

I am a first-year PhD student in the Department of Geography. My research focuses on risky migration between Vietnam and the United Kingdom, in a context of suspicions that certain migratory experiences match the definition of human trafficking and modern slavery. One of my research objectives is to better understand the difficulties that protection stakeholders face as they attempt to support potential victims of trafficking or modern slavery in both countries. In Vietnam specifically, UN agencies, NGOs, local charities and the media struggle to access to and build trust with 'hidden' communities of returning victims. It is particularly the case with women returnees: some of them face stigmatisation once they are back, which leads them to keep a low profile, and there are report that people actually willing to receive support struggle to access the few existing protection services.

I am grateful to Royal Holloway, University of London, as receiving a 2018-2019 Travel Award enabled me to undertake field research both in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in order to better understand how these challenges impact the understanding of Vietnamese migrants' trajectories, experiences and the assistance effectively available to them across borders.

My three-month field research in Vietnam primarily consists in interviews with a range of persons providing direct or indirect support to migrants at risk and to confirmed victims of trafficking or modern slavery across the country. An exploratory trip in Vietnam in 2018 allowed me to build relationships with most of them, which was really helpful in securing interviews this year. Most of the interviewees are based in the capital-city Hanoi (see the picture attached), in the North of the country. Two of them are based in Ho Chi Minh City, in the South. I was lucky enough to have a Hanoi-based research institute support the administrative and logistical aspects of my research travels, such as sponsoring a research visa and offering me a place to work from at their office. I also receive the valuable support of a Vietnamese research assistant who helps me gather and analyse data in Vietnamese.

This trip is instrumental in understanding how people involved in protection activities on the ground differently understand and negotiate protection challenges. Analysing the data from these interviews will also help me see how these difficulties affect the discourse on trafficking. It will highlight different methods and obstacles in the process of gathering migrants' voices and taking them into account in the design of assistance programmes.

On a personal level, conducting research in Vietnam is a very rich experience. It allowed me to build a wide network and solid relationships with Vietnamese researchers and professionals – from whom I learnt a great deal on the best ways to undertake research in the country. I now understand better how the geographical and cultural difference - between the North and the South of the country for instance, impacts perceptions and response in respect to my research topic. I also learned from administrative and operational challenges related to setting up research in Vietnam, which will be useful in the next steps of my research. Finally, travelling there gave me the chance to practice and improve my Vietnamese language skills, undertake direct observation and collect visual materials that will be part of my PhD thesis.