

# IOM'S REGIONAL SITUATION REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS INTO FORCED CRIMINALITY IN ONLINE SCAMMING CENTRES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

FEBRUARY 2024



Credit: Christophe Archambault

This second IOM regional situation analysis on trafficking in persons (TiP) for forced criminality (FC) in Southeast Asia's online scamming centres offers practitioners, policymakers and the donor community a concise overview of

counter-trafficking initiatives. It encompasses IOM's key figures, achievements, prominent press coverage and publications from the year of 2023, accompanied by recommendations for 2024.

# MODUS OPERANDI

Infographic from IOM's Situation Analysis on Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia (March 2023):

ACT	MEANS	PURPOSE OF EXPLOITATION
<b>Recruitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combination of online job offers posted on social media and in-person recruitment by agents in the countries of origin.</li> <li>Recruitment is mostly free of charge for the victims.</li> </ul> <b>Transportation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The travel fees tend to be arranged and paid by traffickers.</li> <li>Traffickers usually support the issuance of victims' travel documents, including tourist visa applications.</li> <li>For land bordercrossing, transporters are normally residents of bordering communes who receive small fees and are unaware of their role in human trafficking.</li> <li>Victims usually move in small groups before being slowly split up throughout the different legs of the journey.</li> </ul> <b>Harboring</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guarded compounds that operate as online scamming centres.</li> </ul> <b>Transfer and Receipt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several changes of hands in the process: recruiters hand victims over to smuggling agents to cross borders, traffickers then receive the victims at the border, before being rewarded by the employers.</li> </ul>	<b>Fraud and Deception</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promises of good working conditions: high salary, regular bonuses, attractive or free accommodation and food, as well as, regular days off.</li> <li>Fraudulent job offers in hostels, customer service, data entry, supermarkets, marketing, accounting, translation, particularly common in Bangkok.</li> <li>Advance payment of salary as an additional incentive</li> </ul> <b>Abduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without their knowledge, victims are administered drugs to facilitate their abduction.</li> <li>Can be carried out by armed individuals.</li> </ul> <b>Coercion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threats of being sent to the local militia, of being sold to another company, of physical punishments, or even of organ removal.</li> <li>Identity and/or travel document confiscation.</li> <li>Abuse, violence and torture: beatings, food deprivation, heavy physical exercises, electrocutions, etc.</li> <li>Captivity and confinement</li> <li>Restriction of communication: no phones allowed.</li> </ul>	<b>Forced Labour</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive working hours for little or no pay, with minimum break.</li> <li>Salary deduction: if the assigned work quotas are not met or as punishment for violating regulations.</li> </ul> <b>Criminal Activities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scam centres involved in online gambling, cryptocurrency, online money lending, and romance applications.</li> </ul> <b>Slavery and Slavery-like Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successive sales of victims between companies.</li> <li>Debt bondage: victims are asked to pay money for their release and the fee for recruitment, food, and accommodation. Victim of trafficking's (VOT) families are sometimes extorted for ransom.</li> </ul> <b>Sexual Exploitation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entertainment industries surrounding and inside of online scam centres.</li> </ul> <b>Organ Removal</b>

Following IOM's 2022 Situation Analysis on TiP for FC in Southeast Asia, significant progress has been made in understanding traffickers' modus operandi, notably through **UNODC's Key Indicators of TiP for FC to Commit Cyber Enabled Crimes**, developed with IOM's input. One specific example outlined in the report is how traffickers

often issue **employment contracts to deceive the victims** and trick the authorities into legitimizing their illegal operations. The presence of a contract does not mean that a person has not been trafficked. In fact, it signifies a physical manifestation of various means used to traffick a person for exploitation.

# IOM'S FACTS AND FIGURES

Disclaimer: Figures provided below cover caseload related to TiP for FC of the seven most affected IOM country offices in the region, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The data communicated below is based on IOM's internal operations and does not accurately represent the full scale of TiP for FC in the region, which is likely to be of far greater magnitude.

## Comparative Analysis of 2022 and 2023



**Caseload surge:** X4,7, from 296 in 2022 to **978** in 2023.



**Higher proportion of cases referred by governments:** The proportion of government-referred cases has increased by 19%, compared to 2022, while the proportion of NGO referrals has decreased by 10%.



**Moderate increase of male cases:** 8% rise in the proportion of male cases.

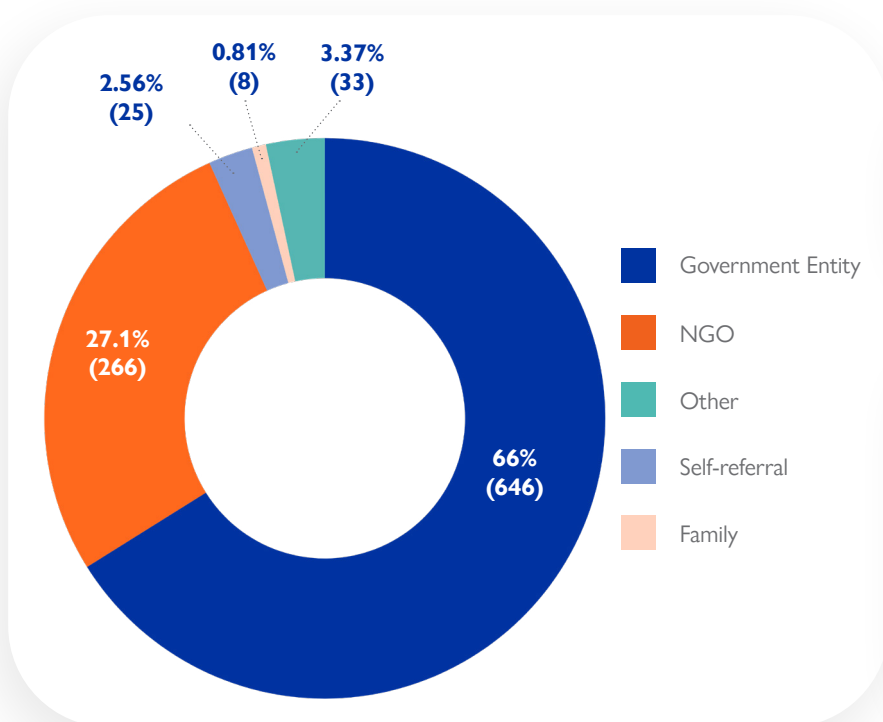


**IOM VoT Case Management now mainly directed towards TiP for FC:** in 2022, 36% of IOM's total VoTs caseload is related to exploitation in online scamming centres based in Southeast Asia, vs. **70%** in 2023.



**Decline in the educational levels and linguistic skills of victims**

## Mainly Young Men Referred by Governments



**3/4 of IOM's caseload are males.**



**Male:**  
**75.77%**  
(741)



**Female:**  
**24.23%**  
(237)

### Profile of Victims



+ 90% are **18-35 years old**



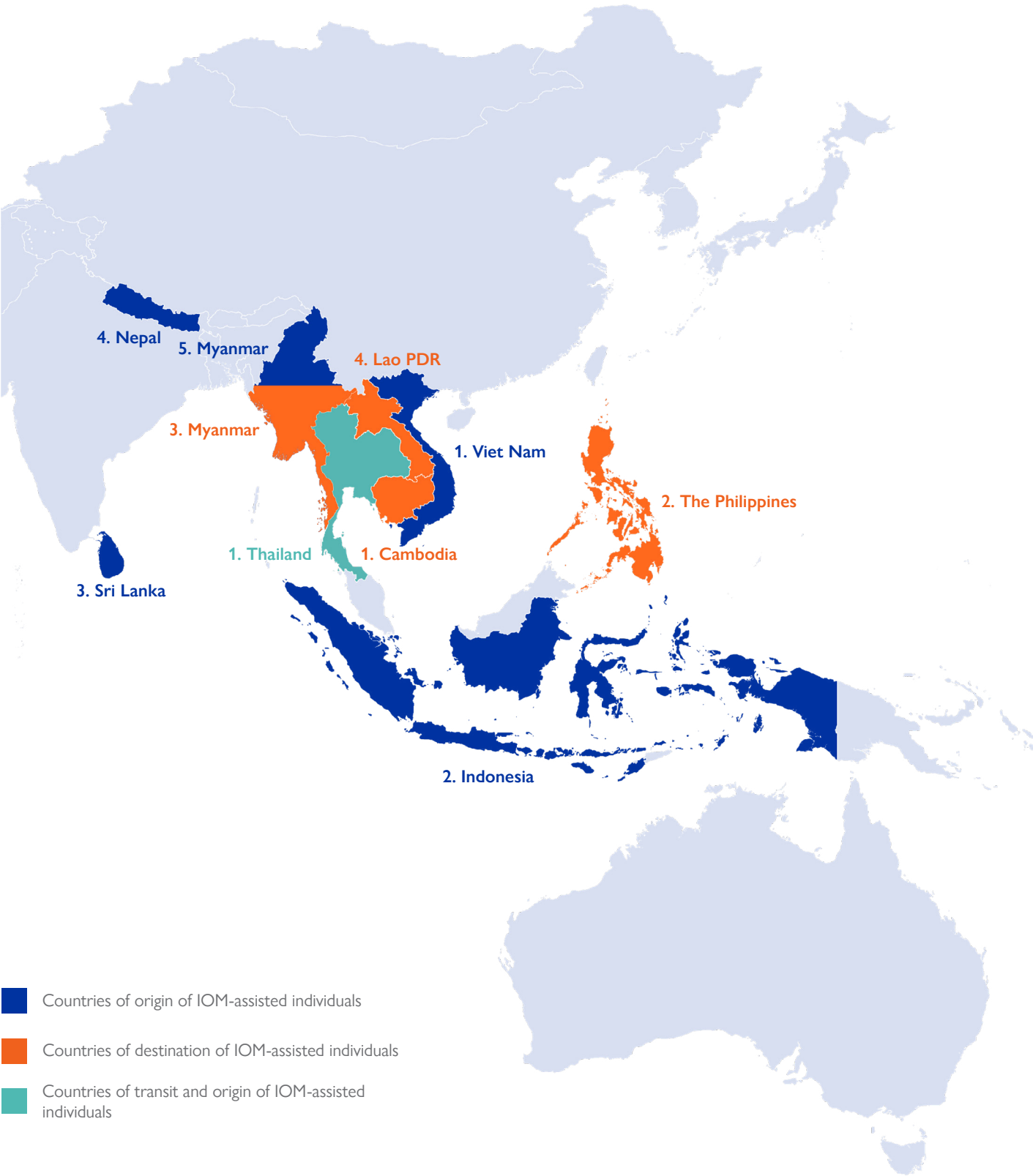
50% **secondary**, 50% **higher education** completion



Majority are **multilingual**

Predominantly from South and Southeast Asia

Top 5 countries of origin and destination of IOM-assisted individuals, in 2023



Disclaimer: These maps are for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM



## VICTIMS' TESTIMONIES



Credit: © IOM 2023

*I spent a month in the compound, grappling with depression, hopelessness and isolation, forced to exploit individuals and scam them out of their life savings.*

**Nasim\***, a 20-year-old university graduate, fluent in both English and Chinese, found himself in a harrowing situation after the unfortunate wave of job losses hit Dubai, where he has been working for years. Nasim was seeking job opportunities without considering the potential risks.

Successfully securing a job in Mae Sot, he later met an agent who promised him a well-paying opportunity in Chiang Rai, Thailand. "During our journey, we crossed a river, and my concerns grew. Despite the reassurance from the agent, my fears materialized when, after a seemingly endless drive, the car abruptly stopped, and I was forced out of the car, and instructed to cross the river with a Chinese girl."

Realizing that he had been trafficked into a scam compound, for two weeks, Nasim constantly faced threats and endured the stress of being hung by his hands until he succumbed to scamming others. "I spent a month in the compound, grappling with depression, hopelessness and isolation, forced to exploit individuals and scam them out of their life savings."

Yearning to escape, one day, Nasim made up a story about a severe toothache, convincing the person in charge of the centre that he needed urgent surgery. "My supervisor then arranged for the driver to take me to a dentist. At the dentist's office, I confided in them, seeking their help. After pretending to undergo an operation, I seized my chance and jumped out of the car. At that time, I had been in contact with a local NGO for about 10 days. After my escape, I ran into a family, from where I urgently contacted the staff of the local NGO, who swiftly came to my rescue."

With the help from the NGO and IOM, Nasim was provided safe shelter, where his wounds and traumas were properly treated. Due to lacking a valid travel document, Nasim contacted the authorities, and following a legal process, was sentenced to six months of imprisonment before being eventually granted a pardon.

**"I returned to my country of origin with the support of IOM and was provided with reintegration support to restart my life."**

*\*Names changed to protect identity*



Legend: Sinta goes through a Thai Government-issued booklet, which explains the rights and support victims of trafficking are entitled to. Credit: IOM/Kasidit Chaikaew

## They even threatened to sell me to an organ harvesting syndicate.

By all accounts, conditions in the centres are brutal.

Sinta\*, was also promised a good job opportunity by a friend. Not being able to speak English, however, made reaching her targets a herculean task. “They kept reducing my salary when I could not reach my targets”, she says. “When I asked how I could go home, they said I had to pay back 200 million rupiah [approximately USD 13,400]. They even threatened to sell me to an organ harvesting syndicate.”

No longer able to tolerate the conditions, a group of Indonesians decided to ‘go on strike’, resulting in them being locked up in a room for two weeks. As luck would have it, one member of the group who had secretly kept a second phone, recorded a video of their situation and published it online. The video went viral in Indonesia, gaining the attention of authorities at the highest level. With so much publicity, the traffickers deemed the group too big of a risk to keep, eventually releasing them back into Thailand.

After receiving initial support from a local organization along the border, the group was referred to the Indonesian Embassy. At the embassy’s request, IOM provided the group of 26 with food, accommodation, legal counselling and interpretation support during their weeks-long stay in Bangkok, before returning home.

“Because this emerging trafficking trend is so complex, protecting victims effectively requires strong coordination. IOM works closely with the national and provincial authorities, civil society and embassies to provide assistance when needed,” explains Géraldine Ansart, IOM Thailand’s Chief of Mission.

“Moreover, one of our priorities is to enhance capacities to accurately identify trafficking cases,” Ansart adds. “IOM supported the government last year to establish the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) on Protection and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking – a new national policy framework that stipulates roles and responsibilities in victim screening, identification, assistance and referral – and sensitized over 2,300 frontline officials on the framework.”

Without rigorous screening measures, victims can fall through the cracks, decreasing the chances of better understanding of the situation and preventing others from being trafficked.

Full story available at: <https://thailand.iom.int/stories/forced-crime-trafficking-survivors-thailand-tell-their-stories>

\*Names changed to protect identity

# KEY INITIATIVES IN ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS FOR FORCED CRIMINALITY IN 2023

Provides an overview of governmental and non-governmental responses to TiP for FC.

**Regional:** During the post-border openings and economic recovery period following the pandemic of COVID19, Southeast Asia saw in 2023 a surge in digital activities. However, this economic growth also fueled criminal operations, particularly online scams. Syndicates, using online tools for recruitment of victims and their operations, expanded across the region, generating estimated profits of 7.5 to 12.5 billion USD. Skilled and semi-skilled workers, still recovering from

the impacts of the pandemic, were prime targets for scams promising lucrative employment opportunities abroad. Governments in the region responded to such a surge of criminality with measures such as revising national referral mechanisms and conducting operations to crack down on scam centres, as well as raising awareness on TiP and safe migration. Travel advisories towards countries with known scam operations were also put in place.






## Yearly Highlight

### ASEAN Leaders’ Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by The Abuse of Technology

The 42<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit raised the profile of the trafficking for forced criminality issue as leaders unanimously approved the Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by The Abuse of Technology. The declaration was particularly timely for ASEAN, given that, in 2023, three key countries of origin for victims of trafficking in online scams (Viet Nam, Indonesia and Myanmar) and the top five countries of exploitation or transit (Cambodia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand) are its member states.

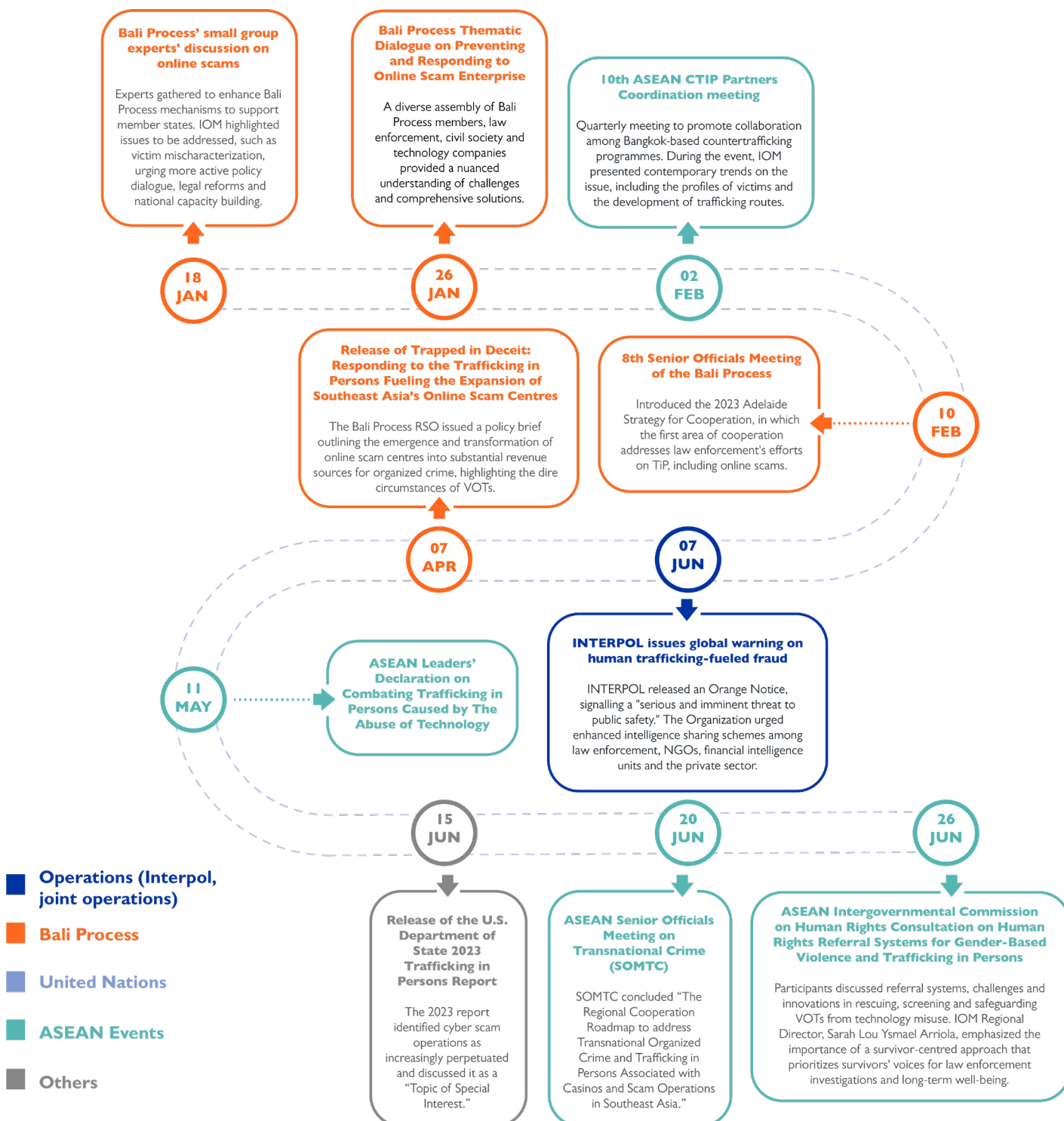
Even though the declaration remains a non-binding instrument and needs to be more concretely incorporated into national legislative schemes, it represents a shift towards greater recognition of TiP for FC, a noteworthy accomplishment considering ongoing debates on TiP classification, and proposes various regional initiatives.

## Content

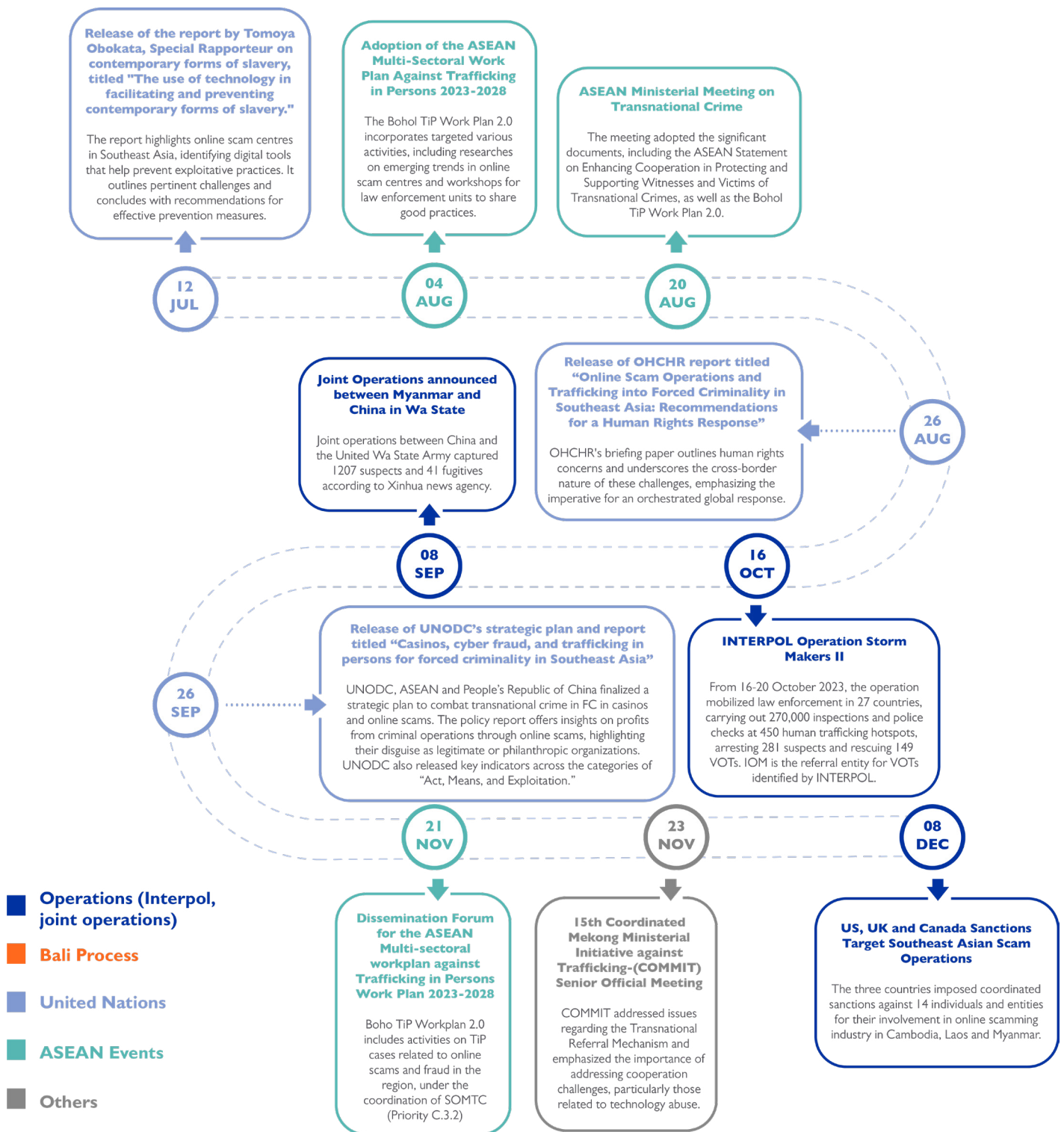
	Implementation of existing ASEAN instruments, such as the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons
	Partnerships with the private sector, civil society organizations and academia to foster innovative solutions and develop preventive measures.
	Mutual legal assistance in TiP cases through the effective implementation of ASEAN Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters
	Setting a minimum standard of protection at the regional level for a VOT
	Development of a regional referral mechanism through leveraging existing ASEAN mechanisms to avoid re-victimization, retraumatisation and continuing exploitation of victims.

## Map of Key Events in the Region




In 2023, numerous regional events have supported collaboration among countries, while a growing body of publications seek to shed light on the issue, ensuring a broader global understanding.







Country of destination and origin

	<p><b>Victim Profile:</b></p> <p>Compounds in Cambodia are found in major cities and along the borders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predominantly male workers</li><li>• Primarily monolingual with incomplete secondary education</li></ul>
	<p><b>Prevention, Protection and Prosecution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC)’s commitment to ousting all forms of TiP in Cambodia, including TiP for FC, by Prime Minister, Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet.</li><li>• To effectively address this challenge, the General Secretariat of the National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT) and other RGC ministries, including the NCCT members, work together to improve victim identification and referral, as well as rescue efforts and prosecution of perpetrators.</li><li>• RGC’s rollout of training on victim identification across the country, in partnership with UN agencies and international organizations and with the support of the NCCT.</li><li>• Finalization of the National Referral Mechanism for VOTs.</li></ul>
	<p><b>IOM Cambodia Key Achievements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Received direct referrals from RGC, UN, embassies and civil society.</li></ul> <p>Note: IOM’s funding constraints and stretched resources impede embassies’ support for repatriation services.</p>

Trafficking Routes:



Disclaimer: These maps are for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.



## Country of origin



### Victim Profile:

- Mainly in their twenties with completed secondary education, bilingual
- Trafficked to Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand.



### Protection:

- From January to November 2023, 3,239 Indonesians were rescued from online scam centres, mainly located in Cambodia, with 1,132 identified as VoTs.
- Presidential Regulation 49 (2023) on the comprehensive interagency coordination framework restructured the leadership of the Task Force for the Prevention and Handling of Human Trafficking. The Ministry of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs is the primary coordinator, and the task force is chaired by the Indonesian National Police. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is committed to various services, including supporting rescue operations, identifying potential trafficking victims, and facilitating reintegration support. The Indonesian Government has contributed IDR 11 billion throughout 2022 and 2023 for these operations.
- High-level meeting between the Indonesian Foreign Minister, the Head of Cambodian National Police and the Cambodian Minister of Internal Affairs for a swift response in handling Indonesians cases.
- In August 2023, the Indonesian Police collaborated with their Chinese counterparts to crack down on an online romance scamming operation in Batam, Riau Islands Province, resulting in the apprehension of 88 Chinese nationals, including five women who were sexually exploited to lure and extort victims in People's Republic of China



### IOM Indonesia Key Achievements:

- Directly assisted the victims.
- Conducted technical trainings for Indonesian diplomats on identification of TiP in online scam activities.
- Hosted a coordination meeting with local government, NGOs, universities, and community members to harness public discussion.
- Premiered **"Through the Screen,"** a film portraying victims' trafficking journey to effectively raise awareness.

## Trafficking Routes:



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## Destination and transit country



### Victim Profile:

- Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in northern Bokeo Province has become a focal point, hosting over 32 trafficked foreign nationalities. The SEZ is featured with extensive infrastructure development, including an international airport. Attracts mostly undocumented migrant workers, especially from Myanmar.
- Typically, victims are male workers in their twenties with completed secondary education, proficient in varying levels of English and their mother tongue.



### Prevention:

- In mid-2023, the Lao People's Democratic Republic approved task force units within the SEZ, represented by relevant Ministries, including the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit under the Ministry of Public Security.
- Government initiatives involve strategic partnerships to boost awareness among migrant workers.
- The revision and production of training manuals aim to enhance the capacity of investigation officials.
- Coordination mechanisms are being established between central, provincial, and district levels, with a focus on capacity-building at the provincial and district levels due to the SEZ's limited jurisdiction.

### Protection:

- The task force adopts a comprehensive approach, ensuring migrant workers' fundamental rights, facilitating conflict resolution, improving social welfare, addressing contractual situations, and managing migration status.
- These initiatives include a:
  - o migration-based complaints mechanism
  - o detailed employment contracts
  - o migrant workers' database in the SEZ.

### Prosecution:

- In September 2023, Lao People's Democratic Republic deported 164 Chinese individuals who were arrested for various offenses within the SEZ.



### IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic Key Achievements:

- Assisted VOTs in online scamming at the SEZ, providing repatriation support to 49 victims from 6 different countries, a key priority for Lao People's Democratic Republic.
- Promoted the newly created Manual on Interview Skills and Testimony of participants in TiP cases (2023), along with the Reintegration Handbook for VoTs in Lao PDR (2023).
- Co-chairs the National Anti-Human Trafficking Working Group meetings, addressing changing trends in TiP and way forward.
- Continued capacity-building efforts for law enforcement officers on the 2018 Lao Penal Code and 2019 Laws on Criminal Procedures, emphasizing the application of the Manual on Interview Skills and Testimony of participants in TiP cases.

## Trafficking Routes:



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## Country of destination and origin



### Victim Profile:

- The situation involves an estimated 120,000<sup>1</sup> or more individuals, including foreign nationals and Myanmar citizens, who have been potentially trafficked into scam compounds, primarily in border areas with People's Republic of China and Thailand.
- Victims assisted by IOM Myanmar are predominantly men between the ages of 18-35.



### Protection:

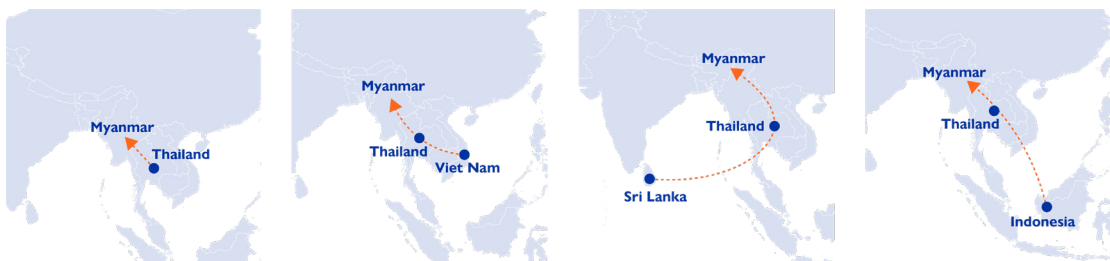
- Law enforcement operations - particularly those led by People's Republic of China - have rescued and apprehended thousands of Chinese nationals and perpetrators respectively.
- Armed offensive carried out by the "Brotherhood Alliance" in Northern Shan, which has expressed its intention to shut down scam compounds, has further disrupted scam operations in Northern Myanmar, particularly in areas bordering People's Republic of China. Repatriations of thousands of individuals took place in the latter months of 2023, coordinated directly through Government-to-Government channels, particularly with Governments in the region.
- However, scam centres operations reportedly continue largely unabated in Tachileik, Shan State, and Myawaddy, Kayin State.



### IOM Myanmar Key Achievements:

- Strengthened its efforts in support of embassies/diplomatic missions when their nationals are caught up in the scam compounds in situations of potential TiP. This has included development of technical guidance and FAQs on reporting and responding to cases of potential trafficking in the scam compounds.
- Facilitated the delivery of training on responding to TiP and trauma-informed care; and sharing of information, lessons learned and good practices in protecting affected nationals.
- Continues to coordinate efforts through chairing of the Human Trafficking Working Group in Myanmar and coordinating with related protection and human rights mechanisms of the UN and civil society.
- Continues efforts, where feasible, to advocate with all relevant stakeholders and stakeholders for a rights-based, victim-centred response.
- IOM's caseload has increased in 2023, from a total of 138 victims identified and assisted in 2022, to a total of 517 in 2023, representing a 275% increase, with 33% of these victims trafficked for FC in scam compounds.
- Worked with partners in providing needed assistance to victims, including safe shelter, food, counselling and trauma support, medical care and assisted voluntary return and reintegration.

## Trafficking Routes:



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<sup>1</sup> OHCHR, 2023. "Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response" Available at: <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ONLINE-SCAM-OPERATIONS-2582023.pdf>

Mainly a country of transit, then of destination and origin



## Victim Profile:

- Generally, victims are in their twenties, with completed secondary education and varied levels of English proficiency alongside their mother tongue
- From as many as 19 countries.
- A significant portion of victims in IOM Thailand's caseload were traveling abroad and entering employment for the first time.
- Majority of victims assisted in Thailand were trafficked and exploited in Myanmar.



## Prevention:

- Concrete commitments with embassies have been forged to develop a consular guide, Frequently Asked Questions on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and the creation of Information, Education, and Communication materials.

## Protection:

- Thailand has implemented measures for identification and protection of VOTs, implementing the non-punishment principle by waiving immigration penalties and ensuring that VOTs are provided with shelters offering medical and pre-departure assistance.
- Thailand has streamlined its immigration procedures, expediting immigration clearances on an exceptional basis for urgent cases requiring VOT assistance and protection.
- The Royal Thai government has continued to prioritize the implementation of the NRM at the provincial levels, and also initiated the revision of the anti-TIP law to ensure the inclusion of stronger victim protection principles.

## Prosecution:

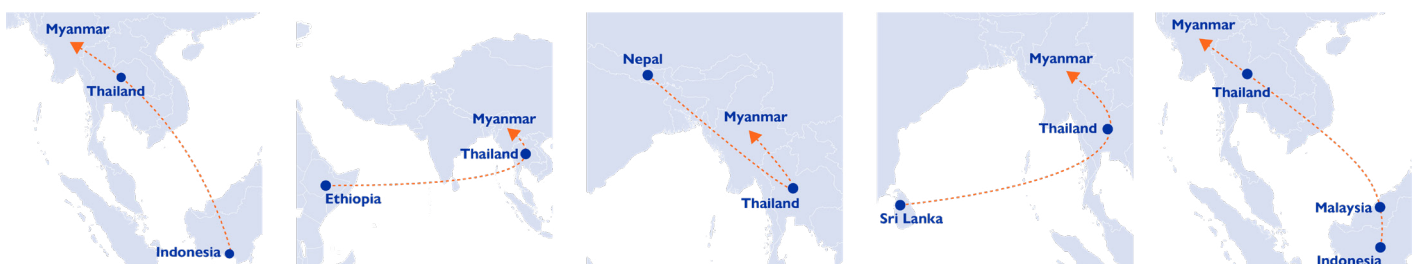
- IOM has collaborated with the RTG to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to enhance screening and identification procedures.
- The Royal Thai Police have initiated crackdowns on potential trafficking syndicates, fostering multilateral meetings with neighbouring countries to enhance cross-border cooperation.



## IOM Thailand Key Achievements:

- Assisted 193 VOTs, with 73% of these victims coerced into FC.
- IOM has continued to support coordination efforts between embassies and consular officials as well as the Royal Thai Government, to support screening and identification efforts, as well as the provision of repatriation and protection support.
- Formed an informal coordination group between IOM, NGOs, and the Royal Thai Government, the Joint Cyber-Slavery Task Force for collaboration and coordination.
- IOM continued to support coordination and referral efforts through facilitating the Mae Sot Anti-Trafficking Committee comprising of key NGOs and CSOs.

## Trafficking Routes:



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# THE PHILIPPINES

## Country of destination and origin



### Victim Profile:

- Victims are generally in their twenties, bilingual, and have completed higher education, with some possessing master's degrees.
- Notably, the Philippines is considered as both country of origin and destination, primarily from Asia, but with smaller numbers from Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- It is worth mentioning that some individuals have been either transferred or threatened to be transferred from one hub to another within the Philippines and across borders.



### Prevention:

- The Department of Migrant Workers issued an advisory in January, cautioning against illegal recruiters or human traffickers offering fictitious jobs as customer service representatives in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, or Lao People's Democratic Republic.

### Protection:

- In 2023, Government authorities conducted large-scale operations on online gaming facilities used as fronts for online scamming hubs, resulting in the release of over 3,000 individuals – both foreign born and Filipino workers. In the first major operation at Clark in May 2023, the 1,063 foreign nationals were treated as VOTs and repatriated without immigration violations under Allow Departure Orders. Following by various rescue operations: Las Pinas City in June (2,714 individuals) and Pasay City in August (650 individuals).
- In November 2023, more than 30 foreign victims were intercepted at the airport, travelling from Manila to Cebu, as authorities found that these hubs were moving to the provinces to escape detection in Metro Manila.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), and Department of Social Welfare and Development provide support, including repatriation, livelihood assistance and psychosocial counselling to identified victims.



### IOM Philippines Key Achievements:

- Actively monitors the situation, providing support to 276 personnel, identifying 190 as VOTs, and repatriating 75 foreign nationals.
- Since 2022, over 400 Filipino VOTs have been repatriated by DFA/DMW from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar (37%, 14%, 49% respectively). The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking has convened a new Technical Working Group (TWG) specifically focusing on FC as an emerging trend. This TWG is co-chaired by IOM Philippines and the Philippine National Police-Anti-Cybercrime Group.
- The Senate is conducting inquiries for legislative purposes on the recent scam operations, with IOM participating as a resource speaker.

## Trafficking Routes:



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### Victim Profile:

- In 2023, victims are generally in their 20s, monolingual workers with low to medium education levels, most of which finished secondary education.



### Prevention:

- In June-July 2023, the Ministry of Information and Communications led a national campaign to heighten awareness about identifying and preventing online scams.
- Vietnamese embassies actively collaborate with local authorities to clarify information, strengthen inspections of labor-employing establishments, and prevent illegal immigration.
- The Ministry of Public Security proactively monitors closed Facebook groups and other social media for suspicious behavior, increasing border patrols to intercept potential victims.

### Protection:

- In the first half of 2023, Vietnamese victim returns decreased overall, except for a significant rise from the Philippines (600+) and Thailand as a transit country.
- The latest rescue operation in October 2023 involved 166 individuals on the northern Myanmar border. Despite risks, individuals continue migrating through irregular routes. Responding to this, dedicated hotlines for citizen protection have been promoted, improving screening mechanisms, enhance referral capacity, and connect victims with corresponding services. IOM supports these efforts through online and offline channels.
- Inter-agency collaboration has been strengthened, focusing on Cambodia for prompt verification and assistance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Vietnamese representative agencies in Cambodia coordinate with local authorities to verify cases and deploy measures to protect and rescue citizens victimized by online scams.

### Prosecution:

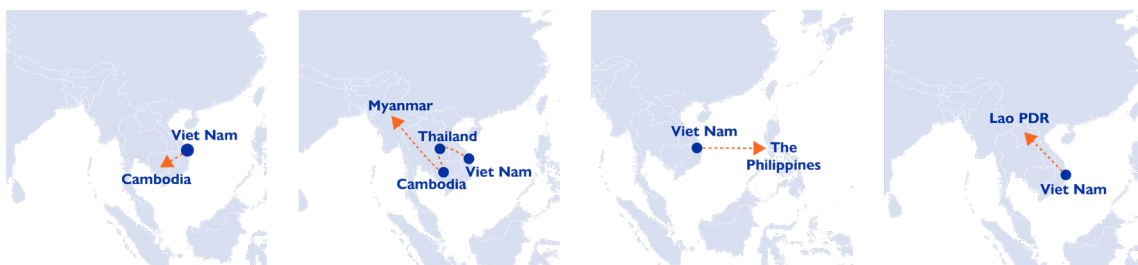
- With technical and advisory support from IOM, the government is considering the inclusion of cybercrime and support for victims in the revised TiP law.
- IOM has further sought to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute, helping the centralization of TiP data, and providing evidence and testimony to support victim identification and trafficker prosecution.



### IOM Viet Nam Key Achievements:

- Due to the absence of an official government support scheme for returnees not officially identified as VOTs, IOM Viet Nam plays a crucial role in referring and coordinating collective support between the Government and NGOs through its chairmanship of the Reintegration Network.
- Collaborated with the MOFA to develop a feasibility study for an interagency mechanism to protect Vietnamese in countries in crisis, including potential VOTs.
- Supports prevention efforts through the use of social media and conducting and public outreach to raise awareness.

### Trafficking Routes:



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# MEDIA AND PUBLICATIONS

The media already shed light on the emergence and scale of TiP for FC in Southeast Asia in 2022. In 2023, it continued to inform the public of the nature of this transnational crime as well as contributed to keeping it on the political agenda. Below are a few TiP cases from the region that made local and international news.

## Cambodia | Victims Sent to Hospital for Organ Removal in Cambodia

**Traffickers sent 122 Indonesians to a hospital in Cambodia to sell their kidneys**

Source: *Khmer Times* / July 26, 2023

National July 31, 2023

**Three Bali immigration officers arrested over Cambodia organ ring**

Khmer Times /



An illustration of organ trafficking. Shutterstock

Source: *Khmer Times* / July 31, 2023

**Viet Nam | Rescue Operations See Vietnamese Victims Return From Philippines and Cambodia.**

XÃ HỘI

**140 công dân Việt Nam tại Philippines được giải cứu về nước an toàn**

(Chinhphu.vn) - Tính tới ngày 1/6, 140 công dân Việt Nam trên tổng số 437 người được lực lượng chức năng Philippines giải cứu, đã về nước an toàn.

Source: *Báo Điện tử Chính phủ* / June 01, 2023  
(in grey) <https://baochinhphu.vn/140-cong-dan-viet-nam-tai-philippines-duoc-giai-cuu-ve-nuoc-an-toan-102230601164320915.htm>

PHÁP LUẬT

**Tiếp nhận, giải cứu 33 công dân bị cưỡng bức lao động tại Campuchia**

Source: *Biên Phòng* / July 26, 2023

**Myanmar | The Dark Reality of The Fraud Industry in Myanmar.**

**The Dark Reality of Telecom Fraud in Northern Myanmar**

The booming telecom fraud industry in northern Myanmar brings corruption, violence, kidnapping, and forced labor to a region with a long history of crime, The Paper's investigation finds.

Source: *The Paper, Sixth Tone* / August 30, 2023

## Myanmar | Justice After Exploitation



How A Job Scam Turned Me Into A Scammer....  
A video from CNA Insider on YouTube provided by:  
<https://www.youtube.com/youtu.be>

Source: *Channels News Asia* / April 19, 2023

**Indonesia | Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs Work in Collaboration to Free Victims in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar.**

**WNI korban 'sindikatan penipuan online' di Laos, Kemlu Indonesia bebaskan 37 WNI - 'delapan WNI masih belum dapat keluar'**

Source: *BBC News Indonesia* / April 29, 2023

**Indonesia Works to Rescue 20 Trafficking Victims in Myanmar**

Fake recruiters allegedly offered the Indonesian victims high-paying jobs in Thailand but instead trafficked them to Myawaddy in Myanmar.

Source: *The Diplomat* / May 05, 2023

**Lao People's Democratic Republic | Authorities Deport Alleged Traffickers and Take Down Fraud Ring in the SEZ.**

**Laos deports 164 Chinese detainees, including alleged human traffickers**

Citizens say good riddance, but that authorities need to go after ringleaders to really clamp down.

Source: *Radio Free Asia Lao* / September 13, 2023

**Joint Police Operation Takes Down 462 Online Fraud Suspects in Golden Triangle SEZ**

Source: *The Laotian Times* / December 06, 2023

**Philippines | Thousands of Victims Rescued in Operations in Clark and Las Pinas**

**Over 1,000 human trafficking victims rescued in Clark, official confirms**

MAY 5, 2023 12:20 PM PHT  
JOANN MANABAT

Source: *Rappler* / May 05, 2023

ONGOING RAID

**Pagcor orders shutdown of Las Piñas-based Pogo hub**

By: *Dexter Cabalza - Reporter* / @dexcabalzaINQ

Source: *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* / July 08, 2023

**Thailand | Anti-online Scam Centre Launched to Tackle Thailand's "Scamdemic"**

**Scam victim rescue effort gets boost**

Myanmar actively backs crackdown

Source: *Bangkok Post* / October 28, 2023

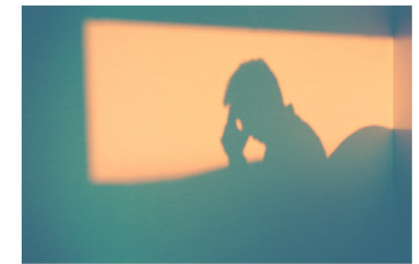
Anti-online Scam Centre gets off the ground



Source: *The Nation* / November 02, 2023

**Global | Nightmare of Trafficking for Forced Criminality.**

**For Trafficking Victims Forced to Scam Others, the Nightmare Continues Even After Escape**



Source: *New York Times* / December 17, 2023

**7 Months Inside an Online Scam Labor Camp**

A man was abducted by a Chinese gang and forced to work in a scam operation. He gathered financial information, photos and videos and shared the material with The New York Times.

Source: *Time* / December 14, 2023

Key Publications

- IOM, **Situation Analysis on Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia**, March 2023.
- Bali Process Regional Support Office, **Trapped in Deceit: Responding to the Trafficking In Persons Fuelling the Expansion of Southeast Asia’s Online Scam Centres Policy Brief**, April 2023.
- OHCHR, **Online Scam Operations and Trafficking Into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response Report**, August 2023.
- UNODC, **Casinos, cyber fraud, and trafficking in persons for forced criminality in Southeast Asia Policy Report** and **ASEAN Member States and the People’s Republic of China Regional Cooperation Roadmap to Address Transnational Organized Crime and Trafficking in Persons Associated with Casinos and Scam Operations in Southeast Asia**, September 2023.
- Shan Human Rights, **Trapped In Hell Report**, October 2023.
- Overseas Development Institute (ODI), **Trafficking for Forced Criminality: The Rise of Exploitation in Scam Centres in Southeast Asia Thematic Brief**, December 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON VICTIMS' PROTECTION

	Challenges	Recommendations
Identification and Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>No</b> prior and systematic vulnerability and/or TiP screening.</li><li>• Identification as an <b>accomplice to cybercrime</b> and/or <b>undocumented migrant</b>.</li><li>• <b>Denial of VoT status</b> in the presence of written contracts, remuneration or previous trafficking experience in online scam centres, <b>despite sophisticated fraudulent recruitment</b> practices, which render the individual's consent irrelevant, as per the Palermo Protocol.</li></ul>	<p><b>For Law Enforcement:</b> Training on all forms of trafficking, especially TiP for FC, for frontline officers responsible for VOT identification.</p> <p><b>For Governments and Law Enforcement:</b> Compliance with the Palermo Protocol, identifying victims based on “Acts, Means, and Purpose.” Article 3(b) underscores that the consent of a victim to the intended exploitation is irrelevant when any of the means outlined in subparagraph (a) have been employed.</p> <p><b>For Governments:</b> Legal revisions extending support to individuals in the process of victim identification.</p> <p><b>For Governments and CSOs:</b> Campaign rollout to increase awareness and understanding of TiP for FC of the groups at risk and prevent revictimization.</p> <p><b>How can IOM support?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Development and facilitation of training sessions on timely, accurate and trauma-informed VOT identification.</li><li>• Protection-sensitive information-sharing on TiP cases with law enforcement and NRM authorities, to provide context to VoT screening.</li><li>• Dialogue facilitation with stakeholders, sharing insights to raise awareness and understanding of TiP for FC.</li></ul>
Protection Gaps	Exposition to <b>prosecution</b> upon returning to their country of origin for victims identified as accomplice to cybercrime, which contravenes the principle of non-punishment.	<p><b>For Governments and Judiciary Authorities:</b> Full implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle (add an asterisk to explain the Non-Punishment Principle: “The Non-Punishment Principle affirms that trafficked individuals should not be subjected to arrest, charges, detention, prosecution, or penalties for any illegal conduct directly resulting from their trafficking experience”).</p>

\* National Referral Mechanism

	Challenges	Recommendations
Protection Gaps	Increasingly severe <b>violations of dignity and physical integrity</b> in online scamming centres, including physical punishments, psychological coercive practices and gender-based violence.	<p><b>For Law Enforcement and Consular Authorities:</b> Increased cross-border cooperation, establishing clear lines of communication, investigations and rescue operations which prioritize victim's safety and dignity.</p> <p><b>For Law Enforcement and CSOs:</b> Training initiatives on gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches for frontline officers and social workers.</p> <p><b>How can IOM support?</b> Training on gender-sensitive and trauma-informed care, in collaboration with governments and local actors.</p>
	<b>Processing</b> of cases while individuals are <b>in the compounds</b> or in immigration <b>detention centres</b> , due to insufficient government facilities.	<p><b>For Governments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of appropriate shelters, in line with VOTs' protection needs.</li> <li>• Partnership with NGOs and private accommodation to increase capacity.</li> </ul> <p><b>How can IOM support?</b> Technical guidance regarding shelter guidelines, as per the <b>IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking</b>.</p>
	<b>Lengthy process</b> and <b>poor treatment</b> for victims from nationalities with limited diplomatic representation in destination countries.	<p><b>For Governments:</b> Rights-based and victim-centred approach adoption for the respect of human rights and equal treatment regardless of nationality.</p> <p><b>For CSOs:</b> Engage in protection and advocacy activities, especially for underrepresented individuals.</p> <p><b>How can IOM support?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical guidance on rights-based approach and victim-centred-approach.</li> <li>• Joint advocacy.</li> </ul>