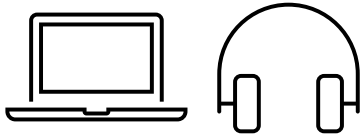


# Trafficking into online scam operations in Southeast Asia



## The situation

A new form of human trafficking has rapidly taken shape in the ASEAN region. Since 2021, people have been recruited from overseas into 'online jobs' in numerous countries in the region. On arrival however, they have been taken to compounds and forced to engage in online scams, and abused psychologically and physically if resisting.

A range of factors have contributed to this phenomenon, including: technology developments, COVID-19, crypto-currencies, criminal networks connecting with local elites in the region, scamming psychology perfected, and a large pool of young migrant workers available.

The scale of profits is fueling further growth beyond the region which is increasing the influence, power, and proliferating crime types. The ability to launder proceeds from the crime at scale increases corruption and fuels these criminal networks.

Scams challenge the existing counter-trafficking response. Some governments are trying to respond, but the problem is endemic and the scale is evolving at a pace beyond authorities' ability to respond, including with AI and the agility of operations.

## How is ASEAN-ACT contributing to responses to the issue?

We are working with partners in the ASEAN region to build the evidence:

- Joint research with the Global Initiative against Transnational Crime and the Bali Process RSO seeks to deepen understanding of the patterns, the criminal networks and financial flows, and identify responses to them.
- Supported research by Cambodian non-government organisation [Legal Support for Children and Women](#) on the circumstances surrounding inbound human trafficking from countries in the region to Cambodia's cyber-scam industry.
- [Research by ODI](#) on the political economy analysis on the vulnerabilities of labour migrants to trafficking into scam centres

We are working with partners in the ASEAN region to facilitate dialogue, strengthen cooperation and policy:

- Joint roundtable with GI-TOC and Bali Process RSO bringing together financial investigators and counter-trafficking experts to 'follow the money'
- Facilitating bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia, Thailand and Lao PDR to share intelligence, facilitate investigations and cooperation, and pursue justice.
- [Partnership with UNODC](#) to strengthen international legal cooperation, bringing together prosecutors across the region to address legal challenges.
- Support to SOMTC to address online recruitment and exploitation in the ASEAN multi-sectoral work plan against trafficking in persons ([Bohol 2.0](#)).

