GLOBAL FUND TO **END MODERN SLAVERY**

Examining the prevalence of labor trafficking among Vietnamese migrant workers in Taiwan and Japan

Labor export and associated remittances have become an important solution by the Vietnamese government to create jobs and alleviate poverty in rural communities. Each year, tens of thousands of Vietnamese leave the country to work overseas. Japan and Taiwan have in recent years become the primary destinations, accounting for the majority of the country's total labor force working overseas. Along with the growing number of migrant exports came the reports of unfair labor practices in recent years. This research team was contracted to estimate the prevalence of labor trafficking victimization and other abusive employment practices among Vietnamese migrant workers to Japan and Taiwan. The survey was conducted in two provinces (Thai Binh and Ha Tinh) known for their high concentration of migrant laborers.

A conventional multi-stage probability-based sampling was employed to reach N=5,017 migrant workers across the two provinces who recently had returned from Japan and Taiwan. Respondents were asked to recall their work experience during their most recent overseas employment.

Defining Labor Trafficking

The research team, which included experts from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, John Jay College, and the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, applied a two-step qualifying threshold, which this team had used in several other studies, for defining what counts as a possible case of labor trafficking[1]: (1) individuals must have experienced abuses that were coercive/deceptive in nature, and be (2) unable to leave the situation without incurring significant forms of cost/penalty.

The research team inquired on a range of labor abuses that they divided into two broad categories — restricted freedom and coercive behavior against a person or their property. When a respondent indicated at least one form of abuse, they were asked about their ability to exit that particular job. If the worker reporting being unable to exit their job without incurring significant forms of penalty, they were labeled as a case of potential labor trafficking.

The findings below summarize the frequency with which workers experienced various forms of abuse as well as their ability to exit their job without penalty.

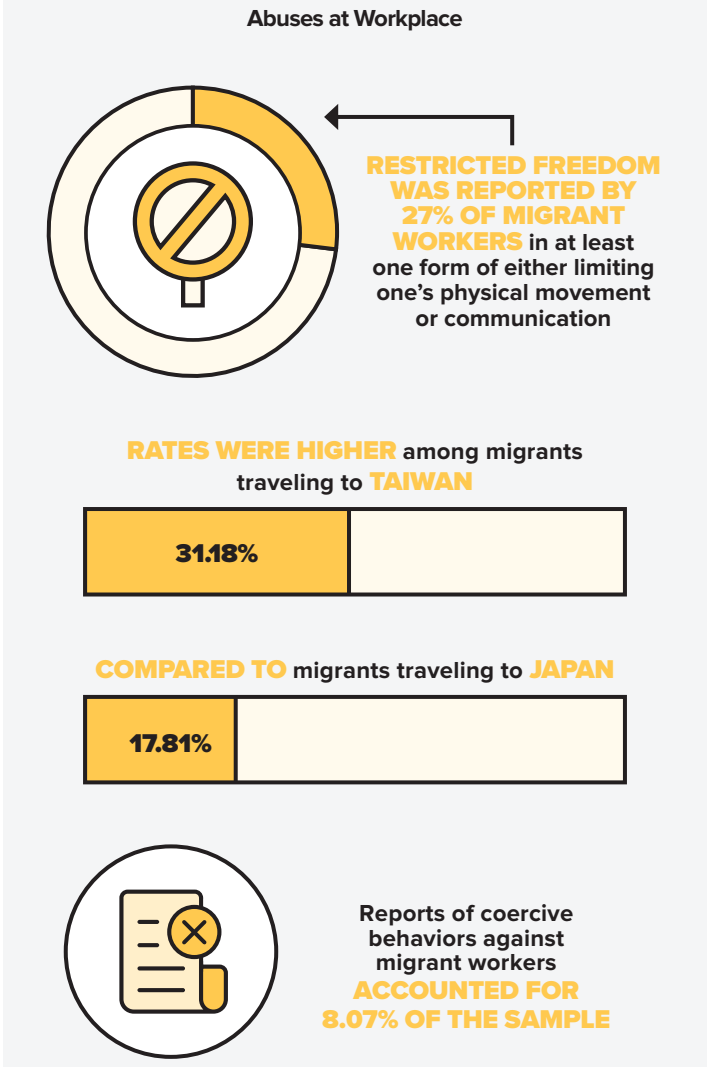
Abuses at Workplace

- Overall, 27% (n=1353) of migrant workers reported experiencing at least one form of restricted freedom either limiting physical movement or communication. Rates were higher among migrants traveling to Taiwan (31.18%) compared to Japan (17.81%).
  - The most frequent restriction of personal freedom was the **confiscation of identification paperwork**, accounting for 13.10% of the total sample. This practice was far less common in Japan (2.46%) than in Taiwan (18.0%).
  - **Forbidden to leave the work site** ranked second, accounting for 8.01% of the sample -Taiwan (8.86%) / Japan (6.13%).
- Reports of coercive behaviors[2] against a migrant worker's physical integrity and property, accounting for 8.07% of the sample (n=405). Taiwan (8.95%) / Japan (6.25%).
  - **Involuntary wage deduction and/or confiscation of assets** were reported by 3.67% of the sample.
  - **Ostracism/exclusion** accounted for 3.41% of the sample.
  - **Actual or threatened physical/sexual violence** was rare, with most measures registering less than 1% of the sample.

Exit Penalties

As the second step in the screening threshold for establishing a possible case of labor trafficking, respondents who reported having experienced any forms of the listed workplace abuses were asked whether they quit or were unable to leave. Those who were unable to leave were asked about workplace conditions. A total of 1,483 respondents reported having experienced at least one type of the listed abuses at workplace, making up 29.56% of the total sample[3]. Of these migrant workers, 77.81% (n=1,154) remained at the job site. The most common reasons cited by those who remained at the job were as follows:

- **Fear of financial penalty** (loss of accrued earnings) was the top reason that prevented workers from leaving the abusive work environment.



- The second most cited factor that prevented migrant workers from leaving an abusive work environment was **withholding one's identification papers**[4].
- **Feeling stranded in a foreign county and nowhere to go** was the third most-cited factor that prevented workers from leaving abusive work environments.

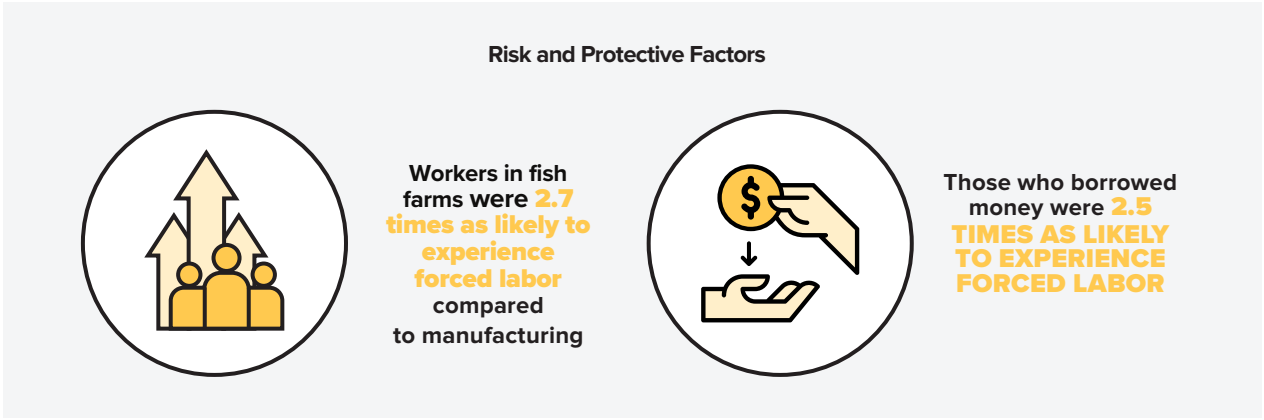
Prevalence of Forced Labor

Only respondents who reported having experienced at least one form of abuse at the work place and were unable to exit their job due to fear of penalty, were counted as a possible case of forced labor. In this study, a total of 13.65% of the sample (N=685) of the total sample met this threshold. When disaggregating by destination, 8.33% of workers who had most recently traveled to Japan met the threshold while 16.09% of workers who had most recently traveled to Taiwan were counted as probable cases of forced labor.

Risk and Protective Factors

Finally, in an effort to identify at-risk or protective factors associated with the likelihood of forced labor victimization, we analyzed demographic profiles, employment destination, type of labor sector, and recruitment processes.

- Those between the ages of 30-40 were 17% more likely to have experienced forced labor than younger workers.
- Being married increased the odds of being victimized by 39% relative to those unmarried.
- Those having obtained training in trade schools or college education were 27% less likely to encounter forced labor.
- Working in Taiwan increased the likelihood of encountering forced labor by 71%, relative working in Japan.
- Relative to migrant workers employed in manufacturing:
  - Workers in fish farms were 2.74 times as likely to encounter forced labor.
  - Working in apparel/textile industry increased the odds of encountering forced labor by 60%.
  - Working construction jobs increased odds of victimization by 33%.
  - Working in healthcare reduced odds of victimization by 40%.
  - Working in food processing decreased odds of victimization by 41%.
- Those who borrowed money to finance their trip overseas were 2.56 times as likely to have experienced forced labor as those who did not.



Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study quantified the rate of forced labor among a sample of returned Vietnamese migrants from Japan and Taiwan. The findings showed that 13.65% of the sample could be characterized as having experienced forced labor while working overseas. If one were to extrapolate that ratio to the number of migrant workers who had migrated during the same period of 2012-2016 (274,890 to Taiwan and 107,975 to Japan) as that of the study sample, more than 50,000 of them may have been subjected to forced labor while abroad. In other words, if these findings were of any indication, **the victims of human trafficking would number in the tens of thousands among those who worked in Japan and Taiwan.**

This study also helped to identify sectors that may be more prone to forced labor abuses. Sectors such as fish farms and apparel work may require **heightened monitoring and compliance measures**. It also identified that older, less educated workers faced increased risks of being victimized, suggesting the need for **greater awareness raising, screening of potential employers, and pre-departure training** for these prospective migrant workers. Further, the lack of agency felt by workers when facing abuses points to the importance of **improved mechanisms to handle workers' employment related grievances**, specifically the ability for workers to lodge complaints against their employer and access appropriate remedy without fear of retribution. Institutions supporting workers from both sending and destination countries can collaborate with the private sector for improved processes that can simultaneously be good for workers and for business.

Results demonstrate that there is a greater role to be played by the Vietnamese government to tighten its oversight over the recruitment agencies and official labor export agreements with overseas employers. At a minimum, the government can explore ways to reduce the debt burden incurred on prospective migrant workers, such as implementing **'no fee' or significantly reduced fee recruitment models** as the standard for overseas labor employment. This would address the finding that borrowing money to finance an overseas job was one of the main predictors of labor trafficking victimization.

1. For the purposes of this study, the terms 'labor trafficking' and 'forced labor' have been used interchangeably throughout this report.
2. Coercive behavior against a person or their property can largely be understood as 'violence' in the framework that includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuses.
3. Respondents may indicate more than one type of workplace abuse.
4. In this study, the research team treated withholding a person's identification paper both as an abuse and a deterrence to prevent someone from exiting the abusive work environment.