



Vietnamese Cultural Resource

Within the UK, law enforcement agencies investigating Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking deal with a high proportion of victims who are foreign nationals (75% of victims referred into the NRM in 2023 were non-British citizens). NRM referrals from Vietnamese nationals increased by 29% in 2023. Vietnamese nationals have been in the top 3 referred nationalities into the NRM for almost every year since the NRM began and accounted for 6% of all referrals in 2023. There is a demand therefore, for cultural competency. Police officers and staff who are equipped with tailored cultural resources that acknowledge and appreciate specific cultural needs are better positioned to gain the necessary trust of modern slavery victims and support them appropriately.

This resource, accompanied by the webinar aimed to provide an insight into the Vietnamese culture and has been collated using the expertise of any individuals credited below. It is important to note that people within a single country can have a range of experiences, attitudes and cultural practices, as such, individuals may not conform to every generalisation about their culture.

The logo for Modern Slavery Organised Immigration Crime. It features the words 'MODERN SLAVERY' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 'V' in 'SLAVERY' is replaced by a red hand icon with fingers spread. Below this, the words 'ORGANISED IMMIGRATION CRIME' are written in a smaller, bold, black, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white background with red horizontal bars above and below the text.

**MODERN
SLAVERY**
**ORGANISED
IMMIGRATION
CRIME**



Introduction and historical background:

Socialist Republic of Vietnam has a one-party system: Communist Party of Vietnam, who have been in power since the end of the Vietnam War and reunification of North and South Vietnam. The country is 1.4 times bigger than the UK in terms of area and in 2023, the population of Vietnam is 99 million, making it the 15th most populated country. Their currency is the Dong and Vietnam's economy is growing at around 5-6% per annum. French influence exists from colonisation within the 19-20th centuries, Vietnam was divided into two countries after the French withdrew in 1954. Chinese influence also exists as a result of the very long 1000-year control. 1940-5 saw the Japanese control of Vietnam. More recent influence has come from Japanese, Korean and Western culture.

The communist movement in Cambodia and Vietnam began before WW2. In 1941, Nguyen Ai Quoc (commonly known by his alias Hồ Chí Minh or Uncle Ho) founded the Viet Minh a national independence coalition. Hồ Chí Minh declared Vietnam as independent in 1945 and served as prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1945 to 1955 and as president from 1945-69. He was born in Nghe An, which along with north central areas is generally considered a poorer region; a tough place to live due to the difficulties in farming and environmental issues such as typhoons, drought and climate change. The people are incredibly resilient in coping with harsh conditions. There is a strong catholic base in Nghe An and some experts believe faith plays a key role in facilitating migration out of the country.

The Geneva convention of 1954 officially divided Vietnam into 2 parts: North and South. The 1955-75 Vietnam conflict saw North Vietnam (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) supported by Russia, North Korea, China and South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam) supported by America, Australia, New Zealand, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand and South Korea. Following unification in 1975, the Cambodian - Vietnamese War took place between 1978-89, the Vietnamese victory saw Pol Pot removed from power and the end of the Cambodian genocide. The post-war era saw instability and economic hardship.

There was a massive displacement from the South during the conflicts and many fled from fear of the new government in the North and their repressive policies. When the wars ended 70% people lived below the poverty line. The Đổi Mới innovation policy was adopted by the government from 1986 to restructure the country and promote growth. The reforms placed emphasis on the family being responsible for supporting themselves which increased measures people were likely to take to survive. This has been a success story to a certain extent, but wealth inequalities are now increasing rapidly. The country has diversified its sources of income, from being mainly focused on agriculture to service, construction and manufacturing industries, however rural areas still face poverty. Increases in education expenditure, rural households' access to electricity, access to health care and infrastructure investment and decreases in mortality all enabled business investment.

In the 15-20 years following the war, many people, mainly from the South, fled Vietnam in small fishing boats and came to be known as "boat people". Between 200,000 and 600,000 boat people have died at sea (Source: UNHCR). The boat people fled Vietnam after the Vietnam War escaping poverty, hardship and draconian rules. Many travelled to the USA, Australia and France, not many travelled to the UK as the connection was weaker. The connection with the USA and Australia was stronger following their involvement in the Vietnam war and France as a former colonial power.

Vietnam in the post war era is very different to the current Vietnam. Vietnam is now considered by many to be more liberal than the 70s and 80s at the peak of the boat people era. Post-Covid pandemic the picture has changed with many workers being dismissed.



Greetings:

Vietnamese people have a friendly and affable nature, so being able to speak a few phrases will support initial engagement and show an interest in the culture.

English is a very difficult language for the Vietnamese to learn. This can have a huge impact if they migrate here, losing confidence if they are unable to learn, becoming isolated, even in the home if their children learn English at school and they cannot communicate with their own family.

The correct spelling of 1st, middle and family names is important, names are written in reverse order to Western norms, but the order may be altered owing to incorrect transcriptions, mistakes or false information. There is a need to ensure the correct order is recorded on police information systems. It is acceptable to say the first name if this is written out in full or Mr/Miss/Mrs followed by the middle name to be more formal. Asking if you have used the correct pronunciation/pronoun is acceptable.

Family name	Middle name	First name	In full
Nguyen	Van	Minh	Nguyen Van Minh
Tran	Thi	Thao	Tran Thi Thao

Vietnamese is a tonal language, a slightly different tone or inflection can completely change the meaning of a phrase/sentence, so caution is recommended.

Pronouns differ for age groups and genders; this video might be useful to watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ulWHuSSLJo>

Using 'bạn' (meaning someone is the same age group as you) instead of other age specific pronouns is safe to use for anyone, Vietnamese people will likely not be offended by being called 'bạn' by a non-native speaker. More formally, you could address the females as "chị" (means older sister) and males as "anh" (means older brother) despite whether the person is older or younger than you.

Xin chào – hello, (pronounced 'sin chow', reflection going down at the end)

Cảm ơn – thank you (pronounced cam urn)

Bạn tên là gì? – What is your name? (pronounced ban ten la zee)

Chào bạn - welcome (when someone comes to meet you, or arrives in your office/place)

Đừng lo lắng – Do not be worried (pronounced dung lo lang)

Tạm biệt – Goodbye (pronounced tam be-et)

Bạn bao nhiêu tuổi? – How old are you?

Chúng tôi sẽ giúp bạn – We are here to help you

Bạn chưa làm gì sai – You have not done anything wrong (pronounced ban cheu-uh lam zee sai)

! **TIPS: Handshake will be seen as a sign of respect, but sometimes seen as not appropriate for the first meeting – generally Vietnamese culture states there is to be no touching on the initial meeting, hand gestures can be seen as disrespectful.**

Nguyen, pronounced 'nuie~n' or 'wein', is by far the most common surname: this is a useful video for pronunciation: <https://www.howtopronounce.com/nguyen>



Key cultural elements:

Vietnam is a multi-nationality country with 54 ethnic groups. The Viet (Kinh) people account for 87% of the country's population and mainly inhabit the river and coastal deltas and major cities. The other 53 ethnic minority groups are scattered over mountain areas (Source: vietnam.gov.vn). People will more easily trust, build and protect connections with those from the same province or minority. Huge differences in dialects exist between the North and the South and Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh for instance, but they can often still understand each other. Vietnamese is the official language of the country. They are resilient and determined people, surviving much hardship over the centuries, but their enduring spirit means they are at risk of exploitation. The drudgery of working in a cannabis farm may be acceptable by the Vietnamese with a strong work ethic.

The Vietnamese are more inclusive, family and community focused than in the UK, people come together to fix problems and they often feel responsible for children until they die, decisions often being made with reference to the wider family. Heritage and respect for ancestors is really important, including an age hierarchy, they may feel indebted to them for bringing them into the world. There is a strong desire to give children a better life, which is a significant pull factor to migrate. The Vietnamese often have a strong connection to their local area, street culture – ‘bia hơi’ sees people sitting in the street chatting and drinking, which typifies with the importance placed on hospitality.

Vietnamese people are often considered to have a face-saving culture; they will often find it hard to admit to mistakes. If they have borrowed money from family to migrate and it does not work out, or they face hardship, they may well struggle to admit to family for fear of shaming and upsetting those left at home, this impacts on the number of unsuccessful stories reaching those at home. Others may be suspicious of the motivations of those who do relay the risks, thinking they are attempting to persuade them not to travel and ‘reap success’.

The Influences of Chinese culture remain, although the Vietnamese are generally very proud to be separate from Chinese rule. The Confucius system (named after the Chinese philosopher) refers to the importance of having respect for authority (king, teachers and then your father as head of the family), still exists today and impacts how people live their lives. Vietnam remains an authoritarian system, entrenched from Communist roots with a real fear of those in power. Being caught by the authorities will cause a lot of distress and trauma.

The South of Vietnam tends to be more liberal and wealthier but the country is opening up as a whole as a result of technology, social media and globalisation. Different ways of thinking now exist, especially within the younger generation. However, there is still a strong need to conform to authority. The government seems to have a desire for economic growth and development and encourages Western investment but a need to balance that with a wish to remain an authoritarian state. There is an element of national pride in terms of having overcome colonial rule and being victorious in the Vietnam War.

TIPS: Yes’ does not mean ‘yes’ all the time – could just be that they are aligning to the majority, maintaining harmony is very important or it could mean ‘I hear you’.



Napping in the afternoon is a common custom – even police teams will have beds in stations for this purpose.



Migration:

Many will migrate to China, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia because of bilateral agreements in place and often onto Russia. The path to Europe is considered more risky but potentially more profitable, so demand is likely higher. Journeys can take anywhere from 6 months to several years. Some will settle in Eastern Europe and Germany, but the latter is often considered to be inundated with Vietnamese migrants working in restaurants, so opportunities are decreasing. Many people knowingly use illegal immigration crime groups to secure the chance of employment overseas. The general route for most Vietnamese is to apply under a work visa to a specific European country legally and then they are smuggled across Europe to a final destination, usually France or the UK. Illicit brokerage networks run by Vietnamese nationals based abroad, or state-owned recruitment organisations, are frequently used to find work abroad, advertising life-changing opportunities overseas. Generally, travel to the UK will not occur unless they have a contract for work and accommodation, they will often be joining family with what is believed to be a secure job offer, as it will be extremely important to be able to send money back home. They are often accepting of the risks, believing they will be earning more than the wages at home. The UK asylum system is perceived as being lengthy, but this can be attractive to smugglers as a selling point; once you are in the system it can take years to be processed and the number of Vietnamese absconding within 48 hours upon arrival is significant.

Money is trickling back into Vietnam, large houses are being built on the proceeds from working in the UK. Inflation has meant that foreign currency is becoming more valuable over time. Many migrants are middle class and relatively well educated, although the four principal source-provinces for illegal migrants to the UK are amongst the poorest in Vietnam. In total, remittances (monies returning to country of origin) are worth £15 billion a year, ranking Vietnam 9th in the world in terms of remittances from migration.

Media clip: The dark realities for Vietnamese smuggled into the UK can be viewed here: [Exclusive: Dark reality for Vietnamese people smuggled into the UK | ITV News \(youtube.com\)](#)

Risks of coming to the UK are quite well known, however they are not a significant deterrent, or migrants may not be aware of the full extent or just be overly optimistic that this will not happen to them, believing they can be the one that might succeed. There is often an element of trust in the older generations that have travelled before them. They may have been told of the planned route via a broker, but the route may change, placing them in the control of other brokers enroute with risks increasing. Once money is handed over from selling land, going into debt, families feel trapped. There is a huge pressure to then succeed and repay the family. Vietnam has long history of accepting risk from its turbulent past.

Most migration now comes from the North and in particular central provinces, including Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Binh. The recent increase in the number of Vietnamese arrivals is believed to result from the Covid pandemic. It is extremely hard to make a good livelihood in Vietnam due to the high cost of living and low employment opportunities, especially in rural areas. Migration can be seen as the only option. The poorer areas of the North and Central regions are used to hardship and have personal resilience, so taking a risk to migrate may not seem so difficult to them. The area suffers from extreme weather conditions, making it very difficult to grow crops, whilst many are sea fisherman, working in harsh conditions, so risking a sea crossing may not seem high risk.



Migration continued:

There is often an illusion in Vietnam of the wealth that the UK has, with UK being seen a paradise compared to life in Vietnam. Those from poorer communities are exposed to huge inequalities in wealth and may feel left behind and discriminated against and even looked down upon from those in cities such as Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. They may look at migration to increase their social status. Migration is generally a collective family choice and seen as a family investment. In more urban communities other migratory reasons include marriage and education. The Vietnamese strong sense of community supports migration; if one person becomes wealthy, they help the collective.

Human rights watchdogs regularly criticise Vietnam's poor record on harassing and arresting political or religious dissenters, some of whom flee the country as a result. However, reasons for migration are multi-dimensional and people who leave on such grounds are also seeking a better life abroad, which most certainly includes an economic element. In the main, political oppression is largely not accepted as a valid reason for asylum in the UK from Vietnam. There can also be some scepticism over reasons people give to leave Vietnam, some authorities in Vietnam feel the situation now is not as bad as people make out and has improved from the past, so feelings of persecution at times may get exaggerated, to pursue a valid reason for migration. On the other hand, the Formosa Ha Tinh Steel environmental scandal of 2016 Activists saw protestors attacked and imprisoned for speaking out, so a lack of freedom of speech can sometimes still be a factor.

Unofficial estimates of the UK diaspora are of up to 100,000 (compared to 37,458 at the last UK census of 2021) especially in Hackney, Southwark and Lewisham, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and Glasgow. Vietnamese migrants will often live very frugally in the UK, so that they are better able to send money home. There is a national expectation to invest in the homeland not just with money but skills, education and technology too.

Established diaspora community groups reach out to newer migrants, but the latter can be very suspicious as they can see charities as part funded by the UK Government. If migrants take part in anti-Communist activity and are reported on by other members of the Vietnamese community, then if they return to Vietnam this can lead to a genuine political asylum claim due to persecution. Those that migrated before the Vietnam War via Hong Kong as the first cohort, are quite distant from Vietnam, they may well think the Communist party is a thing to avoid. The 2nd cohort migrated after the Vietnam War; the boat people via Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and onward to the UK. They may have worked for the Government under US support, so migrated to escape the sanctions expected when the South was defeated. Some have become very successful now, including becoming British citizens, whilst some have may have become owners of cannabis farms, nail bars or restaurants. The 3rd cohort migrated more recently as undocumented workers, may be looked down upon by previous generations in the 'pecking order'. Coming from mainly Central Vietnam, they may be recruited by those arriving earlier and are employed in nail bars, restaurants, or cannabis farms for low pay.

Educational programmes in Vietnam have been a driver to disrupt the migratory flow but education does not necessarily translate into job opportunities; Vietnam can be more about who you know especially amongst the ruling Communist party.

! TIPS: There is much suspicion around government campaigns to limit migration and the motivations behind them.

Strawmen or 'nguai rom' pronounced 'ngyai zerm' refers to those undocumented historically but more recently to those working in illegal trades such as in cannabis farms.

Taboo subjects/prejudices:

Many Vietnamese would see it a disgrace to put your relatives into a care home. To abandon or not provide for your parents, children, spouse would bring dishonour. In rural and poorer areas especially this can place a lot of pressure on children to take care of elders, especially the older siblings. How this money is earned seems to be of less importance, even at times if this involves criminal activity. Fighting over rights to property once parents have died is often very frowned upon as is accumulating debt or be involved in gambling, all of which would tend to bring dishonour.

Divorce as a result of adultery would also tend to bring dishonour but not necessarily as a consequence of other reasons. Relationships outside the marriage for a female in particular would often bring dishonour. There also does not seem to be much empathy towards women who have been sexually abused. Vietnamese victims of sexual abuse, both male and female, are unlikely to make disclosures, so figures are likely to be higher than those documented.

Success is very important so conversely when children or other family members are not successful, this can cause shame and humiliation. This is especially so if they have migrated and the family have gone into debt to send the family member away, feeding into the face-saving culture mentioned above. Jealousy can exist between neighbours that have been more successful they may look to build houses as large as possible to give the appearance of a better life.

The government, under the dictatorial one-party rule of the Communist Party of Vietnam, puts limitation to the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, so discussing politics may well result in a limited response.

LGBTQ+ prejudices exist, despite legislation removing prohibition of same sex couples from marrying but the state does not officially recognise this marital relationship. There is increasing acceptance, although mainly in the cities, but in rural areas less so. Another group facing discrimination are the ethnic minorities in Vietnam's Central Highlands region, also known as Montagnards, who are often majority-Christian and have been persecuted for decades.

Vietnamese people may be most likely to associate this concept of 'mental health' with extreme cases of psychiatric illness rather than experiences that relate to their own well being. Mental health problems can be very stigmatised, especially with males, who are often expected to appear 'strong' and not show emotion. There is still a lack of provision and support, with mental health issues underreported, misunderstood and often ignored. They will prefer to speak to someone they trust for emotional support, this will mainly be relatives and friends of a certain age, often from the same village. Mental health is becoming more talked about in the media and especially amongst young people but can still be considered insulting to ask about someone's mental health.

- ! **TIPS: Not removing your shoes when entering the home would be seen as disrespectful. When handing something to someone, especially to the elderly, use both hands also when receiving something too. Do not point using a finger as this can be seen as a sign of disrespect, use the whole hand instead.**



Being involved in crime would bring dishonour, facts might well be concealed as they may not want the news to spread around the community, there is a Vietnamese saying: 'show something good, hide something bad.'

Family structure/gender dynamics:

Family kinship is very important. Living with up to 4 generations can be common practice, with the elderly being revered. This is changing with some younger generations who are now wishing to live more independently, especially in urban areas. The more children you have can be seen as a sign of wealth with a view to them taking care of elderly relatives. In rural areas, there is an importance amongst some families to have a boy, boys may be favoured and seen as a sign that they strengthen the family. Older children may also be required to take care of younger siblings. There is a strong cultural pressure for the oldest son of a family to seek work abroad and send remittances home.

Heavily embedded gender roles exist especially in rural areas where males often take control, make decisions and provide for the family and females take care of the home and the children. There is starting to be more of a lean towards equality; women will have careers but they are usually still expected to be the main person to take care of the home. Women can find it more difficult to gain respect in the workplace, although they can now be seen in leadership roles, especially in metropolitan areas. Conversely Vietnamese women are often in charge of the family finances, but this is following the male handing over what he considers to be the family income out of his wages. Generally, women are still less respected, are expected to conform and are at a disadvantage in many areas. Females who have migrated to the UK may take a more prominent role in the family with finding work in nail bars and the like to contribute to the family income.

Family tragedies such as serious illnesses or losing your source of income from environmental disasters, can mean livelihoods are destroyed. Social welfare is not very well set up, so costs can be very high adding to the family burden.

The family structure enables those migrating to accept the risks as they have their support. The family will often place emphasis on them succeeding. How your family is seen by others is hugely important. To be a good citizen in Vietnam may also mean to some that you need to provide wealth to your community and the nation adding a political layer of expectation too. Recent arrivals to the UK often have a huge amount of debt, borrowed to fund the migration journey. They are desperate to find any paid work to start repaying interest – to avoid families back home facing loan sharks repayments. This makes newcomers to the UK very vulnerable to labour exploitation.

H'mong people in the NW region of Vietnam have a custom of 'wife snatching' believed by some to be innocent interactions, where a boy 'chooses' a bride by 'kidnapping' a girl. There are very few H'mong people in the UK, but reports exist of this turning more sinister with girls being trafficked to China and forced to marry. More details can be found [here](#)



! **TIPS: The Eastern age of an individual includes the extra 9 months in the womb. This can cause confusion when trying to establish age. People can also say that they are OLDER than what they are for example to avoid separation from those they are travelling with, so do not assume they will automatically state they are younger. In Vietnam the government are starting to collect bioidentical data for those as young as 6 years old, this could be useful to confirm age and which region they are from.**

Sister, auntie, uncle etc can be used for people that have close connections but not necessarily related, especially for the elderly as a sign of respect.



Religion:

Vietnam is a multi-religious state with generally, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Confucianists and Taoists existing peacefully. The right to not follow a religion is protected in law and worshipping ancestors rather than practising a religion is common. The state has arrested those who are deemed to be interfering with politics, for example Catholic priests who protested against the 2016 Formosa incident (see page 6). Dynamic religious activity may be repressed or banned by authorities, even if it technically legal. Religious and community links may become more important to the UK diaspora to assist with integration. The Vietnamese people are often very superstitious. Buddhist monks receive donations from those believing that generosity will lead to a better life for their children.

Holiday dates will vary for the individual in terms of importance, but Lunar New Year at the end of January/start of February tends to be the biggest festival, known as Tết that lasts an entire week with family and friends' gatherings. Lunar New Year is celebrated by several countries including Vietnam, China, Taiwan, South Korea and North Korea. Extra time off work is common, even for authorities, so this is not a good time to carry out deployments.

30th April - Reunification Day

15th day of the 8th Lunar month – Trung Thu or Mid-Autumn Festival

September 2nd – Independence Day.



! TIP: Bereavements – During Op Melrose, where the bodies of 39 Vietnamese nationals were found in the back of an airtight container on the back of a lorry in Essex, it was important to show respect and offer a place for the community to come together. White linen and white flowers were placed in the room used for body identifications. A memorial site for the community to offer condolences and offerings was erected and religious leaders consulted and invited to conduct ceremonies. Photos of the victims were placed on an altar. The wearing of white headbands is reserved for funerals only.

Food:

Food is an important part of the Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese people can be settled in the UK for years and still not have tried Western food due to a strong attachment to their own cuisine. Food and sharing of food as part of communal living is important, feeding each other can be seen as a sign of affection. Meals are a focal part of the day, with lunch lasting from 11am until 2:30pm and up to 7 or 8 courses. Sourcing culturally appropriate food can be a preventative factor to avoid people going missing.

Vietnam is renowned for its food and dishes made from rice, noodles, fish, chicken, meat, fish stock and vegetables. The most popular rice and noodle dishes include Bún Cha (pork with vermicelli noodles), Phở (Rice noodle), Xôi (sticky rice), Miến (Cellophane noodles) and Bánh đa cua (crab red noodles). They also have symbolic cakes for different notable festivals such as Bánh Trung thu (Moon Cake for Moonlight Festival), Bánh Chưng (Square cake made of glutinous rice) and Bánh Giày (Round rice cake) for the Tết Holiday (Lunar New Year). Vietnam is one of the world's largest coffee producers, having gained much popularity, the use of sweetened condensed milk is common.



! TIP: Refusal of a meal can be very disrespectful as can refusal of alcohol, in the past police too would drink on shift, but recent change now prohibits this. Before eating, it is customary for the elderly or host to start first. Do not stick chop sticks into the bowl – signifies bad luck



Education/career prospects:

In Vietnam it is imperative for all children to attend school and have a career path, both males and females. The education system consists of primary (nursery and kindergarten), intermediate and secondary and higher education. Public institutions exist funded by the government along with private institutions. No single sex schools exist. Both males and females face pressure to perform well at school, but females in the more rural northern areas may well leave education as early as 12 or 13 years old and many may leave at 16. Educational attainment is significantly lower among some ethnic minorities who live in remote highland regions.

Educational opportunities are not equal for everyone due to the costs and families can often not afford to send children into higher education especially in poorer and rural areas. This leads to disparity between children from wealthy and poorer families and between those based in rural areas and the larger urban centres such as Hồ Chí Minh city. Education can be a factor in migration, with one family member living abroad and then being responsible for providing for an entire family. Final year students can be targeted by unscrupulous brokers recruiting those wishing to migrate.

There are tuition fees for schools even state schools, as well as higher education. This could be £30 a month for a state school and significantly higher for a private school. Early education can be a great concern for parents for children to learn English early but this too can be expensive. The Montessori approach is developing widely. Private tuition is also on the increase for those that can afford it. Generally, there seems to be pressure to study and work long hours to achieve success. Parents can end up debt-bonded and vulnerable to exploitation by loan sharks who offer to cover school fees.

The Vietnamese respect those that attend higher education, and those in professions such as doctors, lawyers, teachers and high-ranking officers in governmental organisations. A family can also be extremely proud if they are able to send a child overseas. Respect however can be superficial, a teacher/lecturer can be respected but if they have a lower salary than expected, the level of respect granted can waiver. Having a good salary is important, along with a good position in your organisation. Bribery and corruption are not uncommon to obtain a step up the ladder. As a generalisation, the North will tend to have a higher respect for governmental roles and the South will tend to place more emphasis on careers in the private sector.



Interaction with authority:

Fear and intimidation remains with law enforcement and the government, along with a scepticism towards authorities as a result of corruption, lack of state support and trust. Freedom of speech and media are highly controlled. Being caught by the authorities will likely cause a lot of distress and trauma. There is a strong will to conform to authority which can lead to corruption, as some will look to try and pay their way out of trouble to avoid the community finding out and having a police record. This can then cause discrimination, with those with less power or money being worse off. If deported back to Vietnam, they will likely receive a fine for leaving illegally, further increasing debt and vulnerability to re-trafficking.

There is often a huge fear of deportation and that the belief that the UK Police are linked to Police in Vietnam, so the Vietnamese diaspora in the UK often avoid reporting a crime. The link with the Police to the British Home Office is also well known adding to the fear of deportation. During interviews Vietnamese may be observed trying to determine what to say that will not increase the risk of deportation. Trauma-informed and victim focus approach is often replaced with a more offender focus amongst the Vietnamese authorities. There is often a tendency to believe the police are there to punish as opposed to protect.

There appears to be a 'code of conduct' followed by many Vietnamese communities in the UK that includes employers in particular not being reported to the police, as they have provided workers the opportunity to earn money, even if the wages are significantly lower than they should be. Often, the migrants/potential workers are given clear instructions by traffickers and smugglers or by their families as to whom they should contact in the destination country. Speaking with other parties would be considered a breach of the agreement. Hierarchy is very important in Vietnam and plays a role here. Often the details they do provide are scripted.



TIP: Initial contact is vital, establishing identity, names, DOB, where they were born etc. They can say that they are older than their true age as well as younger. Vietnamese individuals can also look older for example from working outside on construction or agricultural sites during long journeys to the UK across Russia and Europe. Appearance can drastically change from the start of the journey, so they may be unrecognisable from ID photos such as having their hair bleached, losing weight and tattoos.

Vietnam does not recognise victims of modern slavery or the term 'trafficking', even if they receive a positive trafficking decision in the NRM system, instead this will be viewed as being the fault of the victims for 'migrating illegally'. Support of the Vietnamese Embassy can have their status recognised. During Op Melrose there was huge fear around the authorities and deportation was a factor to engagement with the families. Having contacts in the religious community was pivotal to take a lead in community engagement and improving trust as was communication to the Vietnamese Community about the intention of Essex Police and how they were only interested in finding the families of the victims, as opposed to their immigration status. Media clip: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0010ldl/hunting-the-essex-lorry-killers>



Interaction with authority:

Vietnam is unlikely to become a “safe country” any time soon. It is not party to international migration conventions, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. Its human rights record is poor. Its decision-making is slow and hierarchical. The opportunities for “joint” working can be limited. However, to be known as a country which exports criminality would bring national shame, so Vietnamese authorities have advised they are committed to collaboration with British Law Enforcement. Contacting the NCA’s Joint International Crime Centre can also assist in investigations.

! TIPS:

Ask them the Lunar New Year animal of when they were born. If there is any delay, they are probably not giving you the true details but what they have been told to say. They will know the animal of their true date of birth.

 RAT	 OX	 TIGER	 CAT	 DRAGON	 SNAKE	 HORSE	 GOAT	 MONKEY	 ROOSTER	 DOG	 PIG
1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031

Vietnam started a database circa 2021/2022 containing ID information and issuing nationals with an electronic ID card which may be useful for investigations. Please contact MSOICU for further information on this.

Vietnamese nationals may well not understand the legal system here, explain the role of the police with simple explanations of the system and their rights.

Social class differences along with linguistic differences are very important between the interpreter and the victim. Certain turns of phrase can be drastically different. Try to obtain an interpreter as close as possible to the victim’s hometown as well as gender and social class matching, or at the very least one who is sympathetic to a migrants’ cause.

Also challenge paraphrasing of a victim’s response, the interpreter should not be giving you a summary of what the victim has said but instead be interpreting word for word what they say.

They are unlikely to have open emotional displays or outwardly express their feelings, for example in court or interacting with authorities. This makes it very difficult to gauge how they are feeling but this should not be misinterpreted as disengagement or not caring.

Do's 👍	Don'ts 👎
Smile, be welcoming, gentle tone of voice, say 'Xin chào' meaning hello/how are you.	Intimidate or scare, or be too serious, avoid hostile stances and tones
Attempt to put yourself in their shoes to assist with empathy and understanding, repeated reassurances may well be necessary. Advise you know the type of hardships or sacrifices they have likely experienced.	Do not go straight into an interview or ask about immigration status immediately, ensure checks on health, introductions and purpose of interview is understood first. Ask about family back home and where they are from instead
Try to pronounce their name or phrase correctly as a sign of respect.	Touch their shoulder (signifies bad luck) or their head (signifies a power imbalance)
Offer a glass of water but closed containers to avoid suspicion, some food too – small gestures will assist with easing fear that may well exist.	Mistake lack of eye contact for untrustworthiness, Vietnamese are taught not to look authority in the eye.
Look out for physical and emotional signs of trauma – for example difficulty of memory recall, missing details.	Judge, challenge or make fun of what they might believe in regard to their religious beliefs or superstitions.
Engage with community leaders as important partners in an investigation to support trust building.	Assume those working in a nail salon will wish or feel they have a need to speak out against their bosses, they may well consider their position fortuitous.

! TIP: Cue cards to introduce yourself, your role, contact details and how you can assist/what you want to speak to them about may help to alleviate some fears and be something they can take away and process when they feel more relaxed. Also put on MS Helpline number detailing this is run by a charity and calls can be made anonymously, with interpreters available.



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