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2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam

VIETNAM (Tier 2 Watch List)

The Government of Vietnam does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government made key achievements during the reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Vietnam was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch List. These achievements included initiating more investigations, prosecuting and convicting more traffickers, increasing international law enforcement cooperation, and initiating criminal proceedings against allegedly complicit officials. The government also identified and assisted more victims and implemented protections for overseas workers. Despite these achievements, the government did not proactively identify victims exploited in forced labor in cyber scam operations as trafficking victims or provide them with services, including foreign national victims identified in Vietnam. Authorities inspected thousands of the most at-risk establishments for sex trafficking but only identified two victims, despite widespread prevalence at such sites.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Collaborate with NGOs and civil society to revise anti-trafficking laws, including by amending the penal code to fully criminalize the sex trafficking of 16- and 17-year-old children consistent with international law.
- Investigate and prosecute traffickers, including labor traffickers and complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- In coordination with civil society, update and train officials on victim identification guidelines, and enhance interagency coordination to

identify and assist victims among vulnerable groups, including migrant workers; individuals in commercial sex, including women and girls discovered during law enforcement actions and inspections of business establishments that facilitate commercial sex; child laborers; individuals fleeing cyber scam operations; and People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals.

- Train officials on implementing guidelines for Articles 150 and 151 of the penal code, with a focus on identifying and investigating labor trafficking and internal trafficking cases, including those involving male victims.
- Finalize and implement revisions to the 2014 NRM.
- Eliminate all worker-paid recruitment fees and predatory recruitment practices for workers migrating abroad or to Vietnam; strengthen efforts to monitor labor recruitment companies, third-party sub-brokers, and the protections outlined in migrant worker contracts; and prosecute predatory or illegal sub-brokerage networks.
- Expand training for social workers, first responders, diplomats, and the judiciary on trauma-informed care and other victim-centered approaches to working with victims of trafficking.
- Implement and allocate sufficient resources to the 2021-2025 NAP.
- Invite independent verification of the termination of forced labor in drug treatment centers and make the results of such verification public.
- Screen any North Korean workers for signs of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services in a manner consistent with obligations under UNSCR 2397.

PROSECUTION

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) (\$847 to \$4,240). 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 (\$2,120 to \$8,470). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with other serious crimes, such as rape. 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. Authorities did not report statistics on its implementation in 2022. Vietnam also maintained a broad 2011 anti-trafficking law that focused primarily on preventative 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. The government continued efforts to revise this law according to a six-step action plan, developed in the previous reporting period, to address deficiencies of the law, along with the gap in coverage for 16- and 17-year-old children, in advance of projected 2023 amendments.

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.

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.

The MPS led the government's investigative efforts, and the SPP led the government's prosecution efforts. Some prosecutors reported difficulty prosecuting cases involving cyber scam operations in Cambodia because of a lack of evidence and cooperation from the Government of Cambodia; instead, prosecutors often used other laws, including migrant smuggling, to prosecute traffickers. The government did not receive extradition requests related to human trafficking cases in 2022. The government worked with foreign governments by engaging in anti-trafficking dialogue, sharing information, conducting trainings, and cooperating on trafficking investigations, including with several Lower Mekong countries. In particular, the government cooperated and increased information sharing with the Government of Cambodia to address trafficking in cyber scam operations and received assistance from another foreign government on a trafficking investigation involving online recruitment. In the past, police noted the extraction, storage, and analysis of digital evidence, combined with ambiguities surrounding its permissibility in court proceedings, negatively impacted the government's ability to combat Internet-facilitated trafficking crimes. The government, in partnership with international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments, provided anti-trafficking training to law enforcement officers, border guard forces, prosecutors, judges, diplomats, provincial and district level officials, and front-line workers. The Supreme People's Court, in conjunction with foreign donors, continued to examine and discuss concluded trafficking cases to establish legal precedent for reference in future prosecutions.

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. 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. 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.

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 implementation. The government continued a process, initiated in the previous year, to revise the NRM and signed a regulation to increase inter-ministerial coordination of victim identification and referral. After its July 2022 signing, MOLISA directed all 63 provinces to create provincial-level frameworks outlining the procedures and roles for each department, agency, and organization involved in victim support. Twenty-seven provinces completed frameworks. NGOs reported concern some provincial frameworks lacked specific measures to combat challenges unique to a province. Observers noted multiple provinces enacted provincial-level action plans in response to the frameworks.

MFA authorities repatriated 30 Vietnamese victims in 2022 – including eight from Cambodia, six from Burma, and 14 from Laos – compared with repatriating 11 victims in 2021. NGOs assisted 238 Vietnamese trafficking victims who returned from other countries, including 179 victims from Cambodia; 44 from Burma; 14 from Laos; and one from Thailand. The MFA, in partnership with an international organization, completed and disseminated SOPs for diplomats to support overseas Vietnamese women who were victims of violence, including trafficking. The government maintained labor representatives at diplomatic missions in countries that hosted large numbers of documented Vietnamese migrant workers, such as Japan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the ROK, Taiwan, and the UAE. These missions could provide basic provisions, transportation, and health care to Vietnamese trafficking victims abroad.

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 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.

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 migrant workers returned without formal victim status certification and therefore lacked support and timely legal assistance. Observers reported concern the government did not have minimum quality standards for protection services administered by service providers. 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. The government did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face retribution or hardship.

PREVENTION

The government 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 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 14.5 billion VND (\$614,150) to its trafficking prevention efforts and for the implementation of the NAP, compared with allocating 17 billion VND (\$720,030) in the 2021 budget. The government did not make any information on the implementation of the NAP public, but it monitored and evaluated its own progress against the plan through internal weekly, monthly, and semi-annual reports. Provincial and municipal officials conducted awareness campaigns targeting school-aged children and the public, many in partnership with NGOs.

In December 2022, the government directed the MPS to collect trafficking data from 20 government agencies, ministries, and departments on a quarterly basis and report the data biannually. Observers noted the government lacked specific guidelines, timelines, and parameters for the 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,

including women migrant workers in ASEAN countries, trafficking in the fishing industry, and electronic evidence handling in trafficking investigations.

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.

MOLISA received 69 civil complaints related to labor recruitment practices in 2022, compared with 58 in 2021; this led to the inspection of 15 labor export enterprises, of which it fined four for administrative violations to a total of 212.5 million VND (\$9,000), compared with 16 inspections and 12 fines leading to 699 million VND (\$29,610) in 2021. MOLISA revoked one business license of recruiters for violations of the 2006 Law on Guest Workers, compared with none in 2021. Local police investigated and verified 109 cases of organizations and individuals sending workers abroad without licenses, compared with 128 cases in 2021. As in prior years, MOLISA raised awareness on labor laws and safe migration practices among employment services centers and businesses. Previous 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.

The government maintained labor migration agreements on Vietnamese workers with 13 governments, including an April 2022 agreement with the ROK 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. In October 2022, MOLISA warned workers about fraudulent job offers by labor export companies that advertised jobs in the ROK, particularly the shipbuilding sector. 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.

The government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The mandatory trainings focused on trafficking prevention, including anti-trafficking regulations, policies, and laws. MOLISA, with donor funding, operated a 24-hour hotline for victims of crime, including trafficking. Hotline operators could speak Vietnamese, English, and seven ethnic minority languages. The hotline received 2,434 calls, compared with 3,808 in 2021; and it received 105 trafficking referrals involving 120 victims, including 44 child victims and 98 labor trafficking victims, – 38 were female and 82 were male – compared with 35 referrals involving 39 victims in 2021. The hotline referred 96 victims to the police, 22 victims to MOLISA, and 54 victims to NGOs. The government made some efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts and child sex tourism by implementing a December 2021 decree to double fines for administrative violations related to commercial sex and to seek accountability for businesses who facilitate it. The government did not take steps to deny entry of known sex offenders. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployments as peacekeepers.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam, and traffickers exploit victims from Vietnam abroad. Fifty-five percent of workers work 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. 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 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. Vietnamese traffickers, including members of Vietnam's diplomatic service, have reportedly exploited Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in Saudi Arabia. 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. Pandemic-related travel restrictions compound these vulnerabilities for many Vietnamese migrant workers overseas, including by forcing some to remain in their positions long after the conclusion of their contracts. Widespread social stigma increases LGBTQI+ individuals' vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit Vietnamese nationals in forced labor in cyber scam operations, or in sex trafficking in locations near cyber scam operations, located primarily in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. Traffickers are increasingly taking advantage of pandemic-induced unemployment to lure Vietnamese nationals, especially women and members of ethnic minority groups, with false promises of job opportunities abroad. 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 exploit some Vietnamese women who travel abroad for internationally brokered marriages or jobs in restaurants, massage parlors, and karaoke bars – including to Burma, Japan, the ROK, Malaysia, the PRC, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Taiwan – in forced labor in domestic service or sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit women and girls in Vietnam to 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. Traffickers in border villages reportedly abduct Vietnamese women and girls, particularly from the Hmong ethnic minority group, and transport them to the PRC for forced marriages that

often feature corollary sex trafficking and/or forced labor indicators. There are 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. 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. 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 the migration process, 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.

Within the country, pandemic-related unemployment, restrictions on movement, 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 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.

North Korean nationals working in Vietnam may be operating under exploitative working conditions and display multiple indicators of forced labor. In 2021, Vietnamese government and NGO officials reported an increase in Cambodian female adult and child trafficking victims transiting Vietnam en route to the PRC. 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. 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. 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.

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