

# **'VULNERABILITY' TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A STUDY OF VIET NAM, ALBANIA, NIGERIA AND THE UK**

**Report of Shared Learning Event held in  
Hanoi, Viet Nam: 6-7 December 2017**

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the first stages of an ethically-led, two-year research study into understanding the causes, dynamics and ‘vulnerabilities’ to and resilience against human trafficking in three source countries – Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria – plus the support needs of people from these countries who have experienced trafficking when identified as potential ‘victims’ of trafficking in the UK. These three source countries have consistently been the top three countries of referrals of potentially trafficked persons into a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) within the UK.

This study has been conducted in partnership between the University of Bedfordshire and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The research study uses an IOM Determinants of Vulnerability model in its examination and analysis of vulnerabilities to and resilience against human trafficking. This model identifies risk and protective factors for vulnerable migrants across five different levels – individual, household and family, community, structural and situational levels.

The focus of this report is on Viet Nam, detailing emerging themes following a two-day Shared Learning Event (SLE) held in Hanoi, Viet Nam, between 6-7 December 2017. These preliminary themes will help shape subsequent research. (See Appendix 1 for the SLE agenda).

## AIMS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1. Explore socio-economic and political conditions plus other contextual factors that create ‘vulnerability’ and resilience to human trafficking in Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria
2. Utilise and refine the IOM Determinants of Vulnerability model
3. Outline routes taken from Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria to the UK
4. Review existing academic and ‘grey’ literature on trafficking within and from Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria
5. Explore the support needs of people who have experienced trafficking from Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria and have arrived into the UK

## STUDY APPROACH

This study is mainly qualitative in its approach with the intention of drawing out the complexities and nuances of human trafficking from Viet Nam, Albania and Nigeria. In each of these countries, and the UK, a minimum of 40 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key informants and adults who have experienced human trafficking. These will be supplemented by available quantitative data from IOM’s Migrant Management Operational System Application (MiMOSA) Counter Trafficking Module (CTM) on trafficking and data held by partners working alongside IOM. Ethical considerations remain paramount throughout this study, from the design stage through to dissemination. An Ethical Protocol has been drawn up from a compilation of ethical guidance documents (see below) and continues to evolve alongside the research.

## SHARED LEARNING EVENTS

Prior to commencing the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study, Shared Learning Events (SLEs) were held in each country as the first step in ascertaining what was already known about trafficking and to explore contextually-based considerations for conducting research on this topic.

At the Viet Nam SLE thirty-one stakeholders from civil society organisations and government agencies, such as law-enforcement, children services, and health services participated in the first day of the SLE (see Appendix 2). These stakeholders were invited to provide presentations addressing the key research aims and questions, helping to ensure that local knowledge was incorporated into the research study at an early stage. These presentations considered the picture of human trafficking within Viet Nam, patterns of human trafficking from Viet Nam to the UK and factors that shape ‘vulnerability’ to trafficking. During the second day, a smaller group were invited to discuss research design, methodologies, ethics when conducting the research and the design of interview schedules to be used for data collection within the UK and Viet Nam research team.

## VIET NAM CONTEXT

Viet Nam has a population of approximately 93.4 million (Human Development Report, 2016) and is transitioning from a centralized state-led economy to a market economy following economic reform and liberalization in 1986 under 'Doi Moi'. The history of migration within and from Viet Nam is lengthy and complex and this report and attached timeline looks at this history in depth, noting key political events as well as legislation, policies and other key events relating to human trafficking and migration more broadly.

## KEY THEMES ARISING OUT OF THE VIET NAM SHARED LEARNING EVENT

A range of relevant key themes and learning points emerged out of the Viet Nam SLE and these preliminary themes will now help shape the subsequent research. This intentionally descriptive report relates solely to Viet Nam, which will be followed up with a final report addressing research aims across all three source countries in early 2019.

Issues arose around: risks and vulnerabilities; forms of exploitation; support services; the extent, nature and impact of stigma and discrimination against victims of trafficking; and, issues related to data protection plus the collection and recording of data on human trafficking.

The first of these – risks and vulnerabilities – included discussion of:

**The causes or drivers of human trafficking appeared to be broad, multiple and overlapping.** A number of factors across the different levels of the IOM Determinants of Vulnerability model influenced an individual's decisions and motivations to migrate. Those highlighted during the SLE included poverty, economic hardship, low levels of education, norms that enabled forced marriage arrangements and limited options for safe and legal migration.

**The 'transition' from a centralized state-led economy to a market economy is intrinsically linked to migration and human trafficking.** Social changes as a result of this transition have impacted on the drivers and dynamics of migration.

**Regional dynamics involving cases of cross-border human trafficking were better understood and prioritized over the routes from Viet Nam to the UK.** A number of participants suggested that regional issues are considered more important than trafficking beyond the region. This is unsurprising given that 91% of trafficking 'victims' detected in East Asia and the Pacific involved either domestic (22%) or sub-regional (69%) cases (UNODC, 2017:106). Overall, it appeared that the experience of those arriving into the UK was less well known or understood within Viet Nam.

**There was an impression amongst participants at the SLE that trafficking from Viet Nam to the UK is uncommon.** There was also an impression that incidents of trafficking occurred due to inaccurate information provided to family members.

**Places of origin for trafficking cases and the overall geography of human trafficking within Viet Nam affects all 63 provinces with an extensive range of places of origin discussed.** Across the SLE, participants reiterated the geographical range of trafficking cases.

**It was suggested that families collect financial resources, sell assets and take out loans to fund the migration of individual members, with payments sometimes made in installments for their journey to reduce risks of not reaching final destinations.** It was also considered that those who reach the UK earn high wages, are given considerable support and freedom. This is an area that remains under-explored.

**Journeys that begin based on rational decision making, hope and promises of employment, transport and housing opportunities can become fragmented journeys towards 'vulnerability', precarity and exploitation.** There is reportedly a considerable amount of hope associated with migration from Viet Nam and risks taken are considered to be worthwhile. In cases reported during the SLE, there was an assumption that these journeys then become exploitative en-route.

**Recruitment methods were varied and ever changing.** It was considered that the use of social media was a key recruitment method for trafficking alongside previous recruitment methods within close family or close social ties.

In relation to forms of exploitation:

**The forms of exploitation are multiple.** For adults these included: sexual exploitation: forced labour (including for mineral extraction in Lao PDR, the fishing industry in Thailand and factory work elsewhere); forced marriages (also referred to as 'fake marriages'); seasonal employment; organ harvesting; work on cannabis production and multiple forms of exploitation (for example, sexual exploitation and begging). For children the purposes included: sexual exploitation; fake adoption; child abductions and infant trafficking (see also IOM, 2017:52); and multiple forms of exploitation (for example, work in nail bars and sexual exploitation). For both adults and children, multiple forms of exploitation were outlined as common but under-researched.

In relation to support services:

**There is little understanding of the causes of trafficking for men and boys and their support needs.** This in some part reflects how the trafficking of women and girls is more prominent in a regional sense. This is significant for this research as there are a high proportion of male Vietnamese nationals referred into the UK NRM. The lack of support services for men and boys in Vietnam increases the difficulties of accessing men and boys as a sample for this research. A focus of support for women and children was apparent from discussions.

In terms of the nature and impact of stigma and discrimination against victims of trafficking:

**The issue of social stigma and discrimination as a result of trafficking were considered to be an issue and were gendered.** For example, girls returning were said to receive no support from their communities whereas boys could sometimes be supported and cherished on their return.

**Children were also stigmatized.** Examples were provided of children being considered "bad" as a result of their trafficking experiences and being used as examples to others.

**There appears to be a perception amongst a few agencies that victims of trafficking are 'lazy', interested only in 'material wealth' and wanting an 'easy life' so are in some way enticed by those promising riches and employment overseas.** Such terms add to the existing social stigma associated with trafficking.

Issues related to data protection and collection included:

**Data protection, confidentiality and anonymity were under-regarded in practice.**

It appears that there is little emphasis given to data protection, confidentiality and anonymity for people who have experienced trafficking across a broad range of sectors within Viet Nam, including within media reports.

**Statistics for trafficking could be improved.** A number of Ministries release statistics and presentation of statistics over differing time frames. This meant that from the presentations at the SLE that it was difficult to quantify cases of human trafficking in Viet Nam. Further work to centralize and improve statistics would be beneficial.

**There appears to be a gap between the number of Vietnamese nationals referred into the UK NRM and the numbers of people accessing support service for trafficked persons in Viet Nam.**

**The term 'good practice' requires further definition and debate.** As with other countries included in this study, there was no consensus as to what 'good practice' might look like in human trafficking work. It was clear from the SLE that there were pockets of what might be described as 'good practice'. However, these pockets were not well known, were not discussed or amplified in any way and did not appear to have been evaluated. This is linked to discussions about methods of measuring effectiveness and is an area requiring further thought and reflection.

**Finally, it was clear that further research is necessary to explore gaps and key themes not elaborated upon during the SLE.** These include the issue of victims' agency and the relationship of this to vulnerability of capabilities; further research on forced labour and other non-sexual types of exploitation; and the relationship between human trafficking and statelessness, particularly within ethnic minority area.



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