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# Lorry deaths: Migrants are promised the earth but the reality is grim

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In high street nail bars and suburban cannabis farms across Britain the Vietnamese slave trade is flourishing. Crime gangs have trafficked across thousands of adults and children in the past decade, forcing them into labour to pay off the huge cost of making the journey to the West.

The trip can cost up to £33,000. One route is through Russia, across eastern Europe with an extended stay in France, then over the Channel hidden in lorries and containers.

Migrants from Vietnam are placed in refrigerated lorries more often than those from other countries, Pascal Marconville, the French state prosecutor in Boulogne-sur-Mer, said. They are persuaded to enter by smugglers setting the temperature at minus 4C “because no one would get in at minus 20”.

“We have noticed that this is a technique used particularly by Vietnamese traffickers,” he said. “And they often put a lot of people in the lorries at the same time — more than 20 people and sometimes more than 30.

“They tell these people: ‘Look, it’s not that cold, all you need to do is to wrap up warmly’. But when they get to the port they turn the temperature to minus 20C because they know that police officers would find it suspicious if they saw a refrigerated lorry with a temperature of minus 4C. Most of the lorries are stopped in Calais, and it’s a good thing, because these refrigerated lorries are death traps.”

Danielle Tan, author of a report on Vietnamese migration to Europe, said that some migrants who borrowed money from loan sharks could not pay it back and had to stop along the way in eastern Europe for months to work.

In the nine years to 2018, the latest period for which figures are available, 3,187 Vietnamese adults and children were referred to the UK authorities as potential victims of human trafficking.

Last year 484 of the 702 referred were for labour exploitation, 92 for sexual exploitation, 22 for domestic servitude, one for organ harvesting and 103 for unknown exploitation. Half of those referred were children.

Gangs promise the migrants a job in a “medicinal herbs plantation” and a salary of up to up to £36,000 a year, Ms Tan’s report said. When they get to Britain, they discover that the plantation is in fact a cannabis farm. Some are unaware that the activity is illegal.

Three teenagers were discovered last week tending a cannabis farm in a disused industrial unit in Rochdale. Police said initial inquiries suggested they had been trafficked from Vietnam to the UK and were being “criminally exploited” to tend the plants, thought to have a street value of £850,000.

Migrants are also promised earnings of up to £1,500 a month in Vietnamese-owned nail bars in London, according to a report, Precarious Journeys.

The reality is very different. Police believe cash-only nail bars across the country are fronts for organised crime gangs exploiting Vietnamese migrants by paying them low wages or nothing. Officers who raided Nail Bar Deluxe in Bath in 2016 found two teenage girls sleeping in a loft above the salon and working without being paid. One of the victims told officers that she had arrived in “the back of a lorry” via France.

### **Scale of misery**

3,187

Vietnamese adults and children referred to UK authorities as potential victims of human trafficking between 2009 and 2018.

702

Total referred last year

484

Referred for labour exploitation last year

92

Referred for sexual exploitation

1,346