



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

BROKERED JOURNEYS

VIETNAMESE SMUGGLING AND
TRAFFICKING OPERATIONS TO EUROPE

Saša Đorđević | Giulia D'Amico | Peter Smith

SEPTEMBER 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors sincerely thank all interviewees who contributed to this research. Their stories and willingness to share sensitive information were crucial to understanding the journeys of Vietnamese migrants to Europe. We are especially grateful to the translators whose language skills, cultural knowledge and careful handling of sensitive topics made it possible to conduct interviews in a respectful, accurate and safe manner. Their work was vital to ensuring that the voices of Vietnamese migrants were properly understood and reflected in this report.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Saša Đorđević is a senior analyst at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) with more than 15 years of experience in civil society and researching organized crime, corruption, security, extremism and policing.

Giulia D'Amico works as a programme manager at the GI-TOC, where she also conducts research on migrant smuggling and trafficking, with a specific focus on the Channel crossings.

Peter Smith is a TV journalist known for consistently producing stories and securing exclusive off-the-record reports, including coverage of the Calais migrant camps and Channel boat crossings, with a focus on Vietnamese communities.

© 2026 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means without permission in writing from
the Global Initiative.

Cover: © Bernard Barron / AFP via Getty Images

Please direct inquiries to:
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland
www.globalinitiative.net

CONTENTS

Executive summary	1
Methodology	3
Key points.....	3
Exploiting a migration desire.....	4
Brokering migration	6
Services provided by <i>moi gioi</i>	8
Smuggling to Europe.....	11
Leaving Vietnam	11
Entering Europe	14
Crossing to the UK.....	16
Moving to Ireland	17
Exploitation in Europe	19
Labour exploitation.....	19
Forced criminality.....	21
Sexual exploitation.....	23
Conclusion	24
Recommendations	24
Notes	26



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2025, eight people received a combined sentence of nearly 80 years in prison following investigations into cannabis farms across the UK, where Vietnamese migrants were exploited to run cultivation sites.¹ During the trial, one victim said that he had no choice but to grow cannabis because he was in debt bondage to those who had brought him to the UK.² Prosecutors explained that victims were forced to cultivate cannabis to repay debts and travel costs, while facing degrading conditions and threats against themselves and their families.³ The case demonstrates that Vietnamese people smuggling to Europe is part of an ecosystem in which migration is financed through debt, which is then repaid through exploitative labour.

At the core of this smuggling-to-exploitation ecosystem are *môi giới* (or *môi giới*): a Vietnamese term that translates to broker but is widely used to describe intermediaries who connect aspiring Vietnamese migrants to documents, transport, employers and, in some cases, smugglers and traffickers. They achieve this through networks of recruiters, informal lenders, document suppliers, transport providers, exploitative employers, remittance channels and other smuggling groups operating throughout Europe.

The recruitment of migrants is concentrated in poorer territories and cities in Vietnam with long histories of international labour migration in north and central Vietnam, especially Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Hai Phong and Ha Noi (see Figure 2). Brokers use relatives, friends, diaspora members and social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok to present journeys as organized and commercially structured. Families may borrow money, mortgage assets, or rely on high-interest lenders and loan sharks to pay for the journey, which is often sold as a package, thereby becoming bound by debt. Furthermore, the exact costs of the service provided are not always clear at the start.

Smuggling to Europe typically begins with *môi giới* arranging visas, contracts, study abroad paperwork, or travel documents that permit entry through airports and official border checkpoints. This cover of legal entry is the starting point of the journey: while the documents may be genuine on paper, they are often used to hide a different intended destination. Hungary is clearly the preferred initial entry point for Vietnamese migrants, but other central European countries are also often used. Netherlands and Belgium are typically transit countries, whereas France and Germany can serve variously as entry points, transit zones or final destinations.

The Channel crossing from France to the UK is where this route most clearly shifts into a covert border crossing. For many Vietnamese migrants, the UK is the final destination, but *moi gioi* do not appear to control the border crossing directly. Instead, they connect migrants with specialized smuggling groups in northern France that organize the final leg. UK-entry options are sold as service tiers, including concealment in lorries, 'VIP' placement in driver cabins and priority boat boarding. Failed attempts, waiting periods, weather delays and law enforcement action can lead to additional payments and deepen debt. At the same time, the route is adapting: some migrants who initially aimed for the UK or Germany are now being redirected towards Ireland. Ireland is seen as a less saturated destination than the UK, which is considered competitive and unpredictable, and Germany, which is increasingly perceived as bureaucratic and difficult to access.⁴

The control of Vietnamese migrants through debt is built gradually: created before departure, deepened during movement through Europe, and later repaid through labour exploitation, forced criminality and sexual exploitation. Vietnamese migrants appear as workers in nail salons, restaurants, takeaways, food-processing factories, hospitality, light manufacturing and other low-wage sectors. Forced criminality is less visible but also noteworthy, especially in the UK, where cannabis cultivation can expose Vietnamese migrants to both coerced labour and criminalization. Sexual exploitation and abuse appear even less frequently, but law enforcement cases from Germany and Czech Republic show that Vietnamese women are affected and that the problem is likely under-identified.⁵ Similarly, Vietnamese women sometimes fall prey to strict surveillance and sexual abuse by smugglers in northern France, who isolate them and continuously monitor their movements.

The *moi gioi* ecosystem is challenging to disrupt because no single actor controls the entire journey from Vietnam to Europe. It is also difficult to detect because exploitation often begins with voluntary migration decisions: people choose to move to the UK, Germany or another destination in search of better livelihood opportunities, but the debt accumulated before and during the journey is then converted into control. Many migrants may not immediately see themselves as exploited, especially when long hours, low pay or illegal work are understood as the only way to repay debt and secure a better future for their families. The ecosystem also adapts when routes become riskier. Brokers can transfer people across different countries, alter documents, change prices, use new handovers or redirect migrants into different labour markets.

The main enforcement challenge lies in the integration of the different services. When the same brokerage chain controls access to every aspect of a migrant's life – from documents and transport to housing, work and repayment – this creates a dependency that is easily exploited. The line between facilitation and exploitation of migrants becomes deliberately blurred.

For authorities, the system is difficult to disrupt because brokers can shift routes, change documents, adjust prices, introduce new intermediaries or redirect migrants to different labour markets. Policy responses should therefore focus on disrupting the organized crime elements embedded in this ecosystem, rather than migration itself. This means targeting the financial model, document fraud, abuse of visa channels, and the link between brokers and employers. Expanding regulated labour pathways remains important, but without addressing the *moi gioi* business model, these pathways risk being absorbed into the same exploitative system.

Methodology

This report was developed using a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, fieldwork interviews, expert discussions and observational research. The desk review covered reports by international organizations, civil society, law enforcement agencies and government bodies, academic researchers and media outlets.

Fieldwork was carried out in the UK, Germany, France and Ireland between September 2025 and February 2026, involving interviews with 36 Vietnamese nationals who had used *moi gioi* services at some point in their journeys. Additional interviews were conducted with public officials, researchers, civil society activists, field experts and journalists working on migration and organized crime.

The observational research included a simulation of sending money from Germany to Vietnam through an informal remittance broker, as well as engagement on Facebook messaging with individuals who presented themselves as *moi gioi*. These activities were undertaken to better understand how these services are arranged, rather than to facilitate migration or exploitation.

All fieldwork followed a do-no-harm approach, with informed consent, confidentiality and anonymization of identifying details. Findings were triangulated with official data and secondary sources, but the sample is non-representative and reflects only those who reached Europe and participated in the research.

Key points

- The *moi gioi* smuggling-to-exploitation ecosystem turns migrant aspirations into controlled, debt-based manipulation that links recruitment, work placement, migration and organized crime.
- Migrants accrue debt even before they leave Vietnam, due to the cost of documents and the price of the journey. Victims are targeted through trust-based recruitment and social media advertising.
- Smuggling typically starts with legal entry into Europe by air, which acts as a cover for irregular onward movement using land transfers and through extra payments.
- The Channel crossing uses specialized, and non-Vietnamese, smuggling networks to evade official border checkpoints and patrol surveillance.
- Forced labour, criminal and sexual exploitation are not separate from the smuggling process, but part of the same ecosystem through which debt is repaid and control is maintained.
- Policy responses should target the organized crime business model behind *moi gioi* services, not migration itself.



EXPLOITING A MIGRATION DESIRE

More than five years after 39 Vietnamese migrants were found dead in the back of a refrigerated trailer in an industrial park in Essex, UK,⁶ the smuggling route that brought them there remains active.⁷ The 2019 tragedy revealed a brokered journey from Vietnam to Europe that had operated covertly. Thousands still risk their lives each year by crossing the Channel in search of a better life,⁸ despite it having become more costly.

Vietnamese migrants use these routes because opportunities abroad are seen as a way to earn higher wages, settle debts and improve family financial stability.⁹ This does not imply that Vietnamese communities in Europe should be viewed with suspicion. The problem lies in how ordinary migration aspirations can be redirected into controlled pathways: the same brokered system that promises visas, jobs and safe travel can also generate debt and subject people to exploitative labour.

This report shows how *moi gioi* direct their services to serve this aspiration, turning Vietnamese migration to Europe into exploitation.

Reaching Europe may involve staged payments, legal or apparently legal air entry and costly irregular Channel crossings. For some Vietnamese nationals and their families, the journey begins as a search for work and upward mobility. Once debt, deception and broker control are introduced, however, migration can transition into an exploitative relationship whereby the *moi gioi*, or their networks, use a smuggled individual for forced labour or criminal enterprise.

This report focuses on that transition. Migrant smuggling is defined here as a consensual arrangement in which migrants pay facilitators to assist their irregular border crossing, with the relationship typically ending once the journey is completed. Migrant trafficking, by contrast, inevitably involves exploitation, with the migrant becoming the victim of crime through coercion, deception or abuse. While these offences are legally distinct, in practice they often overlap. A person may begin their journey as a paying client of smugglers, but later become vulnerable to trafficking due to debt, as control over documents, work or accommodation can be used for exploitation.¹⁰

The distinction is especially difficult to maintain in long, brokered routes. Vietnamese migrants may rely on *moi gioi* because legal routes are often inaccessible, unpredictable or costly. They may consent to travel but may not fully understand the route, debt, working conditions or the actors who will control later stages of the journey. Control can also deepen over time. A person may leave Vietnam voluntarily,

enter Europe through legal or apparently legal channels, and then become dependent on brokers for accommodation, onward travel, work and repayment. Exploitation can therefore begin at different points: during transit, at the Channel crossing, or after arrival in the destination country in Europe.

This report examines the brokerage role of *moi gioi* and the services they provide, before following four key stages of movement: departure from Vietnam, entry into Europe, crossing to the UK and onward movement to Ireland. It then analyzes how different forms of exploitation can emerge after arrival in Europe, before concluding with recommendations for institutional responses in Vietnam and European countries.



The poor conditions in which Vietnamese labourers worked and lived in Zrejanin, Serbia, was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern enabled by investors and institutions. *Photo: Danilo Ćurčić/A11 Initiative*



BROKERING MIGRATION

In migration studies, brokers are individuals or institutions that connect migrants with recruitment channels, documentation and cross-border services.¹¹ Their operations can span the legal and illicit domains, driven by motives ranging from profit to familial obligations.¹² This hybridity makes *moi gioi* difficult to categorize; some brokers work transparently through registered recruitment agencies and travel firms, while others operate covertly, utilizing document fraud, informal labour placement and human smuggling networks.

The *moi gioi* is not a new figure in Vietnamese migration. Its modern role developed alongside the marketization of overseas labour migration after Doi Moi, an economic reform programme, was instituted by the Vietnamese government in 1986. From the late 1980s, the state increasingly transferred recruitment and placement functions to labour-export enterprises,¹³ with a licensing system formalized in 1991.¹⁴ By the early 2000s, brokerage had entered the regulatory framework, and in 2006 Vietnamese law explicitly recognized *moi gioi* as organizations or individuals providing intermediary services in overseas labour recruitment.¹⁵

The role of *moi gioi* became globally visible following the 2019 Essex tragedy. However, it is much more difficult to identify the point at which *moi gioi* became involved in irregular migration and trafficking. Rather than a clear transition from licit to illicit activity, the two forms of brokerage appear to have developed alongside one another and increasingly overlapped. Similar networks, relationships and skills could therefore be used both within formal recruitment channels and to facilitate irregular migration. Contemporary evidence reflects this blurred boundary, with *moi gioi* operating across both regulated recruitment systems and illicit migration networks.

Early literature examining Vietnamese labour migration to Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan between 2000 and 2009 characterized *moi gioi* as localized intermediaries who connected workers with state-owned recruitment agencies for a fixed fee.¹⁶ The role of these intermediaries has since changed. The current Europe-focused irregular migration routes examined in this report require a broader understanding of the role: *moi gioi* are neither simply recruitment intermediaries nor smugglers in the classical sense. They typically operate across the boundary between legal and irregular mobility, using work visas, recruitment schemes, employment contracts and other lawful migration mechanisms to facilitate or mask journeys that may ultimately lead to irregular migration and exploitation.

Dimension	<i>Moi gioi</i> , 2000–2009	<i>Moi gioi</i> now
Primary role	Broker within Vietnam's formal labour-export framework.	Broker within an adaptable smuggling-to-exploitation ecosystem.
Core function	Connecting workers to state-owned recruitment firms.	Coordinate financing, recruitment, movement, work placement and debt repayment.
Institutional connections	Tethered primarily to state-owned or licensed agencies.	Interlinked with commercial entities, informal networks and illicit actors.
Migration model	Predominantly formal labour migration pathways.	Hybrid models combining legal entry as a cover, irregular transit and informal work.
Revenue model	Fixed pre-departure recruitment fees per worker.	Profit through several stages of the journey and ongoing debt management.
Operational scope	Active primarily within Vietnam prior to departure.	Continuously active across the entire journey from Vietnam to Europe.
Network node	Introduces migrants to agencies or employers.	Links migrants to lenders, document and finance facilitators, smugglers, landlords and employers.
Control mechanism	Leveraged through access to formal channels and upfront costs.	Maintained through debt, family guarantees and access to work.
Exploitation risk	High fees, contract non-compliance and poor working conditions.	Debt bondage, document confiscation, forced labour, criminal or sexual exploitation.

FIGURE 1 Changes in *moi gioi* operating models since 2000.

NOTE: The '*moi gioi*, 2000–2009' column is based on research on Vietnamese labour migration to Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan between 2000 and 2009.¹⁷ The '*moi gioi* now' column reflects the Europe-focused routes examined in this report.

Rather than operating as one centrally controlled organization, the current *moi gioi* ecosystem functions as a decentralized brokerage network. Different actors provide specialized services at different stages of the journey. A broker in Vietnam might initiate recruitment, handle family communications, secure initial documentation and arrange upfront financing. Meanwhile, a counterpart based in Europe – not necessarily Vietnamese – coordinates safe houses, subsequent overland transport, informal employment and debt collection. As a result, migrants are moved through a series of handovers. The influence of *moi gioi* lies not so much in full logistical control over the entire journey, but more in their ability to integrate separate services across borders.

The business model relies on a combination of partial upfront payments and debt accrual. Migrants or their families typically provide an initial deposit in Vietnam, while the remaining, often substantial, balance is financed through informal credit networks, relatives or loan sharks linked to *moi gioi* networks. This allows households to begin the migration process without full liquidity, but it often means that migrants depart already heavily indebted.

Once in Europe, repayment becomes part of the migrant's daily life. Income from informal work can be absorbed by debt repayments, accommodation and transport costs, or payments to brokers and intermediaries, depending on the deal. Thus, *moi gioi* profits are not derived solely from brokering movement, but from the long-term extraction of the migrant's labour and the dependency generated by the journey.

Services provided by *moi gioi*

The *moi gioi* ecosystem is predominantly male, with men aged 25-40 often managing core logistical functions. These individuals typically join the system as local recruiters or transport coordinators, before expanding their roles as they accumulate capital, contacts and trust. Women primarily work in administrative coordination, document processing, financial management and digital recruitment. They are often the public face of the brokerage service to engender trust and mitigate perceived security risks.¹⁸

The services provided by *moi gioi* usually follow the journey itself: recruitment, financing, preparation, movement, accommodation, work placement and debt repayment. One broker may provide several of these services, or different actors may provide them at different stages.

- **Recruitment and digital facilitation:** *Moi gioi* identify aspiring migrants or respond to families seeking international migration as a mechanism for socio-economic mobility or debt relief. Recruitment is typically framed around opportunity – promising employment, educational placements, vocational apprenticeships or secure transit to join existing diaspora communities. While historical recruitment relied heavily on localized word-of-mouth networks, modern brokers primarily use digital platforms. Facebook and TikTok allow *moi gioi* to advertise routes, pricing tiers and destination packages far beyond their immediate networks. In many instances, brokers co-opt digital influencers or trusted community figures to legitimize their services and make the offer appear safe.
- **Financing the journey and creating debt:** As travelling from Vietnam to Europe is expensive, *moi gioi* often build financing into the migration package. By connecting migrants to informal lenders early in the recruitment process, dependency is entrenched before departure.
- **Pre-departure documentation and air transit:** Brokers facilitate the acquisition of documents required to clear border control points departing Vietnam. Legitimate, fraudulent and forged documents are all used along with coaching of migrants on airport procedures, interview scripts and behaviour designed to avoid suspicion.
- **En route logistical coordination:** After departure, *moi gioi* serve as logistics coordinators linking migrants to a localized chain of drivers, safe-house operators, document facilitators and specialized trafficking networks. This includes managing transit across Europe, coordinating clandestine handovers and changing routes in response to border enforcement. For UK-bound cohorts, this stage culminates in establishing contact with smuggling groups operating in northern France.



Before departure: Passport collection and a farewell photograph at Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi, Vietnam. Photos: Peter Smith/ITV News

- **Housing and accommodation management:** *Moi gioi* will also manage temporary accommodation along the route in different safe houses. After arrival at the destination, housing is organized through employers, sub-letters or diaspora networks. This is done to deepen structural dependency, particularly when a single broker controls the migrant's housing, employment, legal status and debt terms.
- **Labour brokerage and workplace integration:** *Moi gioi* then place migrants into employment, occasionally with legitimate businesses but more often in highly unregulated sectors characterized by excessive working hours, substandard pay, withheld wages and unsafe environments. Work placement is often built into the original migration deal.
- **Financial clearing and remittance channels:** Finally, *moi gioi* facilitate the movement of funds between migrants, their families, primary lenders and localized smugglers using informal transfer systems. These include initial deposits, ongoing debt payments deducted directly from salaries, and control over standard family remittances.

Money-moi-gioi

Remittances are a growing and normal part of Vietnam's economy. National inflows rose from US\$12.7 billion in 2021 to US\$16 billion in 2024, and Vietnam is among the top countries receiving remittances globally.¹⁹ In 2025, Ho Chi Minh City alone received more than US\$10 billion.²⁰ Europe accounts for a small but growing share: in 2025, it contributed US\$921.46 million, or 8.9%, of remittances to Ho Chi Minh City, a 16% increase from 2024.²¹

Vietnamese migrants use digital international money transfer services such as Wise, Remitly and TapTap Send,²² which are designed to send money abroad more cheaply and quickly than traditional banks. However, debt repayment can be facilitated through low-visibility channels that are difficult to monitor, potentially helping sustain the financial side of the *moi gioi* ecosystem.

Alongside this formal money transfer, there is also an informal transfer service. Interviews suggest that informal remittance brokers, described as *money-moi-gioi*, help migrants send money back to Vietnam, including for debt repayment. The method is best described as a *hawala*-style informal value transfer service in which cash paid to a broker in Europe is matched with a payout in Vietnam through trusted contacts, often outside formal banking channels.

These brokers reportedly advertise on Facebook using coded language, before arranging transfers by phone or private message. In practice, social media adverts often appear as posts announcing a fair price for 'uncooked rice' and

display a phone number. A person calls, specifies the amount of 'uncooked rice' they want to exchange (which refers to monetary value), and is then given a location where the exchange will take place.²³

In January 2026, GI-TOC researchers observed a simulated transfer from Germany to Vietnam through one such informal broker. The service operated discreetly behind a legitimate commercial facade and access was controlled by people linked to the transfer point. A total of €500 was sent to Vietnam, with an €8 fee incurred. The intermediary involved in the research, who had a debt to *moi gioi*, explained that the usual fee was around €13 per €1 000. The money arrived successfully. After the transfer, the intermediary was reportedly told not to disclose the location, existence or function of the service to foreigners.

Some Vietnamese migrants rely more on informal money transfer services because accessing formal banking can be difficult, especially for those with insecure status, limited documents, language barriers or fear of official scrutiny.²⁴ For families, this alternative provides a practical way to receive money quickly; for *moi gioi* and associates, it creates an additional chargeable service within the migration process. As these transfers operate outside formal banking oversight, they are also employed to repay smuggling debts or transfer funds linked to exploitation. Ultimately, this contributes to illicit financial flows, which are recognized as under-tackled in Vietnam, where law enforcement efforts focus primarily on the formal financial sector.²⁵ ■



FIGURE 2 Smuggling and trafficking routes from Vietnam to Europe.



SMUGGLING TO EUROPE

For Vietnamese nationals, migration to Europe began in earnest with refugees after Vietnam War,²⁶ but today it is also driven by the prospect of higher earnings. In many Vietnamese cities and provinces, where working abroad has become common, Europe is seen as desirable and attainable, especially in contexts where family expectations and economic pressures emphasize the need to migrate. *Moi gioi* sit at the centre of these aspirations, as they provide services and resources for migrants to enter Europe.²⁷

Leaving Vietnam

The wage gap reinforces this perception: entry-level monthly wages in selected European destination countries are several times higher than in Vietnam (see Figure 3). Even allowing for higher living costs in destination countries, the belief remains that migration can improve an individual's economic position.

Low income, limited local opportunities and the pressure to support households create a substantial recruitment base that brokers can convert into concrete offers of travel and work in Europe. This base is not evenly distributed across Vietnam but concentrated in several territories with histories of migration, with Nghe An as the main origin point.²⁸ Together with Ha Tinh and Quang Binh, it forms part of a wider migration origin environment shaped by rural poverty, labour export and household reliance on overseas remittances.²⁹ Interviewees from Nghe An noted how word-of-mouth recommendations lead migrants into contact with broader smuggling and trafficking networks.³⁰ Hai Phong and Ha Noi (see figures 2 and 3) are other prominent points of origin.

Recruitment relies heavily on trust. Relatives and friends in Vietnam and abroad recommend brokers and help establish connections. One man from Thanh Hoa, a city in north-central Vietnam, said his neighbour had introduced him to the idea of going to the UK, lent him money at a high interest rate and helped him arrange a Hungarian work visa.³¹ A woman from Nghe An said she heard about going to the UK 'to do nails' from a friend already working there,³² while another observed that in her hometown, 'many people go abroad, there are people that take people in stages'.³³

Interviews in northern France also indicate that the role of *moi gioi* had become so normalized that researchers did not always need to ask how people had reached Europe; brokered movement was often already implied.³⁴ The same interviews showed that migration was frequently framed as a household strategy, with people working long hours to repay debt and support relatives, including young children left behind in Vietnam.³⁵ Brokered migration is integrated into Vietnamese life, rather than a separate or unusual process.

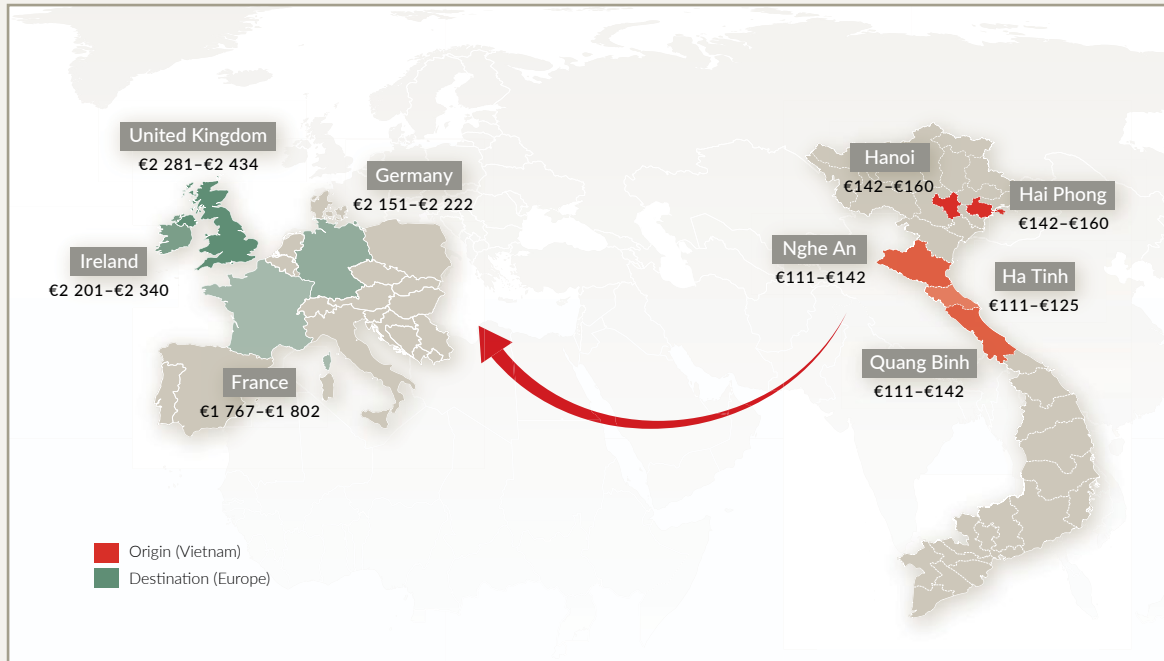
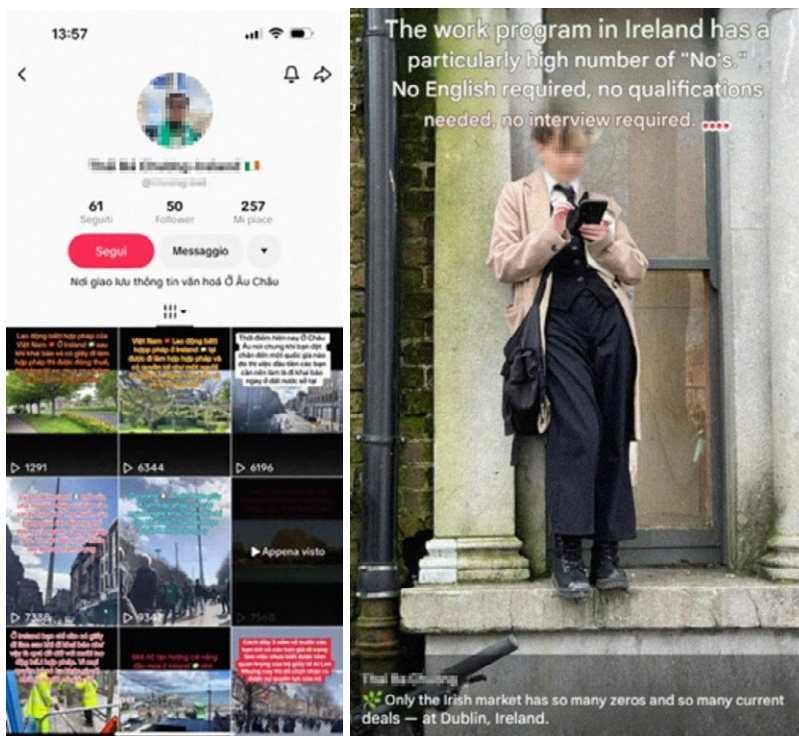


FIGURE 3 Estimated entry-level monthly wage floors, in euros, 2024-2025.

NOTE: In Vietnam, the figures represent the regional statutory monthly minimum wage applicable to selected territories that span more than one wage region. For the UK, Ireland and Germany, the figures are derived from the statutory hourly minimum wage, converted into a monthly full-time equivalent based on a 40-hour workweek. In France, the figures refer to the official monthly gross minimum wage.

SOURCE: Governments of Vietnam, the UK, Ireland and Germany, and the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of France³⁶



Posts on TikTok by *mọi giới* promoting Ireland as an attractive destination for Vietnamese migrants, emphasizing job opportunities and more relaxed migration policies.

However, recruitment is no longer limited to local contacts. Social media has become an important tool for *moi gioi* to market routes and attract younger clients. Facebook and TikTok appear especially utilized.³⁷ Interviews in France and Ireland indicate that brokers use these platforms to advertise travel packages, promote Ireland as more straightforward than the UK and offer jobs in nail salons, construction and hospitality.³⁸ This digital layer expands on the trust networks, and allows brokers to reach people beyond their immediate communities, while presenting the journey as manageable and organized.

Some *moi gioi* offer packages marketed as so-called VIP treatment,³⁹ presented as faster and safer movement or involving more direct support at key points. These packages include pre-departure preparation, a safer transport option and handovers along the journey, temporary accommodation in transit, and access to work on arrival.

Documents required for travel, be they genuine or false, will often remain under the control of brokers or their associates. One woman who was moved to the UK said that she had originally intended to go to Russia for work, but travelled on a fake passport with her photograph and another person's name, which she received only immediately before departure.⁴⁰ Another interviewee said she had not known that she would end up in the UK.⁴¹

Travel and tourism agencies in Vietnam often appear to support *moi gioi* by preparing documents for migrants disguised as tourists and manipulating travel histories to improve the chances of visa approval.⁴² Vocational training related to the promised employment is also arranged by *moi gioi*. Nail academies and language courses in Vietnam can enhance the legitimacy of their services, especially when migrants are promised work abroad.⁴³ This preparation works to increase the migrant's reliance on brokers, as they are encouraged to invest in specific work before fully understanding the debt implications, or the exploitative conditions they might face in Europe.

Pre-departure coaching

Alongside document preparation, *moi gioi* train migrants on how to handle border police with the type of visa and cover story they have. Migrants may be required to memorize different explanations, supported by relevant documents or other items that help substantiate the story.

One migrant, who used the cover of a business visa, revealed: 'We are told to say that we are attending a corporate seminar, trade fair, or summer study camp and we must wear formal clothing and carry real invitations or sponsorship letters.'⁴⁴ For tourist or family cover, statements are usually along the lines of 'I am visiting famous landmarks' or 'I am attending a family wedding or funeral'. Students will say, 'My classes start next week. I arrived early to settle into my dorm.' It is necessary to memorize the school's name and address, another migrant explained.⁴⁵

The *moi gioi* coaching usually combines three elements: what to say, what to carry and how to look. Migrants might be instructed to organize their documents carefully and to memorize consistent answers in case of questioning. Appearance can also be part of the preparation: travel props or other items linked to the stated purpose of the trip may be used to support the cover story. For migrants with better language skills, the training may include more detailed explanations and practice interviews; for others, the focus is often on simple answers, visible paperwork and avoiding statements that could raise suspicion. Migrants may also be instructed to limit disclosure of local contacts, avoid mentioning their work intentions, or to dispose of documents after arrival, thereby increasing their dependence on brokers.⁴⁶

Moi gioi often overstate the job and potential earnings to migrants, while omitting the risk of debt, exploitation and coercion,⁴⁷ which migrants often consider to be a normal part of the process. When many people from the same village accept long hours, poor working and living conditions, or debt repayment as part of their journey, new migrants may view these experiences as expected sacrifices rather than abuse. As a result, they are less likely to report exploitation.

The package price is rarely fixed at the start. Vietnamese nationals are often quoted a first-stage price for a visa or a route segment, while the actual cost becomes apparent only later. One woman paid around €5 000 to reach Romania and then another €11 500 for onward movement through Germany and France to the UK.⁴⁸ Another paid €8 000 for a Hungarian route.⁴⁹ A man from Nghe An said he paid €5 000 for a broker to prepare a Polish work visa and €4 000 for onward travel. A woman from the same place paid US\$16 000 for a Hungarian visa,⁵⁰ while another paid €12 000 for a visa and a factory job in Slovakia.⁵¹

For a rural family from Nghe An these amounts may be an unaffordable upfront cost, as they assist migrants and families in finding ways to finance the package. But they position *moi gioi* as brokers of debt in addition to movement. Once families borrow money – including from loan sharks who are easy to find and may appear legitimate⁵² – or mortgage assets, the migrant becomes responsible for the household's financial stability. This gives brokers significant leverage.

Pre-departure preparation therefore forms a crucial step in the *moi gioi*'s establishing of control. Debt is built into the brokering ecosystem from the start: many migrants do not pay the full cost upfront, but travel on credit or informal borrowing that must be repaid once they reach Europe. Debt makes migrants more dependent on brokers and their network and is one of the main ways in which brokered smuggling turns into exploitation.⁵³ One man from Thanh Hoa said that the brokers knew he could not refuse the work because of the debt he owed his neighbours. If he did not comply, his family would have to work to pay the interest, and he later said that he still had to work to repay the journey debt in addition.⁵⁴

At the departure stage, *moi gioi* rarely need to use overt violence. Their influence is built instead through trust and promises of work, which can control migrants' choices without requiring too much coercion. Interviewees in Germany and Ireland clearly captured this. The migrants explained that brokers 'look after' them by placing them in jobs with the help of the Vietnamese diaspora and moving them between workplaces to accelerate their debt repayment.⁵⁵ Another said that traffickers told him that his grandmother had not paid enough money on his behalf and threatened harm to his family if he resisted, escaped from his place of employment or spoke to the police.⁵⁶ In this context, the assistance offered by *moi gioi* should be understood not as care, but as a form of control that can begin before the migrant reaches the final destination. The same ecosystem that gets people out of Vietnam later absorbs them into exploitative labour systems.

Entering Europe

Moi gioi usually organize entry into Europe by plane, with Hungary as the main entry point, even though it has no direct flights from Vietnam.⁵⁷ This is despite France, Germany and Italy having consistently ranked as the top three Schengen visa destinations for Vietnamese applicants since 2014 (see Figure 4) and all having direct flights from Vietnam.⁵⁸

This suggests factors such as: where documents can be secured at lower cost, where visa procedures may be easier to navigate or manipulate and where onward movement can be organized after arrival appear to matter more to *moi gioi* when deciding on an entry point. Compared with the UK and Germany, where Vietnamese nationals face closer scrutiny,⁵⁹ countries such as Hungary may function less as

preferred destinations than as lower-cost, lower-friction entry points into the Schengen area. Once the migrants are in the EU, *moi gioi* can take advantage of reduced internal border controls to transfer them towards their final destinations. Vietnamese nationals who reached the UK and Germany said that the first countries of arrival are a stepping stone rather than a final destinations. Migrants may obtain visas or temporary legal status at the first entry points and work briefly before *moi gioi* arrange the next stage of the journey,⁶⁰ usually towards Germany, France or the UK.

In Europe, *moi gioi* operations shift to land transfers, domestic flights and, in some cases, crossings to the UK. Segmented supervision – meaning that the whole system operates like an adaptable network, with migrants passed from one actor to another – is a key feature of how *moi gioi* services function. When landing in Europe, migrants may be met by an airport contact, placed in temporary accommodation, and then transferred to a driver or a broker responsible for the next stage.

Moi gioi do not operate within a closed ethnic network, but through a system that connects Vietnamese brokers to specialized actors controlling particular services. At first entry, the receiving contact is often Vietnamese but responsibility for onward movement may then pass to Chinese intermediaries, local European facilitators or, later in northern France, Kurdish smuggling networks. In northern France, Vietnamese brokers could once coordinate movement by phone before control shifted to smugglers at migrant camps.⁶¹ These handovers exposed some Vietnamese women to sexual abuse by smugglers organizing the Channel crossing.⁶²

A woman from Nghe An said that when she arrived in Hungary, she was met at the airport by a man who was waiting for her. Other Vietnamese nationals were also picked up at the same time.⁶³ The group was separated into women and men, and transported onward to Hungary by bus. After several days in Budapest, she took a train to Berlin.⁶⁴

In another instance, a woman reported having travelled alone from Vietnam to Qatar and then to Hungary, where she ‘met a Vietnamese man, [who was] part of the *moi gioi* network’.⁶⁵ He took her to an apartment with other Vietnamese migrants and withheld her passport while her family was contacted concerning payment for this leg. After a few days, she was picked up and driven to Berlin. Shortly afterwards, Chinese brokers arranged a flight for her to Dublin, where she was met by a transporter who drove her to her accommodation there.⁶⁶

Rank	2014–2019	2020–2022	2023–2024
1	France	France	France
2	Germany	Germany	Germany
3	Italy	Italy	Italy
4	Netherlands	Switzerland	Switzerland
5	Switzerland	Netherlands	Netherlands
6	Spain	Spain	Spain
7	Denmark	Czech Republic	Hungary
8	Belgium	Belgium	Czech Republic
9	Norway	Austria	Finland
10	Austria	Hungary	Austria

FIGURE 4 Top destinations for Schengen visa applicants from Vietnam, 2014–2024.

SOURCE: Schengen Visa Info

Beatings, sexual abuse, threats, phone and passport confiscation, and restrictions on movement are all evidenced around entry and handover.⁶⁷ Migrants often have limited knowledge of where they are ultimately going and how they are getting there. 'I had no idea that I would be coming to the UK. Coming here was not part of the plan they [*moi gioi*] had previously discussed with me,' said one woman who was moved there after organizing to go to Russia.⁶⁸ Another man from Thanh Hoa said that he had never heard of Ireland before travelling there and had initially confused it with Iceland.⁶⁹ Others received documents only at the airport or discovered that the promised job was not real but only a cover for onward movement.⁷⁰ In some cases, this confusion may deepen migrants' dependence on brokers and make resistance more difficult. The less migrants know, the more they depend on the *moi gioi*.

Crossing to the UK

Direct legal entry into the UK remains challenging for Vietnamese migrants primarily because of visa eligibility requirements, leading many to turn to *moi gioi* for assistance.⁷¹ This has led to Vietnamese migrants becoming a visible group among small boat arrivals to the UK, although this trend has fluctuated since 2021 (see Figure 5), indicating that use of the route has varied.

The Channel crossing has become increasingly risky and costly, especially after the Essex tragedy in 2019. 'I became fearful and decided not to attempt any kind of travel, whether by lorry or boat, to the UK after the tragedy,' said a woman from Nghe An.⁷² Once in France, migrants can be summoned to undertake the Channel crossing with little notice and under strict instructions. One interviewee described being told to go to a pick-up location, where they would be guided by smugglers' associates towards the beach.⁷³ Another described waiting in a 'storage flat' with more than 10 people, with no clear timeline for onward movement.⁷⁴

At this stage, the *moi gioi* connect Vietnamese migrants to smugglers who control the crossing from France to the UK, mostly Kurdish nationals, who have been leading smuggling operations across the Channel for the past few years.⁷⁵

Moi gioi offer Vietnamese migrants entry into the UK as service tiers: concealment in lorries for £7 000, VIP placement in driver cabins for £18 000 and priority boat boarding for as much as £4 500.⁷⁶ One interviewee stated explicitly that brokers have 'lorries every day except Saturday and Sunday',⁷⁷ and requested family details in Vietnam as part of the 'verification process',⁷⁸ a coercion mechanism documented in previous work by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC).⁷⁹

Year	Vietnamese arrivals	Total arrivals	Vietnamese share of total
2021	1 403	28 526	5%
2022	505	45 774	1.1%
2023	1 306	29 437	4.4%
2024	3 657	36 816	9.9%
2025	1 433	41 472	3.5%

FIGURE 5 Vietnamese nationals arriving in the UK by small boat, 2021–2025.

SOURCE: UK Home Office, as reported by the University of Oxford Migration Observatory



Police in northern France have uncovered temporary accommodation used for Vietnamese migrants travelling to the UK. Photo: Europol

Vietnamese migrants are reportedly prioritized for boarding over nationals from Eritrea and Sudan, and treated as 'VIP' passengers since they had paid higher fees.⁸⁰ Preferential treatment also includes access to life jackets, or separate accommodation, arranged by *moi gioi*.⁸¹ However, brokers still maintain control through communication with family by restricting contact with other migrants.⁸²

In some cases, boat drivers are themselves migrants who travel for free or at reduced cost in exchange for piloting roles, exposing them to greater legal risk, while those with greater means receive easier access and preferential treatment.

Moving to Ireland

The UK increasingly serves as a transit point for Vietnamese migrants travelling to Ireland through additional brokered arrangements. One man had travelled across Europe, including through the UK, before ending up in eastern Irish town of Drogheda. Within hours, he was working in a nail salon where he was under constant surveillance, sleeping in a shared basement beneath the salon, and repaying a US\$20 000 debt to *moi gioi*.⁸³

Another case saw a Vietnamese woman travel legally to the Czech Republic on a business visa, then work in Germany and later move to Ireland using a lookalike passport supplied by the same broker, who then employed her at a nail salon.⁸⁴ Elsewhere, a man paid US\$20 000 to a *moi gioi* for a legitimate Irish work visa and a job in a food-processing factory, but he later ended working up in a nail salon.⁸⁵ The GI-TOC contacted a broker, through Facebook Messenger, who offered transport to Ireland from Spain, with 'paperwork prepared there'. This included a direct flight to Dublin and onward movement to Belfast.⁸⁶

Ireland is not yet comparable in scale to the UK or Germany as a final destination for Vietnamese nationals, but asylum claims in Ireland have risen sharply since 2022, suggesting a growing focus by Vietnamese nationals and migration brokers on the country.⁸⁷ Some Vietnamese nationals who initially aimed for the UK or Germany are now being redirected to, or choosing, Ireland after earlier routes become too difficult. Ireland is reportedly seen as a less saturated destination by migrants, compared to a competitive and unpredictable UK and bureaucratic Germany.

On social media platforms, Ireland is presented as a more accessible destination, with an increasing number of *moi gioi* offering packages to this country.⁸⁸ Vietnamese brokers leverage social media 'influencers' and other internet personalities to promote specific routes online, effectively making them the public faces of a smuggling operation.⁸⁹

Ireland's Vietnamese community has grown from a very small base, from the arrival of 212 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 to an estimated several thousand people today.⁹⁰ That community plays an important role in easing adaptation, and in places such as Drogheda, newly arrived Vietnamese nationals can quickly access food, support and job opportunities through diaspora links.

This creates a dual effect. On the one hand, diaspora connections reduce practical barriers to migration by helping people find accommodation, employment and social support. However, brokers can capitalize on these links by supplying workers to sectors where employment may be informal, low-paid or tied to accommodation. The result is a self-reinforcing system: labour demand and community infrastructure make Ireland more attractive and *moi gioi* use that attractiveness to sell their services.

We are increasingly seeing in Ireland the same conditions around migration that exist in UK and Germany – labour demand, diaspora connections, debt-based recruitment, digital promotion and flexible brokerage. This could see the country transform from being merely another onward destination to becoming a more stable site for exploitation.



EXPLOITATION IN EUROPE

The same brokers can control every aspect of Vietnamese migration to Europe, from recruitment to work and accommodation, so exploitation becomes part of a system connecting irregular movement, forced labour and debt repayment. Although labour exploitation is the most common form of exploitation, forced criminality is also evident, especially in the UK, where migrants often work in cannabis cultivation. Sexual exploitation and abuse are less visible, but the problem is likely under-identified, as indicated by the situation in Germany and the Czech Republic described below.

Labour exploitation

Most reported cases of labour exploitation involving Vietnamese nationals seem to concern adult men. In 2025, adult men accounted for 28% of all Vietnamese referrals to the National Referral Mechanism, the UK's framework for identifying potential victims of modern slavery, or 556 cases.⁹¹ At the EU level, reporting from 2025 reinforces the evidence labour exploitation of Vietnamese migrants, with Vietnamese nationals identified among workers in low-wage service sectors, where abuse is more likely.⁹² In Germany, seven of the 18 trafficking-related criminal proceedings involving Vietnamese nationals between 2018 and 2021 concerned labour exploitation.⁹³ In Belgium, Vietnamese migrants are reported to be trafficked and exploited by fellow Vietnamese nationals, and they make up the highest number of trafficked minors in the country.⁹⁴

In Europe, Vietnamese migrants are typically exploited in low-wage service sectors, such as nail salons and factories. These sectors are part of ordinary European economies, which indicates how exploitation can be hidden beneath the guise of legitimate business activity and the appearance of regular employment. These are sectors where low visibility, subcontracting, informal work and labour shortages can create opportunities for exploitation. Of these, the nail salon economy was the most recurring example, and it illustrates how migration brokerage can lead directly to labour exploitation.⁹⁵

Moi gioi may place migrants in nail salons shortly after arrival at the final destination, with their wages used to repay their journey debt. Brokers also arrange accommodation in the salon itself, so that migrants are dependent on the same people for many aspects of their life in Europe. This does not mean that all Vietnamese-run nail salons in Europe are exploitative, but the sector has become a key site of exploitation because of the overlap between irregular movement, forced labour and debt repayment.

Germany shows how legal training and vocational pathways can become entry points into exploitative work arrangements. A report from October 2025 found that more than 200 Vietnamese students enrolled at a Berlin hospitality school had absconded, while later police raids on nail salons and restaurants suggested that many may have moved into irregular work in these sectors.⁹⁶ The same report linked this pattern of absconding to placement fees of up to €20 000 paid to Vietnamese brokers for forged or fraudulently obtained language certificates and subsequently pressure to repay the fee, as families in Vietnam carried the financial burden.⁹⁷

Recent reporting in the UK reveals that, despite increased enforcement raids, Vietnamese migrants who entered the country illegally continue to find employment in nail salons.⁹⁸ For instance, a young Vietnamese man, who arrived by small boat after paying about £16 000 to smugglers, initially worked on cannabis farms in the UK. After being robbed, he switched to working in nail salons, all while still repaying his debt and pursuing stable housing. The reporting also uncovered Vietnamese Facebook groups used to alert businesses and workers to inspections, and revealed that some nail bars were willing to employ Vietnamese technicians without legal status.⁹⁹ A similar situation is evident in Ireland, where nail salon exploitation is also not confined to women. In one case, a 22-year-old Vietnamese man who had moved through Europe to reach Ireland after paying half of the US\$20 000 fee up front, found himself working long hours in a nail salon to repay his debt, and sleeping in a shared basement under the salon with five other people.¹⁰⁰ While this case does not establish that the same actor controlled his job, housing and debt, it illustrates how the nail salon economy can become an all-encompassing exploitation point for newly arrived migrants carrying debt.

Exploitation of Vietnamese migrants also occurs in south-eastern Europe, where lower wages, high labour demand and weaker oversight may create opportunities for abuse. Serbia illustrates this pattern. In 2021, media and civil society organizations documented serious labour exploitation allegations involving Vietnamese workers at a tyre factory construction site, including false wage promises, passport confiscation, overcrowded accommodation, long shifts and little or no pay.¹⁰¹ Workers were reportedly



In 2021, serious labour exploitation was exposed in Zrenjanin, Serbia, when several hundred Vietnamese nationals were found to be living and working in deplorable conditions. *Photo: Danilo Ćurčić/A11 Initiative*

recruited through Vietnamese agencies and faced threats, abuse and pressure to not speak out.¹⁰² The case drew renewed attention in December 2025, when US Customs and Border Protection issued a withhold release order on tyres linked to the factory's operator, citing evidence of forced labour.¹⁰³

Regardless of the migrant's destination, the *moi gioi* ecosystem turns the promised job into a repayment mechanism. Even when workers receive wages, those wages may be functionally captured by debt and other payments to brokers. This also helps explain why Vietnamese workers may be reluctant to report exploitation. For some, remaining in exploitative work is seen as the only available way to repay the debt, protect family members from financial pressure and continue sending money home.¹⁰⁴ This makes exploitation harder to identify because the person may appear to be free to work, while in practice their choices are narrowed by fear of losing the only income stream available to them.

Forced criminality

Although less frequent than labour exploitation, forced criminality remains an notable aspect of Vietnamese smuggling and exploitation in Europe, especially in the UK. The clearest example is cannabis cultivation.

Unlike nail salons, cannabis farms in the UK operate wholly within a criminal environment. Interviewees described cannabis farms as adapted places with artificial lighting and controlled growing conditions in residential properties, abandoned factories and warehouses. Anyone seeking quick debt repayment would first contact a *moi gioi* in Vietnam, who would arrange the journey to the UK and then connect them with someone linked to a cannabis farm.¹⁰⁵ This creates a double vulnerability for Vietnamese migrants: not only may they be exploited as forced labour, but they also risk deportation if they are regarded as straightforward offenders under cannabis laws.

Cannabis cultivation can be presented by *moi gioi* as offering significantly higher earnings than restaurants, nail salons or construction work. For some Vietnamese nationals under financial pressure, this may seem like the quickest way to clear debt and start sending remittances home. But this calculation takes place when a migrant is already indebted to *moi gioi*, where safety and earnings are never secure.¹⁰⁶ One Vietnamese man said that he was taken to a house used to grow cannabis, told to water the plants until he had repaid his debt, locked inside and not allowed to leave for a year.¹⁰⁷ This does not mean that everyone working on cannabis farms is trafficked or exploited, but the risks are considerable.

Some cannabis farms in the UK are controlled by drug trafficking groups led by or involving Vietnamese nationals, as well as UK nationals of Vietnamese descent. In July 2025, a Vietnamese man from Birmingham was sentenced to six years and two months in prison after authorities proved he led a group that operated at least eight farms on residential and commercial properties across the UK.¹⁰⁸ Many of the farms employed Vietnamese migrants, some of whom were likely exploited due to their immigration status, according to authorities.¹⁰⁹

Here, migrant safety is threatened by violence associated with cannabis production rather than migration alone. During harvest time, when crops are ready for sale and most vulnerable to theft, disputes and rival groups bringing the most risk.¹¹⁰ One interviewee's former partner had worked on a cannabis farm in the UK that was robbed shortly before harvest. She also described another case in which a worker tried to resist a robbery and was beaten.¹¹¹ In this environment, the worker is not only exposed to poor labour conditions but also placed inside a criminal economy where the crop, rather than the worker, is often treated as the protected asset.



In Coventry, UK, police seized over 1 500 cannabis plants at a farm employing Vietnamese migrants. Work in the cannabis sector exposes migrants to forced criminality. *Photo: UK National Crime Agency*

In 2023, UK authorities discovered three suspected victims of modern slavery, all Vietnamese nationals, working on a large cannabis farm within an industrial unit in Stroud, where approximately 500 plants were seized. Authorities stated that the suspected network was involved in establishing cannabis farms and trafficking victims for forced labour.¹¹²

Cannabis farms also present a particular identification challenge for police. They can serve as a modern slavery 'blind spot' because victims may be held against their will, forced to work and unable to leave, even when the signs – debt bondage, threats, deception, document confiscation and psychological coercion – do not necessarily match traditional notions of slavery.¹¹³ Without careful screening, victims can be mistaken for offenders by police when raiding cannabis farms, rather than recognized as individuals being exploited through debt and coercion.

Vietnamese interviewees are unsurprisingly more cautious when discussing cannabis farms than when discussing labour exploitation in nail salons or restaurants. This caution suggests that cannabis cultivation should be treated as a serious but harder-to-document form of exploitation: less visible in interviews but evidenced by law enforcement operations.

Forced criminality should therefore be understood as part of the same continuum as labour exploitation. In both cases, a person's labour is used to repay debt and generate profit for others. The difference from nail salon exploitation is that cannabis cultivation places the victim directly inside an illicit market, where the risk of violence and criminalization is significantly higher. The *moi gioi* ecosystem therefore also exposes Vietnamese nationals to criminal liability for activities they may have been coerced to participate in.

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation and abuse are the least visible of the violations shown in this report but are part of the wider risk environment for Vietnamese migrants in Europe.

Vietnamese women in Germany are particularly affected: nine of the 18 trafficking-related criminal proceedings involving Vietnamese nationals between 2018 and 2021 concerned sexual exploitation, and all identified victims in these cases were adult women.¹¹⁴ Exploitation took place in flats used as brothels or in brothel-type businesses, where the women often also stayed overnight. Sexual services were advertised online, while appointments with clients were arranged by third parties.¹¹⁵

Evidence suggests that migrants can become vulnerable to sexual exploitation at different points along brokered routes through Europe, including in transit countries like France, the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic.¹¹⁶ They can be moved between these countries for sexual exploitation and this exploitation may occur during transit as well as after arrival.

In April 2025, German and Czech authorities coordinated an operation targeting an alleged international criminal group believed to smuggle Vietnamese women into the countries for forced prostitution. German police reported that the group placed women in various apartments – at least 10 in Germany and three in the Czech Republic – and profited off their earnings.¹¹⁷ Media sources, citing German police, stated that many of the women had entered the EU using fraudulently obtained visas and were subsequently coerced into prostitution.¹¹⁸

The extent of sexual exploitation in smuggling ecosystems is likely underestimated. Victims may not report abuse because of fear, shame, debt, language barriers, irregular status or concern that relatives in Vietnam could face consequences.¹¹⁹ These cases may also be processed first as immigration cases rather than trafficking cases, especially when exploitation is identified during border control, police raids or asylum procedures.¹²⁰



CONCLUSION

The *moi gioi* smuggling-to-exploitation system operates as a decentralized network linking recruiters, informal lenders, document suppliers, transport providers, exploitative employers, remittance channels and other smuggling groups. Within this ecosystem, brokers can turn Vietnamese aspirations for work, mobility and a better standard of living into debt-based dependency.

Debt often accrues before a migrant has even left Vietnam, with the substantial prices charged for documents, travel and work placement. Recruitment is built on trust and personal networks and increasingly uses social media advertising. Smuggling may begin with legal air travel into Europe, before journeys shift towards irregular onward movement to final destinations such as Germany, France, the UK or Ireland, involving additional payments and transfers between brokers. Movement to destinations such as the UK may also involve specialized, often non-Vietnamese, smuggling networks operating across the Channel.

Exploitation is not necessarily an outcome separate from the smuggling process, but can be embedded within the same ecosystem. Debt accumulated before and during the journey can be used to channel migrants into forced labour, sexual exploitation or criminal activity. What emerges is therefore not a simple sequence from migration to smuggling and then trafficking, but a fluid system in which recruitment, movement, work placement, debt and exploitation overlap and reinforce one another.

In light of this, institutional responses in both Vietnam and in European countries should concentrate on disrupting the organized crime elements embedded in the *moi gioi* ecosystem, rather than focusing on the fact of migration itself. The priority should be to dismantle the business model that exposes people to exploitation.

Recommendations

- Authorities should focus on understanding and addressing the financial structure underpinning the *moi gioi* ecosystem. Law enforcement investigations should focus on recruitment fees, staged payments, debt enforcement, informal remittance brokers and cross-border money flows. Financial intelligence units, police, prosecutors and tax authorities should collaborate to trace payments from recruitment in Vietnam to brokers, employers and informal transfer points in Europe. Special attention should be given to fragmented payments, cash couriers, informal money-transfer brokers and remittances linked to debt repayment.

- Law enforcement should also focus on the misuse of legal entry channels without treating legal migration itself as suspicious. This report shows that visas, work contracts, study routes and travel documents can appear authentic but be deceptive in purpose. Authorities should therefore enhance risk-based screening of visa applications, employment contracts, travel agencies and recruitment intermediaries, while avoiding broad restrictions that may push migrants further towards brokers. Document-fraud detection should prioritize lookalike passports, borrowed documents, late-issued contracts and repeated use of the same facilitators.
- Law enforcement should also look into the connections between brokerage and employment. Labour inspections should concentrate not only on workplace conditions but also on how workers were recruited, who arranged their travel, who controls their accommodation, and whether their wages are being syphoned off into debt repayments, deductions or broker payments. This is especially important in nail salons, restaurants, food processing, light manufacturing, construction and other low-wage sectors where brokered labour might be obscured behind legitimate business activities.
- Victim identification should be strengthened across the route. Vietnamese nationals encountered in irregular workplaces, cannabis farms, informal accommodation, border crossings or asylum procedures should be screened for debt, document control, threats to family members, restricted movement and broker-managed employment. Cannabis cultivation should be treated as a potential criminal exploitation setting, not only as a drug-related offence.
- Authorities should also expand their digital investigative capacity. Brokers use Facebook and TikTok to advertise routes, jobs and packages. Lawful monitoring, data preservation and cooperation with platforms should focus on repeat facilitators, coded advertising and online recruitment linked to debt-based movement.



NOTES

- 1 Tony Kingham, Sentences totalling almost 80 years handed out as two migrant cannabis farm gangs are jailed following major NCA investigations, Border Security Report, 15 July 2025, <https://www.border-security-report.com/sentences-totalling-almost-80-years-handed-out-as-two-migrant-cannabis-farm-gangs-are-jailed-following-major-nca-investigations>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Giulia D'Amico and Peter Smith, Chasing Ireland's 'pot of gold': How illicit brokers profit from Vietnamese migration routes, GI-TOC, 20 May 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/chasing-irelands-pot-of-gold-how-illicit-brokers-profit-from-vietnamese-migration-routes>.
- 5 Tanja Cornelius et al, Human trafficking and exploitation of Vietnamese nationals in Germany, German Federal Criminal Police Office, August 2024, <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/Research/2023KKFHumanTraffickingOfVietnamese-NationalsEN.html>; German Federal Police in Halle, *BPOL Halle: Fünf Festnahmen und 32 Durchsuchungen bei international agierender Bande in Deutschland und Tschechien*, 9 April 2025, <https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/144602/6009567>; Tagesschau, *Festnahmen bei Razzien gegen Schleuserbanden*, 9 April 2025, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/razzia-menschenhandel-durchsuchungen-100.html>.
- 6 BBC, Essex lorry deaths: Men jailed for killing 39 migrants in trailer, 22 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-essex-55765213>.
- 7 Carlota Torres Lloró and Caitlin Wyndham, Human trafficking in post-Covid Vietnam, Blue Dragon, March 2024, <https://www.bluedragon.org/publications/human-trafficking-in-post-covid-vietnam>.
- 8 Peter Smith, Cannabis, nail bars and deportation: Dark reality for Vietnamese people smuggled into the UK, ITV News, 18 November 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-11-15/end-of-the-road-dark-reality-for-vietnamese-people-smuggled-into-the-uk>; Mihnea Cuibus and Peter William Walsh, People crossing the English Channel in small boats, The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 31 March 2026, <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/people-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats>.
- 9 Peter Smith, 'We have no choice': The Vietnamese dying for a chance to work in the UK, ITV News, 27 September 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-26/we-have-no-choice-the-vietnamese-dying-for-a-chance-to-work-in-the-uk>.
- 10 Louise Shelley, Human smuggling and trafficking into Europe: A comparative perspective, Migration Policy Institute, February 2014, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/human-smuggling-and-trafficking-europe-comparative-perspective>; John Salt, Trafficking and human smuggling: A European perspective, *International Migration*, 38, 3 (December 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00114>.
- 11 Katharine Jones and Heila Sha, Mediated migration: A literature review of migration intermediaries, MIDEQ, August 2020, <https://www.mideq.org/en/inequalities/inequalities-resources/mediated-migration-literature-review-migration-intermediaries>; Olivier Clochard, Assaf Dahdah and Kevin Mary, *Les intermédiaires de la migration*, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 39, 4 (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.24229>.
- 12 Maurizio Ambrosini, Why irregular migrants arrive and remain: the role of intermediaries, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43, 11 (December 2016), 1813–1830, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1260442>; Katharine Jones and Heila Sha, Mediated migration: A literature review of migration intermediaries, MIDEQ, August 2020, <https://www.mideq.org/en/inequalities/inequalities-resources/mediated-migration-literature-review-migration-intermediaries>.

- 13 Nguyen Huyen Le and Daniel Mont, Vietnam's regulatory, institutional and governance structure for international labor migration, in Richard H Adams Jr and Ahmad Ahsan (eds), *Managing International Migration for Development in East Asia*, World Bank Group, 2014, p 204, <https://doi.org/10.1596/21071>.
- 14 Rey P Asis and Carlos L Maningat, The 'ASEAN way' in migration governance, in Heaven Crawley and Joseph Kofi Teye (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of South-South Migration and Inequality*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp 679–698, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39814-8_31.
- 15 See: Law on Vietnamese Workers Working Abroad Under Contract, 29 November 2006, <https://luatvietnam.vn/linh-vuc-khac/luat-lao-dong-o-nuoc-ngoi-2006-29202-d1.html>.
- 16 Danièle Bélanger et al, International labour migration from Vietnam to Asian countries, 2000-2009: Process, experiences and impact, Institute for Social Development Studies, 15 March 2010, <http://hdl.handle.net/10625/48198>.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online.
- 19 World Bank, Annual remittance inflows in 2021-2024, Migration Data Portal, 2 December 2025, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/dashboard/compare-geographic?c=704&i=9691&t=2021_2024.
- 20 Vietnam Plus, Remittances to Ho Chi Minh City exceed 10.3 billion USD in 2025, 23 January 2026, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/remittances-to-ho-chi-minh-city-exceed-103-billion-usd-in-2025-post336515.vnp>.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 23 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 24 Interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; interview 26 with a young couple from Ni Han, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 25 Kristina Amerhauser, Illicit financial flows in the Mekong, GI-TOC, January 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-financial-flows-in-the-mekong>.
- 26 Vietnamese outward migration has occurred in several waves, including the post-1975 refugee movement, labour migration to allied socialist countries and, later, family, work and education-related migration. These flows created a large global diaspora and helped build transnational family and community networks, including in France and Germany. See Karl Miller, From humanitarian to economic: The changing face of Vietnamese migration, The Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute, 29 April 2015, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/humanitarian-economic-changing-face-vietnamese-migration>.
- 27 Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online; Shayma Bakht, What I saw on the trafficking route that ships 'slaves' to the UK, *The Times*, 12 August 2025, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/asia/article/human-trafficking-route-uk-qr3rh256f>.
- 28 This finding is further supported by recent data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA). In 2024, the IOM identified Hai Phong, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Binh as primary hubs for modern slavery and unsafe migration. These findings align with 2023 data from the BKA, which reported that 80% of identified Vietnamese victims of human trafficking in Germany originated from five specific localities: Quang Binh, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Hai Phong and Ha Noi. See: IOM, Terms of reference for the service provider for social media trends analysis and online communications campaign support, June 2024, <https://vietnam.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11396/files/documents/Procurement/annexa-tor-service-provider-social-media-trend-analysis-final01.pdf>; Tanja Cornelius et al, Human trafficking and exploitation of Vietnamese nationals in Germany, BKA, 1 August 2024, <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/Research/2023KKFHumanTraffickingOfVietnameseNationalsEN.html>.
- 29 International Labour Organization, Measuring sustainable development goal indicator 10.7.1 on recruitment costs of Vietnamese workers overseas: Results of the Labour Force Survey 2021, 22 December 2022, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/measuring-sustainable-development-goal-indicator-1071-recruitment-costs>.
- 30 Interview 5 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 6 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 7 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 8 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
- 31 Interview 1 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
- 32 Interview 5 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
- 33 Interview 8 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
- 34 Fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Government of Vietnam, Fresh regional minimum wage policy released, 1 July 2024, <https://en.baochinhphu.vn/fresh-regional-minimum-wage-policy-released-111240701180643367.htm>; Links International, Minimum Wage in Vietnam, 1 January 2026, <https://www.linksinternational.org/minimum-wage-in-vietnam>.

- linksinternational.com/minimum-wage-in-vietnam; Government of the UK, National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates, 31 March 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>; Government of Ireland, National Minimum Wage increase on 1 January 2026, 23 December 2025, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-enterprise-tourism-and-employment/publications/national-minimum-wage-increase-on-1-january-2025/>; Federal Government of Germany, *Was ändert sich im Januar 2025?*, 3 January 2025, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/gesetzliche-neuregelungen-januar-2025-2324594>; Insee, *Salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance (Smic), Données annuelles de 1980 à 2026*, 13 February 2026, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1375188>.
- 37 Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online; Europol, From Vietnam to the EU by air: 8 arrested in a migrant smuggling sting across Europe, 9 April 2026, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/vietnam-to-eu-air-8-arrested-in-migrant-smuggling-sting-across-europe>.
 - 38 Fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; interview 20 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 22 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 26 with a young couple from Ni Han, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
 - 39 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
 - 40 Interview 4 with a woman from Hai Phong, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 41 Interview 3 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 42 Shayma Bakht, What I saw on the trafficking route that ships 'slaves' to the UK, *The Times*, 12 August 2025, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/asia/article/human-trafficking-route-uk-qr3rh256f>; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; Peter Smith, Inside the people smuggling routes which Vietnamese are using to reach the UK, ITV News, 3 October 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-10-03/inside-the-people-smuggling-routes-which-vietnamese-are-using-to-reach-the-uk>.
 - 43 Shayma Bakht, What I saw on the trafficking route that ships 'slaves' to the UK, *The Times*, 12 August 2025, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/asia/article/human-trafficking-route-uk-qr3rh256f>; Peter Smith, 'We have no choice': The Vietnamese dying for a chance to work in the UK, ITV News, 27 September 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-26/we-have-no-choice-the-vietnamese-dying-for-a-chance-to-work-in-the-uk>; interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
 - 44 Interview with a Vietnamese migrant closely connected to the Vietnamese community in the UK who took part in *moi gioi* coaching, June 2026, by phone.
 - 45 Ibid.
 - 46 Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online.
 - 47 Interview 5 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 6 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 7 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 8 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; Thi Hoang, Questions of intent: Where mixed migration and human trafficking overlap, *Mixed Migration Review* 22, 6 December 2022, <https://mixedmigration.org/publications/mmr/2022/questions-of-intent-mixed-migration-human-trafficking>.
 - 48 Interview 5 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 49 Interview 7 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 50 Interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
 - 51 Interview 16 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
 - 52 Interview 22 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online.
 - 53 Interview 1 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 12 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online; Georgia Poncia and Duc Ha, 'Trafficked to a cannabis farm over family's debt', BBC, 6 March 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gmmn46n8vo>.
 - 54 Interview 1 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 55 Interview 9 with a man from Ha Noi, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 20 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 22 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
 - 56 Interview 2 with a man from Hai Phong, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
 - 57 Interview 1 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 7 with a woman from

- Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 8 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 25 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 26 with a young couple from Ni Han, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online.
- 58 Flight Connections, Flights from Vietnam, 1 June 2026, <https://www.flightconnections.com/flights-from-vietnam-vn>.
- 59 UK Home Office, Immigration Rules Appendix Visitor: Visa national list, 29 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/immigration-rules/immigration-rules-appendix-visitor-visa-national-list>; Germany Federal Foreign Office, Overview of visa requirements/exemptions for entry into the Federal Republic of Germany, 3 June 2026, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/visa-service/231148-231148>.
- 60 Interview 5 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 7 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 16 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 61 Interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; GI-TOC, Small boats, big business: The industrialization of cross-channel migrant smuggling, February 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/english-channel-migrant-people-smuggling-france-uk-kurdish-gangs-crime>.
- 62 Fieldwork in Grande-Synthe, France, January 2026.
- 63 Interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Interview 25 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Interview 2 with a man from Hai Phong, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 3 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; fieldwork in Grande-Synthe, France, January 2026; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026.
- 68 Interview 4 with a woman from Hai Phong, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025.
- 69 Interview 20 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 70 Interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 71 For the different visa eligibility requirements, see: UK Government, Standard visitor visa, <https://www.gov.uk/standard-visitor/apply-standard-visitor-visa>; skilled worker visa, <https://www.gov.uk/skilled-worker-visa/documents-you-must-provide>; student visa, <https://www.gov.uk/student-visa>. Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online; interview 10 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 9 with a man from Ha Noi, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 72 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
- 73 Fieldwork in Grande-Synthe, France, January 2026.
- 74 Fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; fieldwork in Grande-Synthe, France, January 2026.
- 75 GI-TOC, Small boats, big business: The industrialization of cross-channel migrant smuggling, February 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/english-channel-migrant-people-smuggling-france-uk-kurdish-gangs-crime>.
- 76 Fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026.
- 77 Availability on these days is limited because in France, lorries over 7.5 tonnes are subject to traffic bans from Saturday 22.00 to Sunday 22.00 and additional summer restrictions are in place on selected Saturdays. See TruckBAN: France, <https://truckban.eu/France>.
- 78 Fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026.
- 79 GI-TOC, Small boats, big business: The industrialization of cross-channel migrant smuggling, February 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/english-channel-migrant-people-smuggling-france-uk-kurdish-gangs-crime>.
- 80 Interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 21 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 81 As the GI-TOC's earlier work on Kurdish smuggling networks in northern France has noted, control over 'space, waiting and movement' is as important as control over transport itself. Kurdish groups operating in Loon-Plage, a key hub between Calais and Dunkirk, and surrounding camps have long been documented controlling access to boat crossings, setting prices and regulating departure timing. See GI-TOC, Small boats, big business: The industrialization of cross-channel migrant smuggling, February 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/english-channel-migrant-people-smuggling-france-uk-kurdish-gangs-crime>.
- 82 Interview 25 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; fieldwork in Grande-Synthe, France, January 2026; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026.
- 83 Interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 84 Interview 24 with a woman from Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 85 Interview 22 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.

- 86 In February 2026, GI-TOC researchers observed a simulated Facebook communication with a *moi gioi* who offered a route from France through Spain to Ireland, including the provision of false documentation and onward travel instructions to Dublin and Belfast.
- 87 Vietnamese asylum claims in Ireland were reportedly low during the COVID-19 period: 12 in 2020, 13 in 2021 and 20 in 2022. They then rose to 36 in 2023, 251 in 2024 and 520 by early October 2025. See Ailbhe Conneely, Trafficking concerns amid rise in Vietnamese seeking international protection, RTÉ, 16 October 2025, <https://www.rte.ie/news/2025/1016/1538791-vietnamese-asylum>.
- 88 Giulia D'Amico and Peter Smith, Chasing Ireland's 'pot of gold': How illicit brokers profit from Vietnamese migration routes, GI-TOC, 20 May 2026, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/chasing-irelands-pot-of-gold-how-illicit-brokers-profit-from-vietnamese-migration-routes>.
- 89 Interview 26 with a young couple from Ni Han, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 90 RTÉ, When we came here, we had no money, 1989, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1665-immigration/370205-vietnamese-refugees-in-ireland>; Vietnam Plus, Top leader's visit to bring Vietnam-Ireland ties to new height: Ambassador, 30 September 2024, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/top-leaders-visit-to-bring-vietnam-ireland-ties-to-new-height-ambassador-post297420.vnp>.
- 91 UK Home Office, Official Statistics: Annex: An analysis of NRM referrals and Dtn reports for potential victims of modern slavery, 2024 to 2025, 9 February 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-nrm-and-dtn-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2025/annex-an-analysis-of-nrm-referrals-and-dtn-reports-for-potential-victims-of-modern-slavery-2024-to-2025>.
- 92 European Commission, Report on the progress made in the European Union in combating trafficking in human beings (fifth report), 20 January 2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0008>.
- 93 Tanja Cornelius et al, Human trafficking and exploitation of Vietnamese nationals in Germany, BKA, 1 August 2024, <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/Research/2023KKFHumanTraffickingOfVietnameseNationalsEN.html>.
- 94 Council of Europe – Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Evaluation report Belgium: Third evaluation round, 20 October 2022, p49, <https://rm.coe.int/3rd-greta-evaluation-report-on-belgium/1680a8940b>.
- 95 Interview with an investigative journalist from the UK specialized in Vietnamese smuggling and trafficking, November 2025, online; interview 13 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; fieldwork in a Vietnamese restaurant in Paris, France, January 2026; interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 19 with a woman from Hanoi, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 20 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 21 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 22 with a man from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 23 with a woman from Hanoi, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 24 with a woman from Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 25 with a woman from Hi Nan, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; interview 26 with a young couple from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 96 Jens Kastner, Vietnamese trainees abscond from German schools, slip into criminal world, Nikkei Asia, 23 October 2025, <https://asia.nikkei.com/business/education/vietnamese-trainees-abscond-from-german-schools-slip-into-criminal-world>.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 Patrick Clahane, Divya Talwar and Khue Luu, Illegal nail bar jobs offered despite clampdown, BBC, 20 December 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8dqeerd75mo>.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Men typically work as receptionists in the salons. Interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026.
- 101 Sasa Djordjevic and Vanja Petrovic, Forced to work: Labour exploitation in the Western Balkans, GI-TOC, August 2024, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/forced-to-work-labour-exploitation-in-the-western-balkans>.
- 102 ASTRA Anti Trafficking Action, Would you really buy this?, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LUZR7VYImVYW5IE7YOvU421oqVyZ9Leu/view>.
- 103 US Customs and Border Protection, CBP issues withhold release order on Linglong International Europe D.O.O. Zrenjanin, 18 December 2025, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-issues-withhold-release-order-linglong-international-europe-doo>.
- 104 Interview 1 with a man from Thanh Hoa, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 2 with a man from Hai Phong, Vietnam, now living in the UK, November 2025; interview 18 with a man from Ha Tinh, Vietnam, now living in Ireland, February 2026; UK Visas and Immigration, Guidance Country Policy and Information Note: Trafficking, Vietnam, February 2025 (accessible), 12 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vietnam-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-trafficking-vietnam-february-2025-accessible>; UK Visas and Immigration, Guidance Country policy and information note: fear of illegal moneylenders, Vietnam, February 2025 (accessible), 12 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vietnam-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-fear-of-illegal-moneylenders-vietnam-february-2025-accessible>.

- note-fear-of-illegal-moneylenders-vietnam-january-2023-accessible.
- 105 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
 - 106 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; UK Visas and Immigration, Guidance Country Policy and Information Note: Trafficking, Vietnam, February 2025 (accessible), 12 March 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vietnam-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-trafficking-vietnam-february-2025-accessible>.
 - 107 Peter Smith, Cannabis, nail bars and deportation: Dark reality for Vietnamese people smuggled into the UK, ITV News, 18 November 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-11-15/end-of-the-road-dark-reality-for-vietnamese-people-smuggled-into-the-uk>.
 - 108 UK Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, *Rex -v- Roman Le, Yihao Feng and David Qayumi*, 4 July 2025, <https://www.judiciary.uk/judgments/rex-v-roman-le-yihao-feng-and-david-qayumi>.
 - 109 Will Jefford, Kingpin behind chain of cannabis factories jailed, BBC, 30 July 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c860q2l638vo>.
 - 110 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026; Nicolas Lesenfants Ramos, Gang convicted of trafficking migrants, exploiting them at UK cannabis farms, OCCRP, 26 February 2025, <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/gang-convicted-of-trafficking-migrants-exploiting-them-at-uk-cannabis-farms>; Max Daly, People are getting killed in Britain's cannabis farm wars, Vice, 5 May 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/people-are-getting-killed-in-britains-cannabis-farm-wars>; Stay Energy Safe, Cannabis farms: How to spot and report grow houses in the UK, <https://www.stayenergysafe.co.uk/more-on-energy-theft/cannabis-farms-grow-houses-uk>; Total Landlord Insurance, The growing threat of cannabis cultivation for landlords, 29 July 2025, <https://www.totallandlordinsurance.co.uk/knowledge-centre/growing-threat-of-cannabis-cultivation-for-landlords>.
 - 111 Interview 14 with a woman from Nghe An, Vietnam, now living in Germany, January 2026.
 - 112 UK National Crime Agency, NCA targets crime group suspected of operating slave labour cannabis farms, 25 January 2023, <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/nca-targets-crime-group-suspected-of-operating-slave-labour-cannabis-farms>.
 - 113 University of Cambridge, Cannabis farms are a modern slavery 'blind spot' for UK police, 15 September 2020, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/cannabis-farms-are-a-modern-slavery-blind-spot-for-uk-police-study-suggests>; Adam Ramiz, Paul Rock and Heather Strang, Detecting modern slavery on cannabis farms: The challenges of evidence, *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing*, 4 (August 2020), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41887-020-00052-1>.
 - 114 Tanja Cornelius et al, Human trafficking and exploitation of Vietnamese nationals in Germany, BKA, 1 August 2024, <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/Research/2023KKFHumanTraffickingOfVietnameseNationalsEN.html>.
 - 115 Ibid.
 - 116 Mimi Vu and Nadia Sebtaoui, Smuggling and trafficking from Vietnam to Europe, Forced Migration Review, June 2020, <https://www.fmreview.org/issue64/vu-sebtaoui>; Debbie Beadle and Leah Davison, Precarious journeys: Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe, Anti-Slavery International, Every Child Protected Against Trafficking UK and Pacific Links Foundation, March 2019, p 13, <https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Precarious-Journeys-full-report.pdf>.
 - 117 Federal Police Inspectorate for Crime Prevention Halle, *BPOL Halle: Fünf Festnahmen und 32 Durchsuchungen bei international agierender Bande in Deutschland und Tschechien*, Presse Portal, 9 April 2025, <https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/144602/6009567>.
 - 118 Tagesschau, *Festnahmen bei Razzien gegen Schleuserbanden*, 9 April 2025, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/razzia-menschenhandel-durchsuchungen-100.html>.
 - 119 Rodion Ebbighausen and Thao Nguyen, EU officials fight human-smuggling from Vietnam, DW, 22 December 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/human-trafficking-from-vietnam-to-europe-what-can-be-done/a-71097823>.
 - 120 Ibid.



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with 800 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net