



Human Trafficking in Vietnam

Blue Dragon Children's Foundation has been addressing human trafficking since 2005. While the term "human trafficking" covers a wide range of crimes, our work is in two specific areas: the trafficking of children into exploitative labour and the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls into sexual exploitation and forced marriages in China.

INTRODUCTION

To address these issues Blue Dragon has a team of lawyers, psychologists and social workers who work closely with law enforcement agencies, schools, government services agencies, and communities. Together, we identify cases of trafficking, find the victims and their traffickers, rescue victims, and provide all the necessary services for their successful recovery and reintegration into their communities.

In cases where the trafficker is arrested, we collaborate with police to support the investigation of the case and then represent the victims in court to ensure they are not further traumatised during the process, and to see that justice is served through appropriate sentences and compensation claims.

This fact sheet captures some of what we know about human trafficking and Blue Dragon's approach to countering it.

CHILD LABOUR EXPLOITATION

Blue Dragon's anti-trafficking work started as a result of a chance meeting in 2005 with a child who was being exploited selling flowers on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC).

On reuniting this child with his family in central Vietnam we learned a lot of children were missing and presumed working in HCMC. Most of these children were not selling flowers, but rather exploited in informal garment "factories" (usually one room of a house with children sewing cheap clothes up to 18 hours a day).

Since 2006, Blue Dragon has rescued over 400 victims of labour exploitation. Blue Dragon collaborates with the child's family and police to identify where the child is, and to then rescue them from their place of exploitation and reunite them with their families. On their return, we assist children to re-enroll in school, and youth to attend vocational training or to find employment.

We work with communities, schools and local authorities to educate on the dangers of labour exploitation and the tricks traffickers use to deceive parents into allowing their children to leave home. These programs have been highly successful, and we have seen a decline in the number of labour related rescues in recent years.

It seems the exploitation of children in these informal garment factories in HCMC is largely a problem of the past. However, other industries still exploit children, including illegal mining, agriculture, construction and domestic service.



In Vietnam, child labour is a rarity in the formal employment sector; however, there is a large informal employment sector which makes policing child labour more difficult. The issue is further complicated, as in Vietnam only those under 16 are defined as children. Youth over 16 are legally able to work and not given the same protections as children under 16.

Blue Dragon is receiving an increasing number of calls from teenagers requiring assistance to escape labour exploitation.

In many cases, young people have gone to a neighbouring country seeking work or for a job offer, but on arrival find themselves in slave-like conditions: being confined, not being paid, and working long hours.

Blue Dragon is ready to respond to and support the police and Vietnamese labour authorities to address and prevent all forms of child exploitation.

TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

In 2007, one of the girls we knew through our centre for street children in Hanoi called for help to escape from a brothel in China. This marked the beginning of our work fighting the trafficking of women and girls to China. This is believed to be the primary form of human trafficking from Vietnam. The Vietnamese government estimates 90% of Vietnamese trafficking victims are trafficked into China, and 80% are sexually exploited.

When Blue Dragon first started working with trafficking victims, the majority of rescues were from exploitation in the sex industry. Typically, women and girls would be trafficked across the border of Vietnam and China and then sold into brothels where they would be confined, drugged, and forced to "serve" many men daily.

In the last few years we have been increasingly rescuing women and girls from forced marriages in China: an insidious effect of the (now abolished) One Child Policy. Although these are referred to as "forced marriages", there is no legal marriage and the women are bought and sold as property or as domestic slaves. Since 2007, we have rescued 192 victims from the sex industry, and 334 from forced marriages.

The problem of trafficking women and girls to China has been particularly serious along the northern border. Blue Dragon has rescued women from 61 (of 63) provinces. Traffickers tend to target the poorest and most vulnerable young people, particularly women and girls from ethnic minority communities who may not have many opportunities in their home communities, but victims we have assisted include people from urban middle class backgrounds as well.



Common deceptions include the promise of well-paying jobs, or posing online as a potential boyfriend to entice victims into meeting face to face. This means that most Vietnamese young people are readily online and, without proper supervision or knowledge, are vulnerable to approaches from traffickers. Nielsen* estimates that 84% of the population had a smartphone as at 2017 as even quite poor people in Vietnam can afford cheap, Chinese made smartphones and data is the cheapest in the world.

In most of the cases Blue Dragon is working on, traffickers on the Vietnamese side of the border are not organised criminals. Often they are neighbours, friends, or extended family members who are just as poor and disadvantaged as their victims.

Once a victim has crossed the border to China (generally through unofficial crossings) they are often sold to a Chinese man as a "wife". Most women will not know where they are and will be confined to the house, forced into domestic slavery, and face physical and sexual abuse.

In most cases Blue Dragon encounters, the husbands' families are too poor to "compete" in the Chinese marriage market. In some cases the husband has a disability or mental health problems. The victim may be on-sold when the husband tires of her, needs money, or after she has a child.

*Nielsen Vietnam Smartphone Insights Report, 2017.

BLUE DRAGON'S VIRTUOUS CYCLE OF TRAFFICKING PREVENTION

Referrals from families and via the National Child Protection Hotline 111



HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

Nobody knows!

Information, particularly accurate statistics about the incidence and prevalence of trafficking, is difficult to obtain. As an underground, illegal industry it is difficult to study, especially in poor countries. The limited statistics available are almost definitely an underestimate as many victims return independently and never report their exploitation to authorities.

As there is significant stigma surrounding sex work, even if the girl is forced into it, many victims do not tell anyone about their ordeal. Some people in Vietnam falsely assume any woman who goes to China engages in sex work.

THE STATISTICS WE DO HAVE

Icon: Person with bag

A 2018 report by the Vietnamese National Committee on Crime Prevention and Control found from 2012 to 2017 law enforcement agencies rescued and received about 7,500 trafficking victims (1,250 per annum), where over 90% were female and 80% were from an ethnic minority. Most victims were trafficked internationally (90% to China), and 80% were sexually exploited in both marriages and the sex industry.**

** <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/workshop-revie-ws-assistance-for-returnee-victims-of-trafficking/138095.vnp> viewed 12 September 2018

Icon: Group of people

In 2017, authorities identified 490 victims of human trafficking, a decrease from 670 in 2018.****

**** US Department of State, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report. Vietnam Narrative.

Icon: Handcuffs

The Ministry of Public Security, Vietnam Border Guards, and Vietnamese diplomatic missions investigated 211 trafficking cases involving more than 276 alleged offenders in 2018. The justice system initiated the prosecution of 194 defendants for trafficking offences, and the court system secured 213 convictions. Sentences ranged from less than 3 years to up 30 years imprisonment.****

**** US Department of State, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report. Vietnam Narrative.

Icon: Person and child

Walk Free Foundation's Global Slavery Index estimated between 2012 and 2016, over 400,000 Vietnamese people were subject to modern slavery (including forced marriages, labour exploitation, and sexual servitude).***

*** www.globalslaveryindex.org

BLUE DRAGON'S IMPACT

In 2019, Blue Dragon

rescued **111** women and girls from China and assisted an additional 38 victims to return to Vietnam.

represented 15 victims in 13 court cases resulting in the conviction of **24** traffickers.

Annually, Blue Dragon

rescues around **130** women and children from sex trafficking and labour exploitation.

provides training for over **1000** police, border guards, and local officials in child rights and how to combat trafficking.

represents an average of **15** victims of trafficking in **06** court cases.

Blue Dragon will continue to work in collaboration with the Vietnamese authorities to end the harmful trade of humans. Long term, we believe the country has the willingness and capacity to stop trafficking, and we are committed to assisting Vietnam in achieving this goal.

