is a child – although in some regions, the proportion is much higher – and children are twice as likely as adults to face violence while being trafficked.

IOM’s research also shows that no age group, gender or nationality is immune. Family members or friends are involved in more than 50 per cent of cases. And ever-evolving online platforms are making it easier for traffickers to exploit children while avoiding detection.”

(Source: IOM Viet Nam – [Global call for for investment in youth education and equip young changemakers with skills to combat trafficking in persons in the digital age](#), 26 September 2024, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

13. What government and NGO programs exist to support young returnees in finding safe employment?

This 2020 review prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP⁹¹ by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance, noted that:

“7.4 Special considerations for trafficked children in Viet Nam
[...]

Table #27
Legal and policy instruments in the provision of assistance to child trafficking victims in Viet Nam

Form of assistance	Legal and policy instrument
Education, training and life skills	Article 16 and 98 of the Children Law set out the right to education, study and development of talent, “so that [children] can have a comprehensive development and promote their ability in the best way”. That article grants children “equal opportunity for study and education, and developing their talent, creation and invention”. Disabled children are also entitled to special assistance, caring and education for rehabilitation (Article 35). Article 44 further guarantees education, with the government committing to formulating policies so that all children can go to school, including through policies to support disadvantaged children. The government also commits to implement policies to universalize preschool education for children at five years old (Article 44(5).

(Source: NEXUS Institute – [Trafficking Victim Protection Frameworks in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam: A Resource for Practitioners](#), 2020, pg.106, last accessed 23 February 2026)

The Australian Government’s Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Country Report for 2022, stated that:

“[...]3.146 The Government of Vietnam and CSOs rescue and repatriate victims trafficked to other countries and, once returned to Vietnam, provide services to support their social reintegration, in accordance with the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat (2024). Available services include a national hotline, safe housing, financial assistance, medical support, mental health counselling, vocational training, internships, job placements and legal aid. Vietnam’s Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, in partnership with CSOs, and the Vietnam Women’s Union operate dedicated shelters for women and children human trafficking victims, although these are few. DFAT is aware of at least one such shelter in northwest Vietnam, near the border with China. Returnees identified by Vietnamese law enforcement as victims are referred to shelters, which accommodate both short- and long-term residents and provide counselling, training and job placements, among other services. Shelters also monitor victims once they have returned to their communities, including through visits. In-country sources said support services for male victims of trafficking were lacking in comparison.”

(Source: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report; Vietnam](#), 19 February 2025, pp.49-50, last accessed: 29 May 2025)

In its 2023-3024 annual report, Blue Deragon presented information although it was not clear if this was specific to young returnees:

“73 young adults assisted in securing employment, including:
[...]
21 survivors of human trafficking”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Annual Report July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024](#), pg.11, last accessed 1 August 2025)

In its 2022-2023 annual report, Blue Dragon reported on the assistance it provides to young people , although it was not clear if this was specific to young returnees:

⁹¹ This review was prepared by NEXUS Institute under USAID Asia CTIP by Winrock and implementing partners NEXUS Institute, Liberty Shared and Resonance. [...]Preparing young people for a successful post-school life is a crucial part of Blue Dragon’s work. The Careers Department works with teens aged 15 and over from across all of our programs to nurture their soft skills and job-seeking capabilities, as well as their access to vocational training, tertiary education and employment. In 2022-2023, our careers advisors provided activities that foster cross-border coordination and consolidated action by governments, civil society, and business; develop opportunities for private sector leadership; and improve understanding of the nature and patterns of human trafficking, especially in the agriculture, fishing, domestic work and construction sectors.

individual and group counselling, careers preparation training and visits to employers and training providers on behalf of more than 2,000 youth. A total of 149 students studied at the tertiary level funded by scholarships from Blue Dragon. 41 of these students graduated in the 2022-2023 academic year.

[...]

54 young adults secured employment, including:

[...]

12 survivors of human trafficking”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Annual Report 2022-2023](#), pg.3, last accessed 1 August 2025)

14. Are there reported cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities?

From the sources consulted no new information could be found on specific cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities.

In a series of written responses to questions sent by Asylos for this report, Dr Hai Luong who we corresponded with for this report in March 2026, noted that:

“I lack the specific database to answer this question. However, based on long-term observations from the 39 Essex case (2019), I remain concerned about young returnees with unpaid migration debts, disrupted education, and no targeted reintegration support who often attempt repeat migration or accept high-risk jobs, leading to pathways back into exploitation. Studies and case material show that debt bondage, coercive “repayment” demands, and recruiter pressure (often through acquaintances) are common triggers, while provincial services rarely provide sustained vocational support.”

(Source: Dr Hai Luong, written communication with Asylos, 26 March 2026)

As reported in Asylos’ 2020 report, it was documented that:

“6.2. Household Registration System

6.2.1. Household Registration System: General information (non-gender or age specific)

The following sources describe the Household Registration System, also referred to as ‘Ho Khau’, to which citizens need to be registered with in order to access social services:

[...] Conditions for returnees [...] Returnees, including failed asylum seekers, labour migrants and trafficking victims, typically face a range of difficulties upon return. These include unemployment or underemployment, and challenges accessing social services, particularly in cases where household.” registration has ceased [...] (pg.111)

(Source: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Country Information Report Vietnam](#), 13 December 2019, pg.44)

[...]

“7.1. Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking and/or being subjected to reprisals: General information (gender-neutral) (pg.114)

The following sources highlight the issues that increase the possibility of re-trafficking, namely economic, social and psychological problems on return, as well as not accessing support upon return:

[...] So the victims always face a risk of being re-trafficked because we need to understand why they were trafficked. For example, were they looking for a job, an opportunity and they got returned? Normally the victims do face a lot of economical, and social, and psychological issues when they are returned. So being re-trafficked so the exploitation can happen, or even

become a trafficker. This is the context for many Vietnamese victims trafficked to China. Often many return and become a trafficker themselves so that’s also the danger also to the society that is a vicious circle that also impact and affects many people [...] But the risk of re-trafficking is quite prevalent when a victim returns and can’t receive or is unable to receive the support and end up facing a lot of mostly, economic difficulties. Upon return, VoTs usually feel low self-esteem, due to shortage of economic, financial, family support...They are therefore very vulnerable for any fraudulent promises to help. And discrimination, of course, is one of the sources that puts the victim into isolation and they’re unable to receive the support [...] (pg.115)

(Source: Hong Thi Tran, interview record, 20 November 2019)

[...]
 [...] 7.2. Challenges with reintegration [...] [...] Finally, the challenges faced by survivors in reintegrating into their communities were often compounded by the factors such as poverty and lack of economic opportunity that made them vulnerable to trafficking in the first place. Stakeholders explained that reintegration is unlikely to succeed when underlying vulnerabilities are not addressed, and that this may lead to re-trafficking in some cases [...] (pg.115)

(Source: Coram International, [Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam](#), June 2019, p.61)

Bernie Gravett, Anti Trafficking Expert Specialist Policing Consultancy interviewed for this report, explained how the situation of victims of trafficking returned to Vietnam with a debt increased their risk of being re-trafficked: [...] If they’re [VoT] carrying a debt, and the majority are. They are carrying the debt of that 20,000 US dollars to come to the UK, then that debt still exists. And the Black society, or their traffickers, will hunt them down and they’ve still got to pay off that debt. So how do they do that? They still haven’t got a farm. They still are struggling to get housing. They can’t access work because you can’t get work without a national identity card. So they’re ripe for being re trafficked [...]” (pg.123)

(Source: Bernie Gravett, interview record, 1 November 2019)

(Source: Asylos – [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking, trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking](#), 6 May 2020, pp.111-114-115), last accessed 6 August 2025)

Section 7. Trends and Emerging Issues

7.1 Changes in Prevalence and Demographics

1. How has the overall prevalence of human exploitation (e.g., forced labour, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking) changed in Vietnam over the last five years? If so, why?

In the 2025 Country Information Report published by the DFAT, the current prevalence of human trafficking from Vietnam is summarised as follows:

“Vietnam is primarily a source country for human trafficking. In-country sources reported in October 2023 that most victims were trafficked in Asia (primarily China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan), usually for forced marriage, forced labour or forced criminality. Some victims are trafficked to the Middle East and Europe, including Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Czechia and Serbia (usually migrant workers in debt bondage). According to in-country sources, traffickers used Vietnam’s land borders, which were largely unpatrolled, as their primary travel routes (air routes were less commonly used). Traffickers increasingly use social media (which is widespread in Vietnam) and online gaming to lure victims.” (pg.48)

The same report also notes the issue of organ harvesting and trafficking:

“DFAT is aware of reports that criminal syndicates run organ trafficking rings in Asia as part of their human trafficking operations. [...] The profile of organ harvesting and trafficking victims is often, though not always, the same as that of victims of human trafficking: female, of an ethnic minority, rural, poor and less educated. Victims are reportedly targeted through social media. 3.150 Victim-survivors of organ harvesting and trafficking are at high risk of medical complications and related costs; some have died. The money that victim-survivors receive for their organs, if paid at all, is unlikely to cover costs for medical complications.” (pg.50)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pg.50, last accessed 13 April 2025)

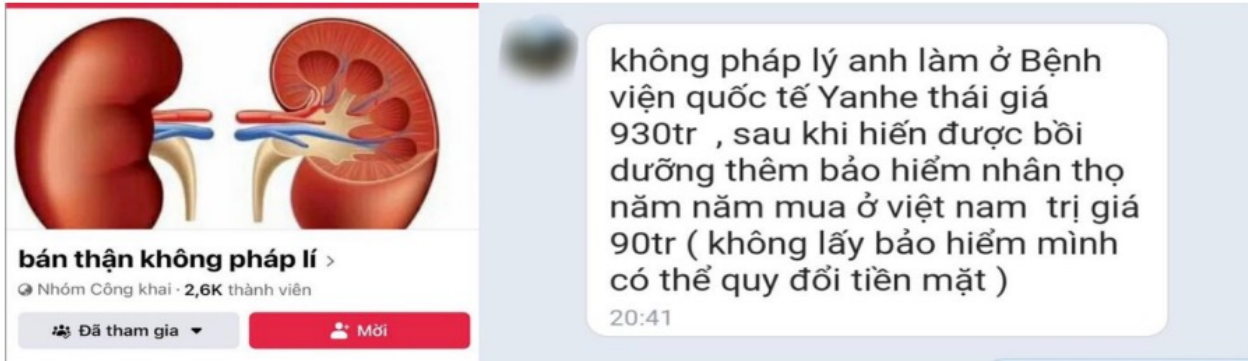
Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁹² and Hieu Minh Ngo⁹³ noted in their 2024 journal article:

“[...] Scammers and traffickers are now using the trick of buying kidneys at high prices to trick people who want to sell their kidneys illegally across the border and become victims of human trafficking crimes. Through social networking sites such as Facebook, Zalo, and Telegram, they promise to buy kidneys for hundreds of millions of VND. They lure victims in by promising a simple procedure, and financial bonuses with optional benefits combined with lifetime services (see Figure 6)⁹⁴. With this trick, they have deceived many people who are in difficult economic situations and trust them to accept the offer. Then, they guide the victims to the Mien Dong Bus Station in Ho Chi Minh City, before sending a car to pick them up and take them to the Moc Bai International Border Gate, Tay Ninh.[...]”(pg.11)

⁹² School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia

⁹³ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

⁹⁴ Figure 6. A translated text from Vietnamese to English. Left: Facebook’s public group (2.6k members joined)—Sell Kidney without Legal Barriers. Right: @NOLAW: I work at the YANHE International Hospital. The price is VND 930 million (around USD 40,000). After transplanting your kidney, we will offer money (Source: <https://congan.kontum.gov.vn/an-ninh-trat-tu/canh-giac-voi-toi-phammua-ban-nguoi-qua-thu-doan-mua-than-gia-cao-.html> (assessed on 10 August 2024) [Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available])



(pg.12)

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective](#), 21 November 2024, pp.11-12)

With regard to economic exploitation, Washington D.C. based NGO Freedom House noted prevalent trends in its 2024 country report:

“Vietnamese migrant workers are vulnerable to recruitment for forced labor abroad in a variety of industries, and debt bondage has been prevalent in recent years. Enforcement of legal safeguards against child labor and exploitative or hazardous working conditions remains poor.”

(Source: Freedom House – [Freedom in the World 2024: Vietnam](#), 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

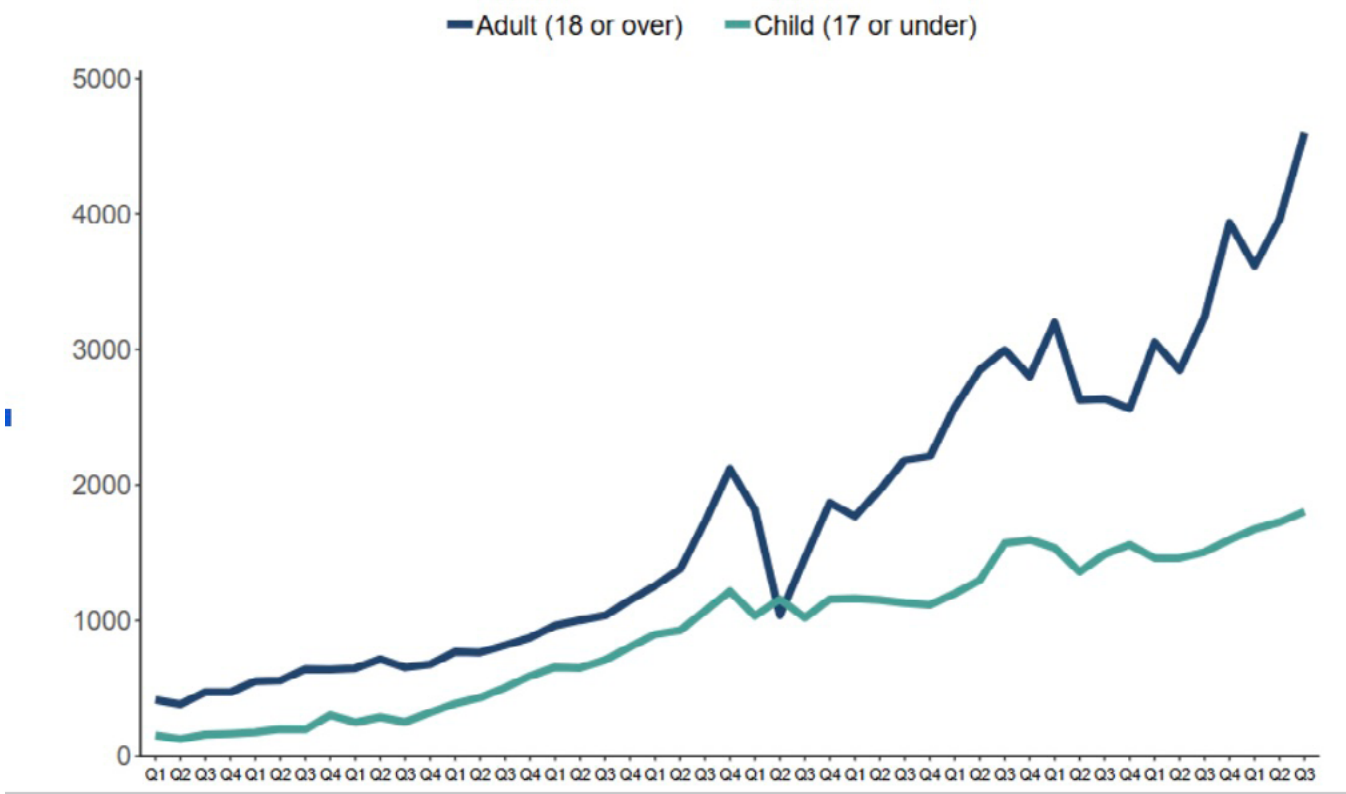
2. Have the demographics of trafficking victims (age, gender, background) changed in Vietnam over the last five years? If so, why and how?

Age

Official statistics from the UK Home Office, for quarter 3 of 2025 (July to September), noted that :

“[...]Of all referrals this quarter, 72% (4,598) were adults at age of referral (compared to 70% in the previous quarter), whilst 28% (1,803) were children (compared to 30% in the previous quarter) (figure 3). The age at referral was unknown in 13 cases.”

Figure 3: Number of quarterly NRM referrals by age of referral



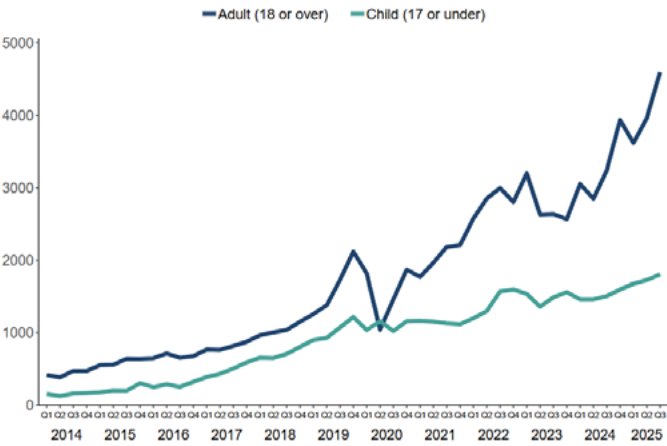
(Source: UK Government – [Modern slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK](#), quarter 3 2025 - July to September, updated 29 December 2025, last accessed 14 February 2026)

The 2025 Blue Dragon report on human trafficking into forced criminality noted that:

“[...]Previously understood trends about the gender, age and ethnicity of trafficking victims do not apply to forced criminality, making this new data very important to understanding the nature of victimisation for this particular form of exploitation.

Figure 3: Number of quarterly NRM referrals by age of referral

number of male victims, from 5 in 2022 to 68 in 2024. The



Source: SCA, IECA
including sexual abuse. It is also notable that the court documents recognise that one of the victims was transgender – the first time such information has been recorded in a court ruling.

e children between 15 and 18. Of the female victims, 14
l 18.

cked of forced criminality is adult males. This finding is
m forced criminality from 2022 to 2024, which finds that
most vulnerable to being trafficked of forced criminality.²⁹
ality in Vietnam and elsewhere, which indicates that adult

times, it is not negligible. Although this particular dataset
minality assisted by Blue Dragon report having also been
are therefore vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation,

Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic groups. The Kinh, as the majority ethnic group, represents 85.3% of Vietnam’s population, while the country’s 53 ethnic minority groups comprise 14.7% of the total population.³¹

Historically, trafficking in all its forms has disproportionately affected Vietnam’s ethnic minorities, especially women and girls. This, however, is not the observed pattern within forced criminality. Data shows that Kinh people, who make up the majority of the Vietnamese population, also make up the majority of victims of forced criminality, 85 cases (65.4%). Only 24 (27.7%) victims belong to four different ethnic minorities. Of the four ethnic minorities, the Thai account for the largest share of victims at 18.5%. There is no information on the ethnic origin of 9 (6.9%) victims. This trend indicates that traffickers are now exploiting economic hardship and job insecurity across a much wider demographic.

Findings pertaining to the disproportionate vulnerability of Kinh and Thai victims are mirrored in the data about victims rescued by Blue Dragon between 2022 and 2024, which shows that 54.4% of victims of forced criminality were Kinh while 18.2% were Thai.³²

An important factor to examine is the vulnerability of each ethnic group based on their population size, as Vietnam’s ethnic groups make up only a small percentage of the country’s population. As per this dataset, Thai and J’rai are both 13 times more vulnerable to forced criminality than the Kinh, while the Dao and the H’mong are 3.3 and 1.4 times more vulnerable than the Kinh, respectively.³³ It is important to note, however, that all the J’rai people were trafficked as a group by the same traffickers, thus this may not be representative of the true vulnerability of this community.

²⁹ Le, Wyndham, and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’
³⁰ See for example Freedom Collaborative, ‘Freedom Collaborative Data Spotlight on Trafficking of forced criminality’, accessed 19 June 2025, <https://data.freedomcollaborative.org/trafficking-for-forced-criminality/>
³¹ General Statistics Office (GSO), ‘Completed Results of the 2019 Viet Nam Population and Housing Census’ (GSO, 2020), www.nso.gov.vn/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ket-qua-toan-bo-Tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-2019.pdf
³² Le, Wyndham, and Mukhopadhyay, ‘Caught in Crisis’
³³ These calculations are based on the 2019 census.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Scamming to Survive: Shedding light on the trafficking of Vietnamese people into forced criminality](#), September 2025, pp. 22-25, last accessed 13 March 2026)

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Other reports suggest many children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking, with children from rural and vulnerable communities at particularly high risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in street hawking and begging in major urban centers and urban family homes.[...]”

Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse travel to Vietnam to exploit children; many of the perpetrators reportedly originate from elsewhere in Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes the following forms of exploitation of children in Vietnam:

“[...] reports suggest many children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking, with children from rural and underserved communities at particularly high risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in street hawking and begging in major urban centers, and in forced or bonded labor in brick factories, and urban family homes. [...] Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands,

including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse, reportedly from elsewhere in Asia, the UK, other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, exploit children in Vietnam.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 June 2025)

The 2023 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report notes:

“[...]Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to commercial sex establishments on the borders of the PRC, Cambodia, and Laos, or elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe. Traffickers exploit an increasing number of Vietnamese women and girls in sex trafficking in Burma.[...]

Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children – including unhoused children and children with disabilities – in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases. One study indicates 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam are members of ethnic minority communities. Another suggests 5.6 percent of children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking or in the context of migration, with children from rural and underserved communities at particularly high risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in the garment sector, in street hawking and begging in major urban centers, and in forced or bonded labor in brick factories, urban family homes, and privately run rural gold mines. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas and a rising number of women from middle class and urban settings. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Child sex tourists, reportedly from elsewhere in Asia, the UK, other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, exploit children in Vietnam.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 15 June 2023, last accessed 19 June 2025)

A Vietnam-based NGO reports that trends that emerged during the pandemic continued to be significant into 2023:

“Preliminary data from 2023 confirms that the trends that emerged during the pandemic, such as the increased exploitation among homeless youth and the upsurge in human trafficking in Cambodia and Myanmar, notably into large-scale scam compounds, remain significant threats today. The number of victims continues to be very high, with Blue Dragon involved in the rescue and repatriation of 202 human trafficking victims and the assistance of 137 new children and youth on the streets of Hanoi between January and September 30, 2023.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.32)

The 2022 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report noted that:

“[...]Traffickers exploit Vietnamese women and children in sex trafficking overseas, misleading many victims with fraudulent employment opportunities and transferring them to brothel operators on the borders of the PRC, Cambodia, and Laos, or to elsewhere in Asia, West Africa, and Europe. An increasing number of Vietnamese women and girls are reportedly subjected to sex trafficking in Burma.[...]

Within the country, pandemic-related unemployment, restrictions on movement, and other socio-economic stressors are increasing vulnerabilities to trafficking, particularly for women and children in rural areas and among ethnic minorities. Traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children—including unhoused children and children with disabilities—in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases. One study indicates 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam are members of ethnic minority communities. Another suggests 5.6 percent of children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking or in the context of migration, with children from rural and underserved communities at particularly high risk.

Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in the garment sector, in street hawking and begging in major urban centers, and in forced or bonded labor in brick factories, urban family homes, and privately-run rural gold mines. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas and a rising number of women from middle class and urban settings. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Child sex tourists, reportedly from elsewhere in Asia, the UK, other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States, exploit children in Vietnam.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 19 July 2022, last accessed 18 February 2026)

According to this 2021 ECPAT report, service providers reported a prevalence of cases of children with indicators of trafficking, the most common nationality being Vietnamese:

“From October 2020 to October 2021, the Scottish Guardianship Service (SGS) received 124 referrals, with 44 of the children referred having trafficking indicators. The long-term nature of the support provided by the SGS means that the service is still working with 385 open cases. Vietnamese nationals remain the highest nationality of children referred to the service and labour exploitation remains the most common type of exploitation experienced, accounting for 38% of referrals, followed by criminal exploitation at 25% (down from 35% last year).

Over the past year the SGS has seen an increase in the proportion of young people who are criminally exploited being charged with crimes. In 2016-2017, 20 potential trafficking survivors were charged with offences. Between April to December 2020, this increased to 27 individuals (including six children), and between January to March 2021 alone a further 42 individuals were charged (again, six were children).⁵³ The service is very concerned that currently more victims of human trafficking face criminal justice processes than traffickers.”

(Source: ECPAT UK – [Child Trafficking in the UK 2021: A Snapshot, December 2021](#), last accessed 13 June 2025)

The 2021 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report noted:

“[...]Within the country, traffickers are sometimes parents, family members, or small-scale networks exploiting Vietnamese men, women, and children—including street children and children with disabilities—in forced labor, although little information is available on these cases. One study suggests 5.6 percent of children in Vietnam may experience coercion or exploitation indicative of trafficking or in the context of migration, with children from rural and deprived communities particularly at risk. Traffickers exploit children and adults in forced labor in the garment sector, where workers are coerced to work through threats and intimidation. Traffickers force children into street hawking and begging in major urban centers. Traffickers subject some children to forced or bonded labor in brick factories, urban family homes, and privately run rural gold mines. Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas and a rising number of women from middle class and urban settings. Traffickers increasingly exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service, by channeling their criminal activities through the traditional practice of bride kidnapping. In 2020, pandemic-related issues such as decreased employment opportunities, restrictions on movement, and other socio-economic stressors, increased the vulnerability to trafficking, particularly for women and children in rural areas and ethnic minorities. Child sex tourists, reportedly from elsewhere in Asia, the UK and other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States exploit children in Vietnam. The North Korean government may have forced North Koreans to work in Vietnam.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 1 July 2021, last accessed 18 February 2026)

Gender

In 2025, the DFAT notes the following risk of trafficking based on disability, gender, ethnicity, age, and socio-economic background. At the same time, it notes that demographics of trafficking victims in Vietnam are not limited to people who are economically vulnerable or ethnic minorities:

“The prevalence of disability is higher among Vietnamese women and girls than men and boys, and they are also more likely to fall victim to human trafficking. [...] In-country sources, speaking in October 2023, said women and girls were most likely to be trafficked, usually for forced marriage, although men and boys were trafficked, too, usually for forced labour or forced criminality. Ethnic minorities face the greatest risk of human trafficking: according to international NGO analysis, ethnic minorities are three times more likely to be trafficked than Kinh (relative to their population, the Hmong are most affected). Victims of human trafficking tend to be economically vulnerable, possess limited education and young (international NGO analysis found the average age of victims in 2021 was 19.2). Most originate from mountainous regions along Vietnam’s northern border with China and the southern Mekong River Delta region. Nevertheless, human trafficking is not specific to ethnic minorities and the poor, and victims have included educated young students and recent graduates from middle-class backgrounds, including Kinh.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pp.43-48, last accessed 13 April 2025)

According to the DFAT 2025 report, several factors have contributed to a gender imbalance in Vietnam which could create conditions for increased trafficking of women and girls for marriage into Vietnam. The report states:

“3.117 Historically, Vietnamese parents have preferred sons to daughters because they were considered to enhance the social status of parents. Traditional views held that sons and men carried on the family name and traditions, earned more financially, and cared for ageing parents who lacked social protection. Son preference remains an ongoing issue, and while the Law on Gender Equality (2006) prohibits sex selection and abortion on the basis of a foetus’ gender, these practices continue to occur. In 2023, Vietnam had the third-highest rate globally of gender-biased sex selection at birth, with 112 boys born for every 100 girls (behind only China and India). Revealing the gender of a foetus is illegal although, in practice, it is common for doctors, if requested, to inform a couple indirectly during a scan. Vietnam has one of the highest abortion rates in the world, with girls accounting for most aborted foetuses; in 2020, the UNFPA estimated Vietnam had a yearly deficit of 46,000 girls. Many Vietnamese women emigrate for marriage, particularly to East Asia (where they account for most marriage migrants), contributing to the gender imbalance. By 2034, Vietnam is projected to have 1.5 million more men than women (and 2.5 million more men than women by 2059). In-country sources said the gender imbalance could promote the trafficking of women and girls for marriage into Vietnam.”(pp.43-44)

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pp.43-44, last accessed 13 April 2025)

The increased risks of trafficking for LGBTQI+ individuals in Vietnam is noted in the 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam:

“Widespread social stigma increases LGBTQI+ individuals’ vulnerability to trafficking.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

In November 2021, UN experts specifically called to attention the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls into Saudi Arabia as domestic workers:

““We are seeing traffickers targeting Vietnamese women and girls living in poverty, many of whom are already vulnerable and marginalised,” they said. “Traffickers operate with impunity”.

After signing on with labour recruitment companies in Viet Nam, some girls and women found themselves sexually abused, beaten and subjected to torture and other cruel treatment by employers once they arrived in Saudi Arabia, the experts said. Often the women were denied food and medical treatment, not paid at all, or paid less than stipulated in their contracts. [...]

The experts said they had received “truly alarming allegations” that some companies in Viet Nam recruited girls as domestic workers and forged their age on identity documents to hide the fact they were children.

They cited the case of one 15-year-old Vietnamese girl who became ill because of beatings inflicted by her employer, who also denied her food and medical treatment. She arranged to return home but died before she could board her flight back to Viet Nam. Because her documents had been forged by the labour recruitment agency, her family has not yet been able to get her body returned home.”

(Source: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – [Viet Nam and Saudi Arabia: UN experts call for protection of trafficked workers](#), 4 November 2021, last accessed 24 June 2025)

Background

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that:

“[...]Identified victims included 169 members of ethnic minority communities, or 34 percent of the total victims identified. Ethnic minorities constitute approximately 15 percent of Vietnam’s population. The government did not formally identify any foreign national trafficking victims for the third consecutive year. Despite widespread government, NGO, and international organization reporting of traffickers exploiting thousands of Vietnamese nationals in forced labor and forced criminality in online scam operations in Southeast Asia, the government did not report how many victims from such operations it identified.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – [2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

Regarding the ethnicity of trafficking victims in Vietnam, the U.S. Department of State notes in its 2024 report the following change:

“A previous study indicated 80 percent of known trafficking victims in Vietnam were members of ethnic minority communities; however, NGOs report an increasing number of Kinh ethnic majority members trafficked into forced labor.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 June 2025)

U.S. Department of State’s 2024 Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes the ways in which labour exploitation takes place both within Vietnam and affects Vietnamese nationals abroad:

“As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam, and traffickers exploit victims from Vietnam abroad. Sixty-nine percent of workers are employed in the informal economy where labor laws are not effectively enforced, increasing vulnerability to trafficking. Vietnamese men and women migrate abroad for work informally, including through illicit brokerage networks operated by other Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or through state-owned or state-regulated labor recruitment enterprises; approximately 155,000 Vietnamese workers went abroad under contracts in 2023 alone. Some recruitment companies are unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation, and some charge excessive fees, increasing workers’ vulnerability to forced labor through debt-based coercion. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, ROK, Laos, Japan, and in some parts of the Middle East, and Europe – such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Iceland – including in nail salons and on cannabis farms.

[...]

North Korean nationals working in Vietnam may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor. [...] Cuban government-affiliated workers, including medical professionals, in Vietnam may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

The same 2024 report further notes the labour exploitation of Vietnamese nationals by various organisations abroad, including Vietnam’s diplomatic service, training programs in Japan and Israel, and the Belt and Road Initiative:

“Vietnamese traffickers, including two members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service, reportedly exploited Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in Saudi Arabia; the diplomats in this case were recalled and investigated. Many Vietnamese nationals are exploited in forced labor under the auspices of Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program and in agricultural education programs in Israel. Vietnamese nationals endure restricted freedom of movement, travel and identity document confiscation, threats of physical violence, poor living and working conditions, contract irregularities, fraudulent recruitment, and punitive deportation at PRC national-owned factories affiliated with the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Balkan region.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also notes their concern about continuing trafficking of Vietnamese women from ethnic minority groups:

“While noting the efforts of the State party to prevent trafficking in persons, including those made under the national programme to prevent such trafficking for the period 2021–2025, the Committee is deeply concerned that the majority of victims of trafficking for forced labour, in particular for domestic work and marriage, continue to be women belonging to ethnic minority groups residing in the North-West Highlands.”

(Source: UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of Viet Nam](#), 27 December 2023, pg.8)

In a 2022 article published in the Anti-trafficking Review⁹⁵, titled ‘*What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam*’, based on an analysis of over 100 human trafficking court cases in Vietnam, the authors Le Thi Hong Luong and Dr Caitlin Wyndham noted that:

“[...]Analysis of the Blue Dragon database of over 1,600 victims indicates that H’mong people are fourteen times more likely to be trafficked than the Kinh Vietnamese majority people.¹⁸ The same is true for traffickers, with H’mong people more vulnerable to perpetrating human trafficking.”

¹⁸ L T H Le and C Wyndham, What Makes People Vulnerable to Human Trafficking?, Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation,Hanoi, 2021, <https://www.bluedragon.org/profile-of-victims-of-human-trafficking-in-vietnam>
[Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available]

(Source: L T H Le and C Wyndham – ‘[What We Know about Human Traffickers in Vietnam](#)’, Anti-Trafficking Review, issue 18, 2022, pg.44)

Human trafficking from Vietnam to Serbia and Romania via guest worker visa programs, was discovered and reported in 2021:

“An Observer investigation has found that Serbia and Romania are being used as new gateways to Europe for smuggling and trafficking gangs who are using guest worker visa programmes to transport large numbers of Vietnamese workers into eastern Europe. There they are often exploited in factories and construction sites before some are transported across land borders into the EU and, eventually, to the UK.

At all stages along the way, Vietnamese workers are highly likely to fall into forced labour or debt bondage, often charged up to £30,000 for passage to the UK.

[...] According to interviews with Vietnamese workers, the Vietnam to Serbia migration route began operating in the summer with more than 500 workers flying on guest worker visas from August-October. Each worker was charged around £1,700, generating at least £850,000 in revenue for recruitment agencies arranging visas, jobs and travel.

⁹⁵ See more about the Anti-trafficking Review Journal at: <https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

[...] The Observer’s investigation found that workers who continued on to the EU and UK from the Balkans could take several routes, with smuggling networks taking Vietnamese people across the border into Romania and then on to Slovakia, Germany and France. They then waited in a makeshift camp for the chance to take an inflatable raft to the UK.

Mimi Vu, an anti-trafficking expert living in Vietnam, has spent the past months researching the links between bilateral visa schemes in eastern Europe and the exploitation of Vietnamese migrant workers.

“A key selling point to the Serbia route is that, like Romania, you can migrate legally through the reciprocal visa arrangements and it only costs a few thousand pounds, which is seen as a great bargain compared to the more traditional routes of going through Moscow or one of the central EU countries such as Poland or the Czech Republic into Europe, which can cost up to £30,000,” she said. [...] Debt is also a major driver for people to try to move.

While Serbia is believed to be a new landing post used by criminal gangs, Romania, which signed a bilateral visa agreement with Vietnam in an effort to fill a huge manual labour shortage in 2018, is already established as a point of entry into Europe. Many also find themselves trapped in exploitative and dangerous work when they arrive there.

[...] Over the past five years at least 231 Vietnamese people were intercepted trying to cross into Europe according to data from the Romanian border police. Hungarian police intercepted another 101 in the same period. Experts like Vu estimate this is only a very small portion of Vietnamese who leave Romania into western Europe.

[...] Social media plays a central role for smuggling gangs. Facebook groups visited by the Observer offer “VIP” routes in private cars out of Romania. Packages are advertised with the dialling codes of the destination countries, with buyers able to pick the “44” package for the UK, “49” for Germany and “33 for France”. Prices fell during the pandemic, but a trip to the UK can still cost over £10,000.

[...] In the past year, people smuggling of Vietnamese migrants out of Romania has continued despite border restrictions caused by the pandemic.”

(Source: The Guardian – [Revealed: the secret ‘forced labour’ migration route from Vietnam to the UK](#), 25 December 2021, last accessed 25 June 2025)

7.2 COVID-19 Impact

3. How have the recent or current patterns and trends in trafficking been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The 2025 Country Information Report published by the DFAT notes that the COVID-19 pandemic created economic vulnerabilities that made people more susceptible to human trafficking in Vietnam:

“In-country sources reported in October 2023 that human trafficking activities had increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, with associated economic vulnerabilities making people more susceptible to traffickers. Victims are usually trafficked for sexual exploitation; forced marriage; forced labour in factories, mining, construction, brothels and online scam centres; and to work as domestic servants. In-country sources said victims trafficked to Europe were often forced to work on cannabis farms and in nail salons. According to in-country sources, Vietnamese women accounted for one-third of trafficking victims and the largest number of foreign prostitutes in Malaysia. Vietnam was also the largest supplier of foreign brides for South Korean and Taiwanese men.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pg.48, last accessed 13 April 2025)

According to the 2025 DFAT report, the COVID-19 pandemic also led to an increase in demand for illegal money-lending, which is often linked to human trafficking:

“In-country sources reported that loans from illegal moneylenders were often used to repay gambling debts or purchase ‘migration packages’ to third countries; with respect to the latter, migration agents were behind these loans in some cases. Illegal moneylending is also often linked to human trafficking. Demand for illegal moneylending services is thought to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic disruptions.”

(Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – [DFAT Country Information Report VIETNAM](#), 2025, pg.55, last accessed 13 April 2025)

Authors Hai Thanh Luong⁹⁶ and Hieu Minh Ngo⁹⁷ noted in their 2024 journal article:

“[...]Our current data identify three specific factors explaining why the link between human trafficking and scam-induced criminal activity occurs in Vietnam. Primarily, we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated issues have exerted a significant influence on this trend. Among the various negative impacts of the pandemic, high unemployment and limited job opportunities are the primary factors affecting the economic conditions faced by local people in Vietnam. Consequently, individuals are compelled to seek out opportunities to secure employment and maintain their standard of living while the state grapples with the challenge of rebuilding society. In other words, most laborers often need more financial stability to apply for official migration through registered recruitment agencies, which is time-consuming and expensive.[...]”

(Source: Luong, H.T.; Ngo, H.M – [Understanding the Nature of the Transnational Scam-Related Fraud: Challenges and Solutions from Vietnam’s Perspective](#), 21 November 2024, pg.11)

Blue Dragon reported in a 2024 report that Vietnamese border communities experienced increasing hardship due to China’s border closure during the pandemic, which has been linked to the trafficking of rural border community members to emerging trafficking destinations such as Cambodia and Myanmar:

“The measures also reduced income-generation options for Vietnamese border communities who were heavily reliant on cross-border trade and informal, seasonal, and short-term labour in China. (pg.8)
The construction of a fence along the entire China–Vietnam border only added to this worsened financial hardship. In 2012, China began building a fence along parts of its southern border with Vietnam aimed at curbing illegal migration and trade.¹¹ When the pandemic broke out, the country accelerated construction until it was completed in 2021. Since then, a fence blocks China’s southern border from Vietnam all the way to Myanmar.¹²

Due to this fence and the very few legal crossings allowed since China ended their zero-Covid policy in early 2023, opportunities to earn informal income have dried up in these rural communities. The fence has ended local trade fairs and markets that used to happen regularly in border areas, as traders from both countries can no longer cross. This has significantly impacted the incomes of these communities. For example, in one border commune in Ha Giang province the poverty level increased from 32.4% in 2019 to 46.6% in 2022.¹³

Based on insights collected through our front-line rescue and assistance work, Blue Dragon believes these measures have contributed to a shift in the migration patterns of rural border communities. In the process of migrating to areas unfamiliar to them, many have fallen victim to human trafficking in newly emerged human trafficking destinations, such as Cambodia and Myanmar.” (pg.9)

¹¹ I. Zhao, ‘China is building walls with Vietnam and Myanmar to keep people out, but also in’, ABC News, 25 January 2021, retrieved November 28, 2022, www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-25/why-china-building-border-walls-with-vietnammyanmar/13068344

⁹⁶ School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Mt Gravatt, QLD 4122, Australia
⁹⁷ National Cyber Security Center, Hanoi VN100000, Vietnam

- 12** ‘China’s new fence on Myanmar border shows shift in strategy along complex border’, ASEAN Today, 30 December 2020, retrieved November 28, 2022, www.aseantoday.com/2020/12/chinas-new-fence-on-myanmar-border-shows-shift-in-strategyalong-complex-frontier/, and L. Quiao and Chingman, ‘Vietnamese border region residents remove China’s electrified fencing’, Radio Free Asia, 21 September 2021, retrieved November 28, 2022, www.rfa.org/english/news/china/vietnamborder-09212021095446.html.
- 13** ‘Giải bài toán lao động nơi biên giới (Kỳ 2) (Solving the labor problem at the border (Part 2))’, Bao Nhan Dan (People’s paper), 18 October 2022, retrieved November 27, 2022 nhandan.vn/giai-bai-toan-lao-dong-noi-bien-gioi-ky-2-post720460.html

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pp.8-9)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted that for Vietnamese workers outside of the country, pandemic travel restrictions exacerbated their experience of labour exploitation:

“Vietnamese nationals endure restricted freedom of movement, travel and identity document confiscation, threats of physical violence, poor living and working conditions, contract irregularities, fraudulent recruitment, and punitive deportation at PRC national-owned factories affiliated with the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative in the Balkan region. Pandemic-related travel restrictions had previously compounded these vulnerabilities for many Vietnamese migrant workers overseas, including by forcing some to remain in their positions long after the conclusion of their contracts.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

This 2024 Centre for Social Justice and Justice and Care, detailed that specifically within the UK, criminal exploitation connected to drugs increased during and since the pandemic:

“Data analysis shared via the Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit indicates that in July 2023 just over half the live police modern slavery investigations for criminal exploitation related to drug distribution and almost a fifth for cannabis cultivation (where criminal exploitation was the primary exploitation type).[...]

““The pandemic saw a fundamental change in typologies within the West Midlands. Labour exploitation became less visible to the police and local authorities, but criminal exploitation increased significantly. Most of this was attributed to Vietnamese and Albanian adults encountered within cannabis grows. This pattern has continued post pandemic, but we are also seeing UK adults who are being exploited by drug networks.’—Staff at West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network”

(Source: Centre for Social Justice and Justice and Care – [Criminal Exploitation: Modern Slavery by Another Name](#), February 2024, pg.8, last accessed 13 June 2025)

This 2021 USAID assessment report noted that:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted global economies and human lives in an unprecedented manner and control measures have affected criminal activities worldwide, including human trafficking and irregular migration.While travel restrictions and tightened border controls have disrupted established trafficking patterns, they have also created dynamics that make high-risk populations more vulnerable and can become targets for money lenders and at greater risk of debt-bondage when seeking alternative income sources (McAdam, 2020. UNODC, n.d.). Economic difficulties involve sectors associated with human trafficking,such as garments, agriculture and farming, manufacturing, and domestic work, and the fishing sector may be particularly affected as tightened restrictions prevent vessels from docking at ports, trapping workers at sea in forced working environments. People trafficked into the fishing industry are often men, and it is estimated that within the ASEAN region 150,000 people are being forced to continue working on commercial vessels (McAdam, 2020).

During the pandemic,Vietnam has experienced the highest unemployment rate in ten years, especially affecting unskilled laborers, female workers, and people working in the informal sector. (Nguyen, 2020). MPS has speculated that the economic difficulties resulting from the pandemic will likely lead to an increase in vulnerability to trafficking and irregular migration (National Central Bureau, 2020).Victims already in confinement may be further isolated during restrictions of movement, which reduces their access to information and services, and their living and working conditions may have worsened (UNODC, n.d.). Organizations involved in supporting victims of trafficking from China have reported increased numbers of women trying to return, but this may be a result of Chinese authorities checking residency more stringently than any change in trafficking patterns (CTN, 2020).”

(Source: USAID: [Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – Situational Analysis Report](#), pg.10, 2021)

4. What statistical data is available on formally identified human trafficking victims in Vietnam before and during the pandemic?

Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, a Vietnamese grassroots charity combatting human trafficking, collected and reported the following 2018-2022 statistics based on their collaboration with local police in assisting victims:

“Blue Dragon collaborates with Vietnamese police to rescue victims from slavery and support the repatriation of victims to Vietnam. Rescues are conducted in response to a call for help – often from a family member – or from the government trafficking hotline, or reports from friends. These calls for help have increased significantly since the pandemic, as can be seen in table 1 below. (pg.10)

Table 1: Numbers of human trafficking victims assisted by Blue Dragon, 2018–2022

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
No. of victims	152	155	301	283	237

Note that Blue Dragon considers someone a victim if we have met them and they report sufficient information to indicate that they would be considered a victim under international laws such as the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol).¹⁴

[...] The Vietnamese government’s official figures as reported in the US State Department Trafficking in Persons reports do not show an increase between 2018 and 2021. However, this is largely due to legal and practical challenges and barriers in formally verifying victims and reporting data, particularly during Covid-19 when victims returning from cross-border trafficking were taken straight to quarantine before any investigation or verification processes could be undertaken. The numbers for 2022 do reflect an increase in victim identification compared to the first two years of the pandemic.” (pg.11)

Table 2: Numbers of human trafficking victims formally verified by the Vietnamese government

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
No. of victims	490	300	121	126	255

Source: US State Department TIP Reports. Vietnam 2019–2023¹⁵

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pp.10-11)

With regard to the destinations of human trafficking activities from Vietnam, the same report noted statistics that demonstrate pandemic-related changes:

“The forms of exploitation and the destination countries of these trafficking victims have also changed. Prior to the pandemic, nearly all victims Blue Dragon assisted were women who had been trafficked into forced marriages or forced sex work in China.¹⁶ The Vietnamese government estimates that between 2011 and June 2020, 75% of victims were trafficked to China and 11% to Cambodia and Laos.¹⁷ (pg.12)

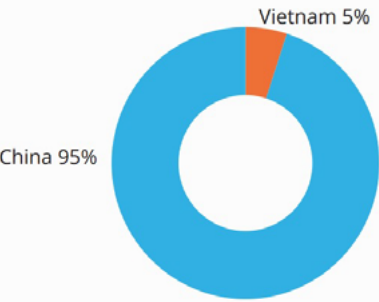
However, this has changed since the outbreak of Covid-19. The number of human trafficking victims whom Blue Dragon rescued or assisted to repatriate from China to Vietnam spiked in 2020. Once that peak period when Chinese authorities detected and deported large numbers of undocumented Vietnamese citizens was over, human trafficking cases from China began to decline. By 2022, only 44% of the victims Blue Dragon assisted had been trafficked to this country. This, however, did not translate into a drop in human trafficking cases overall. Myanmar and Cambodia quickly emerged as significant and concerning alternative ‘hotspots’ for the trafficking of Vietnamese people.” (pg.13)

Table 3: Destination country of victims rescued by Blue Dragon, 2018–2022

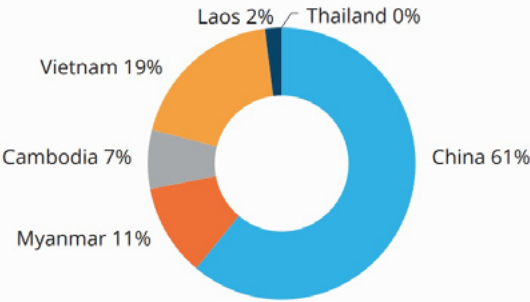
Year	Cambodia	China	Laos	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam	Total
2018	0	140	0	0	0	12	152
2019	0	144	0	8	0	3	155
2020	0	274	0	3	0	24	301
2021	0	198	0	59	0	26	283
2022	62	105	14	44	1	10	236
Total	62	861	14	114	1	75	1127

Chart 3: Human trafficking destination countries pre/post Covid

Human trafficking destination countries pre-COVID (2018–2019)



Human trafficking destination countries post-COVID (2020–2022)



Source: Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation.

Data from the Vietnam Border Guard corroborates this trend; 17.5% of the total victims detected and investigated by them between January and September 2022 had been exploited in Cambodia.¹⁸

- 16** Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, What makes people vulnerable to human trafficking?, November 2021, Hanoi, Vietnam.
- 17** Ministry of Public Security, 3 June 2021, ‘Summary of 09 years implementation of Law on human trafficking prevention and combat 2011, Hanoi, Vietnam, p.11. See also Minh Nga, August 1 2019, ‘**80 percent of human trafficking victims end up in China**’, VNExpress, retrieved November 30, 2022

(Source: Blue Dragon – **Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam**, March 2024, pp.12-13)

According to a 2024 Blue Dragon report, Vietnamese government authorities recognize an increase in domestic trafficking, and the following statistics are available:

“This increase in domestic trafficking has been recognised by Vietnamese government authorities who are very concerned about the increase of all forms of exploitation across the country. The Justice Committee of the National Assembly recently conducted research into the implementation of the National Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control and reported that domestic trafficking was increasing rapidly and involved all forms of exploitation.”²⁷

The Ministry of Public Security recently reported that in 2022, 90 cases of trafficking in persons including those with victims under 16 years of age were detected and investigated, with 247 traffickers and 222 victims, of which domestic trafficking accounted for 46% of the total. In the first six months of 2023, 88 cases involving 229 offenders were detected and investigated and 224 victims of trafficking were identified. A total of 45% of these cases involved trafficking inside Vietnam.”²⁸

- 27** Tien Phong, 8 May 2023, ‘Xuất hiện nhiều đường dây mua bán người dưới thủ đoạn ‘việc nhẹ, lương cao’ (Many human trafficking rings utilizing the trick of ‘light work, high salary’), <https://tienphong.vn/xuat-hien-nhieu-duong-day-mua-bannguoi-duoi-thu-doan-viec-nhe-luong-cao-post1532386.tpo> viewed on May 5, 2023, National Assembly of Vietnam, 8 May 2023, ‘Chủ Nhiệm Ủy Ban Tư Pháp Lê Thị Nga: Sớm Tổng Kết Thi Hành Và Đề Xuất Nội Dung Sửa Đổi, Bổ Sung Luật Phòng, Chống Mua Bán Người (Chair Of The Justice Committee Le Thi Nga: Early Summary Of Implementation And Proposal Of Amendments And Supplements To The Law On Prevention And Combataion Of Human Trafficking), <https://quochoi.vn/tintuc/Pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-quoc-hoi.aspx?ItemID=75560>[Note: The webpage referred to in this citation is no longer available] viewed on May 9, 2023
- 28** Criminal Police Department, Ministry of Public Security, Review of the implementation of the National Program for Anti-human Trafficking; Results, advantages and disadvantages in reception, victim identification and verification for the period of 2021-2023, International Organisation for Migration/Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs workshop: ‘Mid-term review of the implementation of the National Program for anti-human trafficking on victim support component for the period of 2021 - 2025”, held 21 July 2023, Hanoi, Vietnam.

(Source: Blue Dragon – **Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam**, March 2024, pg.21)

5. Which regions or demographics, if any, within Vietnam have seen significant changes in trafficking activities during this period?

The 2025 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report noted that:

“[...]Sex traffickers target many children from impoverished rural areas. Traffickers increasingly channel their criminal activities through the traditional practice of “bride kidnapping” to exploit girls from ethnic minority communities in the northwest highlands, including in sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic service. Perpetrators of extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse travel to Vietnam to exploit children; many of the perpetrators reportedly originate from elsewhere in Asia, the United Kingdom (UK), other countries in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Environmental impacts causing displacement, including extreme heat, saltwater intrusion, and drought, force an estimated 24,000 people to leave the Mekong Delta region every year, increasing trafficking risks due to livelihood loss.[...]”

(Source: US Department of State – **2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam**, 29 September 2025, last accessed: 10 February 2026)

The 2024 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam report notes the impact of the pandemic on the increased vulnerabilities of trafficking for specific socio-economic groups:

“Traffickers continue to take advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, increasingly men and young adults with secondary education, with false promises of job opportunities abroad, often in online scam operations. [...] Within the country, ongoing pandemic-related unemployment and other socio-economic stressors increased vulnerabilities to trafficking, particularly for women and children in rural areas and among ethnic minorities.”

(Source: US Department of State – [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

The vulnerability of men and boys to trafficking is also observed by the Vietnam-based NGO Blue Dragon to have increased during the pandemic in its 2024 report:

“NEW VICTIM PROFILES

Gender as a factor of vulnerability to trafficking is also changing, with the new forms of trafficking disproportionately impacting men and boys. The Vietnamese government statistics from 2011–2020 found that 90% of victims identified were female.¹⁹ In 2018 and 2019, 93% of the victims Blue Dragon assisted were women or girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but that percentage has been declining since 2020. Blue Dragon rescued 98 male trafficking victims between 2020 and 2022.

2022 saw a sharp increase of men and boys who were targeted by human traffickers. Blue Dragon rescued 51 men and boys from labour exploitation in Cambodia and assisted an additional 92 victims of labour exploitation on the streets of Hanoi.²⁰ Among the male victims assisted through Blue Dragon’s rescue work, 49% were trafficked into forced criminality in online scamming centres in Cambodia. For the international rescues, male victims made up 22% of the total rescues – a higher percentage than any previous year. If we add the street boys and young men who fell victim to labour exploitation within Vietnam, the percentage of male victims rescued by Blue Dragon in 2022 rises to 40%. (pg.13)

The increase in male victims has been recorded by other agencies supporting victims and was recently recognised by the Justice Committee of the Vietnamese National Assembly in an assessment conducted as part of a review of ten years’ implementation of the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Control.²¹ (pg.14)

[...] While women and girls continue to represent the majority of victims of trafficking Blue Dragon assists, the impacts of the pandemic have fuelled a surge in the number of men and boys becoming victims of labour exploitation. The reasons for this, once more, are multifaceted and rooted in both socioeconomic and cultural factors. The increase in hardship levels due to the economic impacts following Covid-19 is driving vulnerability among men and boys, as a larger number of them are in urgent need to earn an income. The cultural expectation that males must bear the responsibility to financially provide for their family makes them more prone to migrate in search of employment, which further drives their risk of falling victim to exploitation.” (pg.15)

¹⁹ Ministry of Public Security, 3 June 2021, ‘Summary of 09 years implementation of Law on human trafficking prevention and combat 2011, Hanoi, Vietnam, p.18.

²⁰ Blue Dragon Blue Dragon data from April 2022 to January 2023. Note that an additional 75 boys met on the streets of Hanoi during that period did not provide enough information to conclude if they showed indicators of trafficking. Therefore, this number can be considered a minimum.

²¹ Bao Yen - Pham Thang, 8 May 2023, TỘI PHẠM MUA BÁN NGƯỜI TRONG NƯỚC GIA TĂNG VÀ NGÀY CÀNG CÓ NHIỀU NẠN NHÂN LÀ NAM GIỚI (The crime of human trafficking is increasing within the country, and more male victims), Cổng thông tin điện tử Quốc hội Nước cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt nam (Electronic news of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam), <https://quochoi.vn/tintuc/Pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-quoc-hoi.aspx?ItemID=75558>, accessed on May 10, 2023.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pp.13-14)

The same NGO also observed changes in risk for different ethnicities, based on its service provision for trafficking victims up to 2022:

“Prior to Covid-19, 54% of all victims Blue Dragon assisted²⁵ and 75% of victims whose cases were successfully prosecuted²⁶ were ethnic minority people. Vietnamese ethnic minority communities experience higher poverty and disadvantage levels than their majority Kinh peers. Higher illiteracy and income poverty rates, cultural traditions of child marriage, and poorer access to essential public services such as healthcare, schooling, and infrastructure make ethnic minority people, and especially women and girls, more vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. In addition, many of the ethnic minority groups are present

on both sides of the border, so ethnic minority men in China are open to ‘purchasing’ a wife from the same community, but on the Vietnamese side of the border.

While ethnic minority people continue to be overrepresented in human trafficking statistics, the increase in vulnerability, along with a surge in labour exploitation and the need to migrate for work, are now resulting in more people from the majority Kinh ethnicity falling victim to human traffickers. This increase is particularly clear among victims of the new trafficking trends explained in detail below.

This change became especially apparent in 2022, when Blue Dragon registered the highest diversity of forms of exploitation and destination countries of victims. As a result, in 2022, 59% of the human trafficking victims we assisted were Kinh majority and 35% were ethnic minority, while the ethnicity of 5% is unknown (this is due to changes in Vietnam’s national identity document as well as the inability to collect ethnicity information from some survivors due to their condition upon rescue or other circumstances) and 1% were foreign nationals. Ethnic minority people are still overrepresented in the trafficking statistics as they make up only 15% of the total population. However, the number of Kinh victims is increasing. This increase in Kinh victims indicates that vulnerability to trafficking is affecting a wider sector of Vietnamese society. The economic impacts of Covid-19 mean that comparatively less-disadvantaged individuals are now also vulnerable as a result of their efforts to replace lost work and income.”

25 Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, November 2021, What makes victims vulnerable to human trafficking? Profile of victims of human trafficking in Vietnam, Hanoi, Vietnam

26 Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, July 2021, Human Trafficking and Traffickers in Vietnam. An analysis of the nature of trafficking and the profile of traffickers in Vietnam based on information from court cases, Hanoi, Vietnam.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.16)

Along the Vietnamese border with China, strict border control measures during the pandemic did lead to trafficking activities being detected:

“When the pandemic first struck, the border between Vietnam and China was closed. China imposed strict prevention and control measures that remained in place until early 2023. Those measures included increased surveillance and patrolling along the China–Vietnam border, and domestic house-to-house checks throughout the country. [...] The checks and restrictions resulted in more human trafficking victims and perpetrators being intercepted at the border and detected within China. Victims aided by Blue Dragon reported that they were identified during Covid-related house checks and deported back to Vietnam.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.8)

6. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the exploitation and trafficking of children and young people in Vietnam? If so, in what ways?

The 2022 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam noted:

“[...] Throughout the reporting period, courts were intermittently closed due to the pandemic; however, to ensure that all criminal cases—including human trafficking cases—were adjudicated in a timely manner, the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) issued a resolution allowing for all criminal, civil, and administrative trials to be conducted online beginning in January 2022. It also continued to direct the courts to schedule trials on the weekends, rent additional space or utilize outdoor locations to hold hearings, and prioritize trials set to expire. Civil society observers noted incremental improvements in some provincial anti-trafficking law enforcement practices, including efforts to address child forced labor in the garment sector in the northwest part of the country. Anticipating that pandemic-related border closures may lead to a spike in domestic trafficking, MPS also issued policies directing law enforcement to focus on the detection and handling of trafficking crimes occurring within Vietnam. Police continued to conduct raids of establishments suspected of sex trafficking despite pandemic-related challenges. Law enforcement authorities reportedly increased information-sharing activities and joint operations with

counterpart agencies in the PRC, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States, and several Lower Mekong countries, including in special economic zones (SEZs) in Laos. The government did not receive extradition requests related to human trafficking cases in 2021.[...]"

(Source: US Department of State – [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam](#), June 2024, last accessed: 3 August 2025)

Since the pandemic started, the Vietnam-based NGO Blue Dragon has observed an increase of trafficking of children and young people, the majority of whom were boys and young men:

“Due to heightened hardship levels, a higher number of children and youth migrated from poorer rural areas to urban areas seeking employment, and a higher number of them became homeless and vulnerable to exploitation. The number of children and youth Blue Dragon assisted on the streets of Hanoi grew from 94 in 2019 to 153 in 2020, 178 in 2021, and 232 in 2022. While caring for these homeless teens, Blue Dragon social workers have noticed a growing number of them shared accounts that indicated human trafficking. A large proportion of these teenage boys and girls became homeless after escaping an exploitative job or were targeted by traffickers and lured into exploitation shortly after becoming homeless.

In light of these reports, Blue Dragon has been collecting and recording relevant information from children to determine their trafficking status since April 2022. Between then and January 2023, a total of 120 boys and girls Blue Dragon’s outreach team met on the streets had been forced into exploitation. This represents 60% of the young people Blue Dragon met on the streets during said period, and 84% of these were child victims. The forms of exploitation include forced labour in construction, restaurants, and bars, and in small-scale manufacturing. As for the remaining 40%, we do not have sufficient information to determine if they are human trafficking victims, so the percentages could in fact be higher. (pg.18)

The majority of the children and youth Blue Dragon assisted on the streets of Hanoi during this period were underage boys and young men, and so were the majority (77%) of those subsequently confirmed as victims of trafficking. Girls and young adult women made up only 15% of all the street children and youth Blue Dragon assisted. The risk of exploitation among this smaller group is however much higher; 100% of underage girls and 93% of all women and girls had fallen victim to exploitation, as opposed to 54% of boys and young men. (pg.19)

[...]In addition to these street children and youth in Hanoi, since the pandemic began in 2020, Blue Dragon has also collaborated with Vietnamese authorities to rescue an additional 61 people trafficked within Vietnam. Vietnamese law enforcement agencies led the investigation of these cases and the rescue of the victims, with Blue Dragon playing a supporting role. Because of our secondary role in these cases, we lack the data to conduct a thorough analysis on the forms of exploitation, recruitment methods and backgrounds of these victims of domestic human trafficking. Blue Dragon has also registered a rising trend in these domestic trafficking cases. In 2018 and 2019, on average, Blue Dragon assisted seven victims of domestic trafficking rescued by police every year, whereas between 2020 and 2022 that average climbed to 20.

A very significant note is that 68% of these victims were under the age of 18 when the police rescued them. When combined with the victims rescued by Blue Dragon on the streets of Hanoi, we can conclude that of all the victims of domestic trafficking we have documented since 2020, 80% were underage. This is a clear indicator that the pandemic multiplied the vulnerability to human trafficking of Vietnamese children living in poverty.” (pg.20)

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pp.19-20)

7. Were there any disruptions or changes to shelter availability, legal assistance, anti-trafficking support or rehabilitation programs during the pandemic or since pandemic restrictions were lifted? If so, what and how?

This 2024 report titled ‘Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam’, published by the Children’s Foundation Blue Dragon noted:

“[...] The Vietnamese government’s official figures as reported in the US State Department Trafficking in Persons reports do not show an increase between 2018 and 2021. However, this is largely due to legal and practical challenges and barriers in

formally verifying victims and reporting data, particularly during Covid-19 when victims returning from cross-border trafficking were taken straight to quarantine before any investigation or verification processes could be undertaken. The numbers for 2022 do reflect an increase in victim identification compared to the first two years of the pandemic.”

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), March 2024, pg.11, last accessed 11 August 2025)

Authors of a 2023 academic article, published in the Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology and titled ‘*Assessing the Hotline Services on Child Trafficking Victims: An Analysis of Vietnam*’, Oanh Van Nguyen⁹⁸ and Hai Thanh Luong⁹⁹, noted that:

“[...]Outbreak of COVID-19

The coronavirus epidemic makes the 111 hotline services challenging to respond to the callers. As mentioned above, the number of calls to this agency has increased sharply. More critically, referrals to governmental agencies and others are challenging. The information sends to these agencies, but the 111 hotline services cannot ensure the quality of referrals. Even many cases stop because of this epidemic. Many interviewees demonstrated that LEAs and NGOs could not rescue victims because of the lockdown of the border gates with China. These referrals are postponed until opening the border gates again. Others exemplified health services for victims are canceled for social distancing during COVID-19. The interviewees concluded that partner agencies focused on preventing this virus instead of doing other activities. (pg.874)

Reflecting and updating information regarding support for victims of TIP remains slow. Local government officials answered our questions that they are swamped and simultaneously do many tasks. They had no time to follow the victims of this crime. [Interviewee 21]. (pg.874)

Several respondents highlighted different aspects of CTV when receiving callers during the COVID-19 breakout, such as an incredible number of calls or the high risks of child victims. One of them said:

When COVID-19 spread out the whole country, children had to study online. They started to use digital devices more than they did before. Accordingly, they used laptops, tablets, and mobile phones for online entertainment. Many parents called us to express their worries about their children’s schedules, especially their safety on the Internet. They wanted to have guidelines and advances from us to protect their children from being harmed by sexual abuse, online bullying, and TIP [Interviewee 2].” (pg.875)

(Source: Springer Nature | Oanh Van Nguyen and Hai Thanh Luong – [Assessing the Hotline Services on Child Trafficking Victims: An Analysis of Vietnam](#), 4 July 2023, pp.874-875, last accessed 5 August 2025)

This 2022 ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking study on the implementation of the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in seven ASEAN member states:

“8.4. Impact of COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, relevant government agencies had to protect TIP victims while simultaneously preventing outbreaks of COVID-19.³⁷¹ Officers could not regularly conduct field visits for TIP victim identification, especially in remote areas. Similarly, NGOs reported not being able to engage in awareness-raising and other communication activities at the community level.³⁷² Stakeholders said some TIP victims had escaped from their quarantine zones or facilities. Those who remained refused to cooperate in interviews with government authorities.³⁷³”(pg.73)

COVID-19 resulted in people from marginalized groups, including women and children, losing their jobs and livelihoods, creating an increased vulnerability to trafficking as they faced pressure to generate a stable income.³⁷⁴ Some TIP perpetrators took advantage of this vulnerability, tricking people from marginalized groups into various exploitative situations, such as fetus trading, surrogacy, and giving birth abroad.³⁷⁵ Due to low levels of awareness, many members of marginalized groups,

⁹⁸ Faculty of Criminal Police, The People’s Police Academy, Vietnam, Hanoi

⁹⁹ School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, QLD

including women and children, prioritized earning an income over the risk of contracting COVID-19.³⁷⁶ If they became infected with COVID-19, they had few opportunities to receive adequate treatment.³⁷⁷ (pp.73-74)

The COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions also reduced opportunities to rescue TIP victims as border crossings had closed. All vocational courses and counseling services were moved online or canceled. However, with the lack of videoconferencing equipment in the shelters, most victims could not access online courses or counseling sessions. Moreover, the shelters faced challenges in supporting victims due to insufficient equipment and facilities to meet government requirements during COVID-19 restrictions.”(pg.73)

³⁷¹ Private law firm (interview), May 31, 2021
³⁷² NGO staff (interview), May 26, 2021
³⁷³ Government agency (interview), June 4, 2021
³⁷⁴ NGO staff (interview), May 21, 2021
³⁷⁵ Ibid
³⁷⁶ Ibid
³⁷⁷ Private law firm (interview), May 31, 2021

(Source: ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking – [Trafficking victim protection in ASEAN A study on the implementation of the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in seven ASEAN member states](#), September 2022, pp.73-74, last accessed 5 August 2025)

In this 2022 research report titled ‘*The Impact of Covid-19 Response Policies on Select Vulnerable Groups in Vietnam*’, the authors Thao Do and Eric Kasper explained:

“[...]Covid-19 has disrupted the rescue efforts of law enforcement officials and challenged the rehabilitation work of NGOs (T. Nguyen 2021). Under domestic travelling and border crossing restrictions, law enforcement officials in Vietnam find it more challenging to collaborate with their counterparts in neighbouring countries to identify, rescue, and support survivors of trafficking. Many survivors were identified as illegal migrants rather than victims of trafficking due to a lack of court evidence and legal support from social services. Scarce Covid protective equipment and testing kits made the collaboration less effective and exposed law enforcement officials to higher risks of infection (MOLISA 2020). NGO staff have to pay higher expenses and experience longer bureaucratic processes, for example, in coordinating with different departments, including staff in quarantine camps, local health departments, and provincial governments, to return the survivors to their homes. (pg.27)

Different provinces may have different travel restriction policies in place or may not allow inter-provincial transportation, and as a result many survivors have had to spend longer time away from their hometown, which can be up to three to four months or longer before reunion with their family members. For survivors without identity documents or vaccination certificates, they have even been prevented from entering their provinces (e.g., children under 18 accounting for 80-90 per cent). For those reasons, many have experienced mental health problems, and NGOs have struggled to find them shelters, food, and other necessities. For victims experiencing acute trauma, the problems have been further exacerbated. Closures of services and the prioritisation of hospital treatment for Covid-19 patients has meant that their health check-ups and psychological support have often been delayed. Even once reaching home, victims have also faced additional stigma from their communities due to fear of Covid infection (since returning victims may be seen as potential sources of new infections) (RPs three and four). (pg.27)

Covid-19 has affected the reintegration process of survivors of trafficking. Trafficking survivors who have been on vocational training programs have lost their jobs due to the impact of Covid-19, particularly in the tourism, hospitality, and beauty industries. Those who enrolled in school after being rescued faced disruptions when schools were closed (VietnamNews 2021b). According to many NGO staff, psychological support offered to survivors, especially survivors of sexual exploitation, has had to be organised online, which they feel is less effective and has little impact (RPs one and three). Many faced additional challenges obtaining a ‘certificate of victim’⁴, without which they could not receive initial support or other relief packages for victims of trafficking during the Covid period (RP four). Therefore, many survivors have faced compounded hardships because of the Covid response policies, which have made it more difficult to get identified, receive services, heal, and find a foundation from which they can earn a livelihood without excessive risk of exploitation or retrafficking (UNODC 2020)” (pg.28)

- 4 Victims need to be verified by law enforcement officials by the investigation process in order to be considered as victims of trafficking. The process can take up to two or three years.

(Source: Institute of Development Studies | Do, T. and Kasper, E. – [The Impact of Covid-19 Response Policies on Select Vulnerable Groups in Vietnam](#), May 2022, pp.27-28, last accessed 5 August 2025)

A March 2022 IDS Policy Briefing described the Impact of Vietnam’s Covid-19 Response on Vulnerable Groups:

“Covid-19 has disrupted law enforcement rescue efforts and challenged reintegration work

Travel restrictions have made it harder for law enforcement officials to collaborate across borders to identify, rescue, and support trafficking survivors. NGOs must pay higher costs and face longer bureaucratic processes; for example, coordinating between quarantine camps, local health departments, and provincial governments to send survivors home. Restrictions vary or do not allow travel between provinces; many survivors must wait 3–4 months before being reunited with families. Those without identification papers or vaccination certificates (80–90 per cent of whom are aged under 18) are not allowed into provinces; many experience mental health problems and NGOs have struggled to find them shelter, food, and other necessities. Closure of services and priority hospital treatment for patients with Covid-19 have delayed health check-ups and psychological support. Once home, survivors face additional stigma due to community fears of Covid-19 infection. Without ‘victim certificates’, survivors could not receive support designed for them; desperate to find work, many risk being re-trafficked.”

(Source: Institute of Development Studies | Thao Ngoc Do, Mina Chiang, Eric Kasper and Sharlene Chen – [Impact of Vietnam’s Covid-19 Response on Vulnerable Groups](#), March 2022, no page number, last accessed 5 August 2025)

8. What measures have been implemented to mitigate any challenges arising from these changes, and how effective have they been?

This 2020 BBC article, noted that in Scotland where formally identified human trafficking and sexual exploitation increased during the pandemic, police drew from local communities support for identification of victims:

“Det Ch Supt Sam McCluskey, head of public protection at Police Scotland, said: “Despite Covid-19 health risks and the global travel restrictions, traffickers are still plying their despicable trade in human beings.

“We believe the number of women, and girls, identified as being trafficked and sexually exploited is under-estimated. We know there are many more victims.”

[...]

She said key information on exploited women and their traffickers often came from local communities.

“It’s up to all of us to spot the signs, to help those being exploited, to stand against the traffickers and to protect our communities,” she added.

There was a huge increase in the identification of potential victims of trafficking in 2019, when 104 female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were found.

Home Office figures show that 214 victims between the ages of 15 and 35 arrived in Scotland in 2019 from Vietnam alone - the figure was 66 in 2018.

[...]

Recent Police Scotland investigations document hundreds of thousands of pounds moving between bank accounts.

Several sexual exploitation-focused operations have taken place in Scotland this year, with three in Glasgow leading to 13 arrests and the recovery of 25 victims.

A joint operation with police from Scotland and Romania resulted in 24 arrests, 10 in the UK and the remainder in Romania.

In 2019, four people were jailed for a total of over 36 years for the trafficking and exploitation of 10 victims for sexual exploitation and sham marriages in Scotland.

One victim was sold in a city centre street in Glasgow for around £10,000.”

(Source: BBC – [Trafficking gangs continue despite Covid restrictions](#), 30 November 2020, last accessed 11 July 2025)

In this 2024 report published by the Children’s Foundation Blue Dragon noted that:

“The exploitation of Vietnamese in forced scamming compounds continues to grow and these compounds are now moving into other countries in the region. In 2023, the number of rescues from Cambodia has decreased and been replaced by a surge in this form of exploitation in Myanmar and Laos, as can be seen in table 20 and chart 19.

It is not yet clear why the number of requests for rescue coming to Blue Dragon from victims in Cambodia has reduced so significantly in 2023. A contributing factor is likely the recently increased responsiveness from the Cambodian government, which includes some raids on the compounds to free victims and arrest perpetrators, and the establishment of a hotline for victims and relatives to call.³⁸ This hotline assists through official Cambodian authorities in collaboration with the relevant country embassy and does not share information with or request assistance from NGOs. It is possible that Vietnamese victims and their families are using these official channels instead.³⁹ It is also however possible that it is becoming more difficult for victims to call for help, and thus the numbers of requests have reduced in 2023.

In addition, there is credible evidence that the increased action by the Cambodian authorities has caused some of the criminal gangs to move their operations to Myanmar and Laos or other countries in the region where it is easier to conduct their criminal activities.”

³⁸ See Cyberscam Monitor newsletter, ‘Surviving the Compounds, more Raids and Rescues in Cambodia’, Newsletter Issue 2, April 2023 (Part 1&2), ‘Spotlight on Cambodia’, April 30 2023, available at <https://substack.com/profile/157774908-cyberscam-monitor>. CamboJA News has an overview of developments and media coverage of the scam compounds in Cambodia from 2022 to June 2023, Eun Sea, ‘Year in Review: Human Trafficking, Cyber Scams and the Government’s Response’, 16 June 2023, <https://cambojanews.com/year-in-review-human-trafficking-cyber-scams-and-the-governments-response/>

³⁹ Pers. Comm. Jacob Sims, Regional Director/Senior Technical Advisor, International Justice Mission, Bangkok, and Mark Taylor, Chief of Party, USAID Counter Trafficking in Persons project (CTIP), Cambodia, Winrock International, 25 October, 2023.

(Source: Blue Dragon – [Human Trafficking in Post-Covid Vietnam](#), pg.40, March 2024, last accessed 14 July 2025)

7.3 Broader Global and Regional Influences

Cross reference with:

- Section 2 (Trafficking Patterns, Routes, and Actors)
- Section 3 (Risk Factors)
- Section 5 (Disruption to Support Services)
- Section 6 (Reintegration Support)

9. Have climate change, economic crises or political instability contributed to new demographic trends in exploitation in Vietnam?

This April 2025 policy brief published by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) examines the link between displacement and trafficking in Southeast Asia, identifies key gaps in protection, and outlines urgent actions that need to be taken by governments and international actors to protect vulnerable populations:

“Southeast Asia is experiencing one of the most complex intersections of displacement and human trafficking globally. **Political upheaval, armed conflict, human rights abuses, economic instability,** and **environmental degradation** have uprooted millions across the region. Many displaced people live without legal status or adequate protections, making them highly susceptible to exploitation and trafficking.

[...]

Human trafficking across Southeast Asia is deeply intertwined with the region’s growing displacement crises. Refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and climate migrants face severe risks of trafficking for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and, increasingly, coerced participation in online scamming operations.

[...]
 The **Mekong Delta**, often called the “rice bowl” of Vietnam, is facing existential threats due to rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and increasingly erratic weather patterns.The Mekong Delta is one of the **most vulnerable** areas in the world to climate-induced displacement, with projections suggesting that up to one-third of the delta could be **underwater** by 2050. Saltwater contamination has already displaced thousands of farmers and threatens the livelihoods of millions. Many residents are **migrating** toward urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City, but without legal protections or support systems, IDPs often fall into precarious, low-wage employment conditions that heighten their vulnerability to labor trafficking.”

(Source: US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) published on Reliefweb) – **At Risk Twice Over: Displacement And Human Trafficking In Southeast Asia**, 29 April 2025, 1 July 2025, last accessed 23 July 2025)

U.S. Department of State 2024 Trafficking in Persons report on Vietnam notes the recent impacts of climate change on vulnerabilities to human trafficking in Vietnam:

“Climate change impacts, including saltwater intrusion and drought, force an estimated 24,000 people to leave the Mekong Delta region every year, increasing trafficking risks due to livelihood loss.”

(Source: US Department of State – **2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam**, 24 June 2024, last accessed 14 May 2025)

In a 2022 book chapter using Vietnam as a case study to examine the effects of climate change; the relationship between climate change, migration, human smuggling, and human trafficking; and the specific risks for women, author Amy Patel noted that:

“[...]When human trafficking researchers interviewed Vietnamese migrants at a makeshift camp in Europe in 2017 to find out why the number of migrants and trafficking victims had swelled that year, they were surprised to hear environmental changes were a top reason.¹ A toxic waste spill along Vietnam’s coast had wiped out the local fishing industry and motivated thousands to search for work overseas. Many became victims of human smugglers and traffickers. Similar environmental degradation from climate change is likely to accelerate migration, human smuggling, and human trafficking of Vietnamese in the decades ahead. Research shows that women make up the majority of migrants in Vietnam and are at particular risk of gender-based violence and human trafficking.² (g.107)

[...]
 The 2016 toxic waste spill at a steel factory polluted more than 100 miles of Vietnam’s coastline. The environmental disaster ruined the local fishing and tourism industries, resulting in “a dramatic increase in the number of regular and irregular Vietnamese migrants and trafficking victims overseas.”³² Vietnamese at a migrant camp in France cited the job losses after the toxic waste spill as the reason they had left.³³ Although this was a man-made disaster, climate change will produce similar environmental degradation and economic losses that trigger migration. Whether migrating internationally or internally within Vietnam, migrants are vulnerable to traffickers who promise job opportunities.”(pg.111)

1 Precarious Journeys: Mapping Vulnerabilities of Victims of Trafficking from Vietnam to Europe (London: ECPAT UK, 2019), 36–37, 45; and James Pearson, “Postcards from a Poisoned Coast: Vietnam’s PeopleSmuggling Heartland,” Reuters, 28 October 2019
 2 Migration, Resettlement and Climate Change in Viet Nam (Hanoi: United Nations in Vietnam, 2014), 2
 32 Precarious Journeys, 44
 33 Precarious Journeys, 45

(Source: Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education. Marine Corps University Press – **The Nexus of Climate Change, Migration, and Human Trafficking**, 2022, pp.107-111, last accessed 17 July 2025)

In this 2021 USAID assessment, it is noted that:

“According to a global climate-change study, Vietnam is one of nine countries where at least 50 million people will be exposed to impacts of rising sea levels, increasing numbers of storms, and other related risks (IPCC. 2019). Vietnam is affected by tropical storms and coastal erosion, floods, flash floods, and landslides, and slow-onset processes related to climate change include sea-level rises, coastal erosion, increasing temperature, salinization, droughts, and loss of biodiversity. A review of experience and reports in Vietnam and the region by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicates that these processes can drive outmigration to major cities, as a coping strategy (Dang, 2016. IOM, 2017). The migration of populations away from their rural home environments and traditional livelihoods into urban industrial centers, is associated with increased vulnerability to trafficking (IOM, 2016). Traffickers have increased opportunities to approach potential victims at all stages of migration, especially at initial stages when contemplating migration or at destinations and moving to cities without sufficient education, skills, and savings, places migrants at greater risk of forced labor and sexual exploitation (IOM, 2017). While the southern Mekong River Delta is considered the most vulnerable to climate change, the northern Red River Delta is also being impacted. Climate change heightens the risk of natural hazards, which pose a threat to livelihoods and job security, food security, and development (IOM, 2017). According to reports from three Mekong-Delta provinces on the 2016-2020 NPA implementation, economic difficulties constitute the most prominent reasons leading to human trafficking and women are trafficked to neighboring countries for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and illegal marriage (Reports to MPS from An Giang, Can Tho, and Tay Ninh provinces in 2020).”

(Source: USAID: Assessment Of C-Tip Activities In Vietnam – [Situational Analysis Report](#), pg.10, 2021)

10. How has the war in Ukraine affected human trafficking routes within, to, and from Vietnam?

From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on how the war in Ukraine has affected human trafficking routes within, to, and from Vietnam.

Mimi Vu, Co-Founder & Vice-Chair, Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025 explained:

“[...]So I would say it’s not just Ukraine, Russia. So there were some things that happened in that period of 2019, 2020, 2021. And they all influenced the shift from Vietnam. Not just one, but several. So I’ll give you the main ones. Number one was the Essex tragedy at the end of 2019. What that did was it finally brought to light, not just in Europe and the UK, but also in Vietnam, this issue and the risks and the dangers of Vietnamese human smuggling and trafficking from Vietnam into the UK. So what that did was it increased the scrutiny on those routes. So that made the human smuggling networks reroute. Less Lorry, more boat.

Lorry route was being used almost exclusively by the Vietnamese. And then it shifted. The second thing was Brexit, because Brexit happened in 2016. It took time to implement everything. And that reduced the amount of goods being traded between Europeans and the UK. That meant less lorries, less trucks. So not only was there increased scrutiny on that route, but there was less opportunity for them to get the trucks there. So you have one from there. Number two was COVID. COVID, what that did was that shut down borders for a long time. And for the crossings that did happen, there was a rerouting within the Schengen Zone. So instead of going France into the UK because there was a lot of scrutiny on that, they had to stay within the Schengen Zone. And that’s why you saw them moving over to any country that had a coastline that could be crossed into across the channel. So France, of course, but in a different way, Belgium and the Netherlands, right? And then you also saw the rise of Germany, which has always been a primary transit and destination country, becoming a primary destination country, even more so.

The third thing is Ukraine-Russia. So I want to clarify something is that when the Vietnamese leave Vietnam, it is with a valid visa. It may have been fraudulently obtained, but they leave legally. So there’s none of this like, “*Oh, they left illegally.*” They didn’t leave illegally. They left legally. And before Ukraine, Russia and COVID and all that, it was mainly on Russian tourist visas because Russia was issuing, I think, something like 50,000 tourist visas a year. So that meant not just adults could go, but kids could go as well. Because it’s very easy to have a fake auntie or uncle accompanying a bunch of kids and be like, “*Oh, I’m*

taking them to visit their parents who are working in Russia,” right? And that’s why before all that, we did encounter a lot more underage minor victims in Europe and the UK because they were going on these Russian tourist visas. But Ukraine-Russia stopped all that. So you had Brexit. COVID stopped that because no one was traveling, and then Ukraine-Russia stopped all that. Right after the rise or the reopening of borders, you then had the appearance and just the increase of official recognition in Eastern European countries of their labor shortage and the consequent recruitment of Vietnamese workers to go to those countries to fill those labor shortages. We always had that happening, but it really ramped up post-COVID, Brexit, everything, right?”

(Source: Mimi Vu, interview record 12 November 2025)

Dr Chung Pham whom we interviewed for this report in November 2025, explained that:

“[...] It actually impacted the routes that travel[...] from Vietnam to [the] UK or Europe in particular, that’s hugely impacted because I particularly conducted loads of interviews of the Vietnamese who arrived in this country [in] a different capacity. And they told me how the route is changed because of the war in Russia. So they would have to avoid going through Russia, going through Ukraine, and then to aim for other routes to go around it. In the past, Russia and Ukraine were actually the main route.

At one point, just before the war, I was about to go and provide the training for the Ukrainian Law Enforcement Agency in terms of human trafficking and the route and dealing with the Vietnamese cases over there to show the volume and how they desperately needed a Vietnam specialist to come and assist. But because the war happened, then the training did not go ahead. But when I interview the people who arrive after the war, for example, and I spoke to at least two or three of them after. And I asked them.

I said, “So what changed now?” Because in the past, we know that you’re going to be [from] traveling Vietnam, China, China to Russia, and then Russia to Ukraine, and then Ukraine and across all different European countries. What changed? How did you get here? And he said that, “yeah, we’ve been told that we would stay a bit longer in China than in the past, when China would be kind of a passing country. Quickly go to Russia. And Russia is kind of holding, we call it a holding cell, basically. And then from bushes, we’ll be distributing to a different route to different countries, and that sort of thing.”

It’s more like a sorting centre last year, but it’s completely changed now. So people say they would be kept longer in China, where things are being sorted, and from China, still brought to Europe, but avoid going to Russia or Ukraine, and because of that, it is experimenting with a new route.

And they said “that’s why a lot of times we were not so sure, and they can’t even tell us”. In the past, they would be able to tell them, “Okay. You’re going to be arriving here in Russia. You’re going to stay for this long in Russia. You’re going to be at this one.” So it’s completely new routes being set up. So they often don’t even know what happened next and how long they have to wait for.”

(Source: Dr Chung Pham, interview record, 17 November 2025)

A 2022 Journal of Human Trafficking article discusses the displacement and human trafficking that followed the war in Ukraine. In a footnote, the authors note that during the international online roundtable they co-convened with the UK’s Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner:

“one participant also called for attention to how the war might impact upon established trafficking routes through Ukraine, citing specifically routes from Vietnam and China.”

(Source: Ella Cockbain and Aiden Sidebottom – [War, Displacement, and Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Findings from an evidence-gathering Roundtable in Response to the War in Ukraine](#), 12 October 2022)

11. Has the Trump administration’s cancellations of USAID contracts and grants affected NGOs or international organisations working on trafficking and smuggling in Vietnam?

It was reported in March 2025 that the Trump administration cut more than \$500m from 69 global programs combating forced labour and human trafficking, including initiatives in South-East Asia:

“The Donald Trump administration has terminated 69 international programs aimed at combating child labor, forced labor and human trafficking, potentially undermining decades of progress in protecting vulnerable workers globally.

The Washington Post obtained an email detailing how the US Department of Labor’s bureau of international labor affairs (ILAB) will immediately end grants totaling more than \$500m that supported labor standard enforcement across 40 countries, including critical initiatives in Mexico, Central America, south-east Asia and Africa.

[...] The terminated programs covered a wide range of interventions, from preventing child labor in agricultural sectors to addressing human rights abuses in fisheries and electronics supply chains.”

(Source: The Guardian – [Trump cuts 69 global programs tackling child labor and human trafficking](#), 27 March 2025, last accessed 25 June 2025)

At the beginning of 2025, Trump’s executive order to freeze all foreign assistance funding for 90 days caused various NGO programs in Vietnam and across South-East Asia to be put on hold:

““This is a win for traffickers,” said Michael Brosowski, founder of Blue Dragon, a Vietnam-based NGO that assists in rescuing human trafficking victims. “We were mid-cycle in our funding grant, and now we can’t access it ... We’re scrambling to figure out which parts of our work we’ll have to cut – and which staff we may have to let go,” he told the ABC. [...] One key initiative is the anti-trafficking boards, local groups of teachers, police officers, and community leaders who identify and protect at-risk individuals. But now these efforts face uncertainty.”

(Source: ABC News Australia – [Trafficking and crime will rise after US foreign aid freeze](#), experts say, 10 February 2025, last accessed 25 June 2025)

Appendices

A. Methodology

Step 1: Scoping for research topics

The scoping phase will identify what the most pressing COI gaps are for UK asylum applicants and therefore which topics of Thematic COI reports have the potential to benefit both a large number of applicants and those most vulnerable to poor decision making.

To identify the most pressing topics for our research reports, Asylos will:

- regularly consult their networks of legal representatives and refugee community organisations that support asylum seekers in the RSD procedure (asking partners to specify why exactly the topic is so important, asking them to point to Home Office country specific asylum policy known as Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) and Reasons for Refusal Letters (RFRs) where appropriate)
- Contact the Refugee and Asylum Forum / IAGCI / Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration for input on relevant topics.
- launch an open call for topic suggestions and disseminate it to its respective lists of subscribers.

In addition, Asylos will:

- monitor such forums as the Refugee Legal Group, the Asylum Support Advice Network (ASAN), Statelessness Forum, the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre Group, and the Refugee and Migrant Children’s Consortium on an ongoing basis
- monitor the requests it receives for research assistance on individual cases
- record the statistics for common themes in the reports it produces for individual cases
- invite suggestions from partners who have requested our services as part of the ongoing feedback collection.

Asylos will assess which topics to select on the basis of greatest potential impact, with reference to analysis of:

- the number of asylum seekers generated by nationality (UK asylum statistics are not published on convention ground/ profile) Also taking into account small number of claimants claim asylum in the UK/EU And the number of potential victims of trafficking identified in the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM)
- Appeal success rates by nationality
- any existing upcoming Country Guidance (CG) cases that the Tribunal is to hear [to avoid duplication]
- A need for an evidence base to challenge existing CPINs [e.g. where it relies on outdated or uncorroborated COI].
- Where the funding comes from or if it restricts focus on a certain region

Throughout the scoping exercise, we will approach actors that represent groups, particularly vulnerable, to information gaps and thus poor quality decision-making, such as women, children and young people.

In addition, Asylos will set up a Steering Committee who will assist in the selection and prioritisation of strategic research report topics, as well as manage any risks arising from the project. Members of the committee will be approached at least once during the early project phase in order to review and comment on the planned methods and execution. The Steering Committee consists of the following members: Liz Williams, Eleonora Fais, Hebe Lawson, Rebecca Hacker, Nadine Finch, Maria Turda, and Thao Ngoc Do.

Step 2: Identifying preliminary Terms of Reference (ToR)

Once a research topic has been chosen, the following steps will be taken in order to identify the preliminary research headings (i.e. draft ToR):

- Read relevant Country Guidance (CG) cases from tribunal (identifying which evidence is outdated)
- Read relevant Home Office Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs)
- Reference other COI guidance/policy publications from international organisations such as the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons report, EUAA, UNHCR as well as sources from media, human rights organisations and academic research
- Include input from other stakeholders (project partners).

Asylos will draw up the draft ToR, providing input from our topic scoping activities.

Step 3: Training session for Asylos volunteers

Asylos will source from its volunteer network a group of approximately 6 volunteer researchers for each report to conduct the COI desk research and to assist with interviewing stakeholders.

Volunteer researchers will be fully briefed on the project purpose, design and research methodology. They will then be required to attend a zoom training session which will cover the following:

- Advanced COI research techniques
- The nature and scope of the research gap that the report aims to address
- Any Home Office guidance and policy related to the topic
- How experts are instructed in the UK, including how to ensure experts are aware of guidelines for expert testimony in a UK court

Step 4: COI Desk Research

For each report, we will undertake a review of the publicly available COI. This desk research will be coordinated by Asylos’s Programme Manager, working with a team of volunteers.

Before the research begins, Asylos will devise and commit to consulting an agreed list of sources from an agreed period of time. The list will be divided among the volunteers to consult and to submit any relevant findings which will be included in the final report. When any additional sources are identified in the desk research volunteers will record them alongside the initial list, and submit any relevant information. The additional list will then be redistributed among the volunteers to consult.

Once this list has been exhausted, each volunteer will also be designated several of the ToR and asked to do some final research on those topics to ensure that any further sources are identified and included.

Research will be conducted in line with Asylos’s internal COI research [training](#) and [handbook](#) and adhering to accepted COI research standards, including elements of the The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), formally known as the [EASO country of origin information report methodology \(EASO, 2012\)](#), the [ACCORD COI training manual \(ACCORD, 2024\)](#) and the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI \(European Union, 2008\)](#). Researchers should consult these documents throughout the research process and training sessions with volunteers will reflect these standards.

To support the collection of research data, researchers will submit their sources using Google Docs. The google form template will be provided to them by the UK Programme Manager(s). When using Google Docs, researchers should:

- Include links to full sources/ citations. Where the source is not publically available they will need to obtain permission for Asylos to share on request. Particular attention needs to be paid to copyrights issued as the report will be publicly available (e.g. written permission is needed from the author before including a map or photo in the report). Researchers can refer to the Licence or Terms and Conditions of the repository in which the article is stored to find out what the restrictions are. If in doubt, they should consult the holder of the copyright. Where it is not possible to get consent, the link to the journal with the paywall will have to suffice;
- If citing from Home Office FFMs then use the information in the transcripts rather than what has been summarised by the Home Office in the body of the report.
- Include original wording when translating and specify the translator and their qualification;
- Keep source summaries very concise and ensure neutrality by not offering an ‘assessment’ of the source or drawing any conclusions ourselves such as propositions about ‘risk on return’;
- Raise any concerns about the source (e.g. reliability, currency, contradictory content etc) within the source summaries;
- Ensure that sources which are submitted are as recent as possible and within the reporting period;
- Ensure page numbers, paragraph numbers or section headings are included for each excerpt. Insert them in brackets in the ‘citation from source’ box after each excerpt. For example;

“There is little understanding or support for men and boys who have experienced trafficking. The focus of support for women and children was apparent from discussions and there is a gap in understanding about the causes of trafficking of males or their support needs. (Pg 8)

[...] Research undertaken within Albania often provides the best picture of the characteristics of individuals who have been trafficked. (Pg 19)”

Please note! These thematic research reports aim to identify, and fill gaps in COI on certain topics. This will mean that it may be difficult to find sources which address certain parts of the research brief. This is to be expected! When this happens, researchers should submit any findings which relate to the topic more generally and we will ask the experts to comment on how this evidence relates to the specific research question at the next stage in the project. For the same reason, researchers are asked to report back to Asylos’ Programme Manager where they have encountered information gaps.

Step 5: Finalising ToR and drafting interview questions

Once the researchers have submitted all of their sources, Asylos’s Programme Manager will generate a report using Google Docs. Whilst editing the report, the manager will finalise the ToR and arrange the findings according to the headings that were identified. Whilst doing so, the coordinator should assess which topics do not seem to be adequately covered in existing COI and consider where expert evidence would be particularly helpful in order to fill these gaps, for example where there is a total absence of COI, a lack of corroborative COI or where there is contradictory COI.

Once the gaps have been identified, Asylos’ Programme Manager will draft a list of interview questions for stakeholders alongside the ToR for review. The interview questions will address the gaps identified and will be carefully phrased to generate the most accurate and useful answers. These will be approved by the project review committee.

Step 6: Identifying interviewees / stakeholders

The aim is to identify stakeholders that have extensive professional experience or recently published credible research on the topic and those that have recently been in the country of research.

The [EU Common Guidelines on \(Joint\) Fact Finding missions](#) suggest that:

- Possible sources may include academics, research institutes and think tanks, NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, experienced news reporters and journalists, community leaders or other representatives, religious authorities, or political parties, government representatives.¹⁰⁰
- It is important that a variety of sources are identified and interviewed so that information can be cross checked.¹⁰¹
- The guidelines state “try to avoid sources with too similar agendas, standpoints, backgrounds and interests, which can be a challenge – especially when using the ‘Snowballing’. It is generally useful to consult at least three different sources that are independent of each other on each main topic of the ToR”.¹⁰²
- It also suggests that interviewing mid-level staff, rather than those in more senior roles, may be more helpful as they are likely to have more experience working on the ground / in the field.¹⁰³

Asylos will source relevant stakeholders by reference to those cited in UK case law, those having published academic material on the issue in question (e.g. JSTOR search), those recommended on the Refugee Legal Group, Electronic Immigration Network (EIN), AMERA International, and the Refugee Rights in Exile Programme.

Relevant organisations will be sourced and relevant representatives from these identified by reference to human rights material or media sources, for example published on COI databases such as the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD) ecoi.net, UNHCR’s Refworld or Reliefweb.

Asylos will also seek recommendations from our respective boards of trustees and networks of legal representatives. Other project partners with relevant specialist knowledge may also be consulted.

All individuals and organisations contacted will be asked to recommend other potential stakeholders for interview.

We will include in the final report, as part of the “Sources and databases consulted” section, a list of all the places in which we looked for stakeholders. Researchers will be required to make a note of any website, organisations and other sources consulted when carrying out the desk based research to help identify stakeholders.

Any potential experts should be recorded (including such information as who recommended them, credentials, contact details, any notes on their validity as a potential source). The Asylos Programme Manager will discuss the list of potential experts with Asylos team members at the end of the exercise.

In order to assess the validity of individuals and organisations as a potential source, the following questions will be considered:

- Who is the source and do they have specific knowledge / experience which makes them have expertise on the topic?
- What context do they work in and to what extent might this context influence them or create any bias?
- How does the source formulate any information they present? Is it presented in an objective, neutral and transparent way?

¹⁰⁰ p. 10 “Identifying potential sources”

¹⁰¹ p. 11 “Deciding between potential sources”

¹⁰² ibid

¹⁰³ ibid

It is anticipated that all stakeholders with the relevant knowledge/experience in question may be contacted for an interview unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. It is our aim to conduct at least 5 interviews per report, from a range of different disciplines. Given that not all stakeholders will respond, a target number of 15 will be initially contacted by email requesting an interview. We will aim at ensuring that represented in this initial list of contacts is a balance between those who are academics, professionals on the ground and government representatives.

Step 7: Instructing interviewees

Once a list of experts to contact has been agreed, the Asylors UK Programme Manager will send an initial email to them. They may ask project partners for support in making first contact with potential interviewees where their connections may increase the chance of a positive response. Where the manager does not receive a response from potential interviewees, they will follow up with them by email and/or phone. It is our aim to conduct a total of at least five interviews per report, from a range of different disciplines. Given that not all experts will be able to respond or be interviewed, at least 15 experts will initially be contacted by email requesting an interview.

If a stakeholder provisionally agrees to take part, the manager sends a follow-up email attaching the following documents:

- an edited version of the ‘Asylos information sheet for interviewees’ [which explains how responses will be used and how the preferred level of anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed]
- a copy of the ToR and the interview questions.

The manager will also ensure that they are aware that the following can be made available to them on request:

- The COI desk research report
- The Thematic COI Report Methodology.

Once a stakeholder has had sight of this further information and confirms their willingness to take part, arrangements will be made for how they will submit their answers. The information sheet asks the stakeholder to indicate if they would prefer to submit their contribution in written form or through an oral interview. If possible, the manager will encourage each participant to agree to an interview (unless interviewees are very experienced in providing written expert testimony for RSD procedures) as we have found that interviews are more likely to wield usable information. Once these arrangements have been made, each participant is asked to provide a short bio, or link to their CV, which will be published alongside the final report.

Step 8: Interviewing stakeholders

Interviews will primarily be conducted by Asylors’s Programme Manager with assistance from Asylors volunteers where appropriate. Each interview should be recorded, unless interviewees have indicated that they do not wish for this to happen. In this case interviewers should take notes while conducting the interview. Those conducting the interviews are asked to stick to the following guidelines:

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer should start by introducing themselves, thanking the interviewee for taking part, and asking for permission to record the interview. Once this has been agreed they should check that the interviewees have received, and have reference to, the report containing our findings from the desk research and have read and understood ‘[Asylos information sheet for interviewees](#)’ (contained in appendix 2) which sets out our recommendations for supplying their evidence.

All interviewees have received these guidelines but should be reminded of following key points during the introduction:

- Interviewees should not attempt to answer any questions which fall outside of their expertise or about which they have insufficient information
- Interviewees should make clear if the information they are providing is based on direct experience or other evidence throughout the interview
- If interviewees have obtained the information from other sources they should make sure they confirm where they obtained that information
- Interviewees should not withhold any information on the basis it may detract from their view, rather if interviewees are aware of information conflicting with their views, they should be asked to acknowledge it and explain why their opinion departs from this information.

Before launching into the questions, the interviewer should double check how the source wants to be referenced in the final report and whether or not they would prefer to be anonymous. The interviewee will have already indicated this in their Confidentiality and Anonymity agreement, so this serves to ensure that interviewees are still in agreement with what they initially indicated.

Once the introduction is over the interviewer may commence asking questions, working through the questions in a structured and methodical way. Whilst doing so, volunteers are asked to pay attention to the following points on interview techniques:

- Ensure that your manner remains impartial at all times. Do not use ‘leading questions’
- Be mindful that certain topics might be sensitive to ask
- Do not be afraid to interrupt! This may mean asking for clarification or politely suggesting to move on to the next question if the interviewee goes off topic or it becomes apparent they do not have the appropriate expertise or sufficient information to speak authoritatively on the topic
- If it is unclear what information the interviewee is basing their statements on, seek clarification

The EU common guidelines states:

“Additionally, it may also be useful to ask a respondent to clarify or give more factual background to support a statement. This will often be the case where a declaratory statement or Policy position has been given on a particular topic. Requesting additional factual information to back up a statement or position will help give a clearer perspective or a rationale to what has been said, and may also remind the respondent why they have a particular viewpoint. In some instances it may challenge their own assumptions or bring out any potential bias or advocacy on the part of the respondent in a neutral, non-confrontational way.” (pg. 20-21)

In the interest of source validation, ask the interviewees to identify where any information they rely on can be found by our researchers after the interview.

A checklist of steps will be adhered to in order to keep track of the interviewing process.

Step 9: Citing the interviews and writing up the full report

After each interview, the interviewer will send the transcript to the [TranscribeMe](#) transcription service, or will transcribe the recording in full and verbatim, with only very minor adaptations being made to enhance comprehensibility. When using the TranscribeMe service 1) ensure the service is FIRST DRAFT, 2) ensure the speaker ids and time stamps are set to NOT INCLUDED.

Interview transcripts will be saved under a unique reference number, rather than using interviewees’ names if requested. The document which links interviewees’ names to each unique reference number will be password protected and only accessible to project staff. This transcript will then be returned to the interlocutor, giving them 14 days to sign it off. This transcript should then be sent to the Programme Manager which will be appended in full in the report. If the interviewee wishes certain excerpts to be made anonymous, they will be cited as such in the body of the report and not included in the appended full transcripts.

The report drafters will select relevant excerpts from the interviews and present these under the corresponding research headings in the report alongside the findings from the desk review. The manager should use this opportunity to add any additional COI that was mentioned in interviews and then make any further edits to the report, ensuring that the following points have been addressed:

- General formatting should be in line with Asylos’s ‘research handbook’.
- Each source should be introduced separately with a concise summary identifying any patterns in convergence or disagreement in the sources consulted, rather than summarising the content of the sources.
- Ensure the list of sources consulted is complete, with access links and information about when the sources were accessed (this is crucial for the user of the report to trace back the original source).
- To further aid transparency it is crucial to provide page numbers, paragraph numbers and section headings (where appropriate) for each excerpt to facilitate access to the original source.
- When using Fact-Finding Mission reports it is important to extract excerpts from the transcripts provided (if applicable) and to assign the excerpt to the interlocutor interviewed rather than including the summary provided by the authors of the fact-finding mission report.
- The final report should include a note on who instructed the interviewees and when (month and year), and a list of the documents the interviewees were provided with.
- A full transcript of each interview should be included as an appendix at the end of the report, excluding any excerpts that the interviewee wished to keep anonymous.
- Fully anonymous interviews are included as an appendix without any further identifying information.

The following presentation order and referencing style was agreed:

- The report should include a cover page with both logos, title, date, and a picture downloaded from Shutterstock.
- The second page of the report should contain a ‘Feedback and comments’ section with an active link to Asylos’s Feedback webpage, the logo of the funder and a reference to the Creative Commons applicable for the report.
- Use 1., 1.1, 1.1.2, 2., 2.1., 2.1.1. etc. as a numbering guide.
- Where applicable and suitable start with the most recent source first .
- Include a brief introductory paragraph describing the source, date of publication (or timeframe to which the excerpt relates to), a very short summary about the excerpt’s content and also identifying any patterns in convergence or disagreement, followed by the excerpt and the full reference as follows:

The UN Security Council report on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) noted with regards to the security situation in Darfur between 4 October 2018 and 3 January 2019 that:

“The security situation in Darfur has remained relatively stable, except for intermittent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) faction in Jebel Marra that resulted in civilian displacement”

(UN Security Council, [African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur Report of the Secretary-General](#), 14 January 2019, para. 2)

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Following final edits, the report will be sent to Asylos Director for review. Asylos will use this opportunity to revise and update the findings from the desk based research. Once Asylos Director has made her edits, the full report will be sent to each stakeholder detailing how they have been cited, with a copy of their interview transcript / written submissions, to sign off. Stakeholders should be given a 14 day deadline for this, after which we will assume that they are satisfied.

Once the report is published, interviewees can no longer withdraw but we will be able to make additions by issuing addendums, should they wish to provide more up to date sources or information which was not previously available to them.

Step 10: Dissemination

Once the report has been signed off, the Programme Manager will be responsible for publishing it on Asylos' website, ecoi.net, Refworld and EIN (Electronic Immigration Network). Efforts should also be made to promote the report through sharing the report via the RLG mailing list and other platforms such as the RMCC (Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium). The manager will promote it as widely as possible for example, through written blogs on websites such as Free Movement.

Step 11: Evaluation of impact

This information will be made publicly available to all, so that it can be reviewed and used by asylum seekers, Home Office case workers, legal representatives and appeal court immigration judges alike. The reports will be accessible internationally, meaning they will also be used by and influence institutions like the UNHCR and European Union Agency for Asylum(EUAA), as well as decision makers in other countries' asylum determination systems.

Asylos will track progress and impact throughout the project cycle by:

- Recording the number of downloads from its website and asking ACCORD for data from ecoi.net
- Collecting feedback from Asylos' networks of legal representatives to review how well the report met the information needed we identified, as well as how the report has been used.
- Consulting members of the COI Experts Group which it moderates to review how well the report met the information need we identified, as well as how the report has been used
- Tracking how the reports have been used by decision makers (e.g. in Home Office policy documents, UK case law, EUAA reports).

Learning will be fed back into the project on an ongoing basis and an evaluation of its overall impact will be shared with interested stakeholders on its completion.

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C. Interviewee Biographies and Transcripts

(in alphabetical order)

Disclaimer: Please note that all interviewees have provided their own biography details. These have not been authored by Asylos and, as a result, they do not follow a standard format.

Dr Chung Pham

Dr. Chung Pham, is a UK and Vietnam-based educator and researcher who grew up in the regions of Vietnam most acutely affected by the scourge of human trafficking. She holds academic credentials from various reputable universities in Vietnam, Australia, and the UK. During and after her doctoral research in the North of England, Chung has volunteered for various charities helping vulnerable Vietnamese adults and minors access legal assistance and protection, and assisted in locating family members whom they have lost on the journey to the UK.

Chung also works extensively with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in local councils in the UK, and with social services and safe houses that look after Vietnamese youngsters – often those identified as victims of trafficking and/or modern slavery – to provide much-needed specialist support. It is through this work that she has observed first-hand cases of vulnerable people disappearing from care, never to be found.

Witnessing such traumatic cases inspired Chung to join Locate International and work to make positive changes; she is thrilled to be able to utilise her wide-ranging skills to help defend vulnerable people in Vietnamese communities. This is part of her greater ambition – to combat human trafficking and labour exploitation.

As part of our operational advisory board, her particular role is to provide specialist advice for Locate’s case research on Vietnamese trafficking and missing person cases, aiding law enforcement and the judiciary, and helping Locate refine its work on missing Vietnamese person cases (often trafficking victims within the NRM) provided by several UK police forces. Since 2020, she has been delivering a unique Capability and Capacity building programme to support Law Enforcement Agencies, public service bodies involved in specialist safeguarding, and several UK charities.

Chung is also a well-known public speaker on the subject of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery. She often represents Locate, sharing her experience with the media, or sitting on various panels of keynote speakers to discuss issues relating to human trafficking and modern slavery. Below are some links to her talks and the training courses that she is delivering, alongside the Locate training team.

Dr Hai Luong

Dr Hai Thanh Luong is a lecturer in criminology (Assistant Professor) at the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University. He is a member of the Global Initiative Network’s Expert against Transnational Organised Crime (GI TOC). He serves as a senior researcher and chair of the Asian Drug Crime Research Committee at the Institute for Asian Crime and Security (IACS) in the U.S., while also holding the position of Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland. Dr Luong holds a Bachelor of Law (Criminal Investigation) and has dedicated twenty years to researching and teaching in police institutions throughout the mainland Southeast Asia region, particularly in Vietnam. In 2010, as one of the emerging scholars in non-traditional security threat fields (Australian Development Scholarship), he was awarded a full scholarship to pursue a Master in Transnational Crime Prevention at the University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia, before completing his PhD in criminology at the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University in 2017. His latest book was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2019. He has also published several papers in various academic journals, including Asian Survey, Journal of Crime and Justice, International Journal of Cyber Criminology, International Journal of Drug Policy, Policing and Society, International Journal of Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, and Trends in Organised Crime, among others. In 2020, he received the Young Asian Criminologists award from the Asian Criminological Society (ASC).

Mimi Vu

Mimi Vu is the co-founder of Raise Partners, a social and environmental impact and ESG consulting practice in Vietnam. With over 20 years of experience, Mimi has made significant contributions to the field of sustainable development in areas such as gender equality, climate change, economic development, education, public health, ethnic minority empowerment, supply chains, and labor migration. She is also the co-founder and organizer of the annual Vietnam ESG Investor Conference.

Mimi is one of the world’s leading experts on Vietnamese human trafficking and modern slavery, conducting in-depth research, providing direct support to victims, advising local and international governments, training law enforcement, and developing private sector strategies. She is Co-Founder of the Vietnam International Safe Labour Alliance (VISLA) and frequently shares her expertise in international media outlets such as the Washington Post, The Guardian, CNN, BBC, Le Monde, Reuters, Associated Press, and Sky News.

She currently serves as Director of Vietnam Holding, a London listed closed-end fund investing in Vietnamese equities that has outperformed the market over 1, 3, 5, and 10 years. Additionally,

Mimi is Vice-Chair of both the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce’s Advisory Board and European Chamber of Commerce’s Women in Business Committee, and in 2024 was named by Tatler magazine as one of “Asia’s Most Influential” people. Mimi received her undergraduate degrees from the University of Michigan and her MPA from New York University. Originally from Flint, Michigan, she has been based in Vietnam since 2006.

Thoi Nguyen

The Expert is a columnist specialising in Vietnam-related matters, with a strong focus on preparing expert reports on issues concerning the country. He has substantial experience in producing country expert reports for immigration solicitors acting on behalf of Vietnamese clients. He has also participated in a number of conferences and expert group meetings, including those associated with the Global Organized Crime Index. He holds a 2:1 degree. His research and publications cover a wide range of topics, including economic, social, and political developments, as well as human trafficking, political dissent, religious freedom, and the role of Vietnam’s state security apparatus in suppressing dissent.

Interview transcripts

(in chronological order, note that Mimi Vu’s interview was conducted in two sessions)

Interview with Mimi Vu 12 November 2025

Asylos: The first question is about the legal definition of re-trafficking in the Vietnamese context, besides the acknowledgement of ‘re-trafficking’ in Article 36 of the Penal Code, which mentions that victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again, in your knowledge is the risk of re-trafficking recognised or considered in any other domestic legislation/strategy?

Mimi Vu: Not that I know of. Not that I know of.

Asylos: Thank you, the second question relates to the frameworks in Vietnam, from the sources we consulted, no information could be found on the framework for identifying smuggled migrants. Do you know if there is a clear procedural framework for identifying smuggled migrants? If so, are you aware of any evidence of this being implemented?

Mimi Vu: Sorry. Can you say that again, “identify individuals who are smuggling,” or, “have been smuggled”?

Asylos: Sorry let me repeat the question, which relates to the frameworks in Vietnam, from the sources we consulted, no information could be found on the framework for identifying smuggled migrants. Do you know if there is a clear procedural framework for identifying smuggled migrants? If so, are you aware of any evidence of this being implemented?

Mimi Vu: No.

Asylos: No. So that was no, you’re not aware of any implementation or any framework?

Mimi Vu: Exactly.

Asylos: Okay. And the third question then goes into, are you aware of any cases of children who are misidentified as adults overseas and then returned to Vietnam? If so, do you know what support has been provided?

Mimi Vu: I have worked on cases in the UK where they have been misidentified, but it goes both ways. So either adults misidentified as minors and working with adults who were previously misidentified-- were minors, but then misidentified as adults. So by the time they came back to Vietnam or were [returned] there were no established support services for them if they were sent back to Vietnam.

Asylos: I’m sorry my internet connection broke and I lost you for a second. Could I just ask you to repeat that once more for me please?

Mimi Vu: Okay, so I have worked on court cases as an expert witness in the UK for misidentification of ages [inaudible] were adults and then misidentified as minors. Then also minors who were adults by the time I started working with them, but previously were minors and then misidentified as adults. So they were victimized as minors, except when they aged into adults because the legal process was taking so long. Either way, if they were sent back to Vietnam, there would not have been any support oh, I’ve lost you again.

Mimi Vu: You froze for a minute there.

Asylos: I’m so sorry. I don’t know what’s happening. I’m just going to pause it for a second and see if I can maybe switch to my phone. I’m so sorry. Right. So you were on the point about the support, right? Do you know what support?

Mimi Vu: Yeah. So either way, there are no support services specifically for minors and smuggled.

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

Asylos: Okay, thank you so much. And then we go on to question four. So this is a country study that was published in 2023 by ODI. It referenced migrant workers. And it noted that the social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labor exploitation from reporting their case. In addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their families. And the question is, how are individuals typically received and treated by families, communities, general public, and the government, after returning from abroad, especially when their departure or experiences are linked to phenomenon such as migration, exploitation, or forced retention? And are there any perceived differences in treatment owing to personal characteristics? So that could be age or gender. It's a long question, sorry.

Mimi Vu: Definitely the gender for sure. So I'll break it down with gender, so the risk for women and girls with trafficking is always sex and labour. So for a trafficker, labour, sex, it's one and the same because they're dealing with the victims as actual products on the market. And so the value of a female victim is much higher than that of a male because there's so many more ways to make money off of her. So a lot of times, statistics actually, not a lot of time. All of the time, statistics usually split sex and labour as two separate things. But for women and girls, and in some cases, children, depending on what the destination market is, it's always one and the same. So it's not an either/or. It is and/and, right? And so there's loss of faith at the most basic level for both men and women. If you have men who, for example, have gone to Europe or the UK, Australia, kind of the higher-value, more developed Western countries, there's more expectation and this idea that they will be more successful there, that it's easier to be successful there. And so, therefore, the burden on them to be successful is much greater. And that also means that the pressure on them to succeed is much greater, and the loss of faith is much greater if they return unsuccessful. And when I say return unsuccessful, there's multiple layers to that. There's just, they went overseas; they worked low-paying jobs they didn't weren't able to save up a ton of money. They were still managing to save and send money home, but it wasn't really, like, this big money raining from the sky thing that they probably thought they had. So you have that. And then you also have the ones who were just exploited for labor. I managed not to make any money, didn't have papers, and then ended up being deported back to Vietnam. And then you have the ones who were caught up in, for example, police raids in the UK on cannabis farms and then are in detention centers or in prison awaiting trial for whatever reason. Those who return as a criminal or as deported, is also really a big loss of face. So it depends. But the issue is that the way that they deal with this loss of faith is by not telling what's really happening to them to their families, to their communities. Or if they tell their families, their families don't let the communities know because it's too embarrassing. And if they do return, it's very hush-hush, and the priority for them is to find a way to pay off the debt and make money again. So that's where you have the risk of re-trafficking coming into play, right? So that it directly influences their desire to go abroad again, but because they're already in debt and they are more desperate now because they not only have the financial burden, but they also have the potential social stigma. So they're like, "I have to succeed. I have to succeed." That raises their risk and vulnerability of being re-trafficked.

For women and girls, especially those who are victims of sex trafficking, stigma is much greater, and it's not just something that affects them individually, but affects their families as well. And for women and girls, especially, for example, those who have been trafficked to Asia countries like Cambodia or China, they are viewed as damaged goods. They are viewed as kind of bringing shame upon the family. I've worked with victims in the past in the north who were trafficked as children to China. They've been rescued, returned, and there was such stigma against the family in their village that the families had to move, right, because, unfortunately a girl's downfall is her family's downfall, right, especially that burden is, especially acute when it comes to female victims. So the burden on the woman, the pressure on the woman, the stigma on the woman, and by extension, her family is much, much greater. It's very, very high because she carries the honor of the family when it comes to this. Yes, that also applies to the man, but it's easier for the man to regain honor than it would be for the woman, especially if she's a victim of sex trafficking.

Asylos: And in regards to the government side of things, is there any different treatments that those individuals will experience?

Explanatory Note	Section 1: Legal Definitions & Framework	Section 2: Trafficking Patterns, Routes & Actors	Section 3: Risk Factors & Vulnerability	Section 4: State Protection & Criminal Justice System	Section 5: Access to Support, Shelter & Healthcare	Section 6: Reintegration & Opportunities for Returnees	Section 7: Trends and Emerging Issues	Methodology	Bibliography	Interview Transcripts

Mimi Vu: Yes. I mean, because sex trafficking has been recognized for longer than labor trafficking, and trafficking of women and girls is something that is something that the Vietnamese government openly deals with, right it's so much more apparent. It's so much more visible, especially with Cambodia, China, Malaysia, and the Asia region countries. Whereas most of the whatever's going on in Europe is mainly more focused on labor trafficking, right, and labor exploitation. So the government does have a lot of policies and frameworks around support for women, female victims of sex trafficking regionally when they come back. Whereas labor trafficking, it's something that was only recently recognized, within the last-- I can't remember exactly, but you can find it online. It's just within the last 10 years, very, very recent. So there's not much, by the way, of official recognition of labor trafficking as a form of trafficking and also then the needed support to go along with that recognition, support for victims after they return. And also, it's not helped by the fact that if you do have victims of labor trafficking, for example, in the UK, most of the time, if they're recognized by the UK or other European countries, they end up staying, right, because then they get Leave to Remain, and they don't return home to Vietnam. Whereas if you have victims of labor trafficking in Europe, in the UK but then are deported back to Vietnam, they're not recognized as victims of labor trafficking because they've been deported back to Vietnam because, for example, the UK doesn't recognize them. They've denied their claim as a victim of trafficking, modern slavery, what have you. So when they return to Vietnam, they return officially as illegal immigrants, deportees, right, not as victims.

Asylos: Okay. And then we'll move on to a section that's titled migration, reintegration, and re-trafficking. And the question is, do you have any information on how and if threats towards family members of the returnee impact the risk of re-trafficking upon return to Vietnam? I know you've touched on some of this information in the last question.

Mimi Vu: So threats, yes, but it doesn't have to be an actual threat. Just the specter of the threat is enough to influence. That fear, that sort of abstract fear is enough to push people to try and go abroad again. It's the fear of not being able to repay the debt and not being able to repay the debt, especially if you've borrowed money from a loan shark or black market money lender. The fear of what they could do is enough to push you. So they don't actually have to make a direct threat to the person or the family members. It's just the threat of the threat is enough.

Asylos: Thank you, we can go to another section, which is risk factors for children of trafficking survivors. And from the sources consulted, we couldn't find any statistics within the timeframe [the past five years] regenerative trafficking, so for example, cases where children of trafficked victims have experienced trauma or have themselves been trafficked. In your experience, what evidence exists, if any, of intergenerational trafficking in Vietnam and what factors appear to increase the risk of this occurring? Do you know what the risk factors are?

Mimi Vu: So two things. So it's not necessarily intergenerational trafficking. I would say it's more relative trafficking. So I'll give you an example. One of the victims of the Essex 39 was a young man, 25 years old, from Nghe An Province. His sister and he has a family of siblings. After he passed away, the brother still wanted to earn money to support the family. And so he went with a labour broker and went into debt of many, many thousands and is now floating around somewhere in Manchester and Brighton, not being able to send money back home. So third time is a charm. The sister who and they're not the poorest of the poor. None of these victims are the poorest of the poor, but they're just in a debt cycle where they overborrow, and they have no savings, and there's some sort of crisis. In this case, one of the parents got sick, and so they went into debt to pay for the healthcare. So then the sister said, "Okay, who else can go? My husband can go." So now she was looking for opportunities to try and somehow get her husband to the UK or to Australia in the hopes of trying to make money. And that is what we see because it's not a, "Okay, well, after 10 years, the child" it's immediate. It's that quick. So it's not necessarily parent-child, but it's the person's sibling, the person's cousin whatever, right? And then there are other situations where, for example, I met a couple of young men at Vietnam City, the old Vietnamese migrant camp in northern France a few years ago. They were cousins, and they were on their way to the UK because one of the boys' fathers had gone to the UK many years before, worked in a nail salon, didn't have papers or anything like that, would still managed to send money home and everything, and then decided he wanted to retire and just come back to Vietnam. So he went back to Vietnam. But then he said to his son and his nephew, "Hey, you should go to the UK." And the problem is that this man went many years earlier. So for this later version of organized crime getting involved with I think he went in the early '90s, mid '90s. So it was a different time.

And the cost was less expensive, and you didn't have the control of the routes and mixed in with cannabis growing and all the other business lines of the transnational organized crime groups. It wasn't there yet. It was just more people smuggling, right? And so that was the dad's experience. So for him, he was like, "Oh, son, nephew, you should go too." So these young men, I think they were very young, 18, 19 years old, were on their way over, and they were miserable. They were in the middle of the forest. It had already been a couple months. They had to go through Russia and all this. And they were extremely at risk for further exploitation once they got to the UK because it's a different time, right? So you see things like that as well where they think because some relative left beforehand, and it was a different time, they had a different experience. It's the same way how it is now. Same thing happened to a young woman. She was only 17 when I met her in the camp. Her sister had gone several years earlier to the UK. And so the parents said, "Okay. Daughter, you should go too. Follow your sister." But she took this crazy route. The broker took her to Korea and then went through China, and then she had to go through all these things. And I said to her, I was like, "If your parents knew what you had to go through, do you think they would have sent you?" And she said, "No. Absolutely not." She's like, "I hate this so much." And she was 17. And even though she-- we didn't have a long time to talk to her because we were in the migrant camp. But even though she didn't talk about her experiences, she was a single girl who's 17 years old traveling by herself at the mercy of all these men. When we were leaving, we gave her a hug. She started crying and just held onto us and wouldn't let go, right? And it's not a leap to think about what possibly could have happened to her during this very long, crazy journey that she had to take, right? So these are that kind of thing that I've seen. I think with the-- as for the stigma for the child, I think it's less about the stigma because, again, a lot of times they don't even know what's happening to their parents. Parents don't tell them the truth. It's more about growing up as what we call bare branch. These kids grow up without parents because the parents are off.

And so it's not their parents as their primary caretaker. It's usually the grandparents who are elderly, like an auntie or an uncle or a cousin or someone else who's not the primary parent. And there's lots of studies that have been done on the negative impact of these children raised as bare branches, right, because parents are off somewhere else working.

Asylos: Thank you. I haven't heard that term before, bare branches, but in the research, it's definitely come up about parents, what happens to children who are left behind.

Mimi Vu: I know there's lots of studies done in China and longitudinal studies as well because this has been such a long phenomenon in China. And it's shown that provinces in China where there's clusters of most of the parents are away working, children there have-- there's higher crime. They have lower education rates. They have all these things because then you get a bunch of kids who are not raised by their parents together. And so there's definitely an impact on that, right?

Asylos: Thank you so much. Then the next question we're going to move on to is about programs and interventions. So addressing some of this intergenerational trafficking. The question is, are you aware of any interventions or community-based initiatives in Vietnam that are aimed at reducing the risk of factors for children whose parents or guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within, to, or from Vietnam and breaking the cycle of re-trafficking across generations? And if there's any examples of any promising community-based practices that you're aware of.

Mimi Vu: So with my previous NGO, Pacific Links Foundation, we had developed a lot of local community outreach activities in partnership with the local authorities to go into at-risk communities. For example, on the Chinese border, ethnic minority communities there, or into communities in central Vietnam where you have a lot of the victims and migrants coming from who go to Europe and the UK. In that case, we went directly to the schools to do outreach to elementary school students, junior high school students. And then in the north, when it was in the, I think, minority communities, we would go to their weekend markets where everyone congregates outreach activities there. And talk about safekeeping practices. So with the children, for example, it was talking to them about safe migration. So not to say, "Oh, don't go overseas." It's not a bad thing for them to have experiences overseas, but the point is to do it safely, right, and to say, "Okay, your parents are going, yes, but think about what you want to do. If you go overseas, do it as an educated person. That way, you can go with a company. It pays you a higher salary rather than going as a construction worker or lower-skilled."

Which, again, is fine. Let’s not say that’s a bad thing. Of course, a lot of the labor recruitment from Europe is targeting specifically these lower-skilled workers, kitchen staff, all that. That’s fine as well. But be aware and not just look at this as like, “Oh, all my problems will be solved the second I step foot over there.” And also working with these teachers and the school administrators to educate them as well so they can spread the message with the parents and the students. In the north, we did outreach in the markets talking directly to parents about things like, “You need to keep track of your child’s social media. You need to get on Facebook and check her messenger. You need to be open with her and talk about how you know all these things that are going on, and the possibility of being groomed.” And the reason why and then, again, working with this directly with the local authorities so that they could continue to do these activities on their own so that it would be absorbed and integrated into school curriculum or the general activities of the local authorities. I don’t know if Pacific Links is continuing to do that since I left them. But I know for me, when I was there, a lot of the partnerships that I brokered and the fundraising that I did went towards these types of outreach activities.

Asylos: Great. Thank you, we go into social security and welfare for trafficking survivors. And the first question is, do you know if social security support is available for women and children who are trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Mimi Vu: Yes and no. Yes, but the problem is it’s not enough in terms of comprehensiveness, and it’s not enough in terms of length of time because the social security support, that also means integration support. So when the trafficking victim comes back, especially if they’ve been gone for a long time, they need to redo their identity papers and get re-registered and all of that, right? So that takes time. And they need help with that, all that administrative stuff. And that’s for them in order to get their national ID, for them to be eligible for-- get their social health insurance card, for them to be able to enroll their kids in school. All of that needs to be done. If they are a victim and this is what you find also, a lot of victims will be born in one province but then have moved to another province, and so they’re not registered anywhere. So what project province are they from, really? They don’t have a registration anywhere. So then that becomes an issue as well. There’s a lot of admin administrative hurdles that they have to get through that they need support with. If there’s an NGO, if the NGOs can help them with that, that’s great.

However, they need a lot when it comes to social support and integration support. They need job training. They need housing. They need psychosocial therapy for all the trauma they’ve gone through. Not just for them, but also for their children. They need a job. They need support to help them get back not even get back into society, but just be able to cope with everything and really build up their confidence because the psyche of a victim, especially a female victim, is one that is really hard for the current mental health and healthcare system in Vietnam to deal with because we don’t have an advanced mental health system. There’s a lot of social stigma, cultural stigma, and tradition around that. And as a result, the mental healthcare system in Vietnam is very, in general, very underdeveloped. It’s one that focuses on medicating. And it’s one that focuses on kind of like the hard mental health diseases like schizophrenia or bipolar, you know but not more of the less visible trauma, especially one that is so judged, right? So there’s all these things that a female victim, especially if she has a child needs. She needs support circles. She needs like a mentor. She needs all of that. That is not available to her.

Asylos: All right. Thank you so much. I think there is another question further down about the mental health, so I’ll probably touch back on that again. But thank you. That’s already super helpful. Then the next question will be, in your view, what are the main gaps in social protection policies that may increase the vulnerability and risk factors of trafficking survivors?

Mimi Vu: Number one is that there is a huge gap in prevention. The policy just focuses on victim identification and compensation/ victim support, but like I said, it’s not comprehensive enough and it’s not long enough. Initial support of like three to six months is not enough. I’m sorry, it’s really not. And there are not enough organizations, whether it’s state organizations or NGOs that are available to provide the support. Sorry. What was the question again?

Asylos: No problem. In your view, what are the main gaps in social protection policies that may increase the vulnerability and risk factors of trafficking survivors?

Mimi Vu: So one is that there is that lack of comprehensive integration support, really comprehensive integration support that focuses on long-term support and integration for the woman, especially from an economic and social integration perspective. The second thing is the debt, dealing with her debt. So if she, for example, went into debt to go to Europe or the UK and became a victim of trafficking and sent back, there’s no way to clear that debt, right? There’s no way to clear that debt. And especially if she borrowed money from black market money lender or someone connected to organized crime, that’s where you get the risk built into that, because one, she still has to pay back the debt, or two, she’s so worried about the potential perceived threat of not repaying the debt that she would be more likely to seek to go abroad again, right, one, to get out of the sphere of influence of the moneylender and two, make enough money to try and repay the debt. Those two. I always say prevention is protection. It’s a lack of focus on prevention of trafficking in the first place beyond awareness-raising campaigns, instead of really getting to the root causes, is one that impacts the risk of someone getting re-trafficked or re-exploited because they’re still in the same conditions that they were beforehand, only worse, right?

Asylos: Thank you, and then the next set of questions is well, one question under the section, factors that increase the risk of being exploited or re-trafficked. And the question is, are you aware of any information or evidence available on cases of individuals or groups who were trafficked, returned, and then exploited or re-trafficked?

Mimi Vu: I’ve worked with victims in the UK who went either to work overseas somewhere within Asia, so Japan or Taiwan. They had overpaid and then were underpaid. And so they were exploited in that way, and they had to go abroad again in order to earn money and then ended up trafficked and exploited. And then that’s where I met them because they were caught in the cannabis raids being forced to work there. I have met victims whose family members were in that situation, right? And it’s not always easy. I would say it’s not easy at all to get in touch with them because of the nature of exploitation and especially with Vietnamese who when they’re being exploited, they live as shadows. You will never see them. They’re ghosts. And so in order to get in touch with them and meet them, they have to have been there, they have to have surfaced somehow, right? And so I don’t doubt that more exist. It’s just these are just the anecdotes that I hear. I also know that example, I had a meeting with the Hungarian Council General because Hungary is being used as a pass-through country, a transit country, to get people into Europe. So I was waiting in the parking lot to get my motorbike. And I was chatting with the motorbike parking attendant. And he’s asking, *“Where was your meeting?”* And I said, *“Oh, Hungarian consulate.”* And he’s like, *“Oh, Hungary. That’s the country that people go to to go to another country.”* And I said, *“That’s interesting. How do you know that?”* He’s like, *“Oh, because I talk to people as they’re waiting for their motorbike or they hear them talking.”* And he says to me, *“Did you know that a lot of Vietnamese go to Hungary to work, but because they got scammed and they paid too much and they ended up being tricked and the job didn’t exist or they didn’t get paid as much, they had to come back to Vietnam, so there’s exploitation. And so now they’re trying to go again, but they are instead trying to go into Germany or the UK.”* So even though they’re not being exploited for the second time yet, you can infer what’s going to happen to them going forward, right? So these are things that are happening in real time, right, that I’m being told. And there’s no reason to lie because he’s a motorbike attendant. He’s telling me exactly [inaudible]. And he’s giving me the price of what they paid. He’s like, *“Do you know how much they pay? They pay a lot of money.”* And I said, *“How much do they pay?”* And he said *“like a few hundred million Vietnam”*, which is at least like 10-15 thousand dollars, right? So these are things that are happening at this moment.

Asylos: Thank you, we look at the government identification, support, and protection section. And for this, Asylos actually produced a report in 2020. And one of the sources in that report mentioned that in many cases, assistance to men and boys focus on return and basic needs such as transportation and brief shelter stays rather than long-term reintegration. The question is, in your experience or knowledge, how long does support typically last for male survivors of trafficking in Vietnam?

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Mimi Vu: We have had so few, it's becoming a little bit more common now because of the scam centers. So you do have male victims of the scam centers coming back. And they are recognized as victims of trafficking just because it's much less complicated than those going to Europe or the UK. I know that there are organizations, for example, I think Blue Dragon gives some support, but from what I understand, it is not long-term. There's no NGO besides Pacific Links Foundation. And that's very specific, though, for female victims of sex trafficking in their shelter on the Chinese border. So very, very specific. That's the only entity that I know of that provides long-term support, meaning one to three years kind of thing, right? Everything else is not that long because there's just not the funding for it. They don't have any other organizations that have that level of capacity or funding to be able to do that. And on top of that, to follow each returnee. I know that Pacific Links has the contract now to provide support for Vietnamese deportees from the UK. So they got the contract from the UK Home Office because the UK Home Office right now is ramping up. They just announced a couple of weeks ago that they're fast-tracking deportations of Vietnamese who, quote, unquote, "have no right to be in the UK." Already is a problem. But they specifically have not announced what that entails. So before, it was IOM that had a contract to provide support for deportees back from the UK.

And what that amounted to was basically, the attorney would be given-- and this is if they chose voluntary deportation, right? So they would receive an ATM card with cash on it, but they would have to work with IOM to develop a business plan. And that cash would then have to be used to implement their business plan. And there was no follow-up afterwards. So that's what was provided. But in terms of the long-term care, job training, psychosocial support for male victims, all that. I don't know if any organization is providing all that right now, especially for male victims.

Asylos: Thank you, we can now take a look at the global and regional influences in traffic in Vietnam. And for here, we found an article that was published in 2022 by professors Ella Corbin and Adrian Sidebottom, in which they noted that a particular-- sorry, one of their participants also called our attention on how the war might impact upon establishing trafficking routes through Ukraine, and they were citing specifically routes from Vietnam to China. Do you know if and how the war in Ukraine has affected human trafficking routes within to and from Vietnam?

Mimi Vu: Yeah. So I would say it's not just Ukraine, Russia. So there were some things that happened in that period of 2019, 2020, 2021. And they all influenced the shift from Vietnam. Not just one, but several. So I'll give you the main ones. Number one was the Essex tragedy at the end of 2019. What that did was it finally brought to light, not just in Europe and the UK, but also in Vietnam, this issue and the risks and the dangers of Vietnamese human smuggling and trafficking from Vietnam into the UK. So what that did was it increased the scrutiny on those routes. So that made the human smuggling networks reroute. Less Lorry, more boat.

Lorry route was being used almost exclusively by the Vietnamese. And then it shifted. The second thing was Brexit, because Brexit happened in 2016. It took time to implement everything. And that reduced the amount of goods being traded between Europeans and the UK. That meant less lorries, less trucks. So not only was there increased scrutiny on that route, but there was less opportunity for them to get the trucks there. So you have one from there. Number two was COVID. COVID, what that did was that shut down borders for a long time. And for the crossings that did happen, there was a rerouting within the Schengen Zone. So instead of going France into the UK because there was a lot of scrutiny on that, they had to stay within the Schengen Zone. And that's why you saw them moving over to any country that had a coastline that could be crossed into across the channel. So France, of course, but in a different way, Belgium and the Netherlands, right? And then you also saw the rise of Germany, which has always been a primary transit and destination country, becoming a primary destination country, even more so.

The third thing is Ukraine-Russia. So I want to clarify something is that when the Vietnamese leave Vietnam, it is with a valid visa. It may have been fraudulently obtained, but they leave legally. So there's none of this like, "Oh, they left illegally. They didn't leave illegally. They left legally." And before Ukraine, Russia and COVID and all that, it was mainly on Russian tourist visas because Russia was issuing, I think, something like 50,000 tourist visas a year. So that meant not just adults could go, but kids could go as well. Because it's very easy to have a fake auntie or uncle accompanying a bunch of kids and be like, "Oh, I'm taking them to visit their parents who are working in Russia," right? And that's why before all that, we did encounter a lot more underage minor victims in Europe and the UK because they were going on these Russian tourist visas. But Ukraine-Russia stopped all that. So you had Brexit. COVID stopped that because no one was traveling, and then Ukraine-Russia stopped all that. Right after the rise or the reopening of borders, you then had the appearance and just the increase of official recognition in Eastern European countries of their labor shortage and the consequent recruitment of Vietnamese workers to go to those countries to fill those labor shortages. We always had that happening, but it really ramped up post-COVID, Brexit, everything, right?

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And so Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, all these countries are former Soviet bloc countries who have a history of recruiting Vietnamese workers in the '80s and '90s. And therefore, you have these large diaspora communities in each of those countries. And especially in Moscow, Prague, and Berlin, you have well-established ethnic Vietnamese organized crime groups in each of those. And you have migration routes that were well-established from the 1980s between all those countries. And because all these countries now needed workers, they started recruiting heavily from Vietnam because they have good memories of Vietnamese workers, and especially compared to other migrant groups, they prefer the Vietnamese because as the stereotype goes, Vietnamese are hardworking, quiet, and don't cause trouble. So the right skin color, for better or worse, they're considered the model minority migrant worker. And so you had the increase of use of now the D-class labor visas. So now you didn't have to go on Russian tourist visas anymore. You could just go on a D-class labor visa to one of these countries that had a severe labor shortage that was recruiting Vietnamese workers. And so when you leave Vietnam-- again, they're still leaving legally, and they're entering Europe now legally, right? There was a time between 2021 and 2023 when you had underage not going through the labor visa program, but going through the student English class visa program [Rubalita?]. Because there's no point for labor brokers to fake birth certificate documents for a 17-year-old to go on a labor visa program when they can just turn 18. "Just wait until you're 18 and go," right? That's just fine. And now you also have the emergence of the scam compounds in Laos and Myanmar and Cambodia. And so if a minor wants to quit school and go to work, they would just go and do that, rather than try and go [inaudible] Europe, right? You have the split now. And so that's the route now that's happening is it's no longer going through China or going through Russia, but it's going directly into Schengen zone using these D-Class labor visas [inaudible] vocational training visas, right, which are still-- that's to fill the gaps of the labor shortages in each of these countries.

Asylos: Thank you so much, I'm just looking at the time now, and you have about 20 minutes or less so I would suggest that we take one or two more questions depending on the time. And if you're okay with it we can reschedule to finalise the remaining questions?

Mimi Vu: We can set up another call, that's fine.

Asylos: Brilliant, thank you so much. Then let's move on to the section, which is healthcare and medical support. And the first question for this-- it's, "A Thomas Ruther's news article published in 2022 noted that when a large group of people enter the shelter, it will be difficult to give them the rights they're entitled to, such as healthcare," said one individual whose organization provides legal-free aid to migrant workers and victims of trafficking. And the question is, do you know what the main barriers to accessing healthcare for trafficking victims in Vietnam are or is?

Mimi Vu: So the first thing is that administrative hurdle, right? If they have left Vietnam, and especially if they've been gone for a number of years, it's the registration process after they get back. Which province do they register to? And now, because Vietnam has just in July of this year underwent its largest bureaucratic reorganization since the war where they reduced the number of provinces from 63 to 34 and reduced, I think it was, two levels of administration, right, and created new ministries, merged ministries, and so they're still bureaucratic. They're working through all of that. So there are delays. It takes time, just from a bureaucracy standpoint. And like I said, the main thing is like, "Where do they register?" They have no ties. They have no home left. What province do they pick, right? They don't have their birth certificate. They don't have any papers left. They have no family members, for example. That's probably initially the biggest hurdle for them because without their national ID card and a registration home in a province, they can't get their social health insurance card. The second barrier is it depends on what kind of healthcare they're seeking. Is it mental healthcare? Because of mental healthcare, then there's a lot of issues with that depending on who they are, depending on what their issues are, depending on what their needs are. Not just from a stigma perspective, but also one of just pure access and also one of availability of the type of care that they require in Vietnam.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. The follow-up question with that is, do you know if there is any support for trafficking victims with cognitive or learning difficulties?

Mimi Vu: No.

Asylos: No? No, you don't know if there is any support or no, there isn't any support. Just to clarify.

Mimi Vu: There is not any. I mean, there's barely support for just people with children with [inaudible].

Asylos: Right. So in your opinion, you're not aware of any support that exists for individuals who might have cognitive unlearning difficulties. Thank you.

Mimi Vu: Trafficking victims, especially, no. Not at all.

Asylos: Thank you, I think we can leave it here as you have a hard cut off and we can pick up the remaining questions next week. Thank you again for contributing to this report.

Mimi Vu: Thank you

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Asylos: Okay. Right. So we stopped at question 14 last time - do you know if there’s any support for trafficking survivors with cognitive and learning difficulties? - which we did. So the next question now was-- or it’s three questions that are all specific to mental health and psychological support. So for the first one, we found a source that was reporting on children, and it noted that they also experienced stigma on returning home after they’ve been trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonor upon their relations. Children who have spent out of time with school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatized by peers on reintegration on education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally. And the same source reported on-- returnees mentioned that trafficking victims face social stigma and discrimination and may face difficulty in accessing appropriate trauma counselling services outside of large cities. So the question is, do you know if there is stigma towards or negative perceptions of trafficking survivors generally and/or those with physical or mental health issues tied to the experience of trafficking?

Mimi Vu: Yes to both. And there’s varying degrees as well. So, for example, if you’re a young person or a young woman who’s trafficked to China for sex trafficking and they come back with mental health issues, a baby, for example, on top of that, the stigma gets amplified with each later, let’s say.

Asylos: And can I check how you have this knowledge, is it through experience or research that you’ve carried out?

Mimi Vu: Experience. Yeah.

Asylos: Thank you, then related to that question, do you know if there are any known barriers to accessing mental health for trafficking survivors? As you’ve just mentioned, particularly women and children, i.e., things like referral pathways or financial barriers or stigma that gets in the way.

Mimi Vu: Just the existence of mental health services. That’s the biggest barrier, because in Vietnam, the mental health has traditionally and still continues to be considered one of like a clinical, like a physical medical issue rather than a psychological issue, so even doctors the Vietnamese word for doctor-- actually, let me find it exactly for you so I can read it out to you. Sorry, I’m trying to open up this file.

Asylos: No rush.

Mimi Vu: Oh so mental illness is translated as the [bệnh tâm thần or sự điên rồ?] in Vietnamese, which literally means madness, illness. And psychiatrists who, in the Vietnamese word, it basically translates to doctors who treat madness, right? So that is, in a nutshell, how mental health, mental illness is treated and mental issues are treated in Vietnam. They tend to focus more on as a medical thing rather than psychological. And consequently, all the treatments that follow are dealt with from a psychiatric medication view rather than one that is of therapeutic treatment, right? So they tend to medicate, and they focus on diseases like mental health diseases like schizophrenia or bipolar. So things are very psychiatric in nature and much, much less, almost nonexistent, about trauma unless it’s something like an NGO that has a crisis center.

There are a couple of social enterprises that are trying to promote positive mental health with therapists, but there are two or three. I mean, like tiny, tiny numbers. And they’re concentrated only in Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi, right? Psychotherapy is not really a thing. I mean, they exist, but they’re not considered actual, it’s not an official therapy in Vietnam. And psychotherapists are only considered technicians and not clinicians who treat. They can only order psychological tests, right? Not only that, the number of psychotherapists and clinicians and psychologists in Vietnam are so small. What’s the number? And this is actually cited in the latest, it’s from a World Bank report that was cited in the UK’s latest country policy note on mental health.

There are only 143 psychologists and psychotherapists in Vietnamese hospitals, making up only 3% of all clinicians in the country. This rate of psychotherapists per 100,000 people in Vietnam is 10 times below the global average, right? So it just doesn't exist. So before we even talk about can they access, whether there's barriers to access, the barrier is that they just-- really doesn't exist, right? The second thing is you're dealing with oftentimes when you have victims that return, especially victims of sex trafficking, they're suffering from multiple ailments. So it's both physical, it's mental, it's everything else. And Vietnam does not have a strong cross, what is it? What's the exact word?

Asylos: Do you mean a holistic approach?

Mimi Vu: Yeah. Exactly. It's an intersectional approach that's trauma-informed. And the World Bank, again, has identified this as one of the areas where Vietnam needs to improve is providing this sort of intersectional cross-disciplinary, there it is, cross-disciplinary health treatment for victims of trafficking others, right? So none of that really exists in Vietnam and certainly not outside of the major cities. So that's your first barrier to access. So before we even talk about stigma, it's just the fact that the existence of the necessary treatment doesn't really exist, right? The second thing is accessing social health insurance if they don't have-- if they've lost their ID cards and don't have papers, don't have birth certificates, and are cut off from their place of origin or the province of origin. So So there was a victim that I was working with in the UK whose parents went off and never returned. And so she was largely raised by her grandmother in a rural area outside of Hanoi. After her grandmother passed away, she was about 18 or 19 years old, [she] was tricked into going to another province to work. She thought she was working at a reception desk in a karaoke bar, but then she was ultimately forced to work as a karaoke bar hostess. And through a whole very unfortunate chain of events, ended up paying or going to debt for a large sum of money because she thought she was going to work in France, and instead was forced into sex work in France and in the UK. Now, if she were deported back to Vietnam, where would she register her? She has no papers anywhere. She was born in a rural area outside of Hanoi City, but she doesn't have any papers to prove it. She doesn't have a birth certificate. She has nothing. And not only that, she was raised unofficially by her grandmother, but officially her grandmother wasn't on as her parents, right? She also doesn't have the information of her parents, like what their full names were, where they were born, all that stuff that could also be a paper trail to find out where she is. So she has no proof of residency from where she grew up or in the new province where she went afterwards to work because she was never registered there because she was essentially trafficked there. So she's provinceless, right? And so where can she register in order to then receive a national ID and then receive social health insurance, right?

So that is a very specific problem that a lot, a lot, a lot of victims encounter, especially for the ones who have zero family or personal network. They've been outside away for so long, too long, and they don't have roots anywhere. So where would they register that they're from in order to be a resident and receive all of these social insurance and social work protections? So that's another barrier. On top of that, Vietnam just merged. We just went through this massive bureaucratic reorganization where we were previously 63 provinces, and now we're 34 provinces. So we had all these provinces merging. And on top of that, there was an entire layer of administration that was removed just to reduce bureaucracy and make things more efficient. So that means that right now, the reorganization is happening. So it's a little bit jumbled, a little bit messy, right? You don't know who's in charge of what because they're still figuring that all out. So there are delays. There will be delays in ministries coordinating because the ministries also have different names now. There was a reduction of ministries, merging of ministries, and they all have different names. And so the ministries that we're supposed to take care of, for example, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, MOLISA, doesn't exist anymore.

That's what used to oversee all of the trafficking, everything like that. No longer exists. MOLISA's no more. That's been absorbed into MOHA, which is the Ministry of Home Affairs, right? However, if you're dealing with victims from overseas, you also still have to deal with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And because it's health issues, you still have to deal with Ministry of Health. So you have multiple ministries that you're trying to deal with that are reorganizing bureaucratically. And so who takes charge of what, right? And so that is a barrier that's happening right now, right?

And then you have the stigma, right? So you get through all of that. And the stigma comes in multiple forms. So you have external stigma that is very much felt, especially among victims of sex trafficking, and especially the ones that come back with babies, right, where they're basically viewed as bad girls, and they've now also tainted their families. And so the stigma is not just felt by the girl or the woman, the female victim, but also her family, right? And so the tendency is then to not seek out help because you don't want to publicize yourself or amplify yourself anymore, but just try and hide and live quietly so that you and your family don't suffer anymore, right? So you have the lack of access because if you're especially from a rural area, the effort that you have to make in order to access any sort of mental healthcare is one that is onerous. Just from a logistical standpoint, like how do you physically get to that access? You have to take buses. You have to spend a lot of money on transport just to be able to access this. And then because it's such a big effort, that is also noticed by your neighbors because everyone lives on top of each other, and we're a very nosy country, and everyone gossips about each other, right? And so all that effort will also be noticed by the neighbors and the community.

So there's that aspect that's rarely talked about, but is very real when it comes to being a barrier and something that brings stigma to the victim and creates a barrier. Adds to the barrier of trying to access support. And then there's also the perceived stigma, which is almost as effective as the actual external stigma. Because we are a country, we're a culture that operates on losing face and saving face. Just the thought of losing face is enough for us to change the way we behave because you want to avoid losing faith. You want to avoid your family being shamed, right? So it's not the act of shaming. It's the fear of being shamed is what also influences behavior, right? It's like the real threats versus perceived threats, the perceived threats from organized crime and black market moneylenders, whatever else is enough already. And you can't say, "Oh, no, but they're not real." They're very real. They're real in the person's mind and in their culture, so therefore, it's real. So this is oftentimes also for men who are coming back from Europe and the UK because they "failed" at being successful going abroad. And this is also after a period of years, they return. They have nothing to show for it, nothing at all except shame.

And that internal shame then is an influence on them not seeking mental health. First of all, they would probably not acknowledge that they have mental health issues because especially if you're a man in this culture and across the world, but especially in traditional patriarchal societies where mental health in men is not talked about. It's not a thing. It's a sign of weakness. You have that barrier already, that generic general stigma that's found everywhere. Add on top of that, the failure to be successful. And so adding that on there. And then on top of that, the extraordinary effort that they would have to go through in order to seek out help, right, in addition to what I said before about trying to get the residency card and the social health insurance, all that. So add all that on top of it. Their priority is not to seek mental health treatment, but to earn money. And in, say, [faith?], like trying to be successful. They failed at all these things. And this is where it influences their risk of being exploited and/or trafficked again, right.

Asylos: Thank you so much. That was really comprehensive. Then the next question within the same category is, can you provide any information on what kind of mental health or rehabilitation supports are currently available for trafficking victims? And this can be both state or non-state channels. And in your experience, how easy are these to access, and how long do they typically last?

Mimi Vu: So few. I know of one, an NGO, and that's Hagar International, out of Hanoi, that actually has on-staff trauma-informed, trained counselors. But there are not that many. I think it's like a couple, and they're based out of Hanoi. And of course, everything is based on funding as well. And they're trained in a very specific way, they work with sex trafficking victims, right? So very, very specific. And that's not through the mental health system, but that's through an NGO, right? So it's not as if it's easy to access. You'd have to know the NGO exists. You'd have to be able to qualify for the services, right? So I don't know if they even support male victims. I'm not sure, but there are very few. There's another social enterprise in Saigon called [Tang Yung?] Center. And I know the founder. And they do promote mental health, but they are promoting mental health in the family, in the workplace, in general society. They're not trained to work with trauma victims, right? So those, honestly, are the only two I know of that have-- actually, I wouldn't even say Tang Yung is even that. I would say Hagar is the only one I know of that has trauma-informed, trained counselors on staff.

Hagar International. And again, I don’t know how many counselors are on staff at this moment. They may have reduced because everything is based on funding. If they lose funding, they can’t have people on their payroll. There’s none, I would say, that are qualified to give long-term clinical mental health treatment. I don’t know any organization that is qualified to give long-term. For that, you’d have to go to a health system, in the public health system, and get referrals and have therapy as part of your overall treatment plan. That multidisciplinary treatment process doesn’t exist, really. Or if it does, it’s very, very, very rudimentary, and it’s not accessible, and very little-- it does not often include, if at all, mental health treatment that’s non-medical or non-medication-based, like for schizophrenia and bipolar disease and all that. Yeah.

Asylos: Okay. Thank you. And just touching on the funding aspect, are you aware of any organisations who have said their mandate is to support victims of trafficking who are affected by the US aid cuts?

Mimi Vu: Nope.

Asylos: Thank you.

Mimi Vu: One other thing I want to mention is only because I dealt with this in a recent appeals case, is there is, on the surface, yes, there is mental health psychiatry available in Vietnam. So oftentimes, the crown or whatever will use the existence of psychiatrists or the existence of a mental health department as proof that there is mental health there are mental health services available for victims. Without going one step further, oftentimes in the next paragraph, as it’s listed, that there’s a lack of quality and availability of the required mental health treatment within the existing healthcare system structure. And that mental healthcare system structure is heavily skewed towards psychiatric care and medication as treatment.

Asylos: Thank you, then the next question or the last question is regarding opportunities for young people who return. So we found a source that basically mentioned victims are allowed to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal and a stipend, and medical assistance. In your experience, do you know if survivors can re-enter support once they’ve left if they remain vulnerable?

Mimi Vi: No. Not that I know of.

Asylos: Thank you so much.

Mimi Vu: Yeah, and just quickly, that medical support, again, this is the existence of medical support or that support without asking, “Well, how much? What kind?” I don’t know if the figure has changed, but back when I was still with Pacific Links, that medical support was 50,000 Vietnam dong per head, which was about \$3.

So if you’re speaking to other people, maybe get information on what actually that entails now rather than just the existence of. The existence of is not enough. You have to ask you to figure out, “Okay, well, what does it entail?” Because if it’s like, “Oh, it’s 100,000 Vietnam dong in medical support,” that’s \$4. So that’s nothing. That’s nothing, right? So then it gets in that narrative again. Well, it exists, but in what capacity?

Asylos: Okay. Do you think I would be able to get information such as that from Pacific Links, for example?

Mimi Vu: Yeah. No. They should be able to tell you.

Asylos: Great, would you be able to connect me with Pacific Links please?

Mimi Vu: Sure. Sure.

Asylos: Thank you, right then that concludes all the interview questions, is there anything you would like to add or share that was not being covered?

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Mimi Vu: I don't know if this is going to be relevant in the subject of your report, but I'm saying it anyway. It needs to be said. Two things. I can't remember if I said this to you or someone else, but number one is when doing statistics, especially when you're dealing with female victims, there's a tendency to split into where you trafficked for sex or labor, and the risk for women and girls, it's always the two are one in the same. It's always one in the same. So any statistics that say, "Oh, they were trafficked for sex but not labor," they're not actually accurately reflecting the situation of the female victim at all whatsoever, because the value of a female victim to the traffickers and exploiters and perpetrators is one of a product. She's a product, and she's very valuable. She's more valuable than men because of all that she can be exploited for on the market. And so that mindset has to change, and that has to also be reflected in the statistics and how they're presented.

The second thing is-- and this ties into the mental health aspect in terms of where the trauma comes from. When Vietnamese go to the UK or end up in the UK, they do not go directly from Vietnam to the UK. The journey is long, and it goes through-- mainly it goes primarily through the Schengen Zone, through the existing migration and trade routes that were established by the Vietnamese diaspora community in Europe in the 1980s and '90s, and a lot of these roots are influenced and controlled by organized crime. That's where you have the transnational organized crime. Therefore, the exploitation that happens to Vietnamese migrants and victims along their journey before they even set foot in the UK. That's where you find a lot of the abuse and the trauma that creates the mental health issues that the victim ultimately ends up developing. And for the UK, when they deal with Vietnamese migrants or victims, or however they want to term them, ignoring the entire section of Schengen Zone and just treating the Vietnamese situation as one that's bilateral, only from Vietnam to the UK, also conveniently excuses or leaves out all the mental and physical abuse and trauma that the Vietnamese have suffered as they were exploited along the way before they got to the UK.

And then in the UK, that trauma has been exacerbated, right? And why I'm saying all of this is, number one, for the powers that be understand the extent of the trauma that the Vietnamese migrants have gone through, the ones who are suffering from severe mental health issues. And two, why it is important for the UK to acknowledge that the actual journey of the Vietnamese migrant trafficking victim goes through Europe and the Schengen Zone is not a case of illegal migration from Vietnam to the UK. And they have to behave accordingly. They have to recognize that, and then they have to do their policies and their solutions or what have you according to that, as opposed to just pretending that it's just a Vietnam UK thing. It's not.

Asylos: Thank you so much for your contribution Mimi. Okay.

Mimi Vu: No problem.

Interview with Dr Chung Pham on 17 February 2025

Asylos: We’re going to start off with legal definitions and framework. The question is about the legal definition of retrafficking in the Vietnamese context. So besides the acknowledgement of retrafficking in Article 36 of the penal code, which basically mentions that victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again, in your knowledge, is the risk of retrafficking recognised or considered in any other domestic legislation or strategy?

Dr Chung Pham: I’m not aware of that.

Asylos: Thank you. Okay. Then the second question also relates to frameworks in Vietnam. And this is from the sources we consulted. No information could be found on the framework for identifying smuggled migrants. Do you know if there is a procedure or a clear framework for identifying smuggled migrants? And if so, are you aware of any evidence that this has been implemented?

Dr Chung Pham: Legal framework, I’m afraid not yet because Vietnam has always considered-- for a long period of time, they have always considered that the what we call victim of human traffickings, but they always consider as a human smuggling network. Or the people who actually actively look out to travel abroad and to look for a better opportunity, they don’t actually recognise these people as victim[s] at all for so long, you see, until when the Exec Glory incident in 2019 in the UK that came out. And the people, even the Head of the Public Security of the province with the most victim in there, came out on the media where he did not recognize them as a victim. To him as the Head of Social Security is really, really important. It’s equivalent to the police in this country in UK, isn’t it? And if they don’t-- people in his position did not recognise that kind of victim of human trafficking. He believed that everybody in that lorry is just opportunist and using human smuggling network to come to look for better opportunities. So that was 2019. It’s now 2025. So I’m afraid that they have not actually recognised that, although they talk about it. And some people have to retract their interviews, whatever opinion that they said in the interview. But deep down, I have not seen the change in legislation formally.

Asylos: Thank you. Helpful. And then the next question is, are you aware of any cases of children who are misidentified as adults overseas and are returned to Vietnam? If so, do you know what support has been provided?

Dr Chung Pham: I’m more UK and Europe specialist. So I’m more familiar with the group of the migrants of Vietnamese migrants being trafficked or smuggled into the UK and Europe. And that’s where my expertise is. So I can’t really comment on those smuggled or trafficked to the Asian country like China and the neighboring countries, okay? But with the UK context in particular, I have not seen any of the cases being misidentified in that way because the UK has a very, very, very clear procedure to support underage migrants or legal or illegal. And they’re often given the benefit of the doubt in the UK in particular. So I’ve not seen any of the Vietnamese minors being returned from UK to Vietnam because they are misdiagnosed in terms of age.

Asylos: Thank you. Super helpful. Okay. And then the next question is-- so a country study that was published in 2023 referencing migrant workers noted that the social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labor exploitation from reporting their case. And in addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their family. In your experience, how are individuals typically received and treated by families, communities, general public, and government after returning from abroad, especially when the departure or experiences are linked with phenomenon such as migration, exploitation, or forced return? And are there any perceived differences in treatment owing to personal characteristics? So, for example, gender, age, etc. So that was a mouthful.

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Dr Chung Pham: Yeah, so Vietnamese culture is the culture of what we call *saving face*. Everybody wants to save face and always wants to present the best version of themselves and be proud with the family or with the community. And that does not help in terms of trafficking, isn't it? Because that would make the victims returning did not want to kind of admit that they're a victim of any kind. Of course, before they set foot on a bus or a lorry from the other end, that is consensual because they know that they are going so-and-so for work, or they've been promised to have work somewhere. So that is the agreement that's made between them and their family and the people who are taking them. The deception is only when they arrive at this end, there's no such work. So in that sense, yes. At this end of the globe, it is victim, but at the other end, they still believe that, yeah, it's the labor contract that did not end very well. So that's why, when they go back, they don't want-- even the family themselves don't want to present to the community that they are so naive, and they are the-- think that they're so stupid in terms of giving all the stranger all the money and giving this stranger their son and daughter as well, and now you ended up being like this. So naturally, a lot of them don't want to admit that. This has been discussed in huge [number] of articles and journal articles and literature in Vietnam, where people talk about it. It is changing these days. The families started reporting, and victims started asking for support because of the social stigma these days, because all the awareness and people trying to raise awareness by social media in particular, that actually works. People start seeing the people who return from abroad unsuccessful and have no money and still have this huge amount of debt that's left from their journey that they paid for. And the people start kind of recognizing that there's something that these people experience, that they did not experience, which never happened in the past.

Asylos: Thank you. And then we're going to work on the next set of questions. So the first question is relating to a section called migration, reintegration, and re-trafficking risks. And the question is: do you have any information on how and if threats towards family members or the returnee impact the risk of re-trafficking upon return to Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham: So re-trafficking is not common in that sense. I've not kind of come across so many cases or spoke to people, the professional in the field who say that that's something prevalent in the country. But there was just this one case that I came across, which I myself would identify as re-trafficking. So he was a male. He was like, middle-aged male from Vietnam. Came to the UK, did pay the huge amount for human trafficking network. Came to the UK. Did not have the work that they promised. Were put into work in kind of his farm. He was then arrested by the authority here, then he was deported back to Vietnam. After he returned to Vietnam, the original amount of debt from the previous journey was still there, lingering above his head and his family. And that is when the vulnerable factor that you can see that is there. He was then approached by the same human smuggling network to to offer him to take him back to the UK. Although he did not disclose to me whether or not there's any threat that made towards him and his family, with their suggestion that if he comes back to this country again, there will be work and he'll be able to pay back the debt. So that's why when we look at human trafficking or human smuggling networks, we say we need to look at people who are getting a bit smarter. They don't actually always use hard strategy like threat and force. Use of force and that sort of thing. They use kind of soft strategy. So they would approach his family in saying, "Yeah, bring you back to work," and that sort of thing. But deep down is that they wanted to get the debt back, but they knew that there's no way he could pay that debt, and his family has nothing. So he was brought back to this country also, smuggling in. And then he was in here for-- must be at least four or five years before he was arrested again, and then deported to Vietnam. I spoke to both him and his wife. I spoke to them not because I was trying to do a research about human trafficking, but I was actually trying to investigate the case of-- a separate case of a Vietnamese in this country who actually shared the same household with him. That's when I got to interview him. And that's how I came across his story. And I was like, "Actually, he is being used kind of the soft tactics by the human trafficking network to bring him back in this country and make him to work another four years because they wanted the money back." So I said to him and his wife at the end of my interview, and I said, "So you came here twice. They brought you here twice, made you to work in the cannabis factories and things. Did you bring that back or manage to send any money back to the wife to pay any other debt that occurred after?" And he said his wife was sit in the interview with me as well, the two of them. I interviewed both of them at the same time. And his wife was laughing. And she said, "Yep. After more than 10 years, both the first time and the second times, he came back absolutely nothing." And both of us was just working our backside off in the last 15 years in order to pay all his debt. It's not the money that earned from the UK. And I asked him, I said, "What's wrong with the time you work in the UK in the factory? I'm sure that they're not giving you any money to pay back." He said, "Well, they took it directly." And in another word, it's like debt is taken directly from his labour. So cases like that. It's not hurting in the media, isn't it? And I have not spoken about this case to anybody else because it's related to another cold case review that we conducted in this country. That's why it's not hurting in the media.

Asylos: Okay. Are you okay being referenced in this research?

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah. That’s fine. I said to the guy at the end of the interview that if I need to share his story as a showcase, I will not mention his name, his date of birth, or whatever. So nobody would know where he’s from. So don’t worry. And he said, “That’s fine.”

Asylos: Okay. Great. Thank you. A couple of follow-up questions on that. One was, do you remember the timeline that this took place, like when he first entered the UK and then when he was returned and when he managed to come back in? And then the next one, the second question leading to that is, did he also explain to you the route? Were there two different routes that he had taken both times, or was it exactly the same route as the first time he came in if he had the same trafficker?

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah. So the timeline is between 2004 up until 2016. So the first time he came for a period of time, arrested, deported, came back to Vietnam for a few years, but still not managed to pay a penny. And so the same group approached him and wanted to take him abroad again, and he agrees. He did not share with me whether or not they use any false or threat, but he agreed to go back. And he came back and then was arrested, I think, five years after, and then he bought it again.

Asylos: Thank you. Super helpful. Okay. Then we can move on to the next question, which is about the risk factors for children of trafficking survivors. So from the sources that we consulted for this report, we couldn’t find any statistics within the time frame of the prevalence of, let’s say, intergenerational trafficking. So for example, cases where children are trafficked victims have experienced trauma or have themselves been trafficked. In your experience, what evidence exists, if any, of intergenerational trafficking in Vietnam? And what factors appear to increase the risk of this occurring?

Dr Chung Pham: I have not actually observed that kind of intergenerational trafficking issues or issues associated with that.

Asylos: Thank you. Then we can move on to the next question. This is about programs and interventions addressing intergenerational trafficking. So you might not be able to answer it, but I’ll ask just in case. Are you aware of any interventions or community-based interventions initiatives in Vietnam that are aimed at reducing the risk factors for children whose parents or guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within to or from that country, and they’re breaking the cycle of trafficking across generations? If so, can you give any examples of any promising community-based practice?

Dr Chung Pham: Now, the cross-generation trafficking issues is something that’s not discussed a lot these days. And I, myself, as a practitioner, I have not actually come across the issues associated with that. Another thing I want to comment on the, you say, the community-based or intervention program and that sort of thing. Vietnam, that sort of matters into the human trafficking and things that’s mostly controlled by the state. It’s only one of two charities that is given the kind of power to kind of work in that sector. So it’s very tightly, neatly controlled by the state. So whether a community program or not, it’s all initiated by the state.

So I think the latest news is that it’s last month, isn’t it? They just launched the hotline 111. Just last month, is that September? No. Yes. So 25th September, 2025. So previously, this hotline was funded for by Japan, and it was just trial on three provinces like Hanoi Capital, and then two bordering provinces, one in the north and one in the south. And so now I think the British government just poured the funding in, and then that’s when they opened the one-on-one hotline for human trafficking across the country. But like I said, the community-based organization working on this is almost non-existent. You need to have permit to do anything in that country.

Asylos: Sure. Thank you. Research seems to be pointing that way. For the hotline in 111, I guess that’s obviously run by the states and not an NGO, right? Or has it been given to an NGO, the contract?

Dr Chung Pham: So I have a note to doubt here. Let me have a look. So one on one, yeah, it’s still run by the state. Let me see. Yeah. So initially, it was funded for by Japan. And then after 12 years of operation and trial, they officially launched the nationwide for it. So say that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the International Organization for Immigration in Vietnam, launched this. And the project this call center is funded with financial support from the UK Home Office.

Asylos: Thank you. Would you be able to share that? Is that a source? [crosstalk].

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah. I think it’s on-- yeah. It’s on their office. Yeah. I can send it to you in a bit.

Asylos: Thank you. Okay. Great. Then if we look at the next set of two questions under the topic of social security and welfare for trafficking survivors. And the first question is, do you know if social security support is available for women and children who are trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham: So yeah, the short answer is yes. And in theory, this existed a long time ago. But to be honest, from my personal experience, it’s only started working in reality in recent years.

Asylos: And then a follow-up question. In your view, what are the main gaps in social protection policies that may increase the vulnerability and risk factors for trafficking survivors?

Dr Chung Pham: The gap?

Asylos: If you’re aware of any main gaps in social protection policies that actually increase or may increase the vulnerability and risk factors for trafficking survivors?

Dr Chung Pham: I think the main gap is still that kind of the administrations and the paperwork that involve. Even in reality, in paper, it set out quite clearly in terms of you are providing support for victim of human trafficking or suspected victim of human trafficking. From the time they came-- basically, on a paper, you say that within two days of receiving the report, you should start launching that support straight away within two days. And that’s in paper. It looked quite flawless.

But in reality, when you speak to kind of the people who are actually launching that and assisting the program, and that’s when you see that because there’s so much paperwork involved, there’s a long list for people to tick to verify suspected victim or victim and that sort of thing. And it caused difficulty for the authorities who actually recognize or provide support to these people. Having said that, I think it is changing now. It’s changing very fast. So hopefully, by now, it’s not like the time when I spoke to the head of the I spoke to I think he is the guy that injured the distributing the funding from the central government to the victims in Haifang province. So Haifang province, just for the knowledge. The victim of human trafficking or human smuggling network in the UK in particular, the biggest number is from province. Game second is people from Haifang province, okay? So that’s why it’s so relevant to my research because of that. So I spoke to the head of the kind of Social Security from Haifang province who came to a conference. And the question put for him is that, “What is the gap? What is the gap? And what’s the difficulty at the moment to support these people returning to Haifang province? And how could they receive the support from you as the local government?” And he said to me said, “I’m not going to lie to you.” Last year, all the funding, all the funding from the central government sent to my province to support the people who returned from abroad, recognize that victim of human trafficking of suspected victims, all that funding, I had to return back to the central government, untouched. And I said to him, I said, “How? Because you and I both know that victims return from the UK, Hai Phong is the second, isn’t it?

First is [inaudible], and then second is Hai Phong province and he said, “*The list of the requirements that the central government has set out for us in order to tick boxes to see where the victim fit in the criteria that in order for them to receive support, we just can’t fit them all in. And therefore, they’re not recognized as victim. And because after a financial year, if the fund is not used, we have to return to the government.*” So that’s just an example. Having said that, this conversation happened four years ago. So by now, hopefully, things have changed, yeah, after quite a lot of pushed factors from IOM and British governments and everybody else. I hope it has changed. I’ve not spoken to him since. But any change in Vietnam does not happen very quickly to put it that way, okay?

Asylos: I understand. Thank you so much. Then we can look at factors that increase the risk of being re-exploited. And to be honest, I think maybe from your previous answer, you gave an example of a case, but are you aware of any information or evidence available on individual cases or groups who were trafficked, returned, and then exploited and re-trafficked? So I guess that’s besides the case that you already mentioned. Are there any other cases that you’re aware of who were trafficked, then returned to Vietnam, and then re-exploited and re-trafficked again?

Dr Chung Pham: No. I’m not aware of apart from that, just one case that I came across.

Asylos: Thank you. That’s helpful. Then we can look at the government identification, support, and protection for survivors. From the previous research that we conducted on Vietnam in 2020, one of the sources mentioned that, in many cases, assistance to men and boys focuses on return and basic needs, so including such as transportation or basic shelter stays, rather than long-term reintegration. In your experience or knowledge, how long does support typically last for male survivors who are trafficking in Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham: Well, if you talk about number, I think I will be able to refer you the best organisation or the best people to speak to about that because they are Vietnam based. So that figures they would know by heart, and also because they have been, and they’re still continuing to support the victim of human trafficking. So they wouldn’t know any changes to that as well. I would be able to refer you to them. I think you might have heard of them. It’s Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation.

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Asylos: Yes. Thank you. Okay. And then the next question is on a section which is broader global and regional influences on trafficking in Vietnam. So we found an article that was published in 2022 by professors Ella Kobene and Aiden Side Bottom, in which they noted that one participant also called for attention to how the war impact upon establishing trafficking routes through Ukraine, and citing specifically routes from Vietnam and China. Do you know if or how the war in Ukraine has affected human trafficking routes within to or from in Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah. It actually impacted the routes that traveling from Vietnam to UK or Europe in particular, that's hugely impacted because I particularly conducted loads of interviews of the Vietnamese who arrived in this country on a different capacity. And they told me how the route is changed because the war end in Russia. So they would have to avoid going through Russia, going through Ukraine, and then to aim to other routes to go around it. In the past, Russia and Ukraine is actually the main route.

Dr Chung Pham: At one point, just before the war, I was about to go and provide the training for the Ukrainian Law Enforcement Agency in terms of human trafficking and the route and dealing with the Vietnamese cases over there to show the volume and how they was desperately needed a Vietnam specialist to come and assist. But because the war happened, then the training did not go ahead. But when I interview the people who arrive after the war, for example, and I spoke to at least two or three of them after. And I asked them I asked them.

I said, *"So what changed now?"* Because in the past, we know that you're going to be traveling Vietnam, China, China to Russia, and then Russia to Ukraine, and then Ukraine and across all different European countries. What changed? How did you get here? And he said that, *"yeah, we've been told that we would stay a bit longer in China than in the past, when China would be kind of a passing country. Quickly go to Russia. And Russia is kind of holding-- we call it a holding cell, basically."*

And then from bushes, we'll be distributing to a different route to different countries, and that sort of thing. It's more like a sorting centre last year, but it's completely changed now. So people say they would be kept longer in China, where things are being sorted, and from China, still brought to Europe, but avoid not going to Russia or Ukraine. And because of that, it is experimenting new route.

And they said that that's why a lot of times we were not so sure, and they can't even tell us. In the past, they would be able to tell them, *"Okay. You're going to be arriving here in Russia. You're going to stay for this long in Russia. You're going to be at this one."* So it's completely new routes being set up.

So they often don't even know what happened next and how long they have to wait for.

Asylos: No rush.

Dr Chung Pham: It's just a different interview that I conducted.

Asylos: Not a problem, I'll follow back up with you. But thank you. That's helpful. Then, if we look at the next section, which is on healthcare and medical support, for the first question, there was a Thomas Reuters news article that was published in 2020. And it noted that when a large group of people enter the shelter, it will be difficult to give them the rights they're entitled to, such as healthcare. This was said by an individual that they interviewed, whose organization provides free legal aid to migrant workers and victims of trafficking. Do you know what are the main barriers to accessing healthcare for trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Dr Chung Pham: I think at the moment, when I look into that, I actually look at the support that they've been provided. A lot of time is the limited resource that they have. So initially, providing the support for these victims, entering those center under the-- it's called Social Housing group-- equivalent of social housing group, where they have these victims staying in these places, receiving support, receiving accommodation, I think, initially three months, and then being given clothing items, essential food. The mental health conversations are only mentioned lately in the recent programs. Previously, that is a massive gap. So at that time, when we have a discussion with the other practitioner and researcher, and we ask that question, most of that is down to the complexity. They say that the funding all handled by the MOLISA, a equivalent of the Ministry of Labors and everything. But there is a bit longer name for it.

And then MOLISA later also worked with the Department for Women. And then they kind of run this scheme. But I think limited funding, limited resources, and limited knowledge as well of the people in charge. I think that is one of the reason why speaking to Blue Dragon Children's Foundation is important because they are the one that is the body that is pushing the local government into kind of providing all those. So yeah, it is vital that you speak to them.

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Asylos: I also have another follow-up question on that, and that was, do you know if there's any support for trafficking survivors with cognitive or learning difficulties?

Dr Chung Pham: That's a very long article. It's a part of legal framework that they wrote. I'm looking at that, and this new legal framework that they published, it covers the mental health. And it covers the counselling for people returning with mental health issues, and it's just very generic because I want to dig deeper into what kind of exact support they receive rather than just write in the law saying that, "Yeah. They're going to receive mental health support." And that's it. So I'm going to be it's of my own interest as well. I'm going to be digging deep into it and try to find out more. So maybe I can send you more information about that later.

Asylos: Amazing. Thank you so much. Okay. And then we're just going to do two more sections. So one section is on continuing the mental health and psychological support. And for the first question, we found a source that was reporting on children which noted that they also experienced stigma on their return home after being trafficked and face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonor to their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatized by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally. The same source reported on returnees mentioned that trafficking victims face social stigma and discrimination and may experience difficulty in accessing appropriate trauma counseling services outside of large cities. Do you know if there is stigma towards or negative perceptions of trafficking survivors generally and/or those with physical and mental health issues tied to the experience of trafficking?

Dr Chung Pham: So the stigma that these people, the victims have with them, the perception from their family, friends, and community, that has always been the case. Like I said to you, I explained the part of the culture is saving face. The family as well don't want to acknowledge any failure. So like, "Okay. I'm spending this amount of money. We borrow it from everywhere for you to go abroad to work and earn money and bring something back to the family, but you came back now empty-handed, being labeled as a victim. Not ideal, isn't it? Nobody wants to be in that situation. And I want to bring this case of a Baba Vietnamese person in the UK. This one has not been in any media yet. And I'm going to attend his inquest in the next few months of representing their family as well. And it's still very raw case for me as well. He was brought to this country as promised of doing some construction work because I conducted a lengthy interview with his family member, with his parents, his mom. So he's from a very, very poor family. The family said that they came and they said that there's construction work in the UK. So the family just agreed to borrow money from everywhere and send him abroad. He arrived in the UK, and he waited for three months. And when they arrived in the UK, these human smuggling network would have a place for them to stay. I call it the holding or sorting center, where they sought out, "Okay, these people came here and have paid the debt for the journey already," then they have a bit more freedom of movement, and they would be working whatever of their choice. The people have not paid any money yet. They're, I mean, in debt. It's them that are assigning you where to work and what to work. So he actually falls in that category, the second category.

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So after waiting for three months in that sorting center somewhere in London, he was then sent to work, and it was a cannabis factory. Two weeks into working in the cannabis factory, he was arrested by the police because cannabis is not legal in this country. And so he was arrested and he was detained in a local prison for being investigated for cannabis production. So after being in prison for-- I need to look at the timeline, but I don't think he's there for long before he actually took his own life. It's a very sad case. And I read all the paper related to him and could see that he was-- because once he's in, he felt that his dream was crumbled. His dream of changing life and being able to provide to the family and assist family is all crumbled. He just could not face it. So what can you do now? Because you're in the prison waiting for the trial. You have the huge amount of debt left behind. You have the family there. You can't face any of that. You won't be able to get the money to pay the debt. You won't be able to-- he just might find it's difficult to face his own family and his community. So he made this phone call to his mother from prison. And he said, "I hope everybody's okay. I'm fine at this end." So he did not even tell the family that he's in trouble or anything. And at the end of the conversation, he said to his mom, "I want to go home." So that's when people reach to the point where they are exhausted of what they've been through that long journey from Vietnam to here. It is post-Russian war as well. So you have to go a different route. So exhausted of the journey and constantly being fearful for whether you will arrive or you'll be dead along the journey, right? Around this country, now you're in prison. But nothing is more grim than that. So yeah, that's the outcome. And it's really difficult to deal, for me in particular, because I have to speak to the family. I have to deliver the bad news. I have to kind of arrange everything for him to be able to repatriate him from here to the family. And at this moment in time, I'm still representing the family because there's an inquest that's going to be heard at some point down the line. So to show that the pressure that they face is real, okay? Some people won't be able to face it. Some people won't. And cases of people who won't be able to face it, you won't hear in the media. Like this case in particular, absolutely zero report, A, because the case is still-- the inquest is still lingering and still going on. Only the people who work inside the network, like myself, would be able to know what's going on, but it's harrowing. So, from what I could share is that that pressure they face is real. So they have to face the family. They have to face the community, and face everybody else when they return.

Asylos: Thank you for sharing that. I really appreciate it. It's definitely a very tough situation to be put in. Yeah, absolutely. I've never been in there. So I can just say that solidarity, I understand, and it's a very difficult job that you're doing. Thank you so much, again, for sharing that. Right, the next question that related to that: do you know if there are any known barriers to accessing mental health services for trafficking survivors, particularly women and children? So things such as referral pathways, financial barriers. I think you already mentioned that admin is one of the biggest pathways overall. But anything you'd like to add to that particular question?

Dr Chung Pham: They already listed what these people, when they returned, they could get. So they support essential needs of travel expenses. They support-- number two is medical support. Number three is psychological support. Number four is legal aid. Number five is support for cultural and vocational education. And number six is initial hardship allowance or loan support. So with that alone, you can see that it's actually listed out quite clearly on the framework, isn't it?

But in reality, I don't know how much of that going to be participating, isn't it? So yeah, I'm trying to find out more about that because I could see that what's stipulated by the framework is actually looking quite good.

Asylos: Thank you, if you do find anything, can you please share it with me too?

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah, I will.

Asylos: Thank you. And then the next question is: can you provide any information on what kind of mental health or rehabilitation support are currently available to trafficking survivors? And that's through both state or non-state channels. And in your experience, how easy are these services to access, and how long do they typically last?

Dr Chung Pham: See, now, I've not looked at the state program because they are outsourcing to the organization because within them, it was not very working for a while. So both, I think, believe that both Blue Dragon Children Foundation and World Vision are having some of the funding and some of the direction from the state in order to do that. And I know that Blue Dragon Children Foundation have been forefront in terms of providing psychological support, and they have their own counselor. I think for whatever reason, they won't be to speak about it, but I will be able to find out the information. In particular, like what psychological support they're doing, I will be able to find out.

Asylos: Amazing. Great. Then I'll also follow up that with you separately.

Dr Chung Pham: Yeah. If you can just list a few things that we say that we’re going to follow up, then I can just crack on this end. That’d be great. Thank you.

Asylos: I will do. Definitely. Thank you so much. Then I guess that leads us to the last question of the interview, and this is to do with opportunities for young people who return. So we found sources that mentioned victims are allowed to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal and a step behind and medical assistance. In your experience, do you know if survivors can re-enter support once they’ve left, if they remain vulnerable?

Dr Chung Pham: I actually don’t know. I don’t have that kind of on-the-ground knowledge in that fine detail. I only know that, yes, the first three months, I received the full support, and I was trying to look at the legal framework stipulated right in front of me here, and I did not see anything that mentioned that either.

Asylos: Not a problem. Thank you so much. Well, thank you so much, Chung. That was the last question. But before we wrap up, is there anything that you would like to share or add that was not covered in the interview questions?

Dr Chung Pham: No. Can’t think of anything.

Asylos: Thank you so much Chung, that’s the last question of the interview, before we wrap up, is there anything you would like to add or share that was not being covered?

Dr Chung Pham: No, I don’t have any question for you. Sorry, I just want to add the final thing of the case that I mentioned about the psychological support and the pressure is real for these people, regarding the case that I conducted, that the inquest is going to be in the next few months, is that the mental health side of it is not quite recognized in any system from these people. So once they identify as, in this case, suspect, right, then I feel that’s the mental health side of not kind of looked into it so much because they are under a criminal investigation, for example. And it’s just one to suggest that it is real for what these people go through. A lot of times they have to try to toughen themselves up because they have the duty to earn money and to pay the debt and to kind of return to the family where they had held high. And we underestimate that kind of huge amount of pressure they’re under. Not all of them can face that. So at the moment, right at this moment in time, I am looking for a young person in this country who has vanished for nearly four years now, and we’ve not been able to find him. So whether or not it’s a mental health episode that make him feel that he could not really face his family, he decided to completely cut tide and not facing them. It’s easier to not face them and not talk to them and completely vanish in the system because it’s very, very rare for a Vietnamese. He’s been identified as a suspected victim of human trafficking, actually.

In the NRM system. He’s completely vanished, completely vanished, and he’s nowhere to be seen

So I think I did post a missing person appeal for him, in particular, on my LinkedIn. Because once they are here, they consider themselves as a straw man, isn’t it? And they don’t have any status. And we can’t go and look for a *Straw man* because they don’t have any ID in this society. So that’s really sad. So hopefully, it’s just the mental health that the young man is facing and he just disappeared in that sense and nothing worse. And that’s what I hope.

Asylos: You just mentioned the term Straw man, can you explain please?

Dr Chung Pham: Yes. Straw man, it’s come from within the Vietnamese community. So straw man refers to, like, a Scarecrow from the field, right? You make a straw man to scare the scarecrow. So people who live within a society but do not have any identity. So you don’t have a name, age, or whatever. You just live amongst a society like that and kind of exist invisibly.

Asylos: Thank you for your contribution.

Dr Chung Pham: You’re welcome.

Interview with an anonymous source on 24 November 2025

Asylos: The first question is about the legal definition of re-trafficking in the Vietnamese context, besides the acknowledgement of ‘re-trafficking’ in Article 36 of the Penal Code, which mentions that victims may receive legal counseling to avoid being trafficked again, in your knowledge is the risk of re-trafficking recognised or considered in any other domestic legislation/strategy?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: As far as I can tell there is no distinct concept of re-trafficking. There is some acknowledgement of risk of victims being re-trafficked, but no separate category, and no statutory definition. The issue of re-trafficking is very controversial as there are some claims that re-trafficking is not very common, but in my opinion that is not true.

Asylos: Can you elaborate please?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: I base this on repeated comments made in Home Office documents, which are based on the CPIN. There was a HO Fact finding mission, but the document relied on information from an NGO that does not deal very much with trafficking, so there is no reliable research behind these claims. It doesn’t make logical sense. If someone is returned they usually don’t have resources, and this is one of the key factors that leads to trafficking in the first place, so there is considerable risk that they will be subject to the same pressure, ensnared by loan sharks, especially if they have lost livelihoods and homes. They may be identified again by original traffickers. This is downplayed by the Home Office, but I don’t understand. Even if a person is going back to a big city such as Hanoi, if you are not registered with the authorities you cannot access any help from the authorities. Once you are on the databases there is a process of corruption whereby the traffickers will pay the authorities to get access to the information. The National Tax database is open access and wouldn’t even require corruption. There have been cases where the police have informed the traffickers that the individual has been returned. I came across one case where a woman had been trafficked twice already and each time subject to rapes, and the HO argument was that ‘you have already experienced it, so you will manage again’. It is astounding they tried to argue in this way. Re-trafficking is a serious risk to be sure. In my opinion, the Vietnamese authorities put in place rules and regulations to appease the international community, but their interest in actually dealing with it is limited, and they don’t receive enough support from authorities to mitigate risks.

Asylos: The second question relates to the frameworks in Vietnam, from the sources we consulted, no information could be found on the framework for identifying smuggled migrants. Do you know if there is a clear procedural framework for identifying smuggled migrants? If so, are you aware of any evidence of this being implemented?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: No I don’t think so. It seems that in principle you can apply to be recognised as a VoT, I think it is very difficult for returnees from the UK. In principle you can get a victim certificate and access to services but it can be quite difficult. I think it was referenced in your last report.

Asylos: Interjection, the question was about smuggling. Please let us know if this is within your expertise - if not we can note this.

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: What is smuggling? We have overseas work schemes, and agencies that take people out of the country, that creates risk for victims as if it is found out they left the country like this, and then they returned, they could be prosecuted. It is not necessarily in the interests of someone who has left and returned in this manner to identify themselves. There is a peculiar nexus. In a sense the government is colluding, they are supporting overseas work schemes as there is not enough employment in Vietnam, and Vietnam benefits from remittances, but not all work agencies are legitimate.

Asylos: Are you aware of any cases of children who are misidentified as adults overseas and returned to Vietnam? If so, do you know what support has been provided?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: There is a peculiar issue, first the Home Office tries to prove people are children, but there is no biological way of being sure about whether a person is a child either way within at least two years. In Vietnam, the age of majority is 16, so a child is something different in Vietnam than it is in the UK. That raises other kinds of questions. My understanding is that the Home Office will not deport people until the age of majority. The Home Office believes that everyone is trying to pretend to be a child, the Home Office is trying to prove otherwise. I’m not sure what happens to children when they are returned, on the basis that the Home Office claims that they are adults. The tribunals haven’t been very favourable to these claims by the Home Office. This is just a hunch.

Asylos: A country study published in 2023 by ODI, referencing migrant workers noted that:

“[...]The social stigma associated with prostitution and sex trafficking also deters individuals involved in labour exploitation from reporting their case (Huber et al., 2019). In addition, there is an element of pride, particularly for men who have been exploited, where they will downplay the negatives to present themselves as successful and able to provide for their family. (Source: ODI – [Labour migrants’ vulnerability to human trafficking and labour exploitation in Southeast Asia: An analysis of Vietnam](#), July 2023, pg.44) How are individuals typically received and treated by their families, communities, general public and government after returning from abroad, especially when their departure or experiences are linked to phenomenon such as migration, exploitation, or forced return? And are there any perceived differences in treatment owing to personal characteristics, for example such as age or gender?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: The information I have on this is based on research I have done, and I haven’t been able to follow the fate of individual asylum seekers. There are different kinds of issues. Single mothers face particular problems in a social context that emphasises families, and the family may judge that they have been dishonoured, including if there was sexual exploitation involved. There are some very prominent single mothers who are taking a stand against their status and society, but it doesn’t mean that someone who has been trafficked and is a single mother, returned with no father they can manage in that kind of society. If a person is sexually exploited it can happen in different ways, rape, or forced prostitution, in either case it would be perceived as dishonourable. I have come across quite a number of cases where males were sexually exploited, of course they won’t want to talk about that, but if they are returned they will have the stigma of being a failed asylum seeker, and potentially be re-exploited.

Asylos: Do you have any information on how and if threats towards family members or the returnee impact the risk of re-trafficking upon return to Vietnam?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: If there are threats it would be completely unsafe for a person to visit family. It’s quite common that families are threatened where money is owed. The Home Office says ‘you can’t tell us how much money you owed’ or ‘how you came to owe it’, the reason is that it is made up, there might be enormous amounts of interest on the initial amount borrowed, it never disappeared. If the person stops working for the exploiter, and say they are in the UK, then basically the debt is in the eye of the beholder, and they will try to extract money from the families as well. It’s clear that traffickers and loan sharks in a network will seek to locate anybody who has returned. It’s a population control mechanism of the authorities that makes this a significant risk. a) existing debts (real or imagined) b) general economic vulnerability c) difficult access to services, d) threats to family. If individuals pass through the regular border control systems (forcibly or voluntarily), there is a chance their presence will be known to traffickers. If they register using the household registration system, the same applies.

Asylos: From the sources consulted, we couldn’t find any statistics within the timeframe on the prevalence of intergenerational trafficking, for example cases where children of trafficked victims have experienced trauma or have themselves been trafficked. In your experience, what evidence exists, if any, of intergenerational trafficking in Vietnam, and what factors appear to increase the risk of this occurring? the risk factors of this?

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Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Yeah so I think the kind of work that I have mostly seen, I don't know if it fits the category, but very often the initial financial problem arose for the parents, then the son or daughter were trafficked as a way of mitigating these problems. If parents are absent that increases the risk for children especially. There are no prevalence figures in a strict sense, but there is evidence of familial cycles. In October 2019, 39 Vietnamese migrants were found dead inside a sealed refrigerated lorry in Grays, Essex, having suffocated during an illegal journey to the UK. Most had paid large sums to smuggling networks after being promised work, commonly in nail bars or low-paid manual jobs, and many were already trapped in debt bondage. The case exposed highly organised transnational trafficking routes linking Vietnam, mainland Europe and the UK, and several organisers were later convicted of manslaughter and trafficking offences. It has since become a stark reference point for the extreme risks faced by Vietnamese migrants, illustrating how apparent "consent" to travel is often shaped by coercion, deception and debt, and why survivors may remain vulnerable to exploitation or re-trafficking. Adult children try to solve a parent's problem. There is intergenerational vulnerability, no clear category as such.

Asylos: Are you aware of any interventions or community-based initiatives in Vietnam that are aimed at reducing the risk factors for children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within, to or from the country, and breaking the cycle of trafficking across generations? If so, can you give any examples of promising community-based practice?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Well I'm not aware of any large programs. There are some initiatives like Blue Dragon children's foundation, which provides repatriation, reintegration, and the Alliance Anti-Traffic too. I don't have much experience, as the work I have done focuses on the immediate needs of victims. The basic situation is that there are NGOs working in Vietnam, and ostensible government programs, but the level of support is very limited.

Asylos: Do you know if social security support is available for women and children who are trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Well in principle there are some. You have short term shelters, but the number of available places is not great, individuals can stay up to 60 days typically, they will get medical care while in facilities, mental health for three months, health insurance up to a year if not already covered, also possible educational and vocational support. Although these things are gender neutral, in practice they are not available to men really, they are geared to women and children. In practice many don't access support, because they don't get a victim certificate, and there is very small scale support. On the whole the level of support is not very adequate to support trafficking victims.

Asylos: In your view, what are the main gaps in social protection policies that may increase the vulnerability and risk factors to trafficking survivors?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: I think we've referred to some already, the first is short duration and low value of support. The fact that to get any support it depends on formal victim certification, the onus is on police to identify victims. From the point of view of the authorities, they really struggle to identify VoTs, they focus on sexual exploitation, but there is a lot of labour exploitation, which is sometimes illegal, e.g. cannabis farming or online fraud, to acknowledge these issues could create more problems, and young men of 16 and 17 are considered adults in Vietnam. Mental health issues - creates a problem, there are victims who have obtained significant support in the UK and this is not there for them in Vietnam.

Asylos: Are you aware of any information or evidence available on cases of individuals or groups who were trafficked, returned, and then exploited or re-trafficked?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Yeah, so I am aware of the details of cases where re-trafficking has occurred and this is also in publicly available country information. The links in society, when they come back they don't have a job, they are maybe in an area that is not their home area and in some cases they can't contact their families and don't have economic means.

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Asylos: From previous research Asylos conducted on Vietnam published in 2020, one source mentioned that “In many cases, assistance to men and boys focuses on return and basic needs (such as transportation and brief shelter stays) rather than long term (re)integration”. (Source: Asylos – [Vietnam: Returned victims of trafficking, trafficking Issues affecting the likelihood of re-trafficking](#), 6 May 2020, pp.81-82, last accessed 6 August 2025). In your experience or knowledge, how long does support typically last for male survivors of trafficking in Vietnam?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: I don’t really have data on that, except to say that most of these support services are designed for women and men are been returned in poor systems.

Asylos: We found an article published in 2022, by Professors Ella Cockbain and Aiden Sidebottom, in which they noted that “one participant also called for attention to how the war might impact upon established trafficking routes through Ukraine, citing specifically routes from Vietnam and China.” (Source: Ella Cockbain and Aiden Sidebottom, [War, Displacement, and Human Trafficking and Exploitation: Findings from an evidence-gathering Roundtable in Response to the War in Ukraine](#), 12 October 2022). Do you know if/how the war in Ukraine affected human trafficking routes within, to, and from Vietnam?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: No I actually don’t have any, I haven’t seen that in any files. Not a single case. Not clear to me how that affects it. I’m curious a lot of Vietnamese come through China and Russia and into France, in France they are kept in the woods, they then take small boats to the UK. The Home Office says they should have claimed asylum in France, where they are still in control of the traffickers. It might well be but it’s not clear to me so I can’t comment.

Asylos: An Thomas Reuters news article published in 2020, noted that “When a large group of people enter the shelter, it will be difficult to give them the rights they are entitled to, such as healthcare,” said Tangworamongkon, whose organisation provides free legal aid to migrant workers and victims of trafficking [...]” (Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation News – [Record number of trafficking victims in Thailand raises concerns over care](#), 6 January 2020). Do you know what are the main barriers to accessing healthcare for trafficking survivors in Vietnam?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Well it depends on what it is generally speaking Vietnam runs on a system of insurance, meaning it comes out of pocket, so if they are not recognised as victims they can’t access healthcare, they have to pay for it. Some conditions require a lot. They won’t have insurance when they have just returned causing challenges for them. When you get cases, you get the medical reports and you question if they will receive the same care in Vietnam. Mental health is stigmatized in Vietnam, and individuals face difficulties in accessing employment. You can get everything in principle but in practice it’s difficult, particularly for people who have permanent mental health issues such as Schizophrenia.

Asylos: Do you know if there is any support for trafficking survivors with cognitive or learning difficulties?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Yeah, I have looked at mental health, general idea of disabilities, the issue for any type of disabilities is a social problem, they are usually trafficked for economic challenges they are facing, people with cognitive difficulties would also face difficulties in accessing support.

Asylos: We found a source that was reporting on children noted that “They also experience stigma on their return home after being trafficked and may face rejection on return to their families because they are perceived to bring dishonour upon their relations. Children who have spent time out of school as a result of migrating for employment are also likely to be stigmatised by peers on reintegration into education, particularly if they have fallen behind educationally.” and the same source report on returnees mentioned that “trafficking victims face social stigma and discrimination, and may experience difficulty in accessing appropriate trauma counselling services outside of large cities.” (Source: UK Home Office – [Country Policy and Information Note Vietnam: Unaccompanied children](#), February 2025, pp.34-47, last accessed 6 April 2025). Do you know if there is stigma towards or negative perceptions of trafficking survivors generally and/or those with physical or mental health issues tied to their experiences of trafficking?

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Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: There are various reports: issues to do with family, quite common for families of sexual traffickers that face stigma, that leads them to the cycle of concealing what might have happened to them. We might think of strong family connections, not common for women to be out of marriage.

Asylos: Related to that question, do you know if there are any known barriers to accessing mental health services for trafficking survivors, particularly women and children? (e.g. referral pathways, financial barriers, stigma etc)

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Individuals suffering with serious psychological and physical issues might face difficulty in accessing support they would need due to lack of services.

Asylos: Can you provide any information on what kind of mental health and rehabilitation support are currently available to trafficking survivors through state or non-state channels in Vietnam? In your experience, how easy are these services to access and how long do they typically last?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Mental-health support for trafficking victims returned to Vietnam is limited in duration, uneven in quality, and difficult to access once short-term assistance ends. In practice, psychosocial support is usually provided for around three months following identification or return, most often through shelters or NGO-run programmes. This initial period may include basic counselling, crisis stabilisation, and informal emotional support, but it rarely amounts to sustained or specialist mental-health care.

Once victims leave shelters or reintegration programmes, situated support largely falls away. Community-based mental-health services are weak, particularly in rural and poorer provinces from which many trafficking victims originate. Follow-up care is inconsistent, referrals are rarely monitored, and victims are often expected to cope independently despite ongoing trauma, debt pressure, and social marginalisation.

A further structural barrier is low mental-health literacy. Many returnees lack the language, concepts, or confidence to recognise symptoms such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, or dissociation as health issues requiring treatment. Psychological distress is frequently normalised as personal weakness or misfortune rather than understood as a consequence of exploitation and trauma, reducing help-seeking behaviour.

State-provided mental-health services remain extremely limited, especially for individuals suffering serious or long-term conditions. Specialist psychiatric care is scarce outside major urban centres, access often depends on formal victim identification or documentation, and services are not tailored to the specific needs of trafficking survivors. As a result, those with severe trauma frequently receive no meaningful treatment at all.

Finally, social disapproval and stigma significantly restrict access to care. Trafficking survivors may face blame, shame, or suspicion within their families and communities, particularly where migration has failed or debts remain unpaid. Fear of being labelled “mentally ill” or morally compromised discourages individuals from seeking help and can lead families to prioritise concealment over care. Taken together, these factors mean that many returned trafficking victims continue to suffer untreated psychological harm well beyond the short period of formal support, increasing vulnerability to isolation, economic precarity, and re-trafficking.

Asylos: We found sources that mention that victims are allowed to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal and stipend and medical assistance. In your experience, do you know if survivors can re-enter support once they have left it if they remain vulnerable?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: I haven’t come across any cases like this, first we need to aware of the scale of support and scale of need, the need would be greater than the support, if they are recognised they can get sometimes get access to training, depends on their access which a person needs to be formally identified. I doubt that after the initial stay in the shelter after they can re enter.

Asylos: Thank you so much, that’s the last question of the interview, before we wrap up, is there anything you would like to add or share that was not being covered?

Expert on political persecution, religious persecution, trafficking and exploitation in relation to South East Asia: Refugees seeking asylum from Vietnam usually fall into three categories, political persecution, religious persecution and trafficking that include cases where people are victims of loan sharks. Those forced to grow cannabis can be sent to prison, even though they are victims of forced labour. In relation to political persecution, the Home Office often claims that they are “low level” and not at risk, despite evidence to the contrary.

Asylos: Thank you for your contribution.

Written communication with Dr Hai Luong received on 26 March 2026

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, limited information could be found on how long support for male survivors lasts. Are you able to share how long support typically lasts for male survivors?

Dr Hai Luong: In Vietnam, male survivors usually get only short-term, basic aid unless recognized under the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Support facilities offer temporary shelter (about three months), meal stipends, and medical aid. No shelters are exclusive to men; most serve women and children. Male survivors are housed separately in mixed facilities. Access to long-term psychosocial or vocational programs depends on local budgets and NGO capacity, which vary from province to province. Challenges include complex victim-certification, inconsistent screening, and limited social worker resources, discouraging men from seeking help and limiting support to short-term solutions. NGOs like Blue Dragon help bridge these gaps, but access is inconsistent and limited. Blue Dragon reports that the number of Vietnamese male victims of scams (in Cambodia, not in the UK) is higher than the number of female victims.

Asylos: Do you know if pathways exist for regulated migration from Vietnam, and if so, do you know how accessible they are to at-risk groups?

Dr Hai Luong Yes, Vietnam manages licensed overseas labor programs and bilateral agreements, with the 2022 Law on Vietnamese Workers Abroad tightening fees and protections. Yet, at-risk groups like rural poor, ethnic minorities, and low-educated youth face barriers. High fees, reliance on unlicensed brokers, and conflicting rules (e.g., Japan) lead many to irregular routes. Regulated pathways coexist with exploitative practices; debt and information gaps are key. Authorities push reforms, but training and complaint systems are weak, causing people to start legally but fall into exploitation or bypass channels, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, no information could be found within the timeframe (2020-2026) on interventions aimed specifically towards children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked. Are you aware of any interventions or community-based initiatives in Vietnam that are aimed at reducing the risk of factors for children whose parents or guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within, to, or from Vietnam and breaking the cycle of re-trafficking across generations? And if yes, are there any examples of any promising community-based practices that you know of?

Dr Hai Luong: Vietnam’s legal framework recognizes children’s protection needs and outlines education, legal aid, and referral steps, but nationwide support for children of traffickers remains limited. Identification is bureaucratic, support depends on adult victim status, and local services vary. NGO-led initiatives like safe housing and scholarships help reduce risks but are not universal. Intergenerational risks include debt, disrupted schooling, unstable residence, and stigma, with no comprehensive national program for children of trafficked returnees. Case management and school reintegration show promise, but scalability is uncertain.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted sufficient information could not be found on whether or not a lack of social protection increases the risk factors of re-trafficking for women and children in Vietnam. Are you aware if lack of social protection increases the risk factors of re-trafficking for women and children in Vietnam?

Dr Hai Luong: Women and children returning to low-opportunity areas face debt, unstable income, and stigma, increasing risk of repeat migration and re-recruitment. The 2024 anti-trafficking law offers non-punishment, support, and legal aid, but by the end of 2025, implementation lagged due to a cumbersome NRM, an unfinalized screening toolkit, and limited frontline capacity, especially in rural/border regions. Weak reintegration in housing, education, livelihoods, and trauma care is linked to higher re-trafficking, worsened by tight provincial budgets and minimal support, often conditional on certification. NGO aid helps, but unevenly. Overall, limited social protection and unresolved debts heighten risks, especially for ethnic minority women and adolescent girls in remote areas.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted no new information could be found on specific cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities. Do you know of any cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities?

Dr Hai Luong: I lack the specific database to answer this question. However, based on long-term observations from the 39 Essex case (2019), I remain concerned about young returnees with unpaid migration debts, disrupted education, and no targeted reintegration support who often attempt repeat migration or accept high-risk jobs, leading to pathways back into exploitation. Studies and case material show that debt bondage, coercive “repayment” demands, and recruiter pressure (often through acquaintances) are common triggers, while provincial services rarely provide sustained vocational support.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, no information could be found on how the Vietnamese authorities identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking. Are you aware how the Vietnamese authorities identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking?

Dr Hai Luong: Vietnam’s legal framework has historically merged smuggling and trafficking; while the 2015 Criminal Code and 2024 Anti-Trafficking Law enhanced definitions and protections, procedural practices still struggle to distinguish between the two. Identification under the new guidelines from Decree 162/2025/ND-CP, especially for overseas victims (article 9) and repatriated victims (article 10), should involve specialized training and clear procedures. Many cases begin as “irregular migration” before meeting trafficking indicators (debt bondage, coercion, forced criminality). The multi-ministry approval process and local capacity gaps hinder timely recognition and response. Interpreting these legal guidelines into practice remains challenging.

Asylos: Is there any evidence that young returnees face barriers in accessing higher education and vocational training? No information could be found on this question from the sources we consulted.

Dr Hai Luong: I lack the specific database to answer this, but based on the 39 Essex case, many lack stable documentation, complicating school re-enrollment and vocational training. Poor provinces offer limited, short programs poorly linked to labor demand, with inconsistent job placement and mentoring. Stigma and domestic expectations hinder girls and minority youths. Decree 162/2025 supports education and vocational aid for victims, but slow implementation and limited capacity cause disengagement.

Asylos: Does the new legislation (newly adopted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking) address the gaps identified in the previous legislation?

Dr Hai Luong: Overall, yes. Law No. 53/2024/QH15 expands protection to include victims, those under verification, minors accompanied by guardians, and relatives. It adopts a non-punishment principle and broadens the recognized types of exploitation, such as forced labor in online scams, forced begging, coerced marriage, and other inhumane practices. The law also clarifies procedures for victim identification and legal aid (see Art. 41), and through Decree 162/2025/ND-CP, it details processes for reception, verification, referral, and assistance involving commune, health, and police officials, with suggested timelines. However, two issues remain: first, operational capacity, as by the end of 2025, the NRM and screening toolkit have not been fully updated; second, legal gaps—such as the treatment of 16–17-year-olds—still need alignment. Therefore, while the 2024 law addresses key design issues, effective implementation will continue to be a major challenge.

Written communication with Thoi Nguyen received on 26 March 2026

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, we were unable to find any documented cases of children who were returned to Vietnam after being identified as having no immigration status, seeking asylum, or claiming to be trafficked, and who had been misidentified overseas as adults. Are you aware of any such cases? If so, do you know what support, if any, was provided to them upon return?

Thoi Nguyen: I am not aware of any publicly documents in the available Country of Origin Information, including the 2025 Home Office CPIN, of Vietnamese children being misidentified as adults overseas and subsequently returned to Vietnam. The absence of such evidence should not be interpreted as evidence that such cases do not occur.

Based on my professional experience working with Vietnamese nationals and reviewing asylum-related materials, returnees may face challenges in accessing formal reintegration support. Support mechanisms in Vietnam for trafficking victims are generally administered through the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and affiliated social protection centres. However, access to such support often depends on formal identification as a trafficking victim.

In cases where individuals are not formally recognised as victims, including where age was previously disputed, they may receive limited or no targeted assistance upon return. Support, if available, may include short-term accommodation, basic financial assistance, or referral to local authorities, but longer-term reintegration support is often limited and unevenly implemented across regions.

I read a recent article on VTV Online, a national website, indicating traffickers give victims false promises. At the beginning of 2023, a group of offenders used Facebook accounts to join groups such as “ Karaoke Staff Recruitment” to search for young women across various provinces who were looking for jobs.¹⁰⁴ According to the 2023 Migration Profile, published by Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in coordination with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), trafficking for the purpose of forced labour became increasingly prominent and alarming in 2023. Technology has become a powerful tool for traffickers. Human trafficking is increasingly highly organised, operating through closed and sophisticated networks, making detection and dismantling more difficult.

Asylos: Based on the interviews conducted for this report, the term ‘saving face’ came up a few times. In your view, what does ‘saving face’ mean in Vietnamese culture? Also, what are the attitudes of the Vietnamese state and society toward returnees?

Thoi Nguyen: I am not sure the concept of “saving face,” I can understand that is “Mất Mặt” in Vietnamese. It relates to the social stigma and community perception. In Vietnamese cultural context, maintaining reputation and avoiding shame (“saving face”) is closely linked to family honour, social standing and community perception.

Asylos: Do you know if there are any traditional or religious practices that increase vulnerability to trafficking across generations?

Thoi Nguyen: Socio-economic and cultural factors may contribute to vulnerability. These include strong family obligations, expectations to financially support relatives, and migration as a perceived pathway to economic advancement.

In some cases, informal community networks or personal connections facilitate migration opportunities, which may expose individuals to exploitation if not properly regulated.

Additionally, limited awareness of trafficking risks in certain communities, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, may contribute to vulnerability. These factors are not inherently linked to religious or traditional practices but may interact with cultural expectations around migration and family responsibility.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, no information could be found within the timeframe (2020-2026) on interventions aimed specifically towards children whose parents/guardians or caregivers have been trafficked. Are you aware of any interventions or community-based initiatives in Vietnam that are aimed at reducing the risk of factors for children whose parents or guardians or caregivers have been trafficked within, to, or from Vietnam and breaking the cycle of re-trafficking across generations? And if yes, are there any examples of any promising community-based practices that you know of?

104 <https://vtv.vn/xa-hoi/noi-am-anh-cua-nan-nhan-mua-ban-nguoi-20250117194545093.htm>

Thoi Nguyen: I am not aware of specific nationwide programmes in Vietnam that are explicitly designed to address the needs of children whose parents or guardians have been trafficked, particularly in terms of breaking cycles of re-trafficking across generations. As far as I am aware, the Blue Dragon Team is specifically design to help the needs of children in Vietnam. The child protection and social welfare frameworks would include the access to education, social assistance, and child protection services.

In practice, the effectiveness of such interventions may vary depending on local capacity, funding, and awareness. While some NGO-led programmes may provide targeted support in certain regions, there appears to be a gap in coordinated, long-term strategies specifically addressing intergenerational vulnerability linked to trafficking.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted, no information could be found on how the Vietnamese authorities identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking. Do you know if and how do authorities in Vietnam identify and respond to cases where smuggling leads to trafficking?

Thoi Nguyen: First, when individuals leave Vietnam following promises made by traffickers, their movement may initially fall within the category of smuggling rather than trafficking. Many individuals willingly migrate overseas for work and may have some awareness of the nature of their journey.

However, this is not always the case. Some individuals are deceived about the conditions they will face upon arrival, including the nature of the work or the circumstances of their employment. In such cases, their situation may meet the definition of trafficking.

Not all individuals involved in these migration processes are therefore victims of trafficking, and distinguishing between smuggling and trafficking can be complex in practice. It may be difficult for authorities to accurately assess an individual’s circumstances, particularly where evidence is limited or where exploitation emerges over time. Formal recognition as a victim of trafficking typically requires investigation and assessment by the relevant law enforcement authorities.

In some cases, individuals who have been smuggled may initially be treated as administrative or immigration offenders rather than victims of trafficking. This may affect their access to protection and support services.

Asylos: From the sources we consulted no new information could be found on specific cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities. Do you know of any cases of young returnees being re-exploited due to lack of opportunities?

Thoi Nguyen: There is limited publicly available evidence specifically addressing the issue. An article in Tien Phong in 2024, reporting two traffickers at the age of 13, trafficked across three countries, Hanh and Lien childhood memories are filled with tears and misery. After nearly five years abroad, their lives were stolen through beatings and physical abuse.

Lien was trafficked across three countries from China to Myanmar, and then, in December 2023, she was sold to the Bokeo Special Economic Zone (Laos). As before, she and other girls were forced to work, entertain clients and were subjected to abuse in closed room.¹⁰⁵

Young returnees who lack stable employment, vocational skills, or financial support may face pressure to re-migrate or engage in informal or high-risk work. This may increase their exposure to exploitative conditions, particularly where migration channels remain unregulated.

The risk of re-exploitation may be higher in cases where individuals return with debt, including debts incurred during migration, or where they face social stigma that limits local opportunities.

Asylos: From the sources consulted, we found no information on whether young returnees face barriers to accessing higher education and vocational training. Are you aware of any evidence that they do?

Thoi Nguyen: Young returnees who lack stable employment, vocational skills, or financial support may face pressure to re-migrate or engage in informal or high-risk work. This may increase their exposure to exploitative conditions, particularly where migration channels remain unregulated.

In some cases, individuals may prioritise immediate income generation over education due to economic pressures.

105 <https://tienphong.vn/nhuc-nhoi-nan-buon-nguoi-ky-cuoi-nhung-cuoc-giai-cuu-post1655878.tpo>

Access to vocational training programmes exists in Vietnam, but participation may depend on awareness, eligibility criteria, and local availability of services.

Asylos: Do you know if the new legislation (newly adopted Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking 2024) address the gaps identified in the previous legislation?

Thoi Nguyen: Recent developments indicate that Vietnam has introduced updated legislation emphasising a victim-centred approach, including the improved support mechanisms and broader protection for victims. The revised law ensures support for all groups of Vietnamese nationals, foreigners, stateless persons and minors.¹⁰⁶

Asylos: From the sources consulted insufficient information was found on how the war in Ukraine has affected human trafficking routes within, to, and from Vietnam. Are you aware how the war in Ukraine affected human trafficking routes within, to, and from Vietnam?

Thoi Nguyen: There is currently limited publicly available information specifically linking the war in Ukraine to changes in trafficking routes involving Vietnamese nationals.

However, it is reasonable to consider that global disruptions, including geopolitical conflicts, may affect migration patterns and routes. Changes in border controls, labour demand, and migration pathways could indirectly influence trafficking dynamics.

¹⁰⁶ https://vietnamnews.vn/opinion/1722257/viet-nam-makes-strides-in-fight-against-human-trafficking-iom.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com



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