

## The Impact of Vietnamese Organised Immigration Crime and Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking on the UK

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### Background

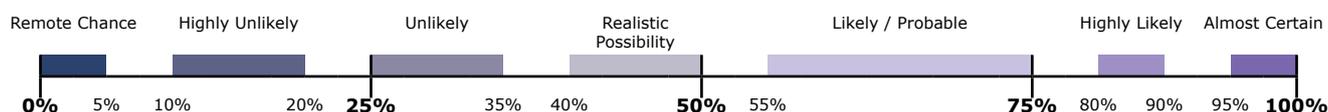
1. This paper has been commissioned by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to assess the extent to which both modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT) and organised immigration crime (OIC) involving ethnic Vietnamese organised crime groups (OCGs) and Vietnamese nationals impacts the UK. It considers the risks and harms faced by Vietnamese irregular migrants, and the harms to the state of irregular migration, illegal working and exploitation.
2. It is highly unlikely that detections of illegal entrants reflect the true scale of Vietnamese irregular migration, as migrants successfully entering the UK illegally are not detected or recorded, while migrants making repeated unsuccessful attempts to enter the UK can be recorded multiple times, increasing the number of recorded detections.
3. In 2020, 658 Vietnamese nationals (including dual nationals) were referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), making up 6% of all referrals (10,613).
4. In Q1-3 of 2021, 851 Vietnamese nationals (including dual nationals) were referred into the NRM, making up 9% of all referrals (9,396). This is despite a significant reduction in referrals of Vietnamese nationals in Q1, where only 186 potential victims were referred into the NRM, compared with 334 in Q2 and 331 in Q3. It is highly likely that the lower proportion of claims in 2020 and Q1 of 2021 was influenced by increased restrictions on travel and business as a result of COVID-19.

### En-Route to the UK

5. Vietnamese nationals consistently make up a small but noteworthy portion of the organised immigration crime threat to the UK. It is almost certain that the majority of Vietnamese irregular migration to the UK, including that which results in exploitation, is facilitated by OIC groups and offenders. Migrants travelling to the UK are also vulnerable to exploitation en route to the UK.

**Team:** Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, National Assessments Centre

**Language of Probability:** Throughout this paper, language of probability is used, which is defined by the Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment (PHIA) 'Probability Yardstick'. The probability ranges for such terms are as follows:



6. Evidence recorded between 2019 and 2022 has shown that Vietnamese irregular migrants are at risk of exploitation and other harms both en-route to and on arrival in the UK. It is highly likely that the greatest risk of physical harm to Vietnamese irregular migrants and victims of trafficking is in transit to the UK.
7. Methods that enable undetected arrival almost certainly remain preferable in the facilitation of Vietnamese victims and migrants to the UK, as they do not necessitate any engagement with the immigration system. Where Vietnamese migrants have used more visible methodologies, including small boat crossings, they have claimed asylum on arrival to prevent removal, and subsequently absconded from asylum accommodation.
8. Vietnamese nationals are rarely detected as inadequately documented passengers (IDPs). It is a realistic possibility that Vietnamese IDPs are skilled at avoiding detection, and therefore underreported. In conjunction, it is likely that OIC facilitators view air travel as less cost effective and higher risk, as the facilitated individual will come into contact with a Border Force officer. Successful use of air routes requires a certain element of credibility; it is a realistic possibility that MSHT victims do not present credibly, or that facilitators do not have access to credible false documents or visas.
9. The reported costs to facilitate entry of Vietnamese migrants to the UK vary, but in the majority of cases run to tens of thousands of pounds, with GBP 7,800 and GBP 39,000 noted as the extremes in the range. It is almost certain that exorbitant fees are charged for each element and that in the majority of cases the bulk of payment is made via debt bondage, rather than upfront.

## Within the UK

10. Many Vietnamese migrants are highly likely to work in exploitative conditions, and some will be in situations of slavery and trafficking. This can include the use of debt bondage to repay agreed travel costs for transit to the UK, and it is highly likely that artificial inflation of this debt is the most significant defining factor in the exploitation of Vietnamese irregular migrants. It is almost certain that victims of MSHT do not constitute the majority of the workforce in sectors or activities in which Vietnamese migrants are commonly identified.
11. It is highly likely that employment in illegal activity, such as cannabis cultivation, offers the highest earnings, and therefore the quickest way to pay off debts and generate income. In contrast, employment in nail bars, restaurants and shops is perceived by prospective migrants to carry a lower risk of detection by authorities, but necessitates a longer period of debt or higher upfront payment.
12. It is highly likely that businesses willing to facilitate illegal working are non-compliant in other areas. As such, Vietnamese irregular migrants working in otherwise legal sectors, such as nail salons, restaurants and shops, are highly unlikely to benefit from legal and regulatory requirements including National Minimum Wage, the European Working Time Directive and Health and Safety Executive guidelines.
13. Female Vietnamese irregular migrants and victims of MSHT are also encountered in the UK sexual services marketplace. It is highly likely that deception is used more frequently in sexual exploitation as a result of the smaller number of victims likely to respond positively to an advert for sex work.

## Vietnamese Migrant

### Perceptions

14. It is highly likely that the majority of Vietnamese irregular migration to the UK is not intended to be permanent, and is predominantly undertaken with the intention of establishing a better life in Vietnam for the migrant and their family.
15. The UK is widely perceived as an attractive destination by Vietnamese nationals seeking economic opportunities overseas, despite limited opportunities for legal migration. It is almost certain that the perceived ease of working illegally is the single most significant pull factor for Vietnamese migrants using irregular routes into the UK. However, other factors such as the perception of the UK as relatively welcoming of migration, and English language being widely spoken in Vietnam also play a role.
16. Despite the significant harm migrants are exposed to, it is likely that migrants perceive that detection, either in transit or within the UK, to pose the most likely and significant risk. Detection resulting in return to Vietnam is highly likely to result in substantial financial loss to migrants.
17. Although the deaths of Vietnamese nationals at Grays were widely and extensively reported in Vietnam, it is highly unlikely that the event has had a notable impact on the intent of prospective migrants seeking to reach the UK.

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