

FORUM:	Human Rights Council
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Introduction

Human trafficking is a pressing issue that violates the human rights of millions of people around the globe. Not only does it strip individuals of their freedom and dignity, but it also uses force to exploit individuals and put them at extreme risk of physical, sexual, and mental abuse. Human trafficking has been around for as long as humans have existed, and it exists in every country on the globe. However, due to technological advancements, human trafficking has now surpassed physical boundaries, making it even harder to prevent. Southeast Asia has become the epicenter for human trafficking exploitation and scam center trafficking. Victims are “lured with false job offers, confined in compounds, and forced to conduct financial fraud” (Human Trafficking Statistics). The victims of this form of trafficking are not limited by gender or even nationality.



Figure 1 Human Trafficking

Background

While trafficking traditionally relied on in-person recruitment or intermediaries, the rapid growth of technology has made online recruitment a primary tool for traffickers, accounting for around two-thirds of newly identified trafficking cases. This has contributed to the propelling of the human trafficking industry, which is now generating approximately \$236 billion in annual revenue (Agape International Missions).

Victims are often lured by traffickers through fake job offers abroad that offer appealing salaries or other attractive benefits. Mediums such as social media and online dating apps are also frequently used to target victims for human trafficking. Scammers will manipulate victims into believing that they are looking for a genuine relationship only to exploit them using force, fraud or coercion. Since 2015, the Polaris Project has identified over 950 potential sex-trafficking victims recruited online. UNODC notes that these platforms also provide personal information that traffickers can use to identify and exploit



victims' vulnerabilities. Once human traffickers have lured victims and convinced them to come to their country, victims will arrive only to be smuggled and locked into scam compounds once they arrive.

Upon arrival, victims lose their passports, phones and freedom of movement. They are constantly being watched by supervisors, as their computer screens are connected to central monitoring systems. Workers must build online relationships with the intent of stealing money. If victims fail to meet financial targets, they will be subject to torture, physical violence, and other forms of abuse (UNODC). According to UN News, victims frequently experienced food deprivation, sleep deprivation, and extreme working hours of up to 19 hours a day. Moreover, survivors frequently mentioned death in compounds.

Besides forced criminality, millions of people have become victims of sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, state-imposed forced labor, organ removal, forced marriage, and more. Labor

trafficking, which includes forced labor in industries like agriculture and construction, affects an estimated 17.3 million people, and about 6.3 million people around the world are affected by sex trafficking. In fact, UN News reported that sexual violence in human trafficking has increased since 2024. Female survivors reveal that they faced rape, forced prostitution and forced abortions, while male victims reported sexual humiliation and assault.

Southeast Asia serves as both a source and destination region for trafficking victims. At least 300,000 people are working in operations across Southeast Asia. Most of these operations are concentrated in the Mekong region, which satellite imagery shows that 74 per cent of scam compounds are located there. UN News reported that at least 120,000 people across Myanmar and 100,000 in Cambodia may be held in exploitative situations. Other states including Lao PDR, the Philippines and Thailand have also been identified as main countries in the human trafficking industry. It is estimated that in the Mekong region alone, the human trafficking industry may be worth more than \$43.8 billion annually.

Category	Annual Profits	Share of Total
Sexual exploitation	\$173.2 billion	73%
Labor exploitation (non-domestic)	\$35.4 billion	15%
Domestic work	\$19.6 billion	8%
State-imposed forced labor	\$7.9 billion	3%

Source: ILO, Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour, 2024

Figure 2 Victim Exploitation Chart

Problems Raised

The Increasing Sophistication of Human Trafficking

Over the years, human traffickers have developed and learned to be discreet with their actions. Scam compounds can vary in size and structure, ranging from large, heavily secured facilities to smaller, more dispersed locations that authorities struggle to identify and shut down. UNODC pointed out that



scam compound operators are often warned before raids take place, allowing them to relocate or hide victims until inspections end.

Advances in technology have allowed traffickers to operate anonymously while reaching a much larger pool of potential victims. Advanced technology makes it difficult for victims to distinguish legitimate opportunities from scams. Furthermore, criminal organizations can quickly delete digital evidence, relocate servers, or communicate through encrypted applications, reducing the effectiveness of traditional policing methods.

Human Trafficking on Popular Sites

The widespread use of social networks, online job search websites, messengers, and dating sites has significantly enhanced traffickers' opportunities to target and exploit victims. The platforms that millions of people use every day, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tinder, Omegle, and various other social or dating websites are now being utilized for human trafficking ("Trafficking in Persons & Smuggling").

Furthermore, UNODC revealed that victims are also frequently advertised on easily accessible websites like Craigslist and Reddit. Traffickers may advertise victims using the pretense of legitimate work and use code words to indicate information about the victim for sale. On these sites, difficulty monitoring content, anonymous accounts, and rapid account creation and deletion can make it difficult to identify and prevent human trafficking.

Government and Authority Corruption

Government and authority corruption is one of the driving forces enabling human trafficking to advance. Corruption is necessary at every step of human trafficking. A UN News report outlined the role that corruption plays in human trafficking: Corrupt officials provide documentation and overlook irregularities during recruitment and transport. At border crossings, they accept bribes. This can make asking for help feel impossible for victims of human trafficking.

The Scam Cycle

One of the most concerning aspects of cyber-facilitated human trafficking is the self-perpetuating scam cycle. Victims who are trafficked into scam compounds are often forced to scam and recruit new victims. Under



Figure 3 Graph of Social Media and Human Trafficking



Figure 4 The Scam Cycle



threats of violence, torture, or financial penalties, they participate in criminal activities against their will. The scam cycle also complicates law enforcement efforts, as trafficked individuals may initially appear to be perpetrators rather than victims.

Revictimization of Survivors

The ordeal of trafficking victims often continues long after rescue, as freedom does not guarantee safety. According to the UN News, most survivors face further hardships, often returning home traumatized, indebted and stigmatized. Victims may be “detained in immigration facilities, fined for visa violations or prosecuted for crimes they were forced to commit.” Although it is common for human trafficking survivors to experience depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, they receive little mental health support. This is due to a shortage in specialists, financial limitations, and other obstacles (Fields).

International Actions

The ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP)

The ACTIP was signed in November 2015 by all ASEAN Member States, and it came into force in 2017. The goal of ACTIP was for member states to cooperate in order to “prevent and combat trafficking in persons, especially against women and children, and to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers” and to “protect and assist victims of trafficking in persons, with full respect for their human rights” (“ACTIP Factsheet”). Despite creating a common regional legal framework for all ASEAN member states, ACTIP depends heavily on individual member states implementing and enforcing its commitments, which could lead to uneven national implementation.

Global Partnership Against Online Scams (2025)

The International Conference on the Global Partnership against Online Scams took place on December 17–18, 2025, in Bangkok. It was co-hosted by the Government Public Relations Department of Thailand and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Over 400 participants from 67 countries gathered to address transnational cyber fraud and human trafficking linked to scam centers. At the conclusion of this conference, the 2025 Bangkok Joint Statement was issued (“2025



Figure 5 Int. Conference on the Global Partnership against Online Scams



Bangkok Joint Statement"). This conference increased international coordination and recognition of scam-center trafficking, but since it is still recent, political commitments still need to become concrete enforcement.

Regional Crackdowns on Cyber Scam Centers

Major police raids, new anti-fraud laws, and international sanctions targeting multi-billion-dollar criminal syndicates have taken place in countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste. These actions have led to the rescue of thousands and the disruption of individual scam centers. However, over 5,300 people remain trapped in online scam centers in Myanmar because criminal networks continue operating, relocating, or exploiting areas with weak government control ("More Than 5,300 People").

Key Players

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime is a central player in the fight against human trafficking. The UNODC has conducted extensive investigations related to the issue and has published numerous reports. They coordinate regional responses, publish definitive threat assessments, and partner with governments and agencies to fight online recruitment scams and human trafficking.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM has provided safe shelter, medical care, counseling, and voluntary return/reintegration for human trafficking survivors from nearly 40 countries. Between 2022 and 2025, the agency assisted over 3,500 trafficked victims of forced cybercrime in the region and actively coordinates regional response strategies. ("Key Facts")

Association For Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Because human trafficking is a critical issue in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN has put in significant effort into fighting this issue. It has provided the primary regional architecture through frameworks like the ACTIP. ASEAN promotes information sharing, harmonization of legal frameworks, joint investigations, and victim protection. Member states generally support increased cooperation while respecting national sovereignty.



Figure 6 ASEAN Member States

Possible Solutions

Strengthen Legal Frameworks

Corruption of authorities is a critical issue regarding human trafficking, so governments should set clear consequences for this corruption and ensure that penalties are effectively enforced. They must encourage transparency and accountability to strengthen public confidence in law enforcement institutions. Legal authorities should strengthen regulations regarding the security of digital platforms so that human traffickers are blocked from abusing popular sites. Moreover, governments should strengthen trafficking investigation procedures and improve procedures for obtaining and authenticating digital evidence across borders. This way, governments can better understand and combat human trafficking.

Strengthen Public Awareness and Digital Literacy

Due to advancements in technology and the increasing use of social platforms for scamming, it is imperative that people using the internet are informed about how to avoid getting scammed. To prevent human trafficking, the public must be informed about common recruitment tactics that online scammers use. Governments, schools, employers, and non-government organizations should conduct awareness campaigns on identifying online scams.

Expand Victim Protection and Rehabilitation Services

Governments should ensure that victims are identified promptly and treated as survivors rather than offenders, particularly when they have been forced to participate in online scams or other criminal activities. States should provide comprehensive support, including emergency shelters, medical care, psychological counseling, and long-term reintegration programs. Fortunately, multiple organizations, such as AIM and the UN have begun stressing the importance of a victim-centered approach to anti-trafficking efforts.



Figure 7 Victim Rehabilitation

Glossary

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking “involves an act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through the use of force, coercion, or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them” (UNODC).



Scam Compound (or Scam Center)

A scam compound (or scam center) is a large, guarded facility—mostly found in Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos—where criminal gangs use forced labor to run massive online financial fraud (O’ Bryan).

Trafficking in Persons (TIP)

The internationally recognized legal term referring to the recruitment, transportation, or harboring of people through force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation (HOME).

Digital Literacy

According to UNODC, digital literacy is defined as “the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.”

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