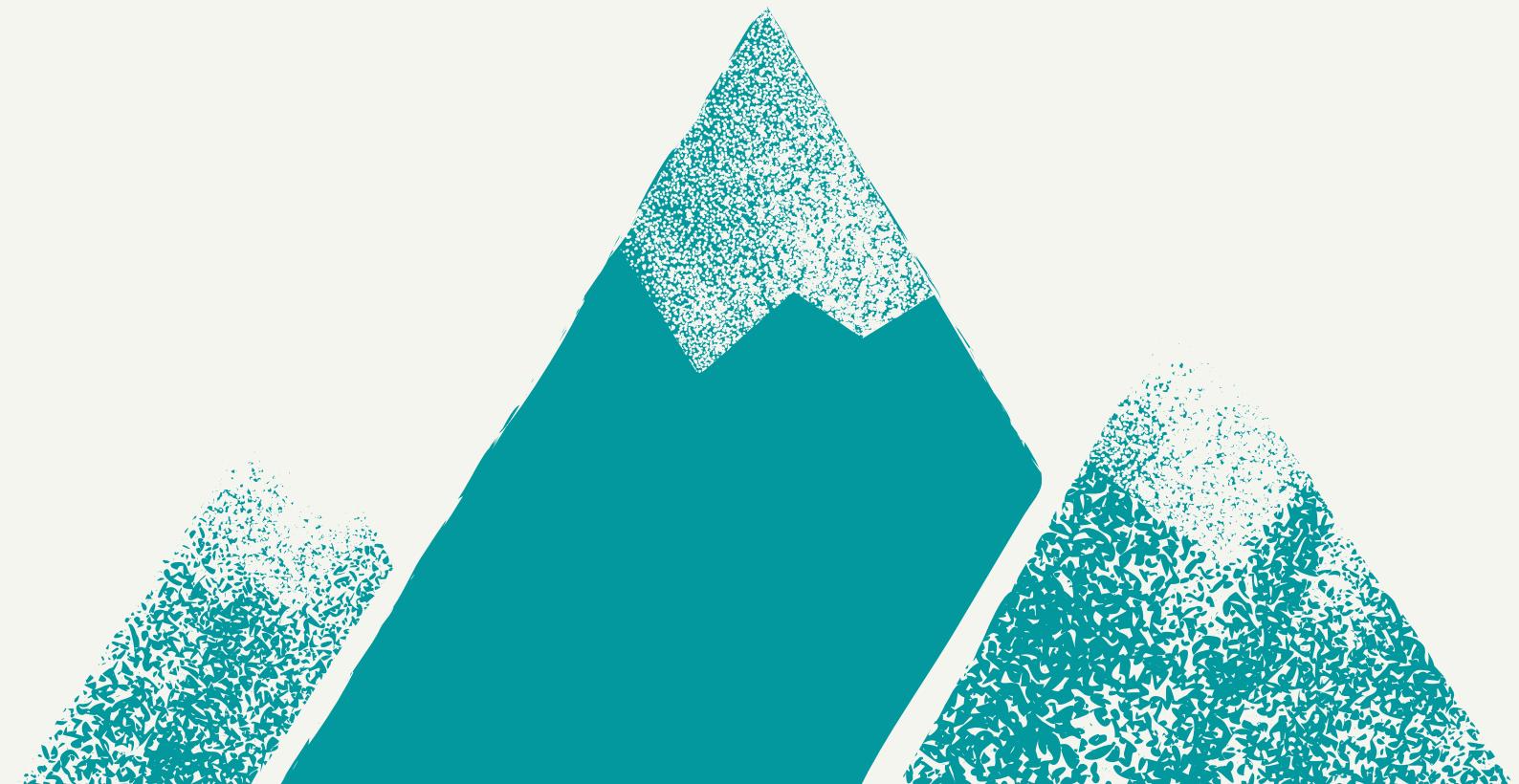


Legal Initiatives
for VIETNAM

LUẬT KHOA
tạp chí

thevietnamese

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



OPEN LETTER

The year 2020 was an extraordinary one for nearly everyone the world over. LIV was no exception.

It was exceptional in both positive and negative ways.

Positive because we could produce more content and carry out more work than in any other year in our six years of operations—by far.

Positive because we were able to elevate our organizational system to an unprecedented level of professionalism and effectiveness.

Positive too in that we wrapped up 2020 with a definite shift to journalism based on reader input; momentum here is also exceptional.

But the negative?

Our co-founder and editor, Pham Doan Trang, was arrested and charged with conducting “propaganda against the state.”

We became entangled in two messy affairs when one of our reporters committed plagiarism, and Liberal Publishing House encountered financial mishandling.

Meanwhile, Facebook – our largest distribution outlet – continued its “bandwidth squeeze,” blocking our articles.

Everything has pushed us to continue pursuing independent and high-quality journalism, disseminating political and legal knowledge to all peoples, and promoting the values of liberty, equality, and tolerance so that we may move towards a more democratic and prosperous society.

This annual report is LIV’s effort to share what we’ve been doing and maintain transparency with you. If you have any questions or concerns, please email us at editor@luatkhoa.org.

Thank you all so much for following and supporting LIV these past six years.

Co-directors: Trinh Huu Long – Tran Quynh Vi | 19/3/2021

Doan Trang and liberal inspiration



For us, journalist-activist Pham Doan Trang is more than just a co-worker; she is the source of inspiration to yearn for liberty in our organization.

Doan Trang co-founded LIV with Trinh Huu Long, Tran Quynh Vi, and Truong Tu Minh in 2014.

She was arrested on October 6, 2020, in Ho Chi Minh City, charged with conducting “propaganda against the state.” The investigation into Doan Trang is not only an attack on LIV’s operations, but it is also a strike against independent journalism and publishing, as well as democracy advocacy in Vietnam more generally.

We are immensely proud of Doan Trang; she is one of the bravest and most talented Vietnamese of our time and among the sharpest journalists we’ve had post-1975.

Doan Trang is the source of inspiration for us, and her arrest only makes her that much more inspiring.

If freedom is a state of mind, Doan Trang is forever free. And so are we.

Timeline of LIV's developments

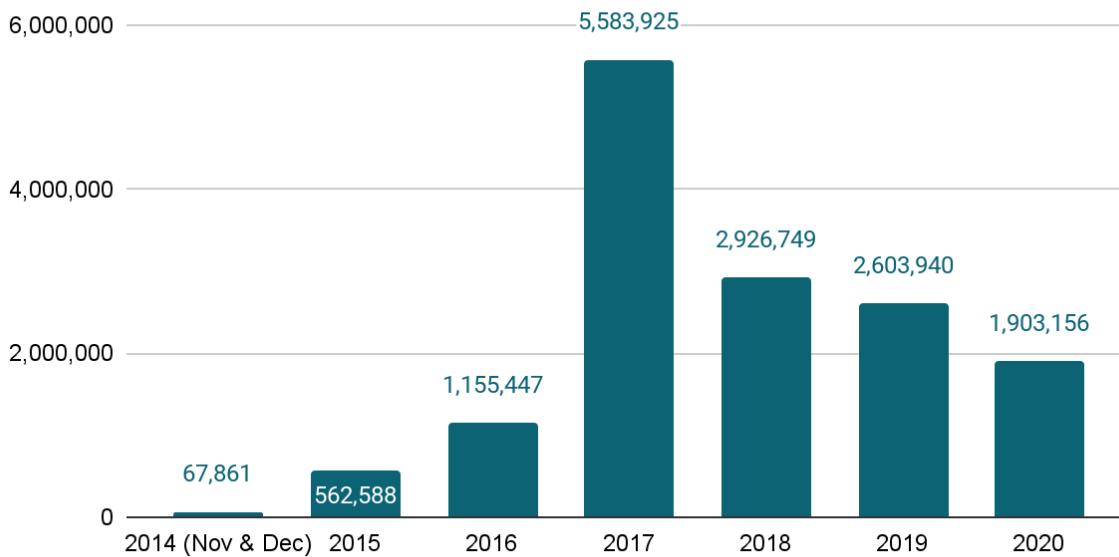
5/2014	Trinh Huu Long, Pham Doan Trang, Tran Quynh Vi, and Truong Tu Minh establish LIV.
7/2014	LIV establishes its book project.
5/11/2014	Luật Khoa Magazine <u>debuts</u> at luatkhoa.org .
17/10/2015	The <u>Program to Provide Funding for Legal Research</u> debuts. The program lasts from 2015-2016.
End of 2015	LIV launches a donation channel via Paypal.
24/12/2016	LIV establishes an office in Taiwan.
1/2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIV <u>registers</u> as a non-profit organization in California, United States, under Legal Initiatives for Vietnam. • Facebook debuts its Instant Article feature, enabling readers behind Vietnam's firewall to access LIV's articles. • LIV launches its newsletter.
31/8/2017	Luật Khoa Magazine encounters a domain name issue, temporarily <u>switching</u> over to luatkhoa.info until October 5.
8/11/2017	The Vietnamese, an English magazine project, <u>launches</u> at thevietnamese.org .
12/2017	Vietnam begins to block access to Luật Khoa Magazine and The Vietnamese.
6/2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luật Khoa and The Vietnamese suffer DDoS attacks over ten days, interrupting operations. • LIV creates backup pages at bit.ly/luatkhoa (unblocked in Vietnam).
1/2019	The group “Luật Khoa Community” <u>debuts</u> on Facebook.
12/9/2019	Co-founder and editor Pham Doan Trang <u>receives</u> the Press

	Freedom Prize for Impact, from Reporters Without Borders in Berlin, Germany.
2/2020	LIV upgrades our management software, automating many parts of our work process.
4/2020	LIV experiments with daily news updates, which we scrapped after more than a month due to a lack of human resources; the project concluded with <u>a case of plagiarism</u> committed by a reporter.
5/2020	For the first time, LIV was able to live-report events, covering <u>the cassation trial of the Ho Duy Hai case</u> .
6/2020	LIV begins to provide scholarships for correspondent training.
7/2020	LIV becomes involved in a <u>case of financial mishandling</u> at Liberal Publishing House after serving as an intermediary; the issue is resolved at the beginning of 2021.
6/10/2020	The Vietnamese police <u>arrest and charge</u> Pham Doan Trang with “conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” under the Year 2015 Penal Code Section 117 and Year 1999 Penal Code Section 88.
1/2021	LIV launches a new fundraising channel at <u>donorbox.org/luatkhoa</u> .
2/2021	Telegram <u>debuts</u> the Instant View feature, enabling readers behind Vietnam’s firewall to access LIV’s articles.

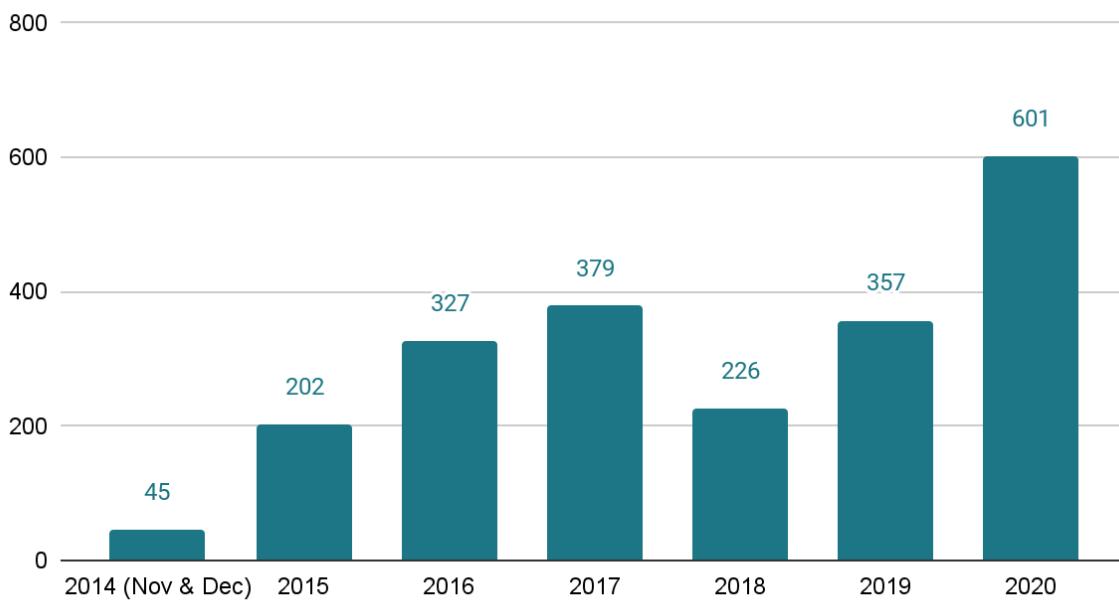
LIV over the years

Luật Khoa Magazine - Page views

Sources: Google Analytics, Jetpack.

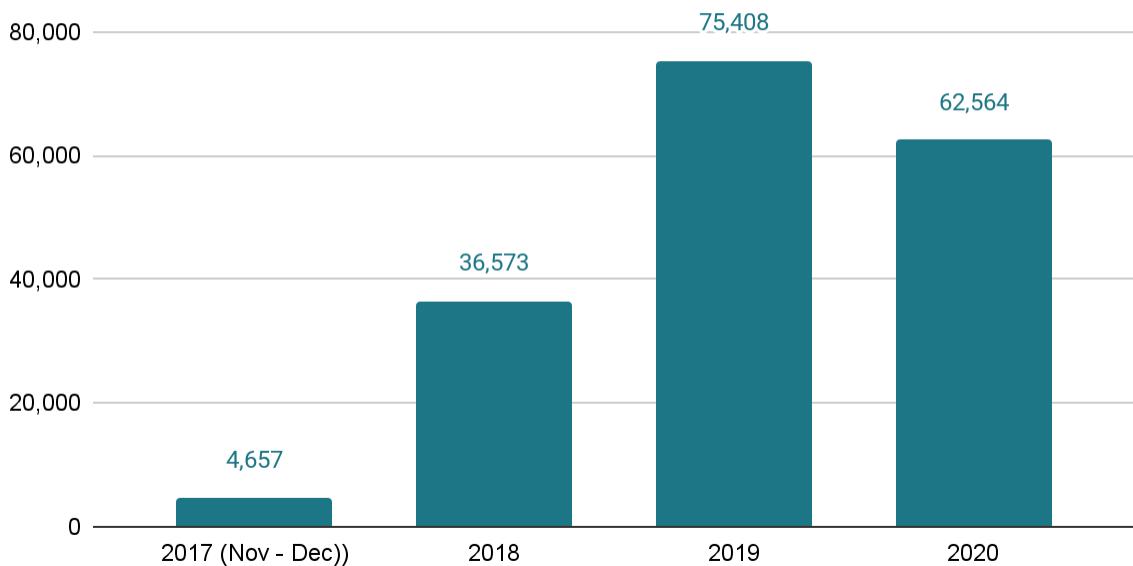


Luật Khoa Magazine - Number of published articles

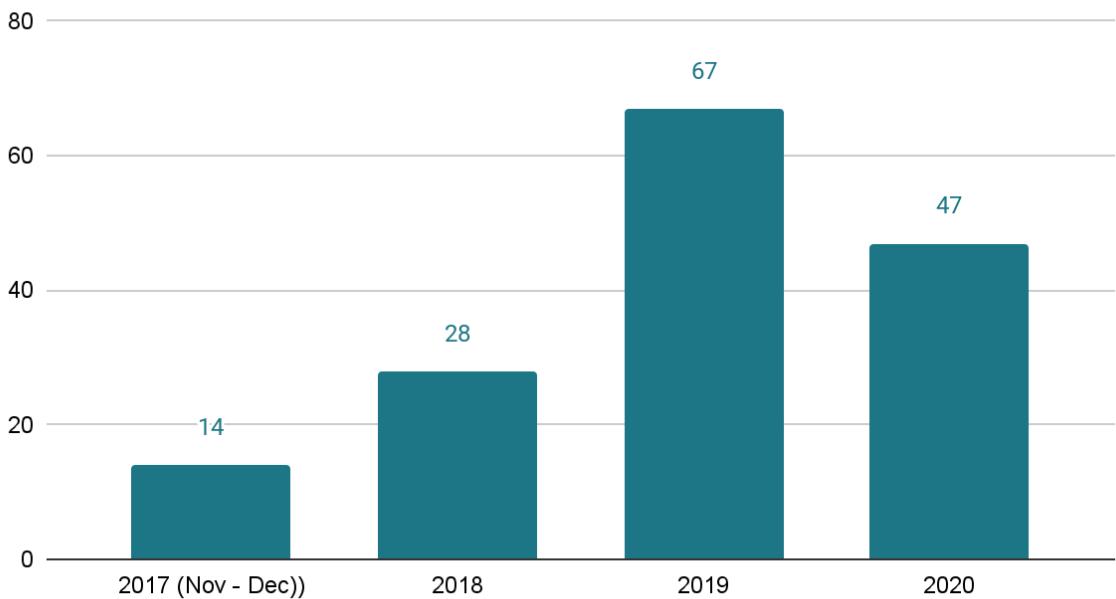


The Vietnamese Magazine - Page views

Sources: Google Analytics, Jetpack.

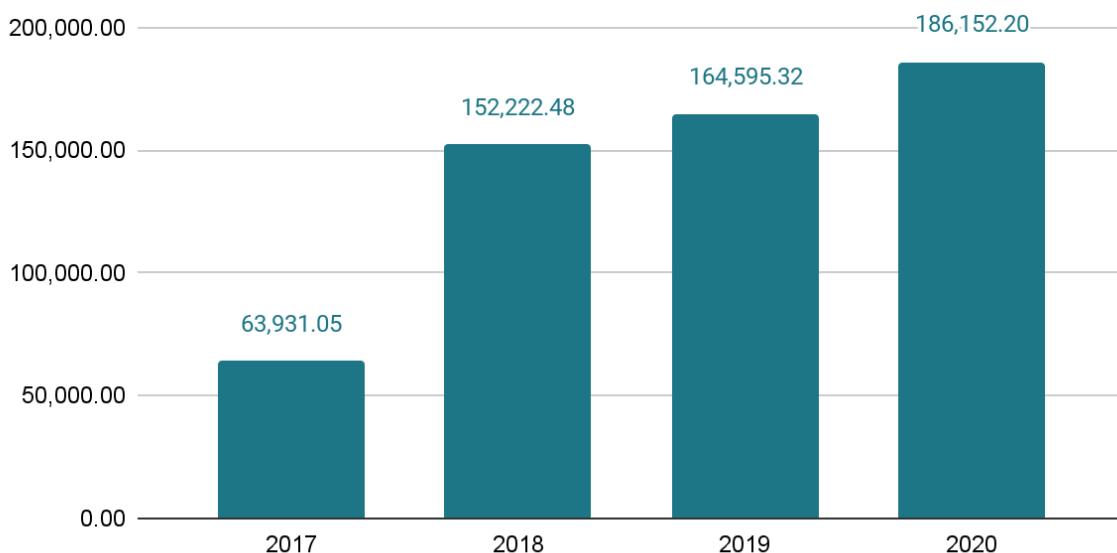


The Vietnamese Magazine - Number of published articles



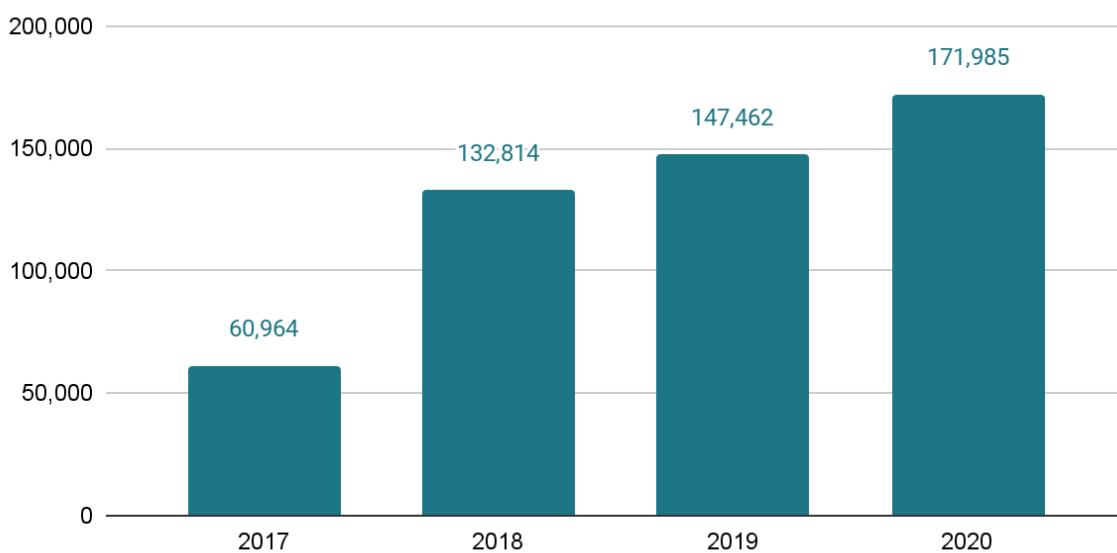
Total budget revenue

USD – audited



Total expenses

USD – audited



* The financial numbers above are drawn from an independent auditor, whom we have used since 2017 when LIV registered as a legal entity in the United States.

2020 Overview

Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent Journalism (Luật Khoa, The Vietnamese) Training Books Research
Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 full-time employees 4 part-time employees 1 volunteer
Total expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 171,985 USD (the amount has been independently audited).
Total number of published articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 601 articles on Luật Khoa Magazine 47 articles on The Vietnamese
Total number of page views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Luật Khoa Magazine: 1.9 million The Vietnamese: 62,500
Total number of trained students (excluding employees trained)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2
Number of books being translated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6
Total number of books collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 300 physical books 1,386 electronic books
Total number of research projects carried out or participated in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3

What have we written?

With nearly 650 articles published on Luật Khoa (in Vietnamese) and The Vietnamese (in English), LIV has tried to keep up with the issues that are most important or topical to our readers. We have sought to write about things that others will not, and for things that have been written about, we have sought to write about them in a better way. Said another way, we are racing to fill the vast space left by the state press by producing better journalism. It is very difficult to do, but we are trying with all our might.

In 2020, we invested the largest portion of our time and energy into the raid on Dong Tam and the ensuing trial nine months later, as well as the cassation trial in the case of Ho Duy Hai. With these two trials (Dong Tam, Ho Duy Hai), we were able to live-report for the first time, announcing developments as they happened, not just during the trials themselves but also for events surrounding the trials, as well as noteworthy perspectives. Related to these two cases, we also published a multiple series on land disputes and criminal justice.

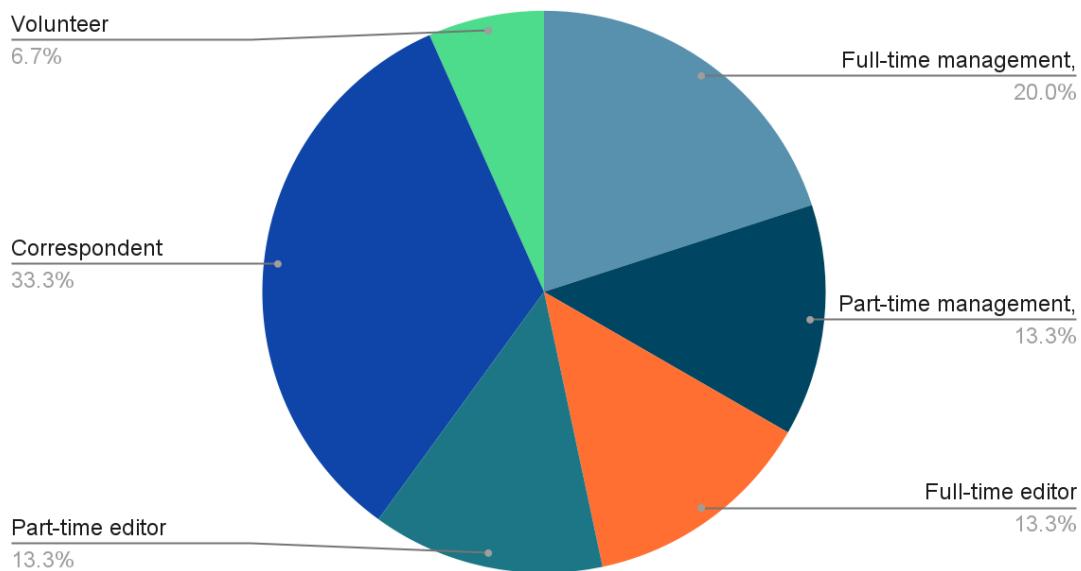
The COVID-19 outbreak, the largest issue in 2020, was unavoidable for LIV. In fact, it was the outbreak that pushed us to launch daily news updates, though this feature only lasted a little more than a month. Luật Khoa even “broke some barriers” and wrote a number of articles about medicine. Another disaster was the historic floods in October, which we covered along with a series on the environment.

As usual, we publish a series of articles on the Republic of Vietnam in March and April of each year. The South China Sea issue is also covered every year. Another notable item is religion, one of the most sensitive and least covered topics in Vietnam, which is why Luật Khoa has invested in it. Freedom of speech, the year 2020 had so many events related to this issue, including our co-founder Pham Doan Trang's arrest. Luật Khoa has even created a weekly section called “Let's read with Doan Trang”.

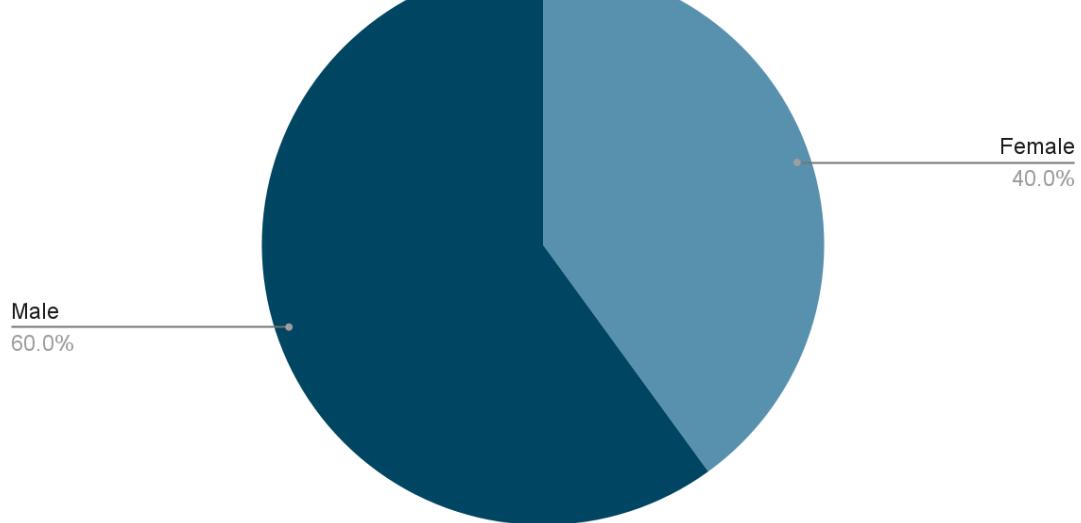
On the international front, China and the US election took up a large proportion of our writing. If you care about American law and politics (beyond the election), then we had you covered with many articles. Taiwan, star of the year, also made an appearance. In 2020, Luật Khoa also participated in a thematic collaboration for the first time, with journalists from New Naratif (Singapore) to produce a series on Singaporean politics specifically for Luật Khoa.

Personnel in 2020

Personnel breakdown



Gender breakdown



Personnel in 2020



Trinh Huu Long
Co-founder, co-director | Taiwan

Long is in charge of Luật Khoa Magazine, personnel, and technology. He has previously worked at VCCorp, BVSC, HAFIC, Tia Sang Magazine, Tuoi Tre Newspaper, and VOICE. Long graduated from Hanoi Law University in 2008.



Tran Quynh Vi
Co-founder, co-director | United States

Vi is in charge of The Vietnamese Magazine, finance, public relations, and administration. She graduated from the University of California, Davis.



Phạm Đoan Trang
Co-founder, editor | Vietnam

Trang has worked for VnExpress, VietNamNet, Ho Chi Minh City Law (publication), and Liberal Publishing House. She is the author of many books on politics and society and graduated from Hanoi Foreign Trade University in 2000. Trang is currently being held at Detention Center Number 1 in Hanoi.



Other employees
Reporters, editors, administrative employees,
volunteers | Various countries

These individuals have worked tirelessly to build LIV into what it is today, but we cannot share their names out of concern for their personal safety.

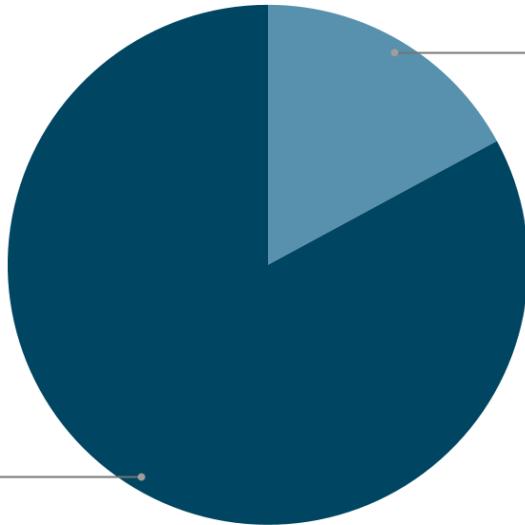
Finances in 2020

Breakdown of income sources

Audited

Non-profit organizations
82.9%

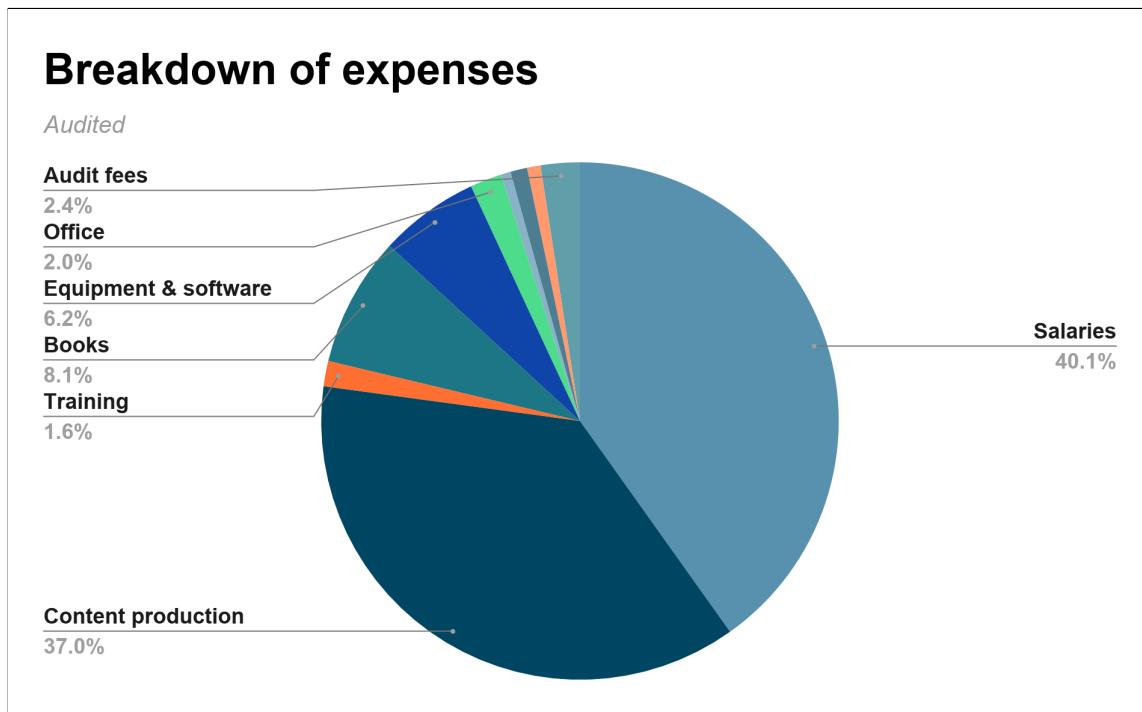
Readers
17.1%



Notes:

- “Readers” includes individual contributions as well as matching donations from a number of American businesses.
- “Non-profit organizations” include grants and contract payments.

Finances in 2020



Notes:

- Salaries: This portion is distributed among managerial, administrative, accounting, and editorial staff. However, besides the editors, nearly all employees in this group also comprise key staff in content production.
- Content production: This portion is distributed to full-time correspondents and collaborators.
- Contributions from readers are primarily spent on content production and secondarily on book projects.
- In 2020, with the exception of some cash transactions totaling approximately U\$6,000, LIV's expenses were handled through American bank accounts or Paypal, with full statements and full audits. LIV limits the use of cash as much as possible, with strict policies in place regarding cash expenses.
- LIV hires an independent auditor to prepare financial statements and an accounting firm to file taxes annually in the United States.

LIV and the world of research, media

<u>News and Notes</u>	1/2020	Journal of Democracy
<u>Vietnam's battalions of cyber armies' silencing online dissent</u>	17/1/2020	Al Jazeera
<u>These Are the 10 'Most Urgent' Threats to Press Freedom in March 2020</u>	2/3/2020	TIME
<u>The Jailed Activist Left a Letter Behind. The Message: Keep Fighting.</u>	14/10/2020	New York Times
<u>'Scorched Earth': Vietnam Arrests Leading Dissident Activist and Blogger</u>	8/10/2020	The Diplomat
<u>Facebook touts free speech. In Vietnam, it's aiding in censorship</u>	22/10/2020	Los Angeles Times
<u>Commentary: Vietnam limits, blocks freedom of speech, dissident voices on the internet</u>	27/10/2020	VOA Vietnamese
<u>Acknowledgments: Freedom on the Net 2020</u>	10/2020	Freedom House
<u>When a Vietnamese National Assemblyman "apologizes" and says police "number too many"</u>	26/11/2020	BBC Vietnamese
<u>Let us breathe! Censorship and criminalization of online expression in Vietnam</u>	30/11/2020	Amnesty International
<u>Facebook and Google accused of complicity in Vietnam censorship</u>	1/12/2020	Financial Times
<u>Facebook Complicit in Censoring Posts in Vietnam, According to Amnesty International</u>	1/12/2020	VICE
<u>Facebook lets Vietnam's cyber army target dissidents, rejecting a celebrity's plea</u>	22/12/2020	The Intercept
<u>Vietnam Wants Western Politicians, Not Western Politics</u>	27/2/2019	Foreign Policy
<u>Incentivising Pro-Labour Reforms</u>	3/2019	CID (Harvard University)

New strategy: Reader-funded journalism

In 2020, LIV adopted a new development strategy for our journalism, formally and firmly turning towards a press model that relies on reader contributions.

As you've seen, the majority of LIV's budget comes from international non-profit organizations (82.9%), with reader contributions only making up a small fraction (17.1%). In the future, LIV seeks to rely on majority-reader contributions to run Luật Khoa Magazine and apply the reader subscription model for The Vietnamese. This means that Luật Khoa will remain free, accessible by anyone, and ad-free, while The Vietnamese will potentially sit behind a paywall.

We've written a [long article](#) explaining our strategy and have asked our readers to contribute a monthly amount equivalent to the price of a book or a cup of coffee. If you'd like to donate, please click [here](#).

A model based on reader contributions also pushes Luật Khoa to increase transparency in our operations, which we currently share with you through our [monthly letters](#), as well as our annual reports, such as the one you're reading now.

How can I donate to LIV?

You can use the donation page donorbox.org/luatkhoa, which integrates multiple payment methods, including Visa/Mastercard, Paypal, Apple Pay, Google Pay, and American Express.

LIV has also signed up for the donation matching service [Bevenity](#), for American businesses. Donations to LIV are also tax-deductible for readers in the U.S.

LIV's taxpayer ID (EIN): 81-5257301.

Channels through which we interact with readers:

- [Telegram](#)
- [Luật Khoa Community](#) on Facebook
- The “Luật Khoa Magazine” pages on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)
- “The Vietnamese” pages on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

Q & A

Did COVID-19 affect LIV at all?

Yes, but the effects were negligible. LIV's work is not physically concentrated in any one place, but rather, is carried out across many different countries. Working from home has been a part of Luật Khoa's DNA since its inception.

Luật Khoa's budget and the number of published articles have increased annually but its readership decreased substantially, beginning in 2018. Why?

From December 2017, access to Luật Khoa was blocked in Vietnam, immediately cutting readership by nearly half in 2018. In the years following, we noticed that our reach on Facebook – Luật Khoa's largest distribution outlet – dropped substantially, causing website readership to drop as well. This phenomenon is often called a “bandwidth squeeze.” Thus, even though our budget, staff size, and the number of published articles have all shown healthy growth, our readership has gone down.

Why does LIV still approach readers for fundraising when it has support from non-governmental organizations?

As with personal or business finances, LIV needs to diversify its sources of income rather than relying on any single one too heavily. Furthermore, we want readers to serve as our main sponsors, that is, for readers' contributions to make up more than half of our budget. Such an arrangement would align our organization with the needs of our readers more directly. We want readers to be the ones who evaluate the effectiveness of our work—through the act of donating.

What will LIV focus on in 2021?

LIV has three priorities in 2021: we want to continue upgrading our managerial system, our capacity-building training for staff, and the quality of our content.

If I want to write articles for Luật Khoa or The Vietnamese, what should I do?

We welcome your work!

You can take a look at our collaboration policy for Luật Khoa [here](#), and The Vietnamese [here](#).

- For Luật Khoa, you can submit articles through our management system at www.luatkhoa.org/guibai.
- For The Vietnamese, you can send articles to editor@thevietnamese.org and vi.tran@thevietnamese.org.



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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE
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