Child Labour & Migration
From Hue to Saigon, Vietnam

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Hue, Vietnam – September 2013
Acknowledgements

This report refers to data collected between 1 to 5 January 2011 inclusive in Hai Tien village and Vinh Hung Commune, Phu Loc district, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam, in relation to ‘Child Labour and Migration: From Hue to Saigon, Vietnam’, a study made under the Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project ‘Delivering Effective Protection to Victims and Prevention of Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region’ (the Project) led by Professor Susan Kneebone (Chief Investigator), Faculty of Law, Monash University, Australia. Dr. Sallie Yea was employed under the Project and supervised the collection of data by a team of researchers who were employed by the Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation. A first draft of the report was compiled by Dr. Sallie Yea with the co-operation of the team of researchers, and was subsequently substantially revised and updated by Professor Susan Kneebone with the assistance of Ms Madhavi Ligam. The support of the ARC for this study is gratefully acknowledged. We also thank Mr. Michael Brosowski AM and Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation for their cooperation and support for this study.

The researchers, Tran Thi Kim Tuyen, Nguyen Thi Hong and Dinh Thi Ngoc Quy from Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation, and Dr. Sallie Yea, benefitted from the assistance and support of local governments, participants and colleagues. They sincerely thank:

- the Red Cross Chapter of Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam;
- local government and other officials at the Vinh Hung Commune, Phu Loc district, Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam;
- 57 families \ households and 10 children at the Vinh Hung commune and Hai Tien who agreed to participate in this study; and
- Mr. Michael Brosowski and all colleagues of Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation.

The researchers are grateful for the hospitality that they received whilst conducting surveys and interviews in Vinh Hung commune. They received help and support from Mr. Do Hieu and his family. The researchers would like to express deep gratitude to them for their kind hospitality during their stay.
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**Executive Summary**

Child migration for paid work which results in exploitation is an emerging issue in Vietnam, particularly for child migrants from the central provinces of Vietnam. This research aimed to explore the background and causes leading to child labour migration, the experiences that children have of working as migrants and the process by which they return to their village. It focused on children who migrated from the central province of Hue to Saigon (or Ho Chi Minh City) in the south of Vietnam.

The research was conducted between 1 to 5 January 2011 inclusive in Hai Tien village and Vinh Hung Commune, Phu Loc district, Thua Thien Hue Province (Hue Province), Vietnam (see Maps 1-3) using ethical procedures approved by the Monash University Human Research and Ethics Committee.¹

Parents from fifty-seven (57) households (either one or both parents) of migrant working children and ten (10) children who had previously worked in Saigon participated in the research. The parents were randomly selected from the local government’s list of households which identified which families had children working away from home and which did not. The parents interviewed were divided into the following three groups:

- **Group 1:** parents from households whose children had returned to Hue Province from working in Saigon - ten (10) households;
- **Group 2:** parents from households who currently had at least one child working in Saigon - thirty-two (32) households;

¹ Application CF10/0173-2010000057: ‘Delivering Effective Protection to Victims and Prevention of Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region’.
Group 3: parents from households who had never sent children to work - fifteen (15) households;

Group 4: children who had returned to Hue Province from a labour migration experience - ten (10) children.

The aims of the project were:

- To understand the causes and reasons for child labour migration from Hue Province;
- To profile the recruiters of child labour migrants and the types of establishments where children are recruited to work;
- To collect information about the living and working conditions and types of work performed by migrant children in Saigon;
- To understand the emotional and psychological needs of the children who have returned from work in Saigon and to help them realize their future working goals and aspirations;
- To work towards the reduction and elimination of the worst forms of child labour for children from Hue Province.

The key findings of this study as contained in this Report are:

- The children who are the subject of this report were aged between 11 and 14 years;
- The decision to migrate was usually taken by the family when it was faced with dire financial circumstances. In some cases, children migrated on their own volition without informing their families of their intention to migrate;
- Child migrant labour is normalized in the source communities where families average five (5) children;
• Most recruitment was performed by someone known to and trusted by the family. For that reason parents did not enquire about or know the terms of the contract relating to their child’s work. In most cases a verbal contract was involved;

• In most cases the children and the parents had little contact once the children were in Saigon;

• In most cases children were exploited at the destination. Such exploitation included debt bondage and non-payment or under-payment of wages, and or harsh and abusive working and living conditions. In Saigon the children were employed in factories, private houses (for domestic work), service businesses (such as retails shops or food outlets), or small scale sub-contracting businesses (such as in the garment or light furnishings industry) located in apartment buildings or private houses in the suburbs.

The authors of the report took care to ensure that ethical procedures and protocols were complied with\(^2\) when they gathered information from all participants including children (Group 4). Chapter 4.2 of the Australian Government’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research deals with the ethical considerations that apply to children and young people. Under the National Statement, it is cautioned that research about or concerning young people raises ethical considerations about their capacity to understand the research and also warns about possible coercion that may occur by parents, peers, researchers or others involved in the project. When the research was conducted, the children’s and their parent’s consent was obtained. Parents and children were approached in their communities and invited to participate. Remuneration for involvement and the objectives of the research were explained to prospective participants. Signed

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\(^2\)Monash University Human Research and Ethics Committee (MUHREC), Application CF10/0173-2010000057: ‘Delivering Effective Protection to Victims and Prevention of Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region’. 
consent forms were collected from participants and information forms were distributed to all participants. Further, to ensure privacy and to maximize disclosure, questionnaires were administered in the relative privacy of the participants’ homes. No vulnerable children or children currently deployed in Saigon were included in the research.

Questionnaires were administered to all four groups (Groups 1 to 4). The questionnaires aimed to gather information about the families’ financial circumstances, levels of education of children and parents, whether there was a family history of migration, the understanding of ‘child labour’ amongst sending families and communities, as well as the living and working conditions of the children and the type of work undertaken in Saigon. Literacy and formal education levels were low amongst all groups, so the questionnaires were simply phrased and aimed to elicit closed answers.

Overlap between child labour and trafficking

A discussion of child labour migration within, or from, Vietnam also touches upon issues of human trafficking. The study found that, in some cases, children were exploited either at the stage of recruitment or at the end destination and therefore their experiences could fall within the ambit of the trafficking definition. Article 3(a) of the Trafficking Protocol defines trafficking as:

… the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the
prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.³

However in the case of children, it is only necessary to prove ‘recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child’, ‘for the purpose of exploitation’ (Article 3(c) of the Trafficking Protocol.)⁴ In the case of children, the key to establishing ‘trafficking’ is whether there is an exploitative purpose. It is not necessary to establish exploitation as a means or process as in the case of adults. The research found that the decision to migrate was often taken by the family as a whole usually when it was faced with dire financial circumstances. However, the issue of consent is irrelevant in the case of children because there can be no consent as the Trafficking Protocol definition acknowledges (Article 3(b)).

In other cases the research found that either ‘informal’ or ‘formal’ recruiters approached children about moving to Saigon for employment. In some cases, the family members and villagers knew the recruiters. The recruiters would inform the families about the type of work available in Saigon and the wages that the child could expect to receive. ‘Trafficking’ is a relevant way to characterise children’s labour migration experiences since understandings of the work and conditions agreed to by both parents and children themselves deviated substantially from the actual conditions in Saigon. Children were expected to work for many hours during the day doing demanding physical labour. Some endured physical and sexual abuse from employers. As discussed below, the exploitation they suffered could also be characterized as child labour including hazardous work, and the worst form of child labour.

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⁴Note that a ‘child’ is defined for these purposes as any person under eighteen (18) years of age.
Thus the findings of this study touch upon the broader discourse of trafficking. The findings can be categorized along three broad themes: first, the reasons why children decided to migrate; secondly, their experiences at destination; and lastly, the process by which they returned to their home villages. The major findings and conclusions are summarized below.

**Reasons for migrating**

Parents were determined to play an important role in allowing and arranging for their children to migrate to Saigon for work. The main motivation for sending their children was related to the family’s marginal economic circumstances, and or high debt levels, coupled with their inability to provide for their children’s educational costs. Some parents thought children were performing poorly at school and had few prospects for successfully completing either primary or, more commonly, secondary school. The findings also showed that in other cases children took the initiative to migrate themselves, often under the influence of friends and peers, including both those who had previously migrated and those who had not.

‘Child labour’ was ‘normalised’ in the minds of many parents in the sending communities in Hue. For parents who previously had (Group 1) or currently had children working in Saigon (Group 2), sending children to work was acceptable because many of their neighbours also engaged in the practice and (in some cases) benefited financially from it. Other factors leading to the widespread acceptance of child labour in the sending communities were: the potential for supplementing the family’s income; the hope that the children’s life chances in terms of income, experiences, and opportunities for job advancement in the future would improve if they migrated; and the financial savings to the parents gained by not having to educate or feed their children. Further, in the sending
communities, which were primarily fishing-based income households, there were high levels of unpaid child work within households and within their family fishing business. Part of the reason for the ‘normalisation’ of child labour in these communities can be found in the utilisation of children’s labour at home, before their entry into paid employment in Saigon. For those parents who had never sent a child away to work (Group 3), awareness-raising through radio, or information circulated through neighbors and friends comprised the main channels through which they received information on the dangers of child labour.

**Recruitment process and labour conditions in Saigon**

Although recruiters and employers were not included as participants in the research, recruiter typologies were developed from the participants’ responses. Recruiters fell into several categories: those who were well acquainted with families (neighbours, relatives); those who were professional recruiters from outside the participants’ communities but who spoke the Hue dialect and were therefore most likely to originate from neighboring districts in the central province of Hue; and finally those who were from Saigon and may have either been owners of factories or recruiters hired to locate children for work. Despite these differences there were similarities in the recruitment process which included a lack of written employment contracts (only verbal agreements were made) and a lack of clarity about the nature of the work and working conditions in Saigon.

In general, migrant labour children and their parents or other family members had very little contact with each other whilst the child was working in Saigon. Parents either had no, or only filtered information about their children’s life in Saigon. In part the reason for this was that children did not disclose their actual circumstances to their parents because they were concerned that parents would
worry about them and in part because the children were ashamed to admit failure in their efforts to assist their family financially.

The most common sites where children worked in Saigon were factories, private houses (domestic work), service businesses (such as retails shops or food outlets), or small scale sub-contracting businesses (such as in the garment or light furnishings industry) located in apartment buildings or private houses in the suburbs. In the latter industry children participated in making a few simple stages of the product, and in the former they assisted with the chores at the home or food shop. Until 2005 there was a large street flower selling racquet involving exploited migrant children, but this racquet was largely broken at the time of the research. Living conditions of migrant labour children were characterized by a lack of sleep, food, holidays or rest days (many children did not have any days off) and a lack of treatment and care when they were sick. The average age of the children was between 11 and 14 years, and they worked a minimum of 12 hours per day (with many participants stating they worked up to 18 hours per day). Some children worked in multiple jobs at the same time, such as working in garment factories and performing domestic work or baby-sitting. Hence, their total working time could not be calculated.

Despite working long hours, children were paid only between 6-10 million VND (US $300 - $500) per year.\(^5\) Children would not be paid at all if they failed to complete a contract (one full year working). Thus children were placed in situations of bondage in their workplaces. Before sending a child to Saigon for work, some parents received a part of their child’s salary in advance and many children borrowed money from their employers, thus placing them in even greater debt. For those

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\(^5\) In January 2011 at the time this research was conducted US Dollar – Vietnam dong exchange rate is computed at US$1 = 20,000 VND. This is the relevant rate of exchange for all references to VND in this report.
who completed their contracts the amount of money they brought back to their parents was often paltry when these advances were deducted.

**Exit, Return & Reintegration**

Through interviews with child returnees (Group 4) the children’s return to the home community was also examined. Relational difficulties with parents, depression and stress were commonly reported. In particular, the results of the study revealed that many children faced difficulties reintegrating into a school environment especially because they felt ashamed of being in a class with younger classmates. They fell behind in their progress and received differential treatment by teachers. Other children wished to receive vocational training, but a lack information, funds and support made that goal unattainable, or they were simply too young.

The research was undertaken at two locations of Thua Thien Hue province and documents a neglected child rights issue in Vietnam, namely the deployment of minors in situations of forced or bonded labour in the context of internal child labour migration. Specifically, the study identifies the causes of child labour migration and the difficulties and problems that children and families face when returning home. Several recommendations are made concerning the reduction of the exploitative migrant child labour situation from the Central Hue region, in particular, and Vietnam in general. These include:

- the need to provide livelihood assistance to economically marginalised families;
- the need to provide learning support and opportunities to undertake training courses for returned and vulnerable children;
- the creation of more opportunities for rural children to access better learning conditions and places of entertainment to encourage their positive socialization.
Apart from these direct interventions in sending communities, there is a need for more rigorous awareness raising campaigns directed to parents, officials of local government and the community about the risks associated with child migrant labour.
1 Introduction

1.1 Child labour as a Global Problem

In 2006 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) set the ambitious target that it and its member states commit themselves to the elimination of all worst forms of child labour by 2016. The ILO’s Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC) prepared estimates on the involvement of children in work and these estimates were contrasted with figures which the ILO published in 2002. The results which emerged were described as providing a truly “dynamic global picture” which was “remarkable” because it showed that, “[c]hild work is declining, and the more harmful the work and the more vulnerable the children involved, the faster the decline.” The key results were summarized in the report as follows:

[24] The new estimates suggest that there were about 317 million economically active children aged 5 to 17 in 2004, of whom 218 million could be regarded as child labourers. Of the latter, 126 million were engaged in hazardous work. The corresponding figures for the narrower age group of 5 to 14 year olds are 191 million economically active children, 166 million child labourers, and 74 million children in hazardous work. The number of child labourers in both age groups of 5-14 and 5-17 fell by 11 per cent over the four years from 2000 to 2004. However, the decline was much greater for those engaged in hazardous work: by 26 per cent for the 5-17 age group, and 33 per cent for 5 to 14 year-olds.

[25] The incidence of child labor [sic] (percentage of children working) in 2004 is estimated at 13.9 per cent for the 5-17 age group, compared to 16 per cent in 2000. The proportion of girls among child labourers, however, remained steady.

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7 Ibid, p. 5.
9 Ibid.
The economic activity rate for 5-14 years olds declined in 2004 in all regions with Latin America and the Caribbean experiencing a rapid decline. The table below shows the regional breakdown of children’s economic activity for the years 2000 and 2004 for the age group 5-14.

**Table 1: Regional trends in the number of working children 5-14 years old (2000-2004)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Child population (million)</th>
<th>Economically active children (million)</th>
<th>Activity Rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>655.1</td>
<td>650.0</td>
<td>127.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>108.1</td>
<td>111.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>166.8</td>
<td>186.8</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Regions</td>
<td>269.3</td>
<td>258.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>1199.3</td>
<td>1206.6</td>
<td>211.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the ILO’s report of 2010 it was found that progress was not fast enough or comprehensive enough to reach the target of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016. It found that “[c]hild labour among boys and young people in the 15–17 age group has risen. In sub-Saharan Africa progress has stalled – this is disappointing. Africa had been identified as a region needing particular attention in our last Report. The bottom line is that some 215 million children across the world are still trapped in child labour.” In 2012 there were still approximately 168 million children in the world who were caught in child labour, with 85 million in hazardous work. As in 2010 the largest number of child labourers was in the Asia-Pacific region (77.7 million), followed by sub-

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10 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Saharan Africa (59 million) and Latin America and the Caribbean (12.5 million).\textsuperscript{15}

The director of the ILO’s International Programs on Eliminating Child Labour, Ms. Constance Thomas, has said that:

Most child labour is rooted in poverty. The way to tackle the problem is clear. We must ensure that all children have the chance to go to school, we need social protection systems that support vulnerable families – particularly at times of crisis – and we need to ensure that adults have a chance of decent work. These measures, combined with effective enforcement of laws that protect children, provide the way forward.\textsuperscript{16}

More information is needed on the causes or motivating factors that lead children to migrate for labour in Vietnam and indeed around the world. The findings of this report indicate that children migrate because they experience extreme financial hardship at home and they hope to assist their families by earning an income. The children are often introduced to opportunities for work through friends, relatives or other village members.

\section*{1.2 Child labour in Vietnam}

\subsection*{1.2.1 Internal economic situation and labour migration within Vietnam}

Internal labour migration in Vietnam is not a new phenomenon, but rather, has been a defining part of its history.\textsuperscript{17} Since reunification in 1975, internal migration has occurred largely as a consequence of government led programmes or through spontaneous migration.\textsuperscript{18} Historically, migration flows from rural to urban destinations, especially to the largest cities, were strictly controlled through

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p.17.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Veronique Marx and Katherine Fleischer, ‘Internal Migration – Opportunities and Challenges for Socio-Economic Development in Viet Nam’ (Report, United Nations in Vietnam, 2010), p. 20.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, pp. 20-25.
\end{itemize}
migration policies and the household registration system (ho khau). This system was aimed at controlling population mobility, especially spontaneous inflows of rural residents.\(^{19}\) Such explicit barriers to movement were effectively abolished by Vietnam’s Constitution and Labour Code which assert the legal right of individuals to choose freely their place of residence and work.\(^{20}\) However, there still exist some restrictions on rural to urban internal migration in Vietnam, such as having to pay for a temporary working permit or requiring employers to contribute to city welfare funds.\(^{21}\)

Economic development has played a key role in internal migration in Vietnam. According to the Strategic Information Response Network (SIREN), key aspects of Vietnam’s internal migration situation are:

(1) strong rural to urban migration, which sees 45% of the country’s population live in cities by 2020; (2) the major flow towards the South; and (3) the existence of the Ho Khau residence registration system, which is slowing down the migration to cities but has had a negative impact on migrants’ lives. Doi Moi [economic renovation] has played a key role in shaping Vietnam since its introduction in the 1980s.\(^{22}\)

Doi Moi was initiated in 1986 and was intended to shift the Vietnamese economy from a centrally planned one into a multi-sectoral, market driven economy. Doi Moi sparked rapid economic growth due to foreign direct investment, attracting labour and encouraging migration to areas where jobs were in good supply.\(^{23}\) Between 1990 and 2004, the GDP tripled and the average annual growth rate

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\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 10.

\(^{21}\) Ibid, pp. 9-10.

\(^{22}\) Strategic Information Response Network (SIREN), Human Trafficking Data Sheet, United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), November 2008, Vol. 1.0.

\(^{23}\) Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, pp. 20-21.
was 7.5%. The rate of poverty dropped from 58% in 1993 to 24% in 2004. Another trend was the decrease in the viability of rural livelihoods in agriculture and traditional products.  

Demographic trends have also shaped internal migration trends. It is estimated that the working age population will outnumber the dependent population for 30 years and nearly 1 million young people will enter the labour market each year. This will most likely cause high migration results as young people move to areas with a high concentration of employment. Environmental factors also influence migration patterns. These factors include severe coastal weather events, shoreline erosion, flooding, rise in sea levels and a disruption to agriculture. According to Marx and Fleischer, migration will become a coping mechanism for people dealing with such environmental impacts.  

Today, there is extensive internal migration within Vietnam. For example, during the five years preceding the 1999 census, nearly 4.5 million persons changed their place of residence in Vietnam. These people constituted 6.5% of the total population aged five and over. This internal migration is usually directed from rural to urban areas. For example, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) is the largest gainer of inter-provincial migration, followed by Hanoi. Internal migrants are predominantly young (over half are under 25 years old). As cited in Marx and Fleischer, the 2009 census found that 6.6 million people (approximately 7.7% of the population) over the age of 5 changed their place of

25 Ibid.
27 Ibid, 22.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid, pp. 5-6.
33 Ibid, p. 6.
residence to a different administration unit between 2004 and 2009.\textsuperscript{35} In the 1999 census, 53.6\% of migrants were women and 43.6\% were men.\textsuperscript{36} According to Marx and Fleischer, these figures are likely to be higher because they probably exclude seasonal, temporary and return migrants.\textsuperscript{37}

The Ministry of Planning and Investment General Statistic Office’s 2009 Report found that the census results show that migrants tend to be young people, especially between the ages of 15 to 29 with the median age being 25.\textsuperscript{38} Further, there were a greater number of female migrants than male migrants in the age group of 15 to 29 years.\textsuperscript{39} The 1999 census found that 53\% of migrants moved from rural to urban areas such as Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Hanoi, Hai Phong and Da Nang.\textsuperscript{40} Migrants who moved from rural to rural areas did so to move from areas of low productivity to high productivity.\textsuperscript{41}

\subsection*{1.2.2 Patterns of child labour in Vietnam}

Vietnam is a country with a young population with approximately 31\% of the total population aged between 0 -17 years old. Economic growth in Vietnam in recent years has been quite rapid and has prompted the strong development of private enterprise, small and medium scale businesses, and families businesses. Whilst this has created many new jobs in Vietnam, particularly in the major urban centers, it has also created a demand for the use of child labour.

\textsuperscript{35} Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 23.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 26.
The Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY), published in 2003, is the largest and most comprehensive survey of youth ever undertaken in Vietnam. The survey involved 7,584 youth aged 14 to 25 years from 42 provinces across the country, and was produced by the Ministry of Health, General Statistics Office, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The survey found that 32% of female participants and 27% of male participants had lived away from home for one month or more.\textsuperscript{42} It was found that:

The main reasons for living away from home include earning money (46.2%), studying (25.9%) and holidays (17.3%). Rural young people report living away from home more often than their urban counterparts (50.5% compared to 31.2%).\textsuperscript{43}

54.9% of young people surveyed had worked for pay at some time, and at the time of the survey 34.5% were currently engaged in paid work.\textsuperscript{44} In the 14-17 years age group, 14% had engaged in paid work whilst 41.2% of the 18-21 years age group had engaged in paid work.\textsuperscript{45} Twice as many rural youth worked before 15 years (15%) compared to urban (7.3%).\textsuperscript{46} Reasons for engaging in underage work included poverty, wanting to support the family and exploitation.\textsuperscript{47}

The ILO’s study of child domestic workers in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) found that children were introduced to their first job by relatives, parents or friends, respectively: 35.5%, 29% and 16.1%.\textsuperscript{48} The report found that 38.7% of the child domestic workers gave up their first jobs due to low income, 16.1% quit their job because they were not sufficiently fed, and 19.4% of female workers said they quit their job because of an excessive workload.\textsuperscript{49} Such situations are often more complex than just blatant exploitation by demonstrating the ways in which children are not passive victims.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} International Labour Organisation, Child Domestic Workers in Ho Chi Minh City: Survey Report, 2006, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, p. 37.
but can often choose to migrate and earn an income.50

Thousands of children flock to the south of Vietnam, especially to Saigon, to earn a living after every Tet (New Year) Holiday. They usually migrate from Thua Thien Hue province in Central Vietnam, especially in the coastal communes such as Phu Dien, Phu Hai, Thuan An town (Phu Vang district), and the Phu Loc district cities of Hien Vinh, Vinh Hung, Vinh Giang, Dien Loc, and Phu Loc town. These children predominantly come from poor families, families with multiple siblings, and or where the parents work in fishing jobs in the Tam Giang lagoon. Having a livelihood based on the fishing industry is quite precarious as it is weather dependent and the amount of seafood in the lagoon declines every year. This has resulted in increasing numbers of families falling into financial difficulties. This constitutes one of the main reasons that parents in the coastal communes in Hue let their children go to Saigon, in particular, and the southern provinces, in general, to work.

1.3 Responses to internal adult labour migration

The administration and implementation of internal migration policy in Vietnam is not specifically assigned to a particular ministry in Vietnam. The effect of this, according to Marx and Fleischer, is that no one ministry has any plan or specific policy “tailored to the needs and risks of spontaneous economic migrants.”51

Rather, migration related social policy comes under the purview of many different ministries. The Ministry of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is responsible for employment and vocational training. As part of this mandate, one of its primary responsibilities is alleviating poverty

50 Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, p. 32.
51 Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, p. 16.
which means that it plays a large role in labour and population relocation programmes. The major units in MOLISA that work on migrant issues are:

- The Department for Employment Policy;
- The Department for Social Protection; and
- The Department of Overseas Labour.

The Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB) was established to negotiate and implement the labour export agreements. It establishes and regulates the Labour Management Boards placed in the Vietnamese embassies in countries with a large population of Vietnamese labour migrants. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is responsible for the development of ‘new economic zones’. Due to this mandate, MARD is in charge of rural-ward movement, mostly organised migration. In recent years MARD recognised the growing significance of spontaneous movement and started taking into consideration the flows of spontaneous migrants in its policies as well.

Finally, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) is responsible for the registration of temporary migrants and directly manages the household registration system (ho khau). In its function to maintain national security, the MPS, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), is responsible for immigration. Recently under the 2011 National Action Plan Combating Human Trafficking for the period of 2011 - 2015, the MPS has started

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52 Dang, above n 19, p. 5.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid, p. 3.
55 Ibid, p. 4.
56 Ibid, p. 5.
57 Ibid.
investigating human trafficking and smuggling cases in cooperation with the Border Guard Command (BGC).\textsuperscript{58}

Internal migration is mentioned in the \textit{Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the Period 2001-2010} and also the \textit{Socio-Economic Development Programme 2001-2010}\.\textsuperscript{59} However, Marx and Fleischer criticize both documents because they aim to reduce spontaneous migration rather than providing a framework for the protection of migrants\.\textsuperscript{60}

The government’s \textit{bo khau}, or household registration system, controls and monitors changes to people’s place of residence by classifying households into different categories that provide different entitlements\.\textsuperscript{61} Household registration is required for certain administrative procedures such as buying land, building a house, registering a motor vehicle, borrowing money, accessing subsidized medical care and participating in poverty reduction programs\.\textsuperscript{62} People who are not registered as a permanent resident in the place they reside will not have full access to government services\.\textsuperscript{63} The \textit{2006 Law on Residence}, however, reduced the number of residence categories and relaxed some conditions for obtaining permanent residency\.\textsuperscript{64} But in 2010 attempts were made to restrict migrants from registering their residence in large cities to reduce rural-urban migration.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Communist Party of Viet Nam Central Committee, Strategy for Socio-Economic Development 2001-2010, presented by the Central Committee, 8th Tenure, to the 9th National Congress April 2001; Resolution No. 56/2006/QH11, Term XI, session 9 on Five Year Socio-Economic Development Plan 2006-2010.
\textsuperscript{60} Marx and Fleischer, above n 17, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{64} 2006 Law on Residence, note 37.
1.4 Responses to internal child labour migration

International and domestic legislative responses


The ILO has made it a priority to eliminate the worst forms of child labour which is defined by Article 3 of the ILO Convention No. 182 as follows:

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Countries that have ratified the ILO Convention No. 138 undertake to stop child labour and to make sure that children below a certain “minimum age” are not employed.65 The ILO Convention No. 138

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provides a framework as to the minimum age at which children can perform certain types of work as follows:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazardous work</th>
<th>The minimum age at which children can start work</th>
<th>Possible exceptions for developing countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any work which is likely to jeopardise children’s health, safety or morals should not be done by anyone under the age of 18</td>
<td>18 (16 under strict conditions)</td>
<td>18 (16 under strict conditions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Basic Minimum Age | | |
|-------------------| | |
| The minimum age for work should not be below the age for finishing compulsory schooling, which is generally 15 | 15 | 14 |

| Light work | | |
|-------------| | |
| Children between the ages of 13 and 15 years old may do light work, as long as it does not threaten their health and safety, or hinder their education or vocational orientation and training. | 13-15 | 12-14 |

Not all work that children perform can be classified as child labour. The ILO has identified that work which does not affect a child's health or personal development or interfere with schooling is usually regarded as something positive. This includes, for instance, performing household chores or assisting in a family business. Child labour, however, is defined as work which deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. Importantly, the worst forms of child labour include: “trafficking of children, debt bondage and … forced … labour”.

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66 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
Vietnam has promulgated many laws and sub-laws to deal with issues that arise as a result of child labour. Chapter XI of the *Labour Code*\(^{69}\) contains exclusive provisions for under age employees. It defines an underage employee as someone less than 18 years of age (Article 161) and requires the employer to only employ underage workers to perform work that does not involve heavy and dangerous tasks or jobs negatively impacting his personality (Article 163(1)). This appears to be in line with the requirements set by the *ILO Convention No. 138* which sets the minimum age at which children can engage in **hazardous work** at 18 years. Article 163(2) also states that the working hours of the underage employee above 15 years of age but under 18 years must not exceed 8 hours in 1 day and 40 hours in 1 week and that the working hours of persons under 15 years must not exceed 4 hours in 1 day and 2 hours in 1 week without working overtime and at night. A child between the ages of 13 and 15 years can only be employed to carry out light jobs under the list prescribed by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (Article 164(1)). Article 164(2) states that when an employer hires a child between the ages of 13 and 15, the employer must comply with the following provisions:

a) Must sign the labour contracts in writing with the legal representative and must be agreed by the full 13 year and under 15 year old person;

b) To arrange the working hours in order not to affect study times of the children;

c) To ensure the working conditions, labour safety and hygiene appropriate with the age of the underage employee.

In addition, the employer has a responsibility to ensure fair terms of labour, wages, health, and learning in the process of underage labour (Article 162(1)).

\(^{69}\)10/2012/QH13.
Like the ILO Convention No. 138, the Labour Code provisions on child labour differentiate between the types of work that children can engage in based on their age. Under both instruments, only children above 18 years can engage in hazardous work and children between 13 and 15 years can engage in light work. However, a glaring omission in the Vietnamese legislation is that it does not contain a definition of child labour or of the worst forms of child labour. Article 165 of the Vietnamese Code does however provide the following list of work in which an underage employee cannot engage:

a) Wearing, carrying and lifting heavy objects beyond the physical condition of the underage person;
b) Producing and using or transporting the chemicals, gases, explosives;
c) Maintaining the equipment and machinery;
d) Demolishing buildings;
e) Cooking, blowing, casting, rolling, stamping, welding metals;
f) Diving, offshore fishing;
g) Other work harming the health, safety or the ethics of the underage person.

2. Prohibiting the underage person to work at the following places
a) Underwater, underground, in caves and in tunnels;
b) Construction sites;
c) Slaughter facilities;
d) Casinos, bars, discos, karaoke rooms, hotels, motels, saunas and massage rooms;
e) Other workplace harmful to the health, safety or the ethics of the underage person.

Section 7 of Article 7 of the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children\textsuperscript{70} provides that abusing child labour, employing children for heavy or dangerous jobs, jobs resulting in exposure to noxious substances or other jobs in contravention with the provisions of the labour legislation are strictly prohibited. Other related articles include prohibitions on abandonment of children, enticing children, abusing street children in order to profit and child sexual abuse.

The *Education Law*\textsuperscript{71} recognizes children's rights to study, including entitlement to free primary education. Retention and support for children in school are widely recognized as important measures to prevent child labour.

**Government programs**

The Vietnamese government has, over the years, implemented a number of programs which are targeted at eliminating and preventing child labour. The National Plan of Action for Children 2001-2010 has the objective of ensuring the care of homeless orphans, reducing significantly the number of street children, the number of children who are employed in dangerous or hazardous work and the number of children who are addicted to drugs.\textsuperscript{72} The National Program on the Prevention and Tackling of Street Children in Hazardous and Dangerous Work for the Period 2004-2010 has four components:

- Awareness raising and capacity building for administrative staff who work with street children, children who are victims of sexual abuse and children in hazardous and dangerous work;
- Prevention of and support for street children;
- Preventing and addressing sexual abuse against children; and
- Preventing and addressing the problem of children working in dangerous and hazardous conditions.\textsuperscript{73}


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
The National Action Programme to Combat Crimes of Trafficking in Children and Women 2005-2010 has an emphasis on awareness raising, training, education and the development of an appropriate legal framework for the purpose of reducing by 50% the number of trafficked women and children.\(^{74}\) Other programs include the Education Development Strategy 2001-2010, which, among other things, aims to eradicate illiteracy among children who are over 15 years of age.\(^{75}\)

The ILO, together with the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), has implemented a number of programs in Vietnam. Of note, it supported the National Programme for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour in Vietnam (2001-2005). It had four aims:

- Policy and programme planning and research on the prevention and elimination of child labour;
- Advocacy and awareness on the prevention and elimination of child labour;
- Capacity building for national partners to implement child labour programmes; and
- Social protection and direct assistance to withdraw children from the worst forms of child labour.\(^{76}\)

### 1.5 Purpose & Aims of Research

The occurrence of child labour in and from Thua Thien Hue Province is quite common. Since 2005, several social organizations and local government officials have become interested in this problem particularly after stories of some children who were sent to work in Saigon, who subsequently were assisted to return to Hue, were circulated publically. However, no prior research

\(^{74}\) Ibid.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid.  
\(^{76}\) Ibid.
exists on the causes, modus operandi and consequences of child labour in and from Central Vietnam generally, or Thua Thien Hue Province specifically (see Map 1). That was the main motivation for Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation (Blue Dragon) to carry out this study in cooperation with Professor Susan Kneebone and Dr Sallie Yea under the ARC project.

One of the communes in Hue that had an alarmingly high number of children working in Saigon is Vinh Hung Commune, in the Phu Loc district (see Map 3). This commune was therefore chosen as the primary case study for this research. In addition, some households in Hai Tien village and Thuan An town, of Phu Vang district (see Map 2), were also selected as a secondary site because there was evidence that many children were sent to work in Saigon from this town.

The purpose of this research was to obtain data and to analyze the main causes leading to child migrant labour by interviewing children and parents or guardians in the Vinh Hung Commune and Hai Tien village. This report is intended to build a comprehensive picture of child labour in Thua Thien Hue Province. It will inform Blue Dragon’s prevention and support efforts as well as provide local authorities and communities in the province with valuable information in order to enhance their understanding of migrant child labour. The ultimate goal is to ensure that this problem does not develop further and will be reduced in the future.

1.6 Structure of the Report

Methods & Ethics

Chapter 2 of the report introduces the research sites in Thua Thien Hue Province and details the data collection process and research methods. Chapter 2 also introduces the approach to the research and ethical considerations.
Characteristics of Families & Motivations for sending children

Chapter 3 describes the circumstances and backgrounds of participants, such as education level, and the economic circumstances of households. The motivation of families to send their children to work in Saigon is also explored in Chapter 3.

Recruitment & Labour conditions in Saigon

Chapter 4 provides profiles of recruiters and the recruitment process, and the characteristics of the owners of workplaces in Saigon as well the living and working conditions of children in Saigon.

Exit, Return & Reintegration

Chapter 5 describes the mode of exit and return of exploited minors to Hue. In addition, the chapter details the awareness and understanding of parents about child labour as well as the experiences of children who had been sent to work in Saigon. Chapter 5 also describes the process of reintegration of children who have returned to Hue.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The conclusions to this report are provided and recommendations to reduce migrant child labour in and from Hue are put forward in Chapter 6.
2 Methods, Ethics & Study Sites

2.1 Field Sites

Thua Thien Hue Province (see Map 1) is located in the central coast of Vietnam and is surrounded by the inland and territorial waters of the South Sea. Hue has a common land boundary with the provinces of Quang Tri, Quang Nam, Danang and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and is adjacent to the South Sea. Thua Thien Hue Province is 540km from Hanoi in the north and Saigon is 650km to the south. The coastline of the province is 120km long. Thua Thien Hue Province has a population of 1,088,822 people with an area of 5,062,59km (as at 2009). The province has one city and 8 districts, in which the population of Phu Vang district (see Map 2) is 171,427 (as at 2009) and Phu Loc district has 134,123 (as at 2009). The average annual income of Hue residents is 16,189,323VND (~$809USD) per person (as at 2011).

Vinh Hung Commune, in Phu Loc district (see Map 3), was the primary research site. Vinh Hung is 40km to the south-east of Hue City. It has a population of 7851 people and 1900 households (as at 2009) and a total area of 1606ha. The main occupations of people living there are in agriculture and aquaculture. The average income is 4,500,000 VND (~$225USD)/person/year (as at 2011), and 40% of the population in the commune is of working age. Currently, there are about 1200 people from Vinh Hung commune working in Saigon (accounting for one-sixth of the population). Of these, at least 50 are migrant child labourers (under 15 years of age). But these statistics come from local government and the real figure may be much higher. Vinh Hung Commune has one high school, one secondary school and two primary schools.

\[77\] Note these were the most recent available statistics.
Hai Tien village was the secondary research site where seven children who had been sent to work in Saigon, and their families, were interviewed. Hai Tien village is part of Thuan An Town, Phu Vang district (see Map 2), and Hue City is 12km to the east. Thuan An Town has a population of 20,802 people with an area of 1,703 ha (as at 2009). Of these, Hai Tien is one of 11 villages at Thuan An town. This village has 3450 people and 650 households. Thuan An town has 1 high school, 2 secondary schools and 3 primary schools.
Map 1: Thua Thien Hue province

Map 2: Phu Vang District

Map 3: Phu Loc District
2.2 Methods & Methodology

The methodology used for this research combined qualitative (semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (questionnaires) methods. The interviews and questionnaires were administered jointly. The questionnaires provided basic biodata and family background information whilst interviews provided information about motivations to send or not to send a child to work, the process of recruitment and deployment, exit and return, and life after return to Hue. The participants were divided into four groups (see Table 1) as follows: parents from households who had a child or children previously working in Saigon (Group 1); parents from households whose child or children was or were currently working in Saigon (Group 2); parents from households who had never sent a child to work in Saigon (Group 3); and returned migrant labour children (Group 4).

### Table 2: Composition of Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Households where a child had previously worked in Saigon</td>
<td>Family representative</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vinh Hung commune &amp; Hai Tien village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Households with a child currently working in Saigon</td>
<td>Family representative</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Vinh Hung commune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Households with children who had never migrated for labour</td>
<td>Family representative</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vinh Hung commune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Child migrant workers who had returned from Saigon</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vinh Hung commune &amp; Hai Tien village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three teams of researchers (two persons per team) carried out the fieldwork over a period of one week. The local commune statistical records were used to identify households that had child migrant workers and children returned from Saigon at the time of the research. From this list participant households were randomly selected. Ten (10) households who had child workers returned home (Group 1); thirty-two (32) households who had children working in Saigon (Group 2), fifteen (15) households who never sent children to work in Saigon (Group 3); and ten (10) children returned from working in Saigon (Group 4) were invited to participate. The majority of participants were from Vinh Hung commune and a smaller number of families and their children were from Hai Tien village in Thuan An town. The information that was obtained from the participants included: economic circumstances, family size, education level, migration history, reasons for sending children to Saigon, the recruiter and their relationship with families, children’s feelings and experiences when they were in Saigon and upon their return to Hue, and parents’ awareness of child labour issues.

2.3 Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with the Australian Government’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (see Executive Summary above). In respect of the child participants, consent of the children and their parents was obtained before they were interviewed. It was also ensured that participants were not coerced to participate by parents, peers, researchers or others involved in the research (as required by chapter 4.2 of the National Statement). Everyone who participated in this study did so voluntarily. The research team secured their agreement through signed informed consent forms in which the participants acknowledged that they understood the purpose and content of the research as well as their rights, including the right to
withdraw from the study at any time, that the information obtained is confidential and used for this study only, and that participants have the right to know and access the research results. Possible risks were also explained to participants. In addition, the participants were provided with a participant information sheet which contained information about Blue Dragon and the research team. Participants were advised to contact the research team at any time to discuss issues related to the study before, during and after their participation. At the conclusion of the fieldwork the research, the research team held a meeting in the local commune hall to advise participants of the main results, reiterate their rights to follow up with the research team, and provided participants with a small monetary compensation for their participation. For adults this was equivalent to approximately half a day’s income, which equated to the time taken for their participation. For children this was a small gift of soap, shampoo and rice.

The participants are de-identified and their names are abbreviated (if included in the report) so as to avoid easy recognition.
3 Characteristics of Households & Motivations for sending children

3.1 Characteristics of Families

3.1.1 Structure of families

A typical family was composed of parents and children and a few families also included grandparents. Typically the father was the breadwinner and usually worked in a fishing job. The mother was usually a housewife. The older children in the families tended to leave school early (at secondary school level) to work to assist their parents to feed the younger siblings. On average there were seven people in a family which included two parents and five children. There were five families which had between nine and eleven members.

3.1.2 Income, debt & work

The participants were divided into three groups: households with returned migrant child labourers (10) (Group 1); households who currently had a child or children working in Saigon (32) (Group 2); and households which had never sent children to work in Saigon (15) (Group 3).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the average income of Group 1 participants was higher than the two other remaining groups. The main occupations in all three groups were fisheries or agriculture. The parents in these cases worked together in fishing or farming businesses and the income derived from this work constituted the principal source of income for their families.
Of the 32 households in Group 2, 20 had only one income earner and nine (9) had two main incomes. Households in Groups 1 and 3 normally had only one or two main sources of income. Some households in Group 3 benefited from remittances of relatives abroad (2 households) or from other provinces (2 households), but this usually occurred on holidays or at Tet.

Households depended heavily on their fishing and farming businesses but, because the business’ success was dependent to a large extent on the weather, there was not a regular flow of work. Thus, although their average income ranged between 1.7 million and 2.4 million VND per month, the households still experienced financial difficulties, especially in the rainy season when fishing and farming work was difficult. Thus, going into debt was unavoidable for many households. Among the 10 households of Group 1, four households had debts between 5 million and 19 million VND,

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78 US Dollar – Vietnam dong exchange rate is computed at US$1 = 20,000 VND.
with at least two additional households having 50 million VND of debt. In Group 3, 4 households had debt, which was owed to the banks and relatives, of between 5 million and 19 million VND, 5 households had debt between 20 million and 50 million VND and one household had a debt of over 50 million VND. Within this context of high debts, many households looked to labour migration as a livelihood strategy, initially with one or both parents migrating to a neighboring province for work and, in some cases, with children. Tr, for example, was taken to Saigon to work in a factory. Prior to this, according to her grandmother, both Tr’s parents migrated for work and both were away working at the time of the fieldwork.

The parents of two sisters and T & C (Group 2) also migrated to Dac Lac province to pick coffee for a monthly salary of 1.5 million VND. They had to go because they owed the bank around 100 million VND which they had borrowed to invest in aquaculture. Their business subsequently failed. In other cases, parents migrated to other provinces to visit family or attend a relative’s wedding and then fell into debt. For example, the mother of Th (Group 2) went to Saigon to cook for a kindergarten for a salary of 1.5 million per month VND. Her business of breeding shrimp had failed and she was 30 million VND in debt. The main reason for these families being in debt was that their investments in aquaculture had failed because the shrimp or fish that they bred had diseases. Besides obtaining loans from the bank for their business (at an interest rate of 0.17% per month) they also borrowed from neighbours or relatives at very high interest rates (3% per month). Thus, those families migrated to other provinces to work because they had a large amount of debt and no capacity to repay it.

“I am illiterate. My husband completed grade 2 only. Some of my children are also illiterate. The highest level that my children have studied is grade 6.”

(Ms. N.T.H, mother of T. V who was taken from Hai Tien village)
3.1.3 Education

Figure 2 shows the education level of the parents in the Groups 1, 2 and 3 participating households. The formal education level of most is low with the majority (parents from 19 households) having studied only at primary school or not at all (parents from 16 households). Only 2 families had a parent who had studied at high school level. Group 2 had the most illiterate parents (9 households). Only two households belonging to Group 3 had high school educated parents, with the two other groups normally having primary school educated parents. Amongst Group 1 participants, no parents had studied at high school.

**Figure 2: Level of education attained by participants (Groups 1, 2 and 3)**

![Bar chart showing the level of education attained by participants in Groups 1, 2, and 3.](image-url)
3.1.4 History of migration

Families who have a history of migration, either amongst parents or older siblings, were identified as providing conducive contexts for younger children to migrate for work. Figure 3 shows the level of labour migration amongst households in each of the three groups. If the groups are separated, Figure 3 shows that in Groups 1 and 2 the number of households where family members have migrated (mainly to go to work) is higher than in Group 3. When the three groups are considered together it can be seen that there were 36 households where family members had migrated for work and a few had travelled to visit relatives only. In most cases, family members went to other cities such as Saigon, Da Nang, Quang Ninh and Ca Mau.

![Figure 3: Number of households which have migrating family members](image-url)
Figure 4 shows that in Group 2, migrants were usually siblings (older sisters or brothers of the child). Only the parents of three families in this group had emigrated and 3 out of the 32 families in Group 2 had no family members (parents or children) who migrated at all.

**Figure 4: Number of households with siblings who migrated (Group 2)**

“‘My family circumstance is difficult, with many children, so I sent my daughter, H, to go to Saigon for work.’”
*(Mrs. T in Hai Tien, mother of 5 children said)*

“In 2001, I [borrowed] 25 million VND from the bank [for] aquaculture [with an] interest rate of 0.17% / month. Every month I have to pay bank interest. If I cannot pay, the monthly interest will accrue to the principal amount. In addition, I also borrowed 7 million VND from relatives to renovate my house in 2009.”
*(Mr. Ng. V. P in Vinh Hung commune; he is the father of 4 children)*
3.2 Reasons for sending children to work in Saigon

3.2.1 Financial circumstances & debt

Debt was a major concern for most of the households in this study and contributed to the decisions of parents to send their children to work in Saigon. Table 3 shows the debt levels of households who currently had a child or children working in Saigon at the time of the research (Group 2).

Table 3: Level of household debt in Group 2\textsuperscript{79}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Debt</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unable to quantify</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-19 mill VND</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-50 mill VND</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 mill VND</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Group 2, 17 out of 32 households were in debt. Of these, eight households had debts over 50 million VND and 6 had debts between 20 and 50 million VND. Debts were incurred for the following reasons (with many households having debts as a result of several of these factors): money to cover expenses of daily life; investment in a business (normally aquaculture) where the money earned was insufficient to repay the debt; and the need to upgrade their house. Most of the

\textsuperscript{79} US Dollar – Vietnam dong exchange rate is computed at US$1 = 20,000 VND.
participant households could not pay the principal on their debt, but were only able to pay the interest to the bank.

In Group 3, there were 10 out of the 15 families who were in debt. They owed between 5 and 50 million VND. Table 4 shows that Group 3 had more debt than Group 1. One third of all families in Group 3 were between 20 and 50 million VND in debt. Meanwhile, no family in Group 1 had a similar level of debt.

### Table 4: Comparison of debt levels between Group 1 and Group 3 households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Debt</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unable to quantify</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-19 mill VND</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-50 mill VND</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 mill VND</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Size of family

The size of most families participating in the research was large. Thirty-three (32) participant households had between 5 and 6 members in their families, which usually included parents and 4 or 5 children. There were seven (7) households of 8-9 people. One household that had a returned child migrant worker had over 10 members.
Having a larger household was also one of the reasons parents sent their children to work. It reduced the burden of educational costs for them, and the older child would send money back home to assist their parents to provide for younger siblings.

3.2.3 The wishes of the children themselves

Some children disliked studying and / or they were enticed by friends to go to the city. These children left by themselves or in the company of a friend. Indeed, for some of these children, the parents did not know their child had a plan to migrate to Saigon for work until the child arrived in Saigon and contacted their parents. Often these children did not have a good school record or the child was uninterested in school and a friend enticed them to go to Saigon. Other children were recruited to go to Saigon. This was usually done by either formal or informal recruiters and the recruiter typically arranged a job, wage and place to live for the child (see Chapter 4).

Figure 5 shows the main reasons for children to go to work in Saigon. Among the 32 households in Group 2, 17 stated that they had to let their children go because family circumstances were very difficult.
3.3 Summary

Some of the structural factors that led children to migrate were that they came from large families with many children, which increased the financial burden on the parents of having to feed and educate the family. Many parents experienced financial hardship because they had large debts and their agriculture or fishing businesses were unsuccessful. Children also wanted to leave because learning was expensive and they may not have been doing well in school. This was another reason parents sent their children away to work. The recruiter easily persuaded the children to drop out of school. In addition, there was a lack of knowledge about the risks of child labour because the educational level of parents is quite low and there was a lack of access to information related to this issue. Moreover, when families had other children who were or had been working in factories in Saigon, the families were usually more willing to allow children to migrate.
4 Recruitment & labour conditions in Saigon

4.1 The process of recruitment

The process of recruiting children to work in Saigon normally involved a recruiter visiting households when the children were present, explaining to parents the work that would be performed (providing simple descriptions of the work that children would perform), discussing wages and living conditions of the children and securing the parents’ agreement. If the parents consented, the recruiter would lead the children away.

4.2 Recruitment

4.2.1 The recruiters

Several different types of persons act as recruiters. Some recruiters may be “formal” recruiters and include persons not previously known in the commune (non-local), such as the owner of a factory in Saigon, or a recruiter hired by the factory. Some recruiters may be ‘informal’ recruiters such as another villager, a neighbor of the family, a sibling or friend of the child, or an acquaintance of the family.
Recruiters could be children who have been working in Saigon, including friends and older siblings; the owner of a factory in Saigon; a neighbor; an older relative; or a person unknown to the commune.
In cases where the recruiter is a sibling or friend of the child, the recruitment process is much more fluid since children are enticed to go to Saigon after hearing stories of success or seeing the visible signs of success (mobile phones, new clothes etc) enjoyed by the returned children. Whilst “formal” recruiters received a commission for recruiting children, those who returned on holidays for family visits were normally not engaged in the business of recruitment (though some did receive a commission from their employer for bringing new children back to Saigon).

In some cases the employer was the child's relative (Uncle, Aunt) who usually contacted the parents by phone and suggested that the children work in their factory in Saigon. Neighbors sometimes also played the role of recruiter by helping to recruit children for their relatives (who were factory owners in Saigon). They went to the village and talked to families with many children and asked the parents to let the children go to work.

Overall, as seen in Figure 6, most participant families knew the recruiter (directly or indirectly). Of the 42 households who currently or previously had children working in Saigon (Groups 2 and 1), only 6 out of 42 (only 14%) families did not know the recruiter. The members of the remaining 36 households (85%) were familiar with the recruiter, who was either a sibling, relative, neighbor or friend of the child and/or their family.

“I knew the recruiter; she lived next to the grandparent of L in Phu Dien commune. She said the job of L in Saigon is selling flowers from 5pm-10pm. Salary for the first year is 1.5 million VND; the second year it’s 2 million VND.”

(Ms. H.T.L, mother of B.T.L who has been selling flowers in Saigon for 2 years)
Group 3 participants (those who had never sent a child to Saigon) would commonly refuse the recruiter’s proposition because the parents wanted their children to continue with schooling. Only 3 of the 15 participant households in Group 3 had never been contacted by a recruiter or potential employer.

“On Tet holidays in 2009, the recruiters (a man & woman) wanted to recruit my oldest daughter to work in a domestic job in Saigon. The wage was 10-12 million VND per year; but my family did not let her go”

(Mr. P.M in Vinh Hung, who has 3 children at school.)
4.2.2 Contracts

In cases where the recruiter was known to the family, the family trusted the explanations about work, salary and conditions given to them. They entrusted their children to the recruiter without requesting a written contract or agreement. Universally, whether the recruiter was known or unknown to the family, there were no written contracts between the parents and the business owner in Saigon. The fact that many of the parents were either illiterate or had only basic formal education mitigated against a more formal agreement being made.

“"No contract, just dealing verbal[ly] about salary, we agreed my daughter will receive 3 million VND per year. Also, she will be support[ed with] accommodation and food by the owner.”
(Ms. H.T.B, mother of Tr.T.D who was a child migrant labourer. She narrated the dealing between her and recruiter)

“Because the owner is my son, I encouraged Tr to go to work for his factory, and I did not mention about Tr’s salary in advance."
(Mrs. Tr. T. K in Vinh Hung Commune, the grandmother of Tr who used to work at the factory of her uncle in Saigon)

In the verbal agreement between the recruiter and families, the salary was of greatest importance. Other issues that were discussed were whether the child would be provided with accommodation, food and medical care if the child was sick. If the owner was a close relative of the family (Uncle or Aunt or brother) the wages were sometimes not mentioned specifically because the family completely trusted the owner. At the end of the year, the owner would decide what the child’s salary should be.
4.2.3 Travel

Once the parents’ agreement had been secured, the recruiter or the employer transported the child to Saigon. Children were usually transported in groups. In cases where the business owner was the child’s relative, the child would travel to Saigon unaccompanied. If the child wanted to go to work in Saigon they could go with other children (friends, neighbors). In this case, the parents may not immediately know the child had left.

Children often travelled to Saigon by mini-van. The owner would buy bus tickets for children if they went with other children. For children who traveled with their friends to Saigon, the owner would repay the transportation cost for the driver of the van. However, this amount was deducted from the children’s wages. Once children went to Saigon, they were brought straight to the owner’s home and put to work.

4.3 Children and their labour conditions

4.3.1 Age and education

In this study, information was collected about the migrant labour situations of 69 children from 57 families (Groups 1, 2 and 3). Of these, 10 children who had worked in Saigon previously (Group 4) were interviewed directly as they had all returned to their home communities. This group comprised 3 boys and 7 girls. Information about the 59 remaining children in Groups 2 and 3 was collected from their parents or guardians. In Group 2 (parents of children currently working in Saigon) information about 44 children, including 18 boys and 26 girls, was collected. Twelve of these 32 households had more than one child working in Saigon at the time of the fieldwork. In Group 3
(parents who had never sent a child to work in Saigon) information concerning 8 boys and 7 girls was collected (see Table 5).

Table 5: Female to male ratio of children within households of each group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 - (from Group 1 households)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 households</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 households</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-one of the 44 children in Group 2 were aged between 11 and 13 years when recruited (see figure 9). Among them, only one child had completed secondary school. The remainder had only completed primary school and then left school or had dropped out of secondary school.

Of the 10 children in Group 4 the majority had not completed secondary school. One child amongst this group could not read Vietnamese (see Figure 7). The average age of these children upon recruitment to work in Saigon was between 11 and 14 years. These children worked in Saigon for either one year or less (8 children) or for between 1 and 3 years (2 children) (see Figure 8).
“After the Tet holiday, when I just finished the first semester of grade 6, I departed from Hue to Saigon.”

*(Tr. T. D in Hai Tien village remembers the date when she went to Saigon)*

“I never attended school, could not read Vietnamese and was 11 years old when I worked in Saigon”

*(Child, M.T.H, in Hai Tien village)*
4.3.2 Type of job and income

Among the 44 children from Group 2 households, 36 were working at the time of the interviews in garment factories in Saigon. That was the most common type of work in which children were engaged. Some sold noodles or groceries, whilst others performed multiple tasks in domestic work (such as babysitting, housework, and sewing). Group 4 children usually made garments or sold flowers in Saigon (see Table 6).

Some recruiters made it a condition of employment that the child would only be paid after one full year of work. If a child wished to leave after only a few months because of the harsh working conditions, he or she would not receive any salary for ostensibly having broken their contract. Withholding of salary meant children were less likely to leave their workplaces either by running away or seeking support from an organization to be taken home. In cases where the salary was forestalled until the end of twelve months, the child would only receive an advance payment of 50,000 VND-100,000 VND to spend on daily needs\textsuperscript{80}.

The average salary range for children working in Saigon was between 6 and 10 million VND per year. Six of the 44 children from Group 2 households had not received a salary (at the time of conducting the research) because they had not yet completed one year’s work. Three of the 44 children received salaries of over 15 million VND per year but 6 out of 44 children only received 5 million VND per year.

\textsuperscript{80} US Dollar – Vietnam dong exchange rate is computed at US$1 = 20,000 VND.
Table 6: Type of work performed by children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of job</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garment making</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling flowers</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling noodles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selling groceries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple-jobs (baby-sitting, domestic work &amp; sewing)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Children’s salaries (million VND/year*)

*US Dollar – Vietnam dong exchange rate is computed at US$1 = 20,000 VND.
The salaries of Group 4 children, who had already returned home, were extremely low (under 5 million VND per year). Four of the 10 children had not received salaries because they did not complete their year’s work before returning to Hue (see Figure 9).

Because of the financial circumstances of all of the families participating in this research, many took a sum of money from the recruiter or employer as a deposit on the anticipated salary. This money was variously used to cover the daily living costs of the family. One participant had to work in Saigon in order to borrow 2 million VND needed for medical treatment for his brother. This salary deposit system created a debt for the child even before she or he commenced work and made it extremely difficult for the child to leave Saigon.

**4.3.3 Working-time & days off**

On average, children worked in excess of 12 hours per day. Up to 70% (31 out of 44) of children from Group 2 households worked over 12 hours per day. In the garment factories in Saigon, children usually worked three periods per day: in the morning from 7am until 11:30am; in the afternoon from 1pm until 5:30pm and then in the evening from 7pm until 11pm. The children who returned from selling flowers in Saigon said that they were forced to work all night.

“My child just worked in Saigon for 3 months so the owner did not pay as promised (750,000 VND/month). The owner would only pay if my child worked one full year”

*(Ms. H.T.H, mother of Ng.T.T in Hai Tien village who was selling flowers in Saigon for 3 months)*
It is difficult to determine the total working time of the children who worked as domestic workers and those who assisted in assembly work in factories. Some children were given time off on a Sunday afternoon; however, this depended on the individual factory owner. If the factories had a large number of orders, children would not be given any time off and their working hours per day would increase.

Thirteen out of 44 children from Group 2 households had no holidays. In Group 4, 4 out of 10 children did not have days off during the time they worked in Saigon (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Average number of hours worked by all children per day

“I sold flowers from 6pm to 7am. Then I slept til noon. In the afternoon, I prepared flowers to sell in the evening.”

(Tr. V in Hai Tien village, describing his work day when he was in Saigon in 2005)
4.3.4 Living conditions

Most children who worked in garment factories slept at the owner’s house. The girls slept together in the garret while the boys normally slept in the room with the sewing machine table. For the children selling flowers on the streets, the employer rented a room for them where between 8 and 10 children normally slept together.

Some children who sold flowers at night did not get enough rest due to working throughout the night. These children usually slept between 7am and noon and, as a result of these poor sleeping habits, they often felt exhausted all the time.

Most of the children were not provided with adequate food. Children who sold flowers were typically given instant noodles to eat. Children who worked in factories would have food cooked for them by the employer. Children ate together with the owner’s family and some ate with other workers in the factory. Although some children had time off (half day Sundays) they normally did not go out and socialise due to a lack of money. A holiday was simply a day when they were not working. Children worked in a high pressure environment. Two out of the 10 exploited children in Group 4 said that there was often discrimination between those who had worked for a long time and the newcomers. The latter were treated unfairly because they were so young and were beaten or verbally abused.

“When I was sleepy and dozed at the sewing machine, if the owner detected I was sleeping he would curse me.”

(H.V.L relates his fear from when he was working in Saigon in 2008)
4.3.5 Contact & communication with family

During the time the 10 children from Group 4 worked in Saigon, their families did not have any information about them. Overall, there was little communication between families and their children. In cases where a child managed to call home the child would never disclose the working conditions in Saigon because they were afraid their parents would become worried. Table 7 shows the degree of contact children had with parents in Group 2 after leaving for Saigon. Parents were often under the illusion that the child was not facing any major difficulties in Saigon, although some parents had an inkling that there may be problems that the child could not reveal.

Table 7: Frequency of communication between Group 2 families and children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of contact</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once per month</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice per month</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than or equal to 3 times per month</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents from Group 2 would sometimes speak on the phone if the child managed to call. Children often asked about the health and economic situation of their family back in Hue. Some children asked their parents if they had paid off the family debt or not, since this was one of the most common reasons children were sent to Saigon for work. The children rarely mentioned their work so as not to worry the family. The family would get a sense of the strenuous work performed by the
children whenever they spoke on the phone. Some other children told their parents that they disliked their jobs and wanted to leave Saigon, but the parents encouraged them to work (at least until the end of one year) to help the family.
5 Exit, Return & Reintegration

5.1 Modes of exit

“Rescue”

Blue Dragon or the local government authority in Hue could initiate the “rescue” of a child. This was done by informing parents about the child’s circumstances and the conditions under which he or she worked. Stories of children being arrested while selling flowers on the street or of children being beaten by owners often prompted parents and the children to agree to return to Hue with the assistance of Blue Dragon and the relevant government authorities (usually the police in Saigon and the local government administration in Hue). When parents and children mutually agreed that the child should return home, Blue Dragon and a representative of the local government in Hue went to Saigon. These representatives, together with the police, negotiated the child’s release with the employer. The child was then removed from Saigon and returned to Hue.

Families who took children back home

In some cases Blue Dragon invited a child’s family member to travel to Saigon to help the child return home. This was done in order to show the family the real work conditions the child was subjected to and also to allow the family to deal with an owner in situations where the owner did not allow the child to return home.

Children who return home of their own will

There was one boy who returned home by himself by mini-van. The family knew that he would return and encouraged him to do so.
5.2 Experiences of children who were returned home

5.2.1 Children who were returned home

Five (5) of the ten (10) children in Group 4 were rescued, by Blue Dragon, Hue Red Cross and representatives of the local government who went to Saigon and directly removed them. Both the
parents and the children agreed to the rescue. In the case of four (4) children, Blue Dragon invited a parent or a sister of the child along with staff members to Saigon to collect the child. One (1) child was returned after Blue Dragon contacted his family in Hue and suggested that they allow the child to return home to study.

5.2.2 Parents’ knowledge of child’s circumstances in Saigon

The parents in Groups 1 and 2 thought that sending children to work was normal as others in their communities also followed this practice. Parents were motivated by the desire to increase family income and hoped that their children’s lives would be better in Saigon. But if there was evidence of abuse or exploitation they wanted their children removed from Saigon.

The parents in Group 3 (families who never sent children to Saigon to work) had received some information relating to child labour via the radio or from neighbours or friends. In other cases they got the information when the child's neighbors were sent to work. In addition, some children of these families were aware of child labour issues as other children had left school to go to Saigon, and when the children returned home they told their parents and friends about their ordeal (see Table 8).

Table 8: Mode of receiving information about child labour (Group 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of information</th>
<th>No. households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio (from commune)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (neighbor, friend, relative)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.3 Problems faced by children upon returning home

Most children felt happy when they returned. However, many of the children faced difficulties when recommencing school, such as being teased by friends and feeling ashamed when they had to learn with younger classmates. Other children did not want or could not continue to participate in formal schooling as the school would not accept them. Having already experienced working life, these children wished to receive vocational training so they may re-enter the workforce from a less vulnerable position. Advice on training and job options was sorely needed for these returned children. M’s and Q’s cases (Cases 2 and 3 below) illustrates the dilemmas and the challenges faced by the children when they return to Hue.

5.3 Reintegration process

Families, local governments, teachers and Blue Dragon assisted the returned children by providing books, clothes and anything else they needed. They tried to encourage children who had completed the first semester to continue to study in the second semester. When children returned to school they often felt ashamed and embarrassed by having to study with younger classmates. Thus teachers, family and social organizations encouraged the children to be confident and adjust to the new learning environment.
Blue Dragon assisted children who wanted to do vocational training by talking with them about the work that they want to do as well as discussing with their families the option of taking training courses. Blue Dragon then approached vocational schools in Hue and other provinces to organise training courses that may be suitable for young people.

Among the 10 children in Group 4 of this study, there were three (3) children attending vocational training. Of these, one had been trained in repairing motorbikes in Ha Noi for six months. Two others were studying an English course in Hue. This is a preliminary course which would enable

Case 2: M, 17 year old boy from Hai Tien village, Thuan An town, Thua Tien Hue

M and his four siblings were living with their parents in Hai Tien village. As in other coastal families, M’s parents are in the fishing business. M and his two younger sisters were attending school in 2008, when C, M’s brother, was working in Saigon. While working, C suffered from serious illness so returned to Hue. The family needed money to treat C so they sent M to Saigon to replace C at the factory. They also borrowed 2 million VND from the factory owner. At that time, M was 14 years old and in grade 8.

Under the verbal agreement made between the owner and family, M would receive a salary of 5 million VND per year and be fed. At the garment factory in Saigon, M had to work three shifts per day: from 7:30am to 12pm, then from 2pm to 7pm and from 8pm to 12am. Sometimes, he worked overtime to 2 am. He had a poor diet and slept only 5 hours per day on the floor along with the others workers. M had one shift off on Sunday nights.

After five months of working in Saigon, M returned to Hue in 2008 because his brother, C, had died and his family agreed to bring him home and return to school with support from Blue Dragon. Upon returning to Hue, like other exploited children, M had to repeat grade 8. M felt ashamed of being with his younger classmates. Because of his absence from school for a fairly long time M’s school results were not very good.

M tried hard to complete secondary school in the summer of 2010. On the basis of his four previous years at school, M did not satisfy the requirements to attend the high school near his house. Fortunately, the school made an exceptional decision for M after learning of his circumstances.

At the time of this research, M was in grade 10. Two of his sisters (grade 7 and grade 4) were also supported by Blue Dragon and encouraged by the family to go to school.
them to apply for an apprenticeship under a cooperative program between Blue Dragon and a training program in Hoi An.

5.4 Future plans

At the time of this study, 7 out of the 10 returned children from Group 4 were attending school. Two children studied in grade 10, one was in grade 9 and 4 children were studying in grade 8. Three other children were in vocational training.

![Figure 11: Children's future plans](image)

Up to half of the children from Group 4 planned to continue studying and four (4) out of ten (10) children planned to go onto vocational training. Their parents did not want them to return to work.
Case 3: Q, 15 year old girl from Vinh Hung commune, T.T.Hue

Q is the youngest child in a family with four siblings in Vinh Hung commune. Her parents ran an unprofitable shrimp breeding business. They had a bank loan so they decided to let Q go to work in Saigon. Q was fourteen years old and had finished the first semester of grade 8 before she left home. Q's relative introduced her to a babysitting job where she would assist in domestic work in a family home in Saigon. Her salary would be 10 million VND per year. Q travelled to Saigon with a person who had worked there previously.

Q said, "Prior to going to Saigon, the house owner told [me] that my job is looking after a baby, but when I was there I did not like that job because I was usually [required] to stay home alone [and was] sometimes scared by the complicated life in the city. So I moved to a garment factory."

In 2010, Q returned to Hue. After 8 months working as a child carer, doing housework and sewing she received 6.5 million VND instead of the 10 million VND that the owner promised because she did not complete one year of work. One of the main reasons why Q returned home was she wanted to return to school. However, when Q returned to school she was very unhappy. Q could not be with her friends because she was required to repeat grade 8. She felt ashamed of learning with younger classmates and that made her uncomfortable when seeing old friends.

Q's teacher did not fully understand her ordeal and said, "Q was not eligible to return to school." However, with the support and encouragement of a sympathetic principal and family, Q began to enjoy school again. At the time of this study, Q had returned to school for three months and was studying the second semester of grade 8.

in Saigon and expected them to continue studying as long as they could, or go to vocational school in order to have a stable job and a better life in the future.
**Case 4: B, 18 year old girl from Hai Tien village, Thuan An town, Thua Tien Hue**

B was 10 years old and had just finished grade 4 when she left Hue in 2003. B’s parents decided to send her to Saigon because of difficult family circumstances. Her mother explained: "At that moment, I thought if B could go to Saigon, she would have more opportunities to grow and be better fed.” The employer was a neighbor of B’s grandmother. They said B would sell flowers in Saigon and that her working hours would be from 5pm until 10pm. For the first year, the wage would be 1.5 million VND and the second year she would earn 2 million VND. After giving 500,000 VND to B’s parents, the employer took her to Saigon by mini-van.

B sold flowers in Saigon for two years. Every day, she started her job at 6pm and finished at 4am the next morning. She then went back to the guest house to eat and sleep with 9 other children in a 5m² room. In the afternoon, B studied grade 5 with the help of a foreigner. Sometimes the foreigner gave her money (around 2 million VND), but the employer took it all. B said it was dangerous selling flowers in dark alleys because there was a risk of meeting drug addicts and of being robbed.

B’s family was unaware of her harsh working life in Saigon until they were contacted by the staff of Blue Dragon. B’s mother went along with Blue Dragon’s staff to Saigon and brought her back to Hue in 2005. After having been back home for six years, B is now enrolled in an English course in Hue. If she passes the English test, she will move to Hoi An to study a hospitality course which will help her find the job she dreams of having.

**Case 5: S, 16 year old girl from Hai Tien village, Thuan An town, Thuan Tien Hue**

S was 11 years old and had only finished the first semester of grade 6 when she left Hue for Saigon to work. She left because of difficult family circumstances; her father was sick at that time. An agreement was made between the employer and S’s family over the phone. The employer said S would work at a sewing factory with a salary of 3 million VND per year. S then went along with her relative to Saigon. In Saigon, S worked from 7:30am to midnight. She slept with 20 other people, ate three meals per day and had time off on Sunday nights.

S contacted her family via phone approximately twice a month. S only asked about her parents’ health and did not mention anything about her work. Her mother says she knew S’s work was very hard because P, her brother, had also worked in Saigon for one year.

After receiving help from Blue Dragon, S returned to Hue in 2008 and returned to school. At the time of conducting this research, S was studying in grade 8; her favourite subject was Drawing. Her dream is to attend a fine arts college and then become a painter. In addition to supporting S’s studies, Blue Dragon has helped her family to breed fish, thereby increasing their household income.
6 Conclusions & Recommendations

This study contains data, information and findings about four (4) Groups:

- Group 1: parents from households whose children had returned to Hue Province from working in Saigon - ten (10);
- Group 2: parents from households who had at least one child currently working in Saigon - thirty-two (32);
- Group 3: parents from households who had never sent children to work - fifteen (15);
- Group 4: children who had returned to Hue Province from a labour migration experience - ten (10) children.

The key findings of this study as contained in this Report are:

- The children who are the subject of this report were aged between 11 and 14 years (Figure 8);
- The decision to migrate was usually taken by the family when it was faced with dire financial circumstances. In some cases, children migrated on their own volition without informing their families of their intention to migrate;
- Child migrant labour is normalized in the source communities where families average five (5) children;
- Most recruitment was performed by someone known to and trusted by the family (Figure 6). For that reason parents did not enquire about or know the terms of the contract relating to their child’s work. In most cases a verbal contract was involved;
- In most cases the children and the parents had little contact once the children were in Saigon;
• In most cases children were exploited at the destination. Such exploitation amounted to child labour including hazardous work, and the worst form of child labour. In some circumstances such exploitation amounted to human trafficking.

**Structural factors**

• This study has shown that in most cases the decision for children to migrate to Saigon was taken because of difficult family circumstances (see Figure 5). The main motivation for migration was that the family was poor and in debt, but not all ‘poor’ families allowed their children to migrate (Tables 3 and 4). The fifteen families in Group 3 who had never sent their children to Saigon, also faced financial difficulties, but they still wanted their children to go to school and declined to accept the recruiters’ offers.

• Parents played an important role in determining whether to let their children work in Saigon, but a substantial proportion of children made the decision to migrate of their own accord (see Figure 6). Some children who were not doing well in school were enticed by their friends to leave home to work in Saigon.

• In terms of educational backgrounds there were significant differences between the groups of families \ households (Groups 1, 2 and 3); more of the parents who never sent their children to work in Saigon (Group 3) had achieved secondary education than amongst the other two groups of parents (see Figure 2). Groups 1 and 2 parents had received little secondary education; the parents in Group 2 had mostly been educated to primary school level (see Figure 2). Figure 7 shows that most of the children about whom data was collected for this report, had not finished secondary school.
Group 3 parents received information over the radio or from neighbors or friends about the dangers of child labour. The information that is transmitted over the radio is part of an educational program to warn people about the risks of labour migration (Table 8).

There was a higher incidence of migration from Group 2 households (least educated - Figure 3) which suggests a correlation with child labour migration and the level of education of the parents.

Notably the income of Group 1 households (where children had returned from Saigon) was higher than in Groups 2 and 3 (see Figure 1).

More girls than boys were child migrant workers (Table 5) but this may be accounted for by the nature of the work available in Saigon (Table 6).

**Recruitment of child workers**

- Recruiters were often well acquainted with families as they were neighbors or relatives (Figure 6).
- Children were recruited by a verbal agreement with the family rather than a written contract.
- The recruiters would not be explicit about the nature of the work and the working conditions of the children in the factories in Saigon. Thus there is substantial risk of exploitation at destination.

**Child labour \ exploitation at destination**

- Often the description of working life that recruiters gave was very different to that which children experienced in Saigon.
- Most of the work that children performed (see Table 6) took place in private and small scale businesses located in the suburbs and thus the opportunities for exploitation were increased.
- Children either participated in making a few simple stages of a product (typically garments) or they helped with the chores at home or in a noodle shop.
- Other children sold flowers on the street where they were more visible.
- Children often suffered from a lack of sleep, food, holidays (some children did not have days off), and did not receive adequate medical treatment when they were sick.
- These children were of an average age of between 11 and 14 years, but they had to work around 12 hours per day (Figure 10).
- Even for those children who did many jobs simultaneously, such as working in garment factories and doing domestic work or baby-sitting, the total number of hours they worked would be difficult to calculate.
- The children worked hard but were paid a low wage of about 6 to 10 million VND per year ($300-$500 USD) (Figure 9).
- If they did not complete a full working year they would not be paid.
- Some families had received a part of their child’s salary in advance before they sent the children to Saigon.
- During their time in Saigon, some children borrowed money from the employer. So, at the end of the year, the amount of money that children could bring back to their families was not much.
- There was very little contact or communication between children and their family while the children were working in Saigon (Table 7). Families had no information or only received limited news of their child. Children did not reveal much information about the real working
or living conditions to their families because they were afraid their parents would be worried for them.

**Return and Reintegration**

- When children returned home they faced difficulties when they recommenced school. They often felt ashamed of going back to school with younger classmates and experienced difficulties in reintegrating into school.
- Some children wanted to study vocational training but they lacked information about the courses and were unsure about career choices.

### 6.1 Recommendations

Labour exploitation of children from Hue occurs in three phases: recruitment in Hue; working life in Saigon; and return to Hue. Therefore, to prevent, reduce and to eliminate child labour, intervention and action needs to be implemented within the context of these three phases.

#### 6.1.1 Recruitment in Hue

1. A comprehensive survey in Hue Province is needed of areas from which children are commonly sent to work, and the reasons why parents send their children. Appropriate plans should be developed at regional and national levels to support families in financial difficulty because of precarious livelihoods. This should be done in order to reduce the likelihood of children being sent to work in Saigon to augment the family income or to pay their debts.
Parents have a pivotal role in deciding whether to send a child away to work and thus prevention strategies should be targeted at parents, to equip them with knowledge about the risks of child labour. Parents should participate in meetings where information and experiences are shared to better understand the disadvantages and dangers faced by children sent away to work.

National and regional programmes should stress the rights that children have to education, care, protection and freedom from child labour – see Chapter 1 of this Report.

Education is a major factor in avoiding exploitation. The children who were sent to Saigon were of an average age of between 11 and 14 years and had interrupted their secondary education to migrate. They had few skills or experience and were easily exploited. The parents in Group 3 who had never sent their children to Saigon were on the whole better educated than their counterparts in Groups 1 and 2. The parents in Group 3 households were aware of the risks and dangers of child labour migration.

For those children who drop out of school by their own choice, and who migrate for work, there is a need for the creation of more opportunities to retain rural children in their communities and/or to access appropriate skills to ensure their future livelihood without exploitation. Other measures could include provision of local places of entertainment to encourage their positive socialization and retention in their community.

The laws and policies on child labour in Vietnam need to be reviewed to bring them in line with the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999 and the ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Work 1973. Measures to implement these Conventions in national law should be taken – see 1.4 above.
6.1.2 Working in Saigon

1 The existing laws and policy of Vietnam which aim to protect children need to be enforced – see 1.4 above. In Saigon, the appropriate authorities and local government need to inspect and survey areas (often in suburbs) where factories and private establishments are based to strengthen inspection and supervision of their activities which often take place out of public sight.

2 Public awareness campaigns are needed to alert the public to the risks of child exploitation. Networks to provide support for child workers in Saigon must be developed with the approval of the appropriate authorities and local government.

6.1.3 Returning to Hue

1 When children return home, they need to receive empathy, encouragement and help from family, school and the community so that they do not feel inferior and ashamed of their experiences. They should be able to reintegrate back into school with confidence.

2 Career guidance courses need to be established so that schools can advise children about appropriate career and training options. Short-term training courses (of 3 months, for example) need to be developed at a standard consistent with their education level (which should not be set too high) so that exploited children can participate and learn basic skills. After the basic training period, teachers could advise and guide the children on their capabilities and options.
6.1.4 Summary

In summary, the prevention and elimination of child labour in Hue requires the cooperation of many agencies, organizations and individuals from families, schools, local government and other appropriate agencies. A targeted action plan should be developed to focus on two key points: prevention and protection.

Some prevention activities include:

- Supporting families to improve livelihoods;
- Helping parents to learn how to manage their finances;
- Organizing meetings or information sessions for families and children about the risks associated with child labour migration;
- Supporting children to access appropriate vocational and life skills, and creating appropriate entertainment places for children.

Some protection activities include:

- Raising awareness and sharing information with the community and nation on the risks associated with child labour migration;
- Making available training courses in line with the educational levels and abilities of exploited children; and
- Development of networks to support exploited children at destination.
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