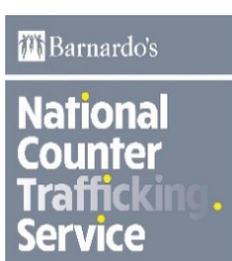




Vietnamese Culture
A Guide for Frontline Professionals



west midlands
police and crime
commissioner



CONTENTS

Project context	1
Greetings	2
Fear of Authorities	2
Religion	3
Culture	3
Diversity	4
Aspirations	4
Family and Community	5
Food	5
Key Dates and Celebrations	6
Acknowledgements	6

PROJECT CONTEXT

This resource aims to increase Vietnamese cultural knowledge amongst professionals who work with people from Vietnam; through doing so, improving professionals' engagement with survivors and perpetrators of crimes from the Vietnamese community. This resource is suitable for any frontline professional who works with anyone from Vietnam, although it targets professionals within policing, the criminal justice system and survivor support services. It was developed using a combination of desk-based research, consultation with statutory and non-statutory services, and co-design with Vietnamese people with lived experience. This resource is not specific to working with survivors and perpetrators of exploitation and it can be used in any sector.

Data from 2021 shows that the average monthly salary in Vietnam is 6.34 million Dong per month (£206.26). Surveys of employees in 150 different Vietnamese companies show that the average cost of living per month is 6.5 million VND (£211.39)¹. Exploitation is present in Vietnam. Sexual exploitation is the most common type of exploitation, followed by forced labour².

Data from the Home Office shows the numbers of Vietnamese survivors of exploitation are rising across the UK³. In addition to this, UK services have experienced challenges achieving positive outcomes for people from Vietnam. One example of this is the high numbers of people from Vietnam who are trafficked to the UK and forced to work in cannabis cultivation. If these survivors encounter law enforcement, they risk being wrongly criminalised for crimes they were forced to commit during their exploitation.

We believe that frontline professionals can use cultural awareness to build trust with people from Vietnam that they work with. This knowledge enables the professional to show that they understand what support someone from Vietnam may need to access as well as the reasons why someone from Vietnam may be hesitant to access support or cannot return home to Vietnam.

1. Wage Centre, (2021). Salary in Vietnam.

<https://wagecentre.com/work/work-in-asia-and-oceania/salary-in-vietnam>

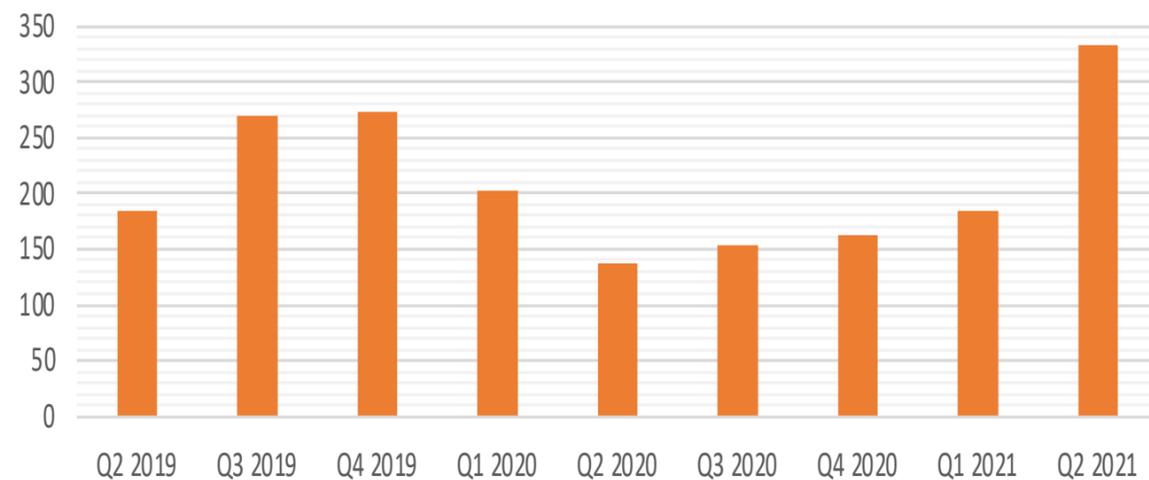
2. U.S Department of State (2021). 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Vietnam.

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/vietnam/>

3. Home Office, National Referral Mechanism Statistics.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-referral-mechanism-statistics>

■ Vietnamese Survivors of Modern Slavery in the UK



GREETINGS

Generally speaking, Vietnamese people shake hands when greeting and saying good-bye to one another.

However, the way individuals greet each other can change depending on the nature of the relationship between those participating in the greeting. For example, when greeting an older person, a Vietnamese person may bow their head as a mark of respect.

Vietnamese women are less likely than Vietnamese men to shake hands but they may still bow their heads. Kissing on the cheek is generally reserved for close friends and family.

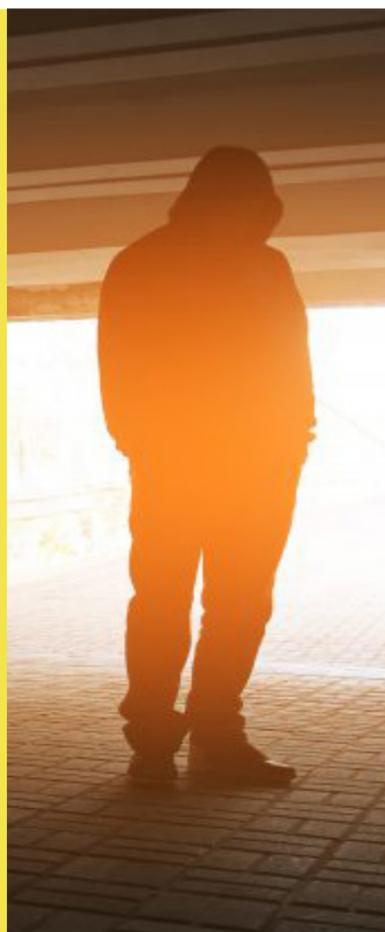
Adults will sometimes greet children with a gentle rub of the head, together with a welcoming smile.

FEAR OF AUTHORITIES

In general, Vietnamese people have a distrust of their own government, the police, the judicial system and many other forms of authority. There is a perception that these Vietnamese institutions are corrupt, lack empathy and are authoritarian in nature. This has naturally influenced their distrust of UK authorities.

Their trust/distrust of UK authorities may also be influenced by previous exposure or by their own individual circumstance. For example, a Vietnamese citizen with secure immigration status in the UK, is more likely to have confidence in, and a willingness to engage with authorities.

However, an individual who is vulnerable by way of their immigration status or their exploitation, is less likely to engage with authorities as they fear corruption and that any engagement may be to their detriment.



RELIGION

A large percentage of the population of Vietnam identify as non-religious (77.7%). Buddhism (14.9%) and Christian Catholicism (7.4%) are the two largest religions in Vietnam.

Buddhist ideas are influential in Vietnam, even for the non-religious, some visit pagodas (Buddhist temples) and eat vegetarian food at certain times of month despite being non-religious.

One fundamental Buddhist teaching is that of the 'Four Noble Truths'. They may be described as:

1. **Dukkha** – Suffering is an inescapable part of life.
2. **Samudaya** – Suffering stems from greed, ignorance, and hatred.
3. **Nirodha** – You can end suffering if you stop 'wanting'.
4. **Magga** – You can achieve enlightenment by following the 8-fold path.

There are several government-imposed conditions placed on religious practices in Vietnam, and many people have spoken about being arrested and persecuted on the grounds of their religion.

It is custom in Vietnam to commemorate deceased family members on the anniversary of their death. Vietnamese people will often return to their home village on the date that an ancestor/important family member died.

CULTURE

Vietnamese culture is very different to that in the UK. Family and community bonds are tighter, and they welcome direct conversation about things like earnings and personal matters.

Poverty is higher in Vietnam and may contribute to wanting to travel to the UK.

Food and faith are important, for example attending the temple to worship ancestors and at lunar new year eating foods like rice cake and sticky rice. For their mid-autumn festival moon cake is eaten.



DIVERSITY

Same sex relationships are legal in Vietnam, but they are not recognised in legislation and no anti-discrimination protections exist.

Life experiences will vary greatly between people raised in cities in Vietnam and those raised in more rural areas. This is largely due to people's opportunities to access education, financial opportunities, and the prevalence of traditional customs and practices.



ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations are individual, and can vary depending on someone's experience, gender, age, educational level, and background. However, underpinning these individual dreams are often some commonly shared aspirations for many Vietnamese people in the UK.

Feeling safe; being able to work legally; experiencing respect; and having a home can all be incredibly important. Education can be an important driver in Vietnamese culture with some people experiencing high expectations from families. However, some people are unable to access higher education due to socioeconomic factors such as lack of financial resources. As such, education can be very important for Vietnamese people in the UK: many want to learn English, develop their skills, and move up a career ladder.

The conditions in Vietnam can mean that moving abroad or to a larger city to work is a necessity for some people and can transform the lives of families from rural areas. The Vietnamese Dong is relatively weak, there is extreme poverty, and the country is increasingly seeing the impacts of climate change. However, as the economy in Vietnam strengthens, moving overseas can become less desirable, as people prefer to stay closer to their families.

It can also be very hard to live in the UK, with a language barrier, lack of community, legal restrictions on working, and being able to find and afford Vietnamese food. Some people from Vietnam work in high-demand low paying jobs such as nail bars, takeaways, and restaurants upon arrival in the UK. Many people's aspirations reflect being able to overcome these challenges, and live and work in safety with support around them.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Family is considered to be the most important element of Vietnamese society. Society is patriarchal with a hierarchical structure, where younger members of the family are expected to listen to and respect their elders. People from Vietnam are very respectful to those that are older than them even if this is someone who is just a few days older. In extreme cases, the importance of respect can be used to abuse or exploit younger members of the family. People are expected to always put their families first and leaving the family household can be emotionally very difficult.

In terms of the family structure, most families have children and most elderly parents live with their families. It is very common for multiple generations of a family to live in one household, particularly in villages and towns, and extended family is very important. People living in cities tend to have fewer children. There can be increased pressure for people to provide financially for their families which can lead to exploitation.

Community is a very important aspect of Vietnamese culture and there is a lot of interaction between community members, particularly in the countryside and villages. This can be both positive and negative in that the community pulls together in times of need, but people can also feel that there is a lack of privacy and may think that they are being judged by others. The Vietnamese community is very friendly and open, and neighbours usually help each other as much as they can.

FOOD

Food is a huge part of Vietnamese culture. People usually eat jasmine rice with at least two meals a day. Other common foods are green vegetables, tropical fruits such as citrus, mango, longans, lychees, melons, guavas, and coconuts. In particular areas of Vietnam, especially openly in the north, animal meat may be dog, cat, snake, porcupine, birds such as pigeons and swallows, and some types of insects. However, many Vietnamese people in big cities such as Hoi Chi Min do not eat these types of animal meat and see it used as a cultural slur.

Phở or 'fuh' is considered Vietnam's national dish, a soup dish consisting of broth, rice noodles, herbs, and meat. Pho is a popular food in Vietnam where it is served in households, street stalls and restaurants countrywide.

For the lunar new year, Vietnamese people usually eat rice cakes and sticky rice, and for the mid-autumn festival they will eat moon cake. For the cold food festival, they will eat floating cake, and on the 5th of May in the lunar calendar they will have fruit and rice wine to kill insects. Many people celebrate their birthdays with families, friends, and colleagues. There is usually a birthday cake with candles. People will have a meal together, which could be home cooked or at a restaurant.

KEY DATES AND CELEBRATIONS

All of the dates listed below are national holidays in Vietnam in 2022. Some dates will change every year depending on the occasion. The Tet Holiday is the most significant and widely celebrated public festival in Vietnam and marks the beginning of the Lunar New Year. Its significance is akin to Christmas in the UK. During Tet it is customary to prepare traditional food, clean, decorate the house, and spend time with family and friends.

Date (2022)	Celebration
1st January	International New Year's Day
3rd January	International New Year's Day Observed
25th January	Kitchen God Day
31st January	Vietnamese New Year's Eve
1st February	Vietnamese New Year
2nd to 5th February	Tet Holiday
10th April	Hung Kings Festival
30th April	Liberation Day/Reunification Day
1st May	International Labour Day
2nd May	International Day/Reunification Day observed
3rd May	International Labor Day observed
2nd September	Independence Day

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

West Midlands Anti Slavery Network, West Midlands Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Modern Slavery Organised Immigration Crime Programme – UK Home Office, Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service, West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council, West Yorkshire Police, Leeds City Council, Police Scotland, Migrant Help, National Crime Agency, UK Border Force in Vietnam and the UK, West Midlands Crown Prosecution Service, West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit, The Children's Society, Hope For Justice, National Probation Service – West Midlands, Sifa Fireside, Survivor Alliance, Adavu, Maria Doan and people from Vietnam who contributed their lived experience to the production of this resource. Booklet designed by Cardboard Zebra Creative.