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USDOS – US Department of State

2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam

Vietnam (Tier 3)

The Government of Vietnam does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Vietnam was downgraded to Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including instituting formal child-centered investigative policies that aimed to address longstanding insufficiencies in preexisting law; increasing international law enforcement cooperation; initiating a process to evaluate a preexisting anti-trafficking law for eventual amendment; achieving the first modest increase in victim identification in five years; and assisting more victims than in 2020. It also enacted a series of policies to eliminate worker-paid service fees and commissions that have historically placed Vietnamese workers at high risk of debt-based coercion in several sectors and key destination countries. However, the government reported a decline in convictions of traffickers for the fifth consecutive year; it also achieved significantly fewer prosecutions than in 2020. Authorities again inspected thousands of establishments most-at risk for sex trafficking without identifying any victims of sex trafficking in the process, despite widespread prevalence at such sites. The government did not hold criminally or administratively accountable two Vietnamese diplomats who were allegedly complicit in subjecting Vietnamese nationals to trafficking abroad during the reporting period, and it did not make sufficient effort to protect the victims in these cases. To the contrary, authorities at times reportedly harassed and pressured survivors and their families in an effort to silence allegations of official complicity.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Collaborate with NGOs and civil society to revise anti-trafficking legislation, including by amending the penal code to fully criminalize the sex trafficking of 16- and 17-year-old children consistent with international law.
- Vigorously prosecute all forms of trafficking and convict and punish traffickers, including in cases involving forced labor or complicit officials.
- Continue to train officials on implementing guidelines for Articles 150 and 151 of the penal code, with a focus on identifying and investigating forced labor and internal trafficking cases, including those involving male victims.
- 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, such as migrant workers; individuals in commercial sex, including women and girls discovered during police raids and inspections of business establishments that facilitate commercial sex; child laborers; and North Korean and People’s Republic of China (PRC) nationals.
- Finalize and implement revisions to the 2014 National Referral Mechanism (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 national action plan (NAP).
- Invite independent verification of the termination of forced labor within drug treatment centers and make public the results of such verification.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts, including by failing to hold criminally or administratively accountable two officials who were allegedly complicit in forced labor crimes. 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) (\$879 to \$4,390). 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 (\$2,200 to \$8,790). 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 2021. 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 completed review of this law and issued a six-step action plan to address these deficiencies, along with the gap in coverage for 16- and 17-year-old children, in advance of projected 2023 amendments. It also issued a formal decision approving Vietnam’s first Program to Protect Children Online for 2021-2025, which included specific guidance on prosecutions. No further information on content of these initiatives or their status was available at the end of the reporting period.

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).

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 in Laos. The government did not receive extradition requests related to human trafficking cases in 2021.

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. 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 in the region and reportedly continued their recruitment activities with impunity. Vietnamese authorities penalized one labor export company for failing to resolve a pay issue; the company alleged that this action was a response to its attempting to assist some of the victims who reported these abuses. In a separate case, the government arrested and charged four high-ranking Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) consular officials for their alleged role in scheming to profit by forcing Vietnamese nationals stranded abroad during the pandemic to

pay exorbitant repatriation fees—a common source of indebtedness that traffickers were known to exploit. Authorities did not provide further information on these charges, which did not appear to result from the aforementioned incidents in Saudi Arabia. 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 continued to provide multiple anti-trafficking trainings—at times with support from international organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments—to its personnel, including law enforcement officers, border guard forces, prosecutors, judges, and social workers at the district, provincial, and commune levels. In conjunction with foreign donors, the SPC continued to examine and hold discussions on a series of concluded trafficking cases in an effort to establish legal precedent for reference in future prosecutions.

PROTECTION

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. The government reported identifying 126 victims in 2021, of whom 114 were female and 12 were male; 45 were children (compared with a total of 121 victims comprising 112 females, nine males, and 32 children in 2020). Of these, 120 were Vietnamese nationals, and 96 were subjected to transnational trafficking. Twenty-two individuals were victims of forced labor and 28 were victims of “sexual exploitation;” some of the latter cases may have fallen outside international definitional standards for trafficking crimes. Slightly more than half of identified victims (64) were members of ethnic minority communities. Seventy-six individuals were victims of unspecified trafficking, which in prior years included “illegal marriage” and “illegal adoption,” neither of which was consistent with international definitions of trafficking (64 and three, respectively, in 2020). The government utilized victim identification criteria as part of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Human Trafficking (COMMIT), along with its own victim identification procedures approved in 2014; however, identification procedures remained largely reactive—rather than proactive—across various key agencies. The victim identification process remained overly cumbersome and complex, requiring approval from multiple ministries before victims could be formally identified and assisted. Ineffective implementing guidelines on victim identification procedures prevented border guards, law enforcement, and other officials from fully detecting and assisting victims. Authorities did not proactively employ 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, and child laborers. Despite conducting more than 36,000 inspections of establishments most-at risk for sex trafficking, authorities did not identify any sex trafficking victims during these inspections.

The government maintained an NRM approved in 2014, but some local officials’ unfamiliarity with anti-trafficking protocol and policies, insufficient inter-jurisdictional cooperation, and limited social worker capacity continued to hinder its systematic implementation. The labor and social affairs ministry (MOLISA) led an inter-ministerial process during the reporting period to review and revise the NRM, as well as to draft supplementary guidance on receiving and providing protection services to trafficking victims; neither effort was complete at the end of the reporting period. The government did not report the total number of victims it referred to NGO or state protection services (compared with 25 referrals to protection centers, 20 to police, 19 to an NGO, and three to the to the Vietnam Women’s Union (VWU) Center for Women’s Development in 2020), nor did it disaggregate data according to whether victims received assistance from NGOs or official sources. Authorities did record and grant 111 total requests for victim support in the form of medical and psychological care, legal aid, lodging, essential needs, travel expenses, vocational training, and loans (compared with 84 assisted in 2020). Survivors benefitting from these services included 12 male and 99 female individuals, and five were foreign nationals—four Cambodians and one Thai national (unreported in 2020). Thirty-four victims requested and were granted legal aid. As with victim identification, more than half of assisted survivors were members of ethnic minority groups (64). With donor funding, MOLISA continued to operate a 24-hour hotline for victims of various crimes, including trafficking. Hotline operators could speak Vietnamese, English, and seven ethnic minority languages. Although the hotline reported an increase in the total number of calls received—3,808, up from 2,826 in 2020—it received fewer trafficking- specific calls during the reporting period: 35 calls involving 39 victims, compared with 59 calls involving an unspecified number of victims in 2020. The majority of these cases (28) involved children. Observers ascribed this change to an increase in reported missing persons cases and a decrease in the movement of vulnerable people across international borders during pandemic-related travel restrictions. The hotline referred 19 of these cases to police for recovery and investigations, 16 to MOLISA for further assistance, two to an NGO, and one to a VWU shelter. 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, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These missions could provide basic provisions, transportation, and health care to Vietnamese citizens subjected to trafficking abroad. MFA authorities did not report complete repatriation data, but Vietnam’s diplomatic mission in Burma reported receiving, identifying, and providing various support services to 16 Vietnamese female victims of sexual exploitation there—14 women and two girls—compared to nine victims repatriated from Burma in 2020. MFA worked with Burmese authorities to fund and conduct repatriation for 11 of these victims after five opted to remain in Burma.

Mandatory quarantine periods and other pandemic-related restrictions negatively affected some victim care and support services during the reporting period. The government continued to assist vulnerable groups, including trafficking victims, through 51 social protection and 43 social service centers nationwide; some of these facilities operated with NGO funding, and none provided services to male or child victims exclusively. The government also

announced a series of protection-related actions to supplement or clarify preexisting policies, laws, and initiatives during the reporting period. In May 2021, the Prime Minister issued a formal decision approving a new national Child Labor Prevention and Reduction Program for 2021-2025 which focused on the provision of timely support to all children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. The government also approved new policy guidance for a 2020 overseas employment law that added or increased financial, legal, and vocational assistance options for Vietnamese workers who return home prior to the end of their contracts, including for those who are fleeing forced labor. Another new policy outlined the development of income generation projects for trafficking survivors in predominantly ethnic minority communities in mountainous regions. Authorities did not provide information on the implementation of any of these policies in 2021. Authorities allowed victims to stay at support facilities for up to three months with a meal stipend and medical assistance according to a circular issued in 2020. A decree issued in the prior reporting period entitled foreign trafficking victims to four support services: essential needs and travel expenses, medical support, psychological support, and legal aid. However, NGOs reported the government did not have adequately trained or experienced social workers to provide appropriate support to trafficking victims. Vietnamese law guaranteed trafficking victims the right to legal representation; the law did not require victims to be present at or testify in-person in court. The law also entitled trafficking victims to compensation in trafficking cases; the government did not provide complete data on this entitlement, but review of case records indicated at least seven cases concluded with compensation orders ranging from 10 million to 100 million VND (\$439 to \$4,390) in 2021 (compared with at least ten cases resulting in non-disaggregated compensation orders, the highest of which was 45.3 million VND, or \$1,990, in 2020). The government encouraged trafficking victims to assist in judicial proceedings against traffickers; however, NGOs previously reported victims were at times less likely to come forward about their abuses in a judicial setting due to fears they may face arrest or deportation for crossing the border without documentation. During the reporting period, MPS established 25 child-friendly investigation rooms at the provincial level for testimony from persons younger than the age of 18, but officials did not report statistics on their use.

The government continued to train officials in various agencies on victim identification and protection. In conjunction with an international organization, MFA continued work on standard operating procedures for diplomats’ reference in supporting overseas Vietnamese women who were victims of violence, including trafficking. 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 returned 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.

Due to a lack of systematic implementation of victim-centered screening procedures during police raids on establishments most-at risk for sex trafficking, authorities may have penalized some women and children for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit. This insufficiency also continued to place foreign victims, including children, at high risk of punitive deportation, although the government claimed it screened all deported individuals for trafficking indicators and did not identify any such cases. Civil society groups previously reported Vietnamese victims who migrated via irregular means or who were forced to commit unlawful acts as a result of their trafficking feared reprisals from authorities. These victims were less likely to seek support and were vulnerable to re-trafficking. International observers previously reported government officials often blamed Vietnamese citizens for their exploitative conditions abroad or suggested victims inflate abuses to avoid immigration violations. The government did not report offering foreign victims legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they may face retribution or hardship.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking. A steering committee chaired by a deputy prime minister, with the minister and a vice minister of public security as deputy chairs, continued to direct Vietnam’s anti-trafficking efforts. In February 2021, the government approved its national anti-trafficking action plan for 2021-2025. The central government, including provinces and municipalities continued to organize several large-scale public anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, many with financial and technical support from international organizations and foreign governments. Included in these efforts, the Ministry of Information and Communication disseminated an anti-trafficking public awareness text message to all 126 million mobile users in Vietnam—the first such nationwide campaign in Vietnam. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), with donor funding, continued to operate a 24-hour hotline—with operators who spoke Vietnamese, English, and seven ethnic

minority languages—for victims of crimes, including trafficking victims. The hotline received reports of 59 potential trafficking cases in 2020, an increase compared to the previous reporting period; it referred these cases to NGO and government services. MOLISA, in coordination with other government ministries, international organizations, and NGOs, organized public awareness campaigns to promote the hotline during the reporting period. The government did not share the full human trafficking assessments with the public. During the reporting period, the MFA organized trainings for 200 diplomatic and consular officials on victim identification and assistance prior to their posting abroad.

In November 2020, the government passed revisions to Law 69 governing contract-based Vietnamese overseas workers, which prohibited charging workers brokerage fees and expanded worker protections including the right for a worker to unilaterally terminate a contract. Labor recruitment firms, most affiliated with state-owned enterprises, and unlicensed brokers reportedly charged workers seeking overseas employment higher fees than the law allows. Many workers incurred high debts and were more at risk for forced labor, including debt-based coercion. In 2020, MOLISA inspected 84 enterprises sending workers abroad, fined 32 enterprises for administrative violations, and revoked six business licenses for violations of the 2006 Law on Guest Workers; MOLISA also resolved 160 out of 180 civil complaints filed by foreign workers related to labor recruitment. This demonstrated an increase in efforts compared to the previous reporting period. In 2019, MOLISA inspected 55 enterprises sending workers abroad, fined 21 of them, revoked two licenses, and resolved 120 civil complaints, all related to labor migration. MOLISA coordinated with seven provinces to conduct 10 training courses for nearly 800 officers at the district- and commune- level to improve counseling and information-sharing for workers migrating abroad; it also conducted three training courses for nearly 250 officers of service enterprises sending workers abroad. MOLISA also raised awareness on labor laws and safe migration practices among more than 470 employment services centers and businesses. In 2020, MOLISA continued negotiations with the governments of Israel and Kuwait to sign labor cooperation agreements. During the reporting period, the government collaborated with the Taiwanese government to form a direct recruitment center in Taiwan to send Vietnamese workers to Taiwan and established a hotline to receive workers’ complaints. The government also maintained labor migration agreements—signed during the previous reporting period—with the Government of the UAE for domestic workers and with the Government of Japan for skilled and technical workers and interns. It also maintained a 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 severe exploitation of Vietnamese workers. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or child sex tourism. The government did not take steps to deny entry of known U.S. sex offenders. In June 2020, Vietnam’s national assembly ratified ILO Convention 105 on Abolition of Forced Labor.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Vietnam, and they exploit victims from Vietnam abroad. 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 that make workers vulnerable to forced labor through debt bondage. Traffickers subject victims to forced labor in construction, agriculture, mining, maritime industries, logging, and manufacturing, primarily in Malaysia, South Korea, Laos, Japan, and—to a lesser extent—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, 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. Vietnamese traffickers, including members of Vietnam’s diplomatic service, have reportedly subjected Vietnamese nationals to forced labor in Saudi Arabia. Many Vietnamese nationals are subjected to forced labor under the auspices of Japan’s TITP and within agricultural education programs in Israel. Vietnamese nationals are subjected to 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.

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 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. Some Vietnamese women who travel abroad for internationally brokered marriages or jobs in restaurants, massage parlors, and karaoke bars—including to Burma, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the PRC, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Taiwan—are subjected to forced labor in domestic service or sex trafficking. Traffickers in border villages reportedly abduct Vietnamese women, 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—subject Vietnamese nationals to deceptive recruitment and 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 subject them to 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 subject local internal migrants to forced labor in neighboring Laos.

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 deprived 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.

The North Korean government may have forced North Koreans to work in Vietnam. 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, had been forced to work in agriculture, manufacturing, and hazardous industries, such as cashew processing.

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