

Introduction: *“Beware of employment traps”* is a series of investigative journalism (including 4 print articles, 2 videos, 1 Reporter Perspective article, 2 online articles), conducted by Reporter Nhat Linh and colleagues - Reporter Cong Nguyen, Reporter Pham Thu Ngan (Thanh Nien Newspaper) since mid-May 2020 in Ho Chi Minh City after social distancing - a period when many unemployed workers were struggling to find jobs to make ends meet.

Taking advantage of the demand for jobs, a “syndicate” opened 3 companies, posed themselves as supermarket and chain-store recruiters (such as Co.opmart, Ministop, etc.), and created hundreds of virtual recruitment sites on Facebook or Zalo. Workers were then lured to apply and pay around 500,000 to 1 million VND, but ended up with no job and no money back. Notably, this scheme had been going on since the outbreak of the pandemic up until after the social distancing period, scamming hundreds of workers, but local authorities failed to take any measures. Workers did not know where to seek for protection, especially when they knocked on the door of the local authorities only to receive silence, exacerbating their misfortunes. The reporters investigated and Co.operated with relevant parties to assist victims in reclaiming their money. After this series, the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City immediately directed local units to handle the situation; the aforementioned companies returned the money to many workers, closed their facilities and took off.

We focus on disadvantaged people in society, especially low-income workers, warn authorities to take measures to prevent them from falling into employment traps in modern society, and help raise their voices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides interviewing authorities and labor and employment experts, the reporters provided many points of assistance, such as reliable job and recruitment centers under Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union, organizations, helping workers understand the regulations and brokerage fees in job seeking.

In June 2020, Thanh Nien Newspaper also conducted the investigation series *“Revealing the secret of missing students”* to rescue students deceived in the same manner.

List of related articles:

- **4 print articles**

Article 1: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-1222450.html>

Article 2: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-can-bo-phuong-kiem-tra-chop-nhoang-1222904.html>

Article 3: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-de-nghi-cong-an-vao-cuoc-1223588.html>

Article 4: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-ubnd-tphcm-yeu-cau-xu-ly-nghiem-1224045.html>

<https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-xu-ly-trach-nhiem-quan-ly-cua-can-bo-dia-phuong-1224519.html>

- **2 videos**

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG4T7q8-KV8>

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGRDDTFkHhg>

- **1 Reporter Perspective article**

Link: <https://thanhvien.vn/blog-phong-vien/nhan-tam-voi-nguoi-ngheo-1225156.html>

- **2 online articles**

Link: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-rong-ra-doi-tien-cong-ty-moi-gioi-deu-1226525.html>

<https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/phong-vien-thanh-nien-tren-moi-neo-duong-xam-nhap-duong-day-giang-bay-nguoi-lao-VND-1324673.html>

Article 1: Beware of employment traps

Link to online article: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-1222450.html>

Published on 12 May, 2020

After the ease of social distancing measures, tens of thousands of workers from different provinces flocked to Ho Chi Minh City to apply for jobs, but many fell into the traps of fraudulent broker companies that pushed them towards unemployment and homelessness.



The cashier desk at Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. Here, the employees would collect 800,000 VND from workers for a “responsibility fund” and make cards for them. CREDITS: Pham Thu Ngan.

Ms. Trần Thị Lam (from Phú Yên Province) called the hotline of Thanh Nien Newspaper for help, reporting that she was deceived by a brokerage company in Binh Chanh District (Ho Chi Minh City). This agency had received her brokerage payment but did not get back to her with any job offer.

Overflowing job registrations after COVID-19

According to Ms. Lam, on April 7, she came to the aforementioned brokerage company and paid a fee of 800,000 VND to register for a job at BigC and Co.op Mart supermarkets in Ho Chi Minh City. However, on the day she was supposed to get the job, the company said they could not arrange it. Notably, when she came to reclaim her money, the company tried to shirk their responsibility.

Thong Nhat Investment Services Company Ltd. (Thong Nhat Company for short; headquartered at No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Binh Chanh District) is the company that Lam accused of deception. On May 5, up contact with Thong Nhat Company via phone, we were told to come to their main office in Binh Tan District on the same day. Afterwards, our reporter received

a text “You are invited to an interview, at No. 105, Street 53, Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District, remember to bring the original copy of your ID card”.



2 workers travelling by motorbike over a long distance to Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. for the job interview. CREDITS: Cong Nguyen.

On the morning of May 5, arriving at the above address, we saw a townhouse (1 ground floor, 3 floors above), with a sign of Sai Gon Group International Development Company LTd. hanging outside. Right at the entrance, there were 2 desks, with 2 employees continuously receiving applications for job brokerage. In addition, a big panel hung in the middle of the house with logos of Co.op Mart, Lotte Mart, CDV, Aeon Mall, BigC, etc. As we sat down at the desk, a male employee gave us a piece of paper and instructed us to fill in some basic information: full name, phone number, desired workplace, phone number of Ms. Nguyet (the person who made the appointment for the job interview).

After filling in the information, we were instructed to head to the first floor for the advisory service. An employee asked us to hand over our registration form and ID card, and started giving us advice. “As long as you work 16 hours a week (4 days with shifts), you will get travel allowances... About the job, our company will give you 2 sets of uniform. To prevent you from taking the uniform away or quitting after 1-2 days at work, we will sign with you a responsibility fund for the first 30 days of contract implementation... you have to pay 500,000 VND”, said the male employee.



Many workers registered and paid for job brokerage at Hung Thinh Company (Ward 4, District 8, Ho Chi Minh City) on May 6. CREDITS: Cong Nguyen.

Afterwards, we were instructed to go to the opposite room to pay the 500,000 VND fee. We had to fill in a form called “Human resources commitment and guarantee”, stamped by Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. “You work part-time, so your salary shall not be as high as those that work in 8-hour or 10-hour shifts. You shall receive hourly wages every week. Before you start the job, call the number in the commitment form”, instructed the male employee. He then continued to ask us to pay another 300,000 VND to make a card.

This multi-functional card, used for identifying, timekeeping, parking, etc. has a warranty fee of 200,000 VND and can be re-issued free of charge if lost. ATM cards must be issued by H. Bank, with 500,000 VND in the balance right upon opening of account. “These two cards are 300,000 VND. You will not get a refund because the documents belong to you now”, says the female employee.

Having paid 800,000 VND, we were asked to come home and wait until May 13 to start working at BigC Supermarket in District 2 (HCMC). When we were at Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd., a great number of workers were crowding the place,

Milk as much money as they can

Likewise, according to our reporters’ field observations, many came to pay the registration fees at the two other companies that were recruiting supermarket salespeople, with a monthly salary range of 8 to 10 million VND, namely, Hung Thinh International Development Services Company Ltd., (250 Ta Quang Buu Street, Ward 4, District 8) and Thong Nhat Investment Services Company Ltd. (No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Binh Chanh District).

We continued to call the number of Ms. Yen from the Facebook page “BigC Viet Nam” and were asked to come to Hung Thinh International Development Service Company Ltd. for an interview on May 6. There, we were also instructed to follow the procedures and pay the fees similar to those at Sai Gon Group International Development Company in Binh Tan District.



Workers register and pay for jobs at Thong Nhat Company (Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District, HCMC) On the morning of May 8. CREDITS: Cong Nguyen.

“Working 8-hour shifts, you will get a minimum salary of 7.2 million. The minimum salary for the 10-hour shift is 8.7 million”, advised the female employee. She asked us to pay 500,000 VND for a “responsibility fund”, along with two uniforms. Two other female workers who came with us asked about this fee. The female employee from Hung Thinh Company cut them off and shouted: “A fee is one kept after payment, and never returned. Have I said anything about collecting a fee? For our company, this is just a deposit, not a fee”.

We wanted to work immediately, so the employee required us to pay a “deposit” of 500,000 to get our paperwork done. We said we only had 400,000, but this employee collected the money anyway. After paying, we were told to leave and call the number 0896520... on May 11 to meet with a manager named Thiên for further instructions. Thiên then told us to come to No.22, Road 13, Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District to receive our uniforms.

On the morning of May 7, we arrived at the aforementioned address, heading into Thong Nhat Investment Services Company Ltd. We did not get the uniforms, yet were asked to pay another 300,000 to make our employment card and bank card. Knowing that we only had 200,000 VND, the employees here still accepted the payment.

Upon payment, we received a paper of “work placement” to Lotte Mart (242 Nguyen Van Luong, Ward 10, Go Vap District). We asked why we were placed to work at Lotte Mart, despite having registered for BigC, and got the answer: “All new employees are trained at Lotte Mart. After 5 days, they will be transferred to their desired workplace.” When the reporter wanted to change the preference from BigC to Co.op Mart, the male employee told us to tell the manager and our wish would be answered.



Many workers came to Sai Gon Group International Development Company to pay the fees and register for jobs. CREDITS: PHAM THU NGAN

Over many days of investigation, Thanh Nien Reporters observed there were hundreds of workers coming for job registration every day at the offices of the three companies that posted job advertisements for supermarket salespeople at BigC, Co.op Mart in Ward 4, District 8; Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District; Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District. Regardless of gender, age, level of education and expertise, prior contact, etc. as long as one came to these three companies and paid from 500,000 to 800,000 VND of “deposit” for the cards, they would get a job appointment. The procedure was simple, with no health examination required, and it took only 5 to 10 minutes to “get a job” with a promised salary of 8 to 10 million VND per month.

N.T.Th (aged 18, from Ninh Thuận Province) travelled from her hometown to one of the aforementioned addresses (250 Ta Quang Buu, Ward 4, District 8) to apply to be a salesperson. Th. was interviewed and asked to pay 500,000 of “deposit”. Th. told the company employees that she only had 50,000 left for lunch, but she was still asked to pay then, and to add the remaining 450,000 within 5 days. P.M.Q (aged 19), despite only having 100,000 VND left to eat, was still forced to pay for the job registration.

However, most workers that paid for the above companies did not get any job; when they came to ask for their money back, the company employees made different excuses and promises in order to avoid returning the money.

Saigon Co.op, BigC do not authorize companies for job brokerage

According to the representative of Saigon Co.op, which owns Co.opMart, Co.opFood, Co.opXtra, the Human Resources Department of Saigon Co.op is in charge of recruiting personnel for the whole system. Until this point, Saigon Co.op has not signed any cooperation, nor has it authorized and used any intermediary recruitment services. There has been a lot of information on websites, online networks, Facebook, companies,... pretending to be Co.op Mart supermarket to hire staff, but it is actually a scam.

All direct recruitment information from Co.opMart, Co.opFood, Co.opXtra is publicly posted and constantly updated on the website and fanpage of Co.op Mart: www.facebook.com/hethongCoopmart.vn, as well as in Saigon Co.op’s publications.

With regards to the above issue, representative of BigC in Vietnam also affirms that this company does not sign any contract to authorize external job agency to supply labor for

them. Workers that wish to apply for jobs at BigC supermarket may directly contact their offices at BigC locations.

Workers do not have to pay any fee, deposit or uniform cost when receiving advice and job appointment within BigC supermarket chain.

Article 2: Beware of employment traps: A quick investigation by local officials

Link to online article: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-can-bo-phuong-kiem-tra-chop-nhoang-1222904.html>

Published on 13 May, 2020

While hundreds of workers were crowding the place, waiting in line to be interviewed and paying for job registration, two officials from Tan Tao Ward People's Committee (Binh Tan District, HCMC) came in to investigate...



The two officials of Tan Tao Ward working with employees of Sai Gon Group Company on the morning of May 5. CREDITS: ANH: PHAM THU NGAN

During the investigation, Thanh Nien reporters noted there were officials from Tan Tao People's Committee (Binh Tan District, HCMC) coming to inspect the operations of one of the three "scammy" job brokerage companies, but then left, leaving the company to continue with their activities.

Twice checked but still operating conspicuously

On the morning of May 5, Thanh Nien reporters posed as workers coming for job registration at Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. (Sai Gon Group Company for short, headquartered at No. 105, Roa 53, Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District, Ho Chi Minh City). While hundreds of workers crowded the place, waiting for their interviews, two officials from Tan Tao People's Committee (Binh Tan District) came in for inspection. When the two officials were working with a male employee representing Sai Gon Group company, two guards from Tan Tao Ward were standing at the door, and hundreds of workers still went in and out, applying for jobs, paying fees, asking for money back, etc. Some of them raised their voice at the employees to ask for their money and were immediately led to the second floor, to a private room to reclaim

their fees. After nearly 15 minutes, the two officials and the guards left, and the activities at the company got even more bustling than before.



The male employee of Sai Gon Group Company points his finger at workers who asked for their money back.

On May 6, 7, and 8, the reporters noticed hundreds of workers continued to come to Sai Gon Group Company, paying the fees and applying to be salespeople at supermarkets.

On the morning of May 8, talking to Thanh Nien reporters, Mr. Ngô Phan Duy Hiệp, Vice Chairman of Tan Tao Ward People's Committee, noted that on April 1, the Ward received a tip regarding Sai Gon Group's operation during the social distancing period, so they sent the officials there to check. Upon their arrival, the company had closed their operation, so they made a written record of the situation. Regarding the inspection of the two officials on May 5, Mr. Hiệp confirmed the visit and called for Officer Út, who was in charge of labor and employment in the ward. Mr. Út said that he received news about job applicants gathering in front of Sai Gon Group Company and causing noise, so he came there to investigate. At the time of investigation, the company representative showed their business registration license and later added a labor supply contract for a security company in District 12.

On May 12, Thanh Nien reporters contacted and requested to see the meeting minutes from May 5 between Sai Gon Group and Tan Tao Ward officials, including the information: given that this company advertised jobs at supermarkets, did the officials check for labor supply contracts between the company and supermarkets? Did the ward check relevant legal documents for job consultancy and brokerage? Was it true that Tan Tao Ward officials overlooked the inspection procedures, thereby enabling Sai Gon Group's misconducts? However, Mr. Ngô Phan Duy Hiệp refused to answer directly and asked Thanh Nien newspaper for a written inquiry, to which he would reply later.



**Workers coming to pay the fees and apply for jobs on the morning of May 7. CREDITS:
NHAT LINH**

Finding ways to avoid returning the money

While the local authority showed signs of not fulfilling their responsibilities, poor workers continued to fall into the traps of treacherous brokerage companies. Talking to reporters, P.T.T (aged 17, from Dong Thap Province, temporarily residing in Thu Duc District, HCMC) said that her family became worse-off after the pandemic, so she came to the city to find jobs. Knowing that Sai Gon Group posted job advertisements for sales staff at a convenience store in Go Vap District, with a salary of 6 million and a later increase to 7.5 million, T. reached out to them. “At first, I was afraid of being scammed, but I saw many others pay the same fees, so I followed suit. They told me to come again on May 5 for work arrangements. On the day of the appointment, I called two company employees but they both tried to avoid the subject”, T. resentfully recalled.

On the morning of May 6, we followed T. to the office of Sai Gon Group Company to reclaim the fees she paid. Upon arrival, T. was immediately taken to the second floor to work with the company employees. She was offered to be a security guard in Go Vap District, but the salary was way below the promised level when she paid the fees, so she declined and asked to get back her 700,000 VND. The Sai Gon Group employees then promised to return money to T. by bank transfer. At the gate, T. asked some older people who successfully reclaimed their money and was told by a middle-aged woman: “You have to toughen up until they pay you. No use in waiting for their promise!” Heeding the woman, T. came back into the company to ask for immediate cash. After a loud argument, the company employees agreed to return to T. 50% of what she paid (350,000 VND) and transfer the rest in around 10 days. Right after T. left, another female victim angrily exclaimed: “No! That is not the job I applied for in the beginning. What a fraud, pay me back right now!”

According to the reporters' observation, on May 6, many people came to Sai Gon Group, both to apply for jobs and to reclaim their money. Most were unskilled labors from other cities and provinces. "I paid 800,000 VND but received no job for more than a month. They kept delaying my money reclaiming appointment. Knowing that I was coming to ask for my money, some strange youths threatened me and kicked me out of the company. All they do is lie, there is no job brokerage at all", said Ms. Hoà (temporarily residing in Go Vap District), frustrated.

The same story took place in Thong Nhat Investment Services Company (Thong Nhat Company for short, No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Binh Chanh District). Ms. Trần Thị Lam (from Phú Yên Province) told us, on April 7 she came to Thong Nhat Company to apply for a job at the supermarket (according to an advertisement on Facebook) and was asked to pay 800,000 VND, then got an appointment to start working at Co.op Mart in Thu Duc District on April 14. On that day, Ms. Lam made several phone calls to a manager called Lộc for job placement but got no answer; she called the company, but they kept transferring her through different people and ended up blocking her.

Suspicious, Ms. Lam went to Thu Duc Co.op Mart, only to realize that they were not recruiting, so she rushed to Thong Nhat Company to ask for clarification. Here, the company employees made an excuse that it was during the pandemic, so they were... waiting for further arrangements. She kept waiting until the end of the social distancing period, without any contact from the company. On May 8, Ms. Lam went to Thong Nhat Company to ask for her money back and was promised to receive her deposit after 10 days via... bank transfer. "Not only me, but also many others from far have come to Thong Nhat Company to reclaim their money. The employees make different excuses to not pay us back. Many people have lost their job due to the pandemic; they cannot keep travelling back and forth for the appointments and were forced to accept the money as lost for good", said Ms. Lam.

On the morning of May 5, the reporters also witnessed 2 young applicants coming to ask for their money and getting into a fight with Thong Nhat employees.

Signs of organized fraud

According to lawyer Nguyen Hai Nam, from Binh Phuoc Bar Association, Article 7 of Decree 03/2014 of the Government details the implementation of a number of articles of the Labor Code regarding employment, which states that the expenses of labor recruitment are paid by employers and accounted into production and business costs; in the case of recruitment through employment service organizations, employers must pay

the employment service charges for recruitment, according to the provisions of law. Thus, the law prohibits collecting money from job applicants in any form. It is against the law to collect money from laborers who apply for jobs, be it fees or deposits.

In the incidents inspected and reflected by Thanh Nien reporters, there are grounds to believe that the recruitment companies were using the names of other businesses to recruit workers, with a view to building trust among applicants to illegally collect money, then finding reasons to withdraw their responsibility of refund; in fact, there were no jobs for the laborers. If this is the case, it is clear that the behavior of the recruitment companies shows signs of obtaining payment by deception and of organized crime. This behavior needs to be strictly investigated and penalized.

Article 3: Beware of employment traps: Asking the police to step in

Link to online article: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-de-nghi-cong-an-vao-cuoc-1223588.html>

Published on May 14, 2020

Through investigation, Thanh Nien reporters noted that the three fraudulent recruitment companies in Ho Chi Minh City had connections to each other and showed signs of non-transparency in collecting money and introducing jobs for laborers.



Security guard at Thong Nhat Company were always following anyone that came to the company to ask for their money back. CREDITS: NHAT LINH

Various signs of non-transparency

Specifically, we discovered that Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. (Sai Gon Group Company for short, headquartered at No. 105, Road 53, Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District, HCMC), Hung Thinh International Development Services Company Ltd. (Hung Thinh Company for short, at 250 Ta Quang Buu Street, Ward 4, District 8) and Thong Nhat Investment Services Company (Thong Nhat Company, No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District) showed similar tricks of setting up their “traps”, as well as a connection in deceiving workers.

Calling the number of Thong Nhat Company, we were instructed to get an interview appointment, then to pay 800,000 VND at Sai Gon Group. Similarly, we contacted to apply for job and pay 500,000 for uniforms at Hung Thinh Company, but then were led to Thong Nhat Company to pay another 300,000 for cards before getting job arrangements.



The young man in black making excuses to not return the money to applicants.

CREDITS: PHAM THU NGAN

Notably, all three companies are newly established, with relatively young legal representatives. Sai Gon Group Company was established on March 19, 2020 and registered for the first change on April 15, 2020, legally represented by Huỳnh Anh Tuấn (aged 21, from Hoa Tien Commune, Krong Pac District, Dak Lak). Hung Thinh Company was first registered on May 7, 2020, legally represented by Pham Duc Thinh (aged 24, from Hoa Binh Commune, Tra On District, Vinh Long Province).

Thong Nhat Company was first registered on December 5, 2019 and re-registered for the first time on February 27, 2020, with the legal representative being Dang Duc Tam (aged 25, residing in Ward 4, Tân Bình District, HCMC).

However, when Thanh Nien reporters contacted the number on the business registration certificate of Sai Gon Group, a woman picked up the phone, saying that she was in Bac Ninh Province, and that she had just bought that number and did not know any Huỳnh Anh Tuan (?).

Next, we called the number on the business registration certificate of Thong Nhat Company several times to reach Dang Duc Tam but no one answered. We called the number 056.30003516, which was said to belong to Pham Duc Thinh, and a young man who initially identified himself as the Director of Hung Thinh Company made an appointment to talk directly with Thanh Nien reporters. Yet, when we called many more times to set up the meeting, he did not answer and proceeded to block our number.

According to our investigation, these three companies are managed by a person named D. (riding a red SH motorbike with the name plate 29..., often appearing at Sai Gon Group every afternoon) and some other people, who plays a key role in managing job advertisements on

social networks, recruitment, as well as money collection from workers when they come for job registration at Sai Gon Group, Thong Nhat and Hung Think.



Thong Nhat employee trying to avoid paying the workers back. CREDITS: CONG NGUYEN

In addition, three companies show many signs of non-transparency during their job brokerage, for example: operating without adequate legal documents for job brokerage; collecting money from workers without following the regulations; making up Cooperation with some large supermarket chains to deceive workers; not arranging jobs, finding excuses to not return workers' money, etc.

Requested to stop working

On the afternoon of May 8, Thanh Nien reporters contacted the People's Committee of Tan Tao Ward (Binh Tan District) to report the case of Sai Gon Group Company for possible frauds of poor workers.

Mr. Ngo Phan Duy Hiep, Vice Chairman of Tan Tao People's Committee, directed a working group to coordinate with Binh Tan District's Labor Department to investigate the company. At the time of inspection, many people were coming to pay and apply for jobs, and many others were asking for their money. Noticing the officials, the employees gathered up the cash and papers, intending to leave, but were all stopped.

There, the police of Tan Tao Ward recorded nearly 20 people that had paid this company and forced the employees to return their money. The inspectors asked to work directly with the managers, but the employees said they did not know who the director was (!?). The inspection crew took note of the case and asked the company to stop operating until they could present all the relevant documents for job brokerage and job recommendation.

On the afternoon of May 12, the People's Committee of Binh Tan District said that they had invited the company director to come since May 8 but he had not shown up; the district directed Tan Tao Ward to send a supervisory force to this company. "Now the company is closed, their

legal representative has not come to the authority to work so we have asked the police to join the investigation”, said the representative of Binh Tan People’s Committee.

On May 13, according to Mrs. To Thi Kim Anh, Chairman of the People’s Committee of Phong Phu Commune, they had asked the director of Thong Nhat Company to come to work with them twice, but this individual still had not shown up. Before that, on May 8, during the inspection, Thong Nhat Company could not present their license for job brokerage activities or labor supply contracts with supermarket chains. Upon arrival of the authorities, the female cashier (the one that directly collected money from the reporter on the morning of May 7) quickly took off on her vehicle.

Phong Phu Commune People’s Committee requested Thong Nhat Company immediately stop collecting money from applicants and return their money. Accordingly, the ward asked workers who had paid Thong Nhat Company, but had received neither a job nor a refund, to come to the People’s Committee (No. D11/314 Trĩnh Quang Nghi, Village 4, Phong Phu Commune) and the Ward police station to report, so that they could report to Binh Chanh District People’s Committee and police to investigate the situation and reclaim the money for workers.

Receiving the information from Thanh Nien reporters, on May 10, People’s Committee of Ward 4 (District 8) formed a delegation to come and inspect the operations at Hung Thinh Company and noted there were around 20 workers coming to apply for jobs and pay the fees. Talking to the inspection group, this company admitted that from May 8 to May 10, they had collected money from 82 laborers. According to Mr. Nguyen Xuan Dinh, Vice Chairman of Ward 4 People’s Committee, Thong Nhat Company had not presented sufficient legal documents for job consultancy and brokerage, and had shown many unusual signs, so they have also requested the company stop operating and return the money to workers.

The People’s Committee assigned the Ward police, People’s street guards, and specialized officers to supervise the refund to workers; at the same time, Ward 4 Police created the preliminary files and reported to District 8 Police to investigate and handle the situation.

Notably, after these companies stopped operating, Thanh Nien reporters noted that at least one of them removed their signboard and attempted to disappear...

The people knew, why not local authorities?

Seeing the authorities coming to inspect Sai Gon Group, many people living nearby gathered to watch, excited. According to Mr. D. (living near Sai Gon Group), this

company had rented the house (No. 105, Road 53) for nearly 2 months. Every day, there were hundreds of young people from near and far coming to pay the fees and apply for jobs.

Since the beginning of their rental, the company has been working consistently, even during the social distancing period, to consult and collect money from job applicants. Many people come to apply for jobs, many other come to reclaim their money (for not getting any job – reporter). People crowd the area and park their motorbikes on the street, causing congestion. Those living nearby have several times reported to the head of the neighborhood, the local police and Tan Tao Ward People’s Committee about the fraudulent works of Sai Gon Group, but they are surprised to see the company carrying on their operations. “If strangers come to this area asking for Road 53, they must definitely be asking for the job brokerage company. I tell them to watch out for fraud, but they did not believe me and still paid the fees. The company have been operating conspicuously for nearly 2 months, people around here all know about it, how come local government and police do not know?” said D., frustrated.

Article 4: Beware of the employment trap: Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee requires strict punishment

Link to online article: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-ubnd-tphcm-yeu-cau-xu-ly-nghiem-1224045.html>

Published on May 15, 2020

The urgent dispatch concerning the direction of the Vice Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee clearly states that the results of this case must be reported to HCMC People's Committee by May 31, 2020.



Many workers come to Thong Nhat Company to reclaim their money, to no avail.

CREDITS: PHAM THU NGAN

Accordingly, the Vice Chairman of the Municipal People's Committee assigns the Municipal Police to administer and coordinate with relevant authorities to quickly verify, detect, prevent, and strictly punish any violations of the law; and to report the results to the Municipal People's Committee by May 31, 2020.

On the same day, Mr. Do Dinh Thien, Vice Chairmen of Binh Tan District People's Committee (HCMC) said that he had directed Binh Tan District Police to investigate Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. (Sai Gon Group Company for short, headquartered at No. 105, Road 53, Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District) for signs of frauds against workers, following the reports by Thanh Nien Newspaper in the series "Beware of employment traps". To this day, Tan Tao Ward Police has recorded many cases of workers reporting that Sai Gon Group collected money without either arranging jobs for them or returning their money.



Workers come to Phong Phu Commune Police to report. CREDITS: PHAM THU NGAN

Simultaneous shutdown of the offices

Meanwhile, according to our reporters, after having their deception exposed, Sai Gon Group Company, Hung Thinh International Development Services Company (Hung Thinh Company for short, at 250 Ta Quang Buu, Ward 4, District 8), and Thong Nhat Investment Services Company (Thong Nhat Company for short, at No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District) have all closed down simultaneously.

Sai Gon Group even removed their signboard, with the landlord having started rental advertisements, and Tan Tao Ward People's Committee has put on a notice: "Sai Gon Group Company has stopped their operations, any individual that has paid them and not received their money back may contact Officer Sang (regional police) via phone number 0909252..."

Talking to us, Mr. Th, the landlord of the premises that Sai Gon Group rented for their head office, said that the company left and removed their signboard without prior notice. According to Mr. Th., 2 months ago, a man named Duc (aged 23), accompanied by a man above 30 years old, came to rent the place for the office of a job brokerage company. After their agreement, Duc signed a one-year lease contract, with a monthly rental fee of 12 million and a deposit of 3 months' rent. After finding out that the company had moved away, Mr. Th. tried to call Duc many times, with no success.



With Sai Gon Group moved away, the landlord puts on a rent notice. CREDITS: NHAT LINH

Hung Thinh Company was also closed, with a notice outside stating that the company was not receiving job applications from May 12 to May 15, with details can be discussed via the phone number 0563003... When we contacted this number, a woman named Thinh said that she was the director of Hung Thinh Company and told us they would resume working on May 16 to handle any need of workers (?!).

Likewise, Thong Nhat Company closed its office and put on a notice of temporary shutdown, with the number 0969967... for people to contact. Calling this number, we were told by a male employee that “the company temporarily stopped working to fix the electricity and water system”, they would answer applicant needs when they open again (?!).

Meanwhile, Phong Phu Commune People’s Committee had put up a notice in front of Thong Nhat Company, which read: “Workers that have paid this company without getting job arrangements or the return of their money may contact the Commune People’s Committee for further instructions.”

Avoid paying the money back

After the aforementioned companies have closed, many workers who could not ask for their money back came to the police office to report the behaviors of these three companies. On mid-day of May 13, more than 15 people came to Thong Nhat Company to reclaim their money, but it was closed.

Mrs. L.T.T (aged 60) and her grandson T.T (aged 21), temporarily residing in District 12, arrived here very early. “We first called them on the phone and then rang the doorbell, but there was no answer, so we knocked on the door, then came a man who not only did not help us but even grabbed a cane to threaten us”, Mrs. N. recalled, frustrated. She also came to Phong Phu Commune Police to report the incident. According to her, on February 12, her kid and grandkid came to Thong Nhat Company and paid 1.6 million in total to apply for jobs at supermarkets, but they had not heard anything back after a long wait.

Not only Mrs. N., during the morning of May 13, many people traveled from Hoc Mon District, Cu Chi District (HCMC), Di An Town (Binh Duong Province) to the office of Thong Nhat Company, waiting to reclaim the money they had paid, but all eventually left in disappointment.

Mr. Nguyen Van Sang, Deputy Director of Ho Chi Minh City Youth Employment Service Center (HCMC Youth Union), shares that workers looking for jobs may contact the Center either directly or indirectly. Job applicants may come directly to branch offices of the center for advice (free of charge) or check recruitment information on their website (www.sieuthivieclam.vn). In addition, workers should visit reliable job centers in the city, such as the job placement center of the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs.

A notable case is that of Mr. H.P.L, who paid Thong Nhat Company 800,000 VND but did not get any job, and who arrived at a closed gate when he came to ask for his money, so on May 13 he reported to Phong Phu Commune Police.

According to Mr. L., when he was at the commune police, the office on duty listened to him then led him to a person named Nhan, dressed in police uniform. Mr. Nhan took his personal phone to call a person that was believed to be an employee of Thong Nhat Company and asked them to give 800,000 back to Mr. L, then gave the phone to Mr. L. to talk directly to that employee. This person told Mr. L. to go home and provide his bank account number so they could send him the money later. When Mr. L did not agree to that and asked to receive the money person, this person challenged him and still refused to pay him back in cash.

On the afternoon of May 13, as there were too many people crowding and making noises in front of Thong Nhat Company to ask for their money back, Phong Phu Commune Police arrived at the scene. Only then did people from Thong Nhat Company open their door to work and return money to some people. Mr. L. got back 500,000 VND; the employees said they would give him the remaining 300,000 later.

In addition, among the people that reported to Phong Phu Commune Police, three registered and paid at Hung Think Company but got appointments at Thong Nhat Company. Arriving at Thong Nhat Company, they called the number on the door and the person picking up the phone tried to shirk the responsibility "Go ask for your money where you paid it!".

On the afternoon of May 13, Mr. N.V.Ph (aged 23), together with 5 other people who had paid 800,000 VND to Sai Gon Group, came to reclaim their money. Seeing that the company was closed, Mr. Ph. and other victims went to Tan Tao Ward Police to report. "I am already so poor, I even became unemployed during the pandemic, but they still mercilessly deceived me for 800,000 VND", said Ph. According to him, Tan Tao Police recorded the case and requested from him a letter of denunciation of the fraudulent behavior by Sai Gon Group Company.

Addressing the management responsibilities of local officials

Published on May 16, 2020. Link to Thanh Nien Online: <https://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-xu-ly-trach-nhiem-quan-ly-cua-can-bo-dia-phuong-1224519.html>

According to a manager from Ho Chi Minh City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, local officials that show signs of neglect, cover-up of the company deception must also be detected and punished strictly. On May 15, a manager from HCMC Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) said they were collaborating with relevant bodies to verify and tackle the fraudulent behaviors of the three job brokerage companies that Thanh Nien has portrayed in the investigation series *Beware of employment traps*.

Through file check, all three companies - Sai Gon Group International Development Company Ltd. (Sai Gon Group Company for short, headquartered at No. 105, Road 53, Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District, HCMC), Hung Thinh International Development Services Company Ltd. (Hung Thinh Company for short, at 250 Ta Quang Buu Street, Ward 4, District 8) and Thong Nhat Investment Services Company (Thong Nhat Company, No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu residential area, Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District) - have not been licensed by DOLISA to operate their job recommendation services per regulation. The quoted person states that the job brokerage and fee collecting activities of the three companies are completely against the regulations, showing signs of worker fraud.

Regarding the fact that these three companies have been operating for a long time and collecting money from many workers, this manager claims that the main responsibility is in the hand of the local authorities.

“The Ward and Commune People’s Committees, as well as the District Department of Labor, must take responsibility of administering the activities of companies in their region”, says this person. He asserts that it is nonsensical that regional police, neighborhood officers, labor specialists in wards claim no knowledge of these behaviors, as the activities of these companies have been bustling every day. If ward officials report to the district and municipal level that they are aware and have inspected, they must specify the date of inspection, the content of such inspection, as well as any written record. It did not make sense for them not to report to the high levels immediately after

learning that the companies were operating without license certificates but rather only requested the companies temporarily close.

“Local officials that show signs of neglecting, cover-up for the company’s deception must also be detected and punished strictly”, says this manager. Leaders of HCMC DOLISA say that in January 2019, in a meeting with leaders of the labor departments from 24 districts in the city, HCMC DOLISA asked the local officials, especially those from districts that share borders with neighbor provinces, to check and review job brokerage companies and report to HCMC People’s Committee. However, by this time, DOLISA has only received report from Thu Duc District.

Article 5: Reporter's Perspective: No mercy for those impoverished!

Link to online article: <https://thanhvien.vn/blog-phong-vien/nhan-tam-voi-nguoi-ngheo-1225156.html>

Published on May 18, 2020

The people know, how come authorities do not? How can they take responsibility when fraudulent companies still operate conspicuously and continually, setting up traps to scam poor laborers?



Workers come to Thong Nhat Company to reclaim their money, but the company was closed. CREDITS: NHAT LINH

During the investigation to expose the tricks of the three fraudulent companies in HCMC (Thong Nhat Company, Sai Gon Group Company, Hung Thinh Company), publicized in the series “Beware of employment traps”, Thanh Nien reporters have witnessed many miserable cases that could bring tears to our eyes.

Specifically, every day many come to these companies to apply for jobs. Regardless of age, level, files, etc. the only concern for the companies is how to get a “deposit” out of the pockets of applicants; those who contact by phone are also told to come to the office to pay this deposit and a card fee (800,000 VND in total).

One person with only 50,000 left in their pocket for lunch was still forced by the employees to pay the “deposit”. In the hopes of employment, they starved themselves to pay the company. Yet there was no job, and when they came back all they got were empty promises, sometimes even threats.

Because of the long distance and travel costs, many workers have lost hope and decided to let go of the stolen money, even though they remained unemployed, living from hand to mouth. A woman traveled from Hóc Môn District to Binh Chanh District under the glaring sun to ask for

her money back from Thong Nhat Company, crying out: "Why do you have to cheat those who are already suffering?"

Notably, during the investigation period, many people living near the companies reported how the companies have been conning money out of workers for a long time. Some residents even stand at the road leading to the companies to warn applicants of potential fraud.

So why do the people know, but not local authorities? Where is the responsibility of local authorities, when these companies conspicuously and continually commit frauds against workers?

The companies have mercilessly deceived poor workers for money, and those in authority have deliberately ignored these fraudulent behaviors. That is no different from being an accomplice to such ruthless acts.

Article 6: Beware of employment traps: A persistent quest to reclaim money from fraudulent companies

Link to online article: <https://thanhnien.vn/thoi-su/canh-giac-bay-lua-viec-lam-rong-ra-doi-tien-cong-ty-moi-gioi-deu-1226525.html>

Published on May 22, 2020

Most victims that have fallen into the “trap” of employment by job brokerage companies are poor and disadvantaged workers.



L. T. K. H is shuffled to different places by job brokerage companies but has still found no job. CREDITS: PHAM THU NGAN

During the investigation of fraudulent brokerage companies, most of the victims we met were poor laborers, deceived by the insidious scheme of fraudulent brokerage companies.

"I just need enough money to pay back my grandma"

P.T.T (aged 17, from Dong Thap Province) told us that, growing up in a poor family, he soon dropped out of school to come to HCMC to work. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, T. lost his job. He was browsing the web for employment when he learned of Sai Gon Group International Development Company (Sai Gon Group for short) and came there to apply for a job.

Arriving at the address No. 105, Road 53 (Tan Tao Ward, Binh Tan District, HCMC), the head office of Sai Gon Group, T. was asked to pay 800,000 VND for a "responsibility fund" and bank card. Having only 700,000 on hand, T. still had to pay all of it, and got an appointment to start on May 5. T. then came back to his hometown, waiting for his first working day.

When the date came, T. took a bus from his hometown in Sa Dec (Dong Thap) to HCMC, but he could not get in touch with the manager. When he called Sai Gon Group, they tried to change the subject, so on May 6, T. went to their office.

At Sai Gon Group, the company manager made excuses, trying to transfer T. to a security guard position at Lotte Mart (Go Vap District). The salary there would be vastly different from

the promised level at the beginning, so T. did not agree and wanted to get his money back. Sai Gon Group employees continued to make excuses and promised they would transfer him the money.

Upon departure from the company, T. was told by another victim: "You have to toughen up until they pay you back. Who knows how long we have to keep waiting?", so T. headed back in to ask for his money. After some argument, the male employee finally paid T. half of his deposit and promised to pay the rest by June 6.

With 350,000 VND, T. was happy but worn out. He shared that the amount of money might be nothing for many people, but it was very important to him.

Posing as job applicants, we have met many young people looking for jobs. Fraudulent job brokerage companies often take advantage of their inexperience to con money out of them. When victims find out that they have been deceived and come back for their money, companies often prolong the process or only return part of the money so as to discourage them.

Having left school at the age of 12, H.P.L (aged 19, residing in District 3, HCMC) took on many jobs - from construction worker, porter, to lottery ticket sales, security guard - to make ends meet. After his parents separated, he lived with his grandma. On May 1, in order to register for job brokerage at Thong Nhat Investment Services Company (Thong Nhat Company, at No. 22, Road 13, Phong Phu Commune, Binh Chanh District), L. borrowed 500,000 VND from his grandma. When the company employee asked for a fee of 800,000 VND, L. immediately paid all that he had. "I was initially hesitant, but paid in the end because I saw many others do it as well", L. recalled.

His grandma suspected that he wasted 500,000 VND on leisure activities. "Whatever comes, I just need to have enough money to give back to her", L. confided.

On the afternoon of May 13, L. and the other victims demanded repayment from Thong Nhat Company. It was not until the commune police arrived did the company open its door and return the money to job applicants. However, Thong Nhat Company employees made various excuses and paid only 500,000 VND for each person, promising to transfer the rest later.

Holding the 500,000 in his hands, L. shared: "That's enough for me. I can go home to my grandma now." According to L., it was no longer important whether he got the remaining 300,000 VND or not, because that amount could not make up for the efforts of going back and forth to reclaim the money.

Borrowing money for my kid to have a job

During the investigation at Sai Gon Group, Hung Thinh Company and Thong Nhat Company, we saw many workers coming there to try and reclaim stolen money.

Mrs. L.T.N. (aged 60) traveled from Vinh Long Province to Ho Chi Minh City and rented a room with her daughter in District 12. Back on February 13, her daughter and grandson paid a total of 1.6 million at Thong Nhat Company but did not receive any job offer afterwards. Since the morning of May 13, Mrs. N and her grandson drove for more than an hour from District 12 to Thong Nhat Company's office in Binh Chanh District to ask for their money back.

Mrs. N stood in front of the office, hurriedly eating a loaf of bread, and said in frustration: "Ringing the bell or making phone calls did not work, so we came to knock on the door. Finally, a man came out of the house, who not only did not solve our problem but even cursed me for disturbing his sleep. He used a cane to threaten me."

Reporting to Phong Phu Commune Police, Mrs. N. was told that Thong Nhat Company would start working on the afternoon to return the money to workers. Spreading the cash notes she had just received, Mrs. N. told us that to have 1.6 million to pay the company before, she had to borrow 600,000 VND from some acquaintances. "I have only been able to pay back 500,000 VND in the past 3 months, and they are still coming after me. I am downtrodden enough already, how come I still get scammed?"

Mrs. N. was not the only one. On mid-day May 13, more than 20 people from Hoc Mon District, Cu Chi District, or even from Di An Town (Binh Duong Province), like Mr. V.T, traveled to the head office of Thong Nhat Company, waiting to get their 800,000 VND back.

L.T.K.H (aged 19, from Ben Tre) also had to make ends meet. Her parents had separated, so H. came with her mother to Binh Chanh District to rent a room. Her mother is a factory worker, and H. just entered her freshman year at a college. She wanted to find a part-time job to share her mother's burden.

On May 11, H. arrived at Hung Thinh Company to apply for employment and got an appointment to come to Thong Nhat Company on May 12 to start her job. When the day of the appointment came without any news about a new job, H. contacted Hung Thinh Company, but they did not address her problem. The company was closed, so H. reported to the People's Committee of Ward 4 (District 8).

From then onward, it had been more than week, but still H. had no job, and her money was gone. “I have to take two bus rides for more than an hour to get to Hung Thinh Company. Now my classes are pilling up, I do not know how I can get my money back, it is a huge amount for me”, H. shared

Mr. Nguyen Van Sang, Deputy Director of Ho Chi Minh City Youth Employment Service Center (HCMC Youth Union), states that workers, especially college students and unemployed people, must be extremely cautious and conduct thorough research, because labor brokers often take advantage of workers’ desperate need for jobs to con them out of their money.

According to Mr. Sang, workers should prepare 1 to 2 sets of documents including the papers to apply for jobs, such as application letter, personal profile, certificates, copies of household registration, ID card, etc.

When coming to the Youth Employment Service Center, workers shall receive advice on vacancies, as well as job requirements such as age, gender, level, experience, and relevant skills. They shall also be counselled on working locations, salaries, and the policies of businesses, etc.

“That is a complete consultancy process to provide workers with sufficient information. Afterwards, the center is responsible for contacting the hiring businesses to confirm the vacancies, before issuing a recommendation letter to the employers for the candidates”, says Mr. Sang.

He also shares that workers can consult various other reliable job centers in the city, such as the job placement center of DOLISA, or Ho Chi Minh Youth Employment Service Center (HCMC Youth Union) for free advisory services. “Normally, hiring businesses do not collect any fees from workers. In the cases of fee collection, there has to be a strict and clear agreement signed between job applicants and employers, not the brokers”, says Mr. Sang.