



REGIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE
THE BALI PROCESS

ANNUAL REPORT '22





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The Regional Support Office of the Bali Process

The Regional Support Office of the Bali Process (the RSO) was established in 2012 to provide a unique function and resource – delivering practical, on-the-ground support and impact for the Bali Process and Bali Process Working Groups who support Bali Process Member States to address people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime.

The RSO works to strengthen cooperation across Bali Process Member States to translate ambitions into action and real-world outcomes – through knowledge transfer and the sharing of information and best practice.

The RSO is the only cooperation mechanism of its kind in the Asia Pacific region and draws on policy knowledge, technical expertise and operational experience from Bali Process Member States and other key stakeholders to develop practical initiatives, and to share these across Member States.

The RSO brings practitioners and officials together from across Bali Process Member States through a regular programme of training activities, events, workshops and roundtables, designed to help Member States stay ahead of new and emerging issues and to work collaboratively to develop responses and solutions.

This publication has been developed by the Regional Support Office of the Bali Office (Publication date: May 2023). The contents of this publication do not indicate any opinion or position on behalf of the Bali Process or its membership; that of the RSO's funders – including the RSO's primary funder the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs, or of the RSO's host organisation – the International Organization for Migration. Please direct any questions or comment to info@rso.baliprocess.net.

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I. Executive Summary



The past year was one of growth and renewal, as the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process (RSO) transitioned in 2022 from working virtually with Bali Process Member States as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – to bringing together hundreds of delegates across 40 Member States for the first time in three years for the Bali Process 20th Anniversary Constructive Dialogue, the RSO 10th Anniversary Border and Technology Forum and a number of workshops, thematic dialogues and training activities.

The events and activities undertaken highlighted the critical role played by the RSO in facilitating regional dialogue on the challenges of trafficking in persons and people smuggling that continue to impact the Bali Process region. The benefits of open dialogue as a means to facilitate productive relationships and strengthen collaboration across Bali Process Member States were observed over the course of 2022. Bali Process Member States discussed and workshoped how best to meet the substantial challenges ahead through developing a shared understanding of those challenges and actively working to strengthen collaboration and information sharing.

Challenges facing Member States are growing in scope and complexity – with an increasingly uncertain global status quo leading to new push and pull factors, and with a changing landscape of source, transit and destination countries that is challenging traditional approaches. Against this backdrop, technology advances have facilitated the operations and reach of transnational criminal networks, with those being targeted often younger, educated, computer-literate, and in search of better economic opportunities.¹

As the world continues to reset following the reopening of international borders from the Covid-19 pandemic, and to adapt to the changed environment in which we find ourselves operating, the role of the Bali Process and the RSO in supporting international collaboration, as part of global efforts to combat transnational crime, people smuggling and trafficking in persons is critically important.

IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are key for the RSO as they support the delivery of capability development activities resulting in a coordinated approach to our work enhancing our impact and reach across Bali Process Member States. Key projects for the RSO over 2022 included a major programme with the Nexus Institute, to develop capacity building materials focusing on mainstreaming victim-centered approaches when responding to victims of trafficking, and to share best practice around identification and protection of victims through a new practitioner guide series.

The RSO partnered with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to support Member States' understanding and capacity for screening and identifying migrants with special needs, and to support Member States to address structural inequalities compounding migrants' vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation, such as a lack of civil documentation and registration.

The RSO also undertook several projects with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), including participation in the Dialogue on the Management of Irregular Migration in South-East Asia, supporting the Voluntary Returns Support and Reintegration Assistance Program and through the development of a Regional Roadmap on Ethical Recruitment and Responsible Business practices.

Together the RSO and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), held national roundtables in Viet Nam, Malaysia and Indonesia as part of an ongoing project to better understand the role of corruption as a facilitator of trafficking and smuggling across Southeast Asia.

Regional partners also provided essential expertise and support to the RSO to enhance our training and capacity building activities for border and immigration officials and law enforcement colleagues – with the RSO reaching 600 participants across 2022. The RSO is proud to continue our long-standing relationship with the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) – delivering several virtual activities and two in-person activities over 2022 to focus on enhancing trafficking in persons investigations and border management by air.

The RSO has also grown our network of partnerships for delivery of training and capacity building which will continue into 2023, partnering with Viet Nam's People's Police Academy and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research CICAL Jeju in South Korea. The RSO looks forward to supporting the new Counter Trafficking in Persons Center of Excellence in Thailand, established under a joint partnership between Australia and Thailand and which will launch in 2023, as a member of the Joint Steering Committee. The RSO looks forward to delivering activity through the Center of Excellence, alongside partners and other regional actors.

BALI PROCESS 8TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

In early 2023, Ministers across Bali Process Member States reconvened for the 8th Bali Process Ministerial Conference in Adelaide, Australia – marking the first time a Ministerial Conference has been held since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the first Ministerial Conference held outside of Bali, Indonesia. The discussions and regional priorities agreed here – including around technology facilitated trafficking, the rise in prevalence of online scams, shifting irregular migration patterns in the region and increasing people smuggling activities especially by sea, will guide the RSO's work over the coming years – working closely with the Bali Process Working Groups, the Bali Process Government and Business Forum, and across our Member and Observer States and Organisations.



An announcement for a one-off funding injection to the RSO from Australia for 2.7M Australian Dollars will bolster RSO capacity to address these issues, through new research and enquiry activities, and with an increased focus on our work around vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking and exploitation protection and support. The RSO will also support regional efforts around public information campaigns and will support the reactivation of the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism in response to irregular maritime movements in the Andaman Sea.

The RSO extends its sincere gratitude to the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs, which has provided primary funding for the RSO since its establishment in 2012, and to IOM, which hosts the RSO in Bangkok, Thailand and supports its administration. The RSO also thanks the Royal Thai Government for its ongoing support for the RSO to operate in Bangkok, Thailand.

The work of the RSO would not be possible without the support and commitment of Bali Process Members, each of whom contribute time, resources, and personnel to work with the RSO across our lines of effort. The RSO was pleased to update Member States at the Ministerial Conference about changes to our funding structure, supported by the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs and IOM, which will allow direct funding of the RSO by Bali Process Member States. These changes aim to support the RSO to continue to evolve and grow its capacity to become an influential regional contributor on behalf of Bali Process Member States.



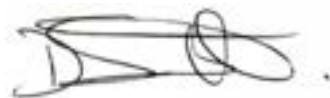
LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead to 2023, the RSO will be reshaping its structure to more effectively serve priority areas and the needs of Bali Process Members. This includes a new programmatic focus on issues around trafficking in persons, people smuggling, transnational crime and technology and irregular migration regional priorities. The RSO will maintain focus on supporting dialogue and development across our Member States, through capacity building and training, and communications and engagement.

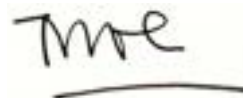
In 2023, we further plan to establish an alumni network of peers and practitioners who have participated in training with the RSO, and to reinvigorate our Regional Information, Liaison and Outreach Network (RILON) to enable information sharing and collaboration for practitioners and officials focusing in on priority thematic areas. We will also relaunch the RSO's Secondment Programme, to support strengthening of technical capacity across Member States, and for Member States to share good practices and high-level capacities through and with the RSO. The Secondment Programme will crucially facilitate in depth two-way dialogue between the RSO and Member States, through secondees.

2022 marked the tenth year since Bali Process Members came together to establish the RSO in recognition of the critical need to translate Bali Process dialogue into practical action through the provision of technical support and cooperation activities with Bali Process Member States.

In this next decade, we look forward to seeing continued engagement across our work with Bali Process Member States, expanding our impact through increased resourcing, capacity and capability, to sustain progress in shared efforts to combat human trafficking, people smuggling and related transnational crime.



David Scott
RSO Co-Manager
(Australia)



Sukmo Yuwono
RSO Co-Manager
(Indonesia)



II. The RSO in 2022



The RSO provides a unique function in the way we deliver practical, on-the-ground support and impact for the Bali Process. We are the only practical mechanism of our kind in the Asia and Pacific region, supporting dialogue and capacity-building through training, facilitating roundtable exercises and workshops, guiding policy development, and providing a responsive, engaged approach to our Member States.

This year, we:

600



Reached 600 participants through trainings, roundtables and events

16



Developed 16 new publications

14



Held 14 events and capacity-building activities

50



Supported in-person dialogue with 50 Bali Process Member States & Organisations

The RSO set out the following principles to guide the activities of the RSO over 2021 and 2022, to ensure we contributed effectively to the overall work of the Bali Process.

1) RESPONSIVE TO BALI PROCESS MEMBERS AND WORKING GROUPS

The RSO engages with Bali Process Members to deliver activities that contribute towards commitments and undertakings arising from Bali Process meetings. We source and provide specialist technical assistance to Bali Process Members, Task Forces and Working Groups.

Over 2022, the RSO:

- Delivered the Bali Process 20th Anniversary Constructive Dialogue and the RSO 10th Anniversary Border and Technology Forum, bringing together Member States in person for the first time since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Facilitated the Bali Process Planning and Preparedness Working Group tabletop exercise together with Immigration New Zealand, using a hypothetical case study scenario to model the movement of migrants, with expert input from IOM, UNODC and UNHCR.
- Supported the Eighth Bali Process Working Group on Trafficking in Persons annual meeting, the Fifth Technical Experts Group on Returns and Reintegration annual meeting and the Seventh Disruption of People Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons Networks annual meeting.
- Responded to Member State requests for more information around online scam centres through an RSO-led thematic dialogue relating to preventing and responding to online scam enterprises which brought together expert voices including IOM, UNODC, INTERPOL, Meta and law enforcement colleagues from Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia.
- Participated in the 16th Bali Process Ad Hoc Group Senior Officials' Meeting, outlining current priorities for Member States working to tackle trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, reflecting on RSO impact in 2022 and outlining our ambitious agenda into 2023.

2) OPERATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The RSO works with Bali Process Members and partners to develop and deliver fit-for-purpose operational capacity building activities relevant to the mandate of the Bali Process.

Over 2022, the RSO:

- Trained 600 frontline law enforcement officers, government officials and practitioners to enhance their skills to detect and investigate transnational crime, trafficking in persons, and identify ways to improve border security.
- Reached colleagues in 26 countries through 14 training events and capacity-building activities.
- Delivered training in partnership with Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) in Indonesia, the Australian Border Force and Australian Federal Police, Viet Nam's People's Police Academy and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research CICAL Jeju in South Korea.
- Adapted the 3P Paradigm of Prosecution, Prevention & Protection – the RSO and UNITAR CICAL JEJU's online learning framework used globally to combat human trafficking – to be delivered using virtual reality technology.



"All the topics covered so far are very important for my work as a border official. I learned tricks smugglers use to pass immigration and how to detect them more quickly and thoroughly from a highly experienced trainer."

**Yaneke Fyrgie Anissa,
First Immigration Analyst, Indonesia**



"This training makes us think outside the box. Without this kind of training, we would handle the cases in the same way although new challenges require different methods to tackle."

**Police Captain Parichaya Silarat,
Royal Thai Police**



"I've absorbed new knowledge that I probably wouldn't have got from the academy or headquarters. This RSO training taught me how to be a more professional, capable, tougher, and wiser immigration officer, and I will be implementing every lesson I have learnt."

**RSO training participant,
Border Management by Air, December 2022**



"The RSO supports Bali Process Member States to incorporate gender perspectives into their responses to people smuggling and human trafficking, to ensure more effective and equitable approaches that meet the needs of all those affected, especially women and girls."

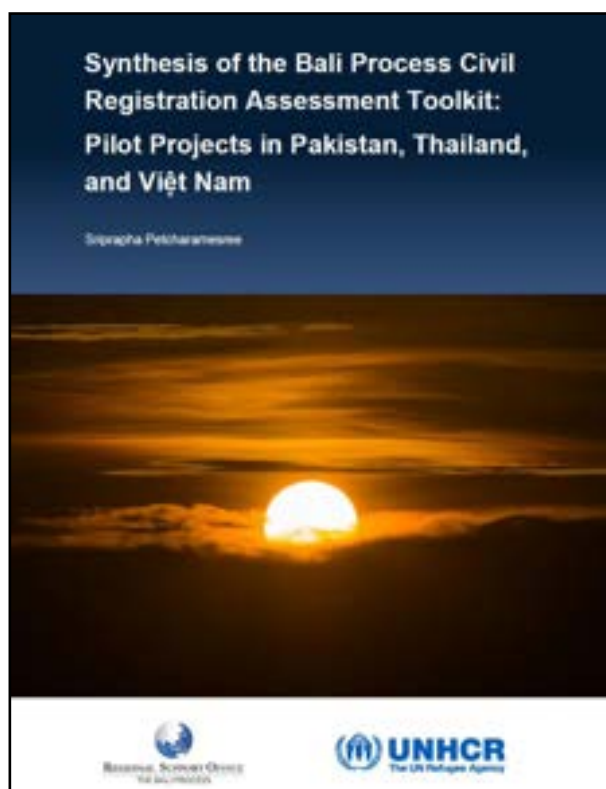
**Eun Jung Yi,
Programme Manager,
Capacity Building and Training, RSO**

3) POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF BEST PRACTICE

The RSO provides support to Bali Process Members to improve aspects of migration management, responses to people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime.

Over 2022, the RSO:

- Developed 16 new publications.
- Partnered with UNHCR to deliver the Screening and Referral Toolkit to support Member States' knowledge and capacity for screening and identifying migrants with special needs, and concluded a Comparative Analysis of Education and Labour Mobility Pathways for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- Concluded the Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit pilot projects with UNHCR, supporting Member States to address structural inequalities compounding migrants' vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.
- Partnered with NEXUS Institute to launch a practitioner guide series on identification and support for trafficking victims, focused on mainstreaming victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches.
- Partnered with IOM to participate in the Dialogue on the Management of Irregular Migration in South-East Asia, supported the Voluntary Returns Support and Reintegration Assistance Program and developed a Regional Roadmap on Ethical Recruitment and Responsible Business.
- Held national roundtables in Viet Nam, Malaysia, and Indonesia as part of an ongoing project with UNODC to better understand the role of corruption as a facilitator of trafficking and smuggling across Southeast Asia.



4) OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

The RSO promotes the work of the Bali Process to partners and dialogues outside of the Bali Process architecture, and publicly advocates on Bali Process issues and activities.

Over 2022, the RSO:

- Developed a new Communications and Engagement Strategy, and accompanying Digital and Social Media Plan – growing activity across social media and increasing engagement with the media.
- Progressed work on new websites for the Bali Process and the RSO.
- Engaged with a wide range of external organisations and regional actors through RSO events and activities – including IOM, UNODC, UNHCR, the Nexus Institute, PROSPECT, Interpol, Blue Dragon Foundation, Meta, the International Border Management and Technologies Association, the Biometrics Institute, International Civil Aviation Organization, the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, the University of the South Pacific, the University of Essex, Global Affairs Canada, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Australian Institute of Criminology, Canadian Border Services Agency and the Pacific Immigration Development Community.
- Participated in thought leadership and information exchange engagements through our attendance at the Tech Against Trafficking Annual Summit.
- Continued our long-standing engagement with the Budapest Process, contributing to regional dialogues and working group meetings to share learning and experiences.



III. Thematic areas of focus



As international borders gradually reopened over 2022 from the Covid-19 pandemic, the RSO carried out an analysis of Bali Process Member State activities and dialogues, to inform the transition back to in-person activity.

This analysis aimed to direct RSO activities into thematic areas of focus, ensuring these aligned with Member needs and regional priorities in a new post-pandemic context. These will continue to inform RSO activities into 2023, with the RSO further expanding its focus and scope through new programmatic areas of work focused on Trafficking in Persons, People Smuggling, Transnational Crime and Technology and Irregular Migration and Regional Priorities.

THEMATIC AREA 1: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND FUTURE IMPACTS

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting international border closures restricted pathways for migration and upturned strategies traditionally employed by criminal networks to facilitate people smuggling. Demand for services increased as many people were left in economically unviable situations as the lockdowns disproportionately impacted women, and the methods employed by criminal networks became riskier.

The pandemic-related restrictions on migration also led to an increased vulnerability of migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, to fall prey to human trafficking.² As borders re-opened and states navigated changing policies and controls around migration, criminal networks took further advantage of the wider demands on attention and resources around border management and control.

In recognition of the changing characteristics of irregular migration trends owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, the RSO collaborated with Bali Process Member States to conduct activities that are responsive to the changing environment of irregular migration in the region³.

These included supporting IOM in delivering safe return and reintegration services to stranded migrants in need of repatriation following the loss of livelihoods and regular permits of stay as a result of Covid-19 pandemic-related disruptions.

Through the Regional Roadmap on Ethical Recruitment and Responsible Business, the RSO and IOM also supported cross-border consultation and cooperation between Thailand and Cambodia, leading to recommendations and practical solutions on how to promote fair and ethical recruitment in Cambodia, and a commitment to reduce visa fees for migrant workers to Thailand.

THEMATIC AREA 2: VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH

The RSO worked with Bali Process Member States to embed a victim-centered approach to assisting and protecting victims of trafficking, through capacity building and training activities and policy dialogue.

Victim insights and experiences were at the centre of policy tools, guides and training curriculums developed by the RSO – which included a new Practitioner Guide Series on improving the Protection of Trafficking Victims, developed in partnership with the NEXUS Institute, and guidance on how to develop a Directory of Services to support trafficking victims to access vital assistance and support upon reintegration.

The RSO, in partnership with the NEXUS Institute and PROSPECT, co-hosted a series of thematic dialogues around these guides, bringing together practitioners across the ASEAN region to explore different challenges that practitioners face in providing protection and services after trafficking, and to raise awareness of these new resources.

These resources will be further rolled out across 2023, with ongoing work to build awareness and support uptake across Member States. This will include national training workshops and a proposed country-level pilot roll-out of the guide on Developing a Directory of Services for Victims of Trafficking.

THEMATIC AREA 3: GENDER RESPONSIVE

Women, men, girls and boys face different risks around recruitment and exploitation in people smuggling and trafficking in persons, with different industries and geographic areas posing different threats and issues.⁴ Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent aspects of trafficking in persons, people smuggling and related transnational crime. Efforts must be gender responsive to ensure they are fit for purpose and context specific.

The RSO advocates for gender-responsive approaches to be taken by Bali Process Member States when interacting with victims of trafficking through our capacity building activities, including by raising awareness of forced marriage and trafficking. The RSO supports Member States to incorporate gender perspectives into their responses to people smuggling and human trafficking, to ensure more effective and equitable approaches that meet the needs of those affected.

More widely, the RSO worked with partners to embed and advocate a gender responsive approach across different thematic areas – for example through the Practitioner Guide Series on improving the Protection of Trafficking Victims, developed in partnership with the NEXUS Institute, and through the RSO's work with IOM to develop a Regional Roadmap on Ethical Recruitment and Responsible Business practices.





THEMATIC AREA 4: DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATION

The RSO established a new programme focused on Transnational Crime and Technology, to support Member States in addressing the role technology plays in facilitating human trafficking and people smuggling, particularly related to the use of social media, dating applications, online communication tools and other emerging technologies.⁵

The RSO aims to support Member States to strengthen the understanding of, and ability to respond to, the use of technology by transnational organised crime – and to address regional challenges such as online scam enterprises. The RSO is working with Member States to implement activities which respond to the challenges technology poses, as well as better leveraging these technologies to counter trafficking in persons and people smuggling.

In addition, the RSO will look to act as a bridge and support dialogue between policymakers, law enforcement, border and immigration agencies and technology companies as we move into 2023. Technology was the theme of the RSO's tenth anniversary Border and Technology Forum in October 2022, with the event bringing together Member States and industry experts, to act as a first step in supporting Member States to consider how technology tools can be used in prevention, disruption, investigation and response activities.

At the end of 2022, Member States requested more information around online scam centres, and the RSO organised a thematic dialogue which took place in January 2023, bringing together expert voices including IOM, UNODC, INTERPOL, Meta and law enforcement colleagues from Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia. The dialogue, which supported Member States to share information on emerging trends and to look more deeply at their implications for the region, resulted in a policy brief setting the scene for further work across 2023.

THEMATIC AREA 5: CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION (BALI PROCESS MEMBERS, BALI PROCESS OBSERVERS, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR)

The RSO is well positioned to support dialogue and collaborative efforts between Bali Process Member States, wider regional actors and the private sector to counter people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime.

Building on the momentum driven by governments and the private sector to strengthen the protection of migrant workers, the RSO in partnership with IOM and the Australian Government published a new guide: *Protecting Migrant Workers in Indo-Pacific Supply Chains: A Good Practice Guide for Business and Bali Process Member States*.

The guide provides a wide range of examples and solutions for businesses and Bali Process Member States to protect migrant workers – offering guidance on how to acknowledge the scale of exploitation in global supply chains, implement or reinforce preventive policies and order frameworks, and advance these efforts through public-private collaboration. The guide operationalises recommendations from the Bali Process Government and Business Forum on eliminating trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery to governments and businesses.

In 2022, the RSO engaged with a wide range of external organisations and regional actors, raising awareness of the RSO through participation in external events, and inviting participation in RSO events to share knowledge and expertise with Bali Process Member States. Partners in 2022 included IOM, UNODC, UNHCR, the Nexus Institute, PROSPECT, Interpol, Blue Dragon Foundation, the Budapest Process, Tech Against Trafficking, Meta, the International Border Management and Technologies Association, the Biometrics Institute, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration, the University of the South Pacific, the University of Essex, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Canadian Border Services Agency and the Pacific Immigration Development Community.





THEMATIC AREA 6: SUPPORTING BALI PROCESS MEMBER STATES THROUGH REGIONAL CRISES

The RSO aims to provide timely support for Bali Process Member States to anticipate, manage and respond to irregular migration – whether stemming from conflict or political instability, humanitarian and natural disasters and regional crises. Armed conflicts, political instability, and large-scale disasters breed opportunities for traffickers, smugglers and transnational criminal networks while simultaneously weakening preventive measures.

In 2022, the RSO supported the work and outcomes of the Bali Process Planning and Preparedness Working Group – with the latest tabletop exercise facilitated by the RSO and Immigration New Zealand using a hypothetical case study scenario to model the movement of migrants, with expert input from IOM, UNODC and UNHCR.

The RSO assists Member States to enhance capacity across law enforcement officers, border and immigration officials, policy makers, judicial personnel and counter-trafficking and migration practitioners by offering capacity building and training activities and through dialogue and engagement. An ongoing project funded by the Australian Government aims to support Member States to better understand the role of corruption as a facilitator of trafficking and smuggling across Southeast Asia, with national roundtables held so far in Viet Nam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

An important focus for 2023 will be to support activity resulting from the reactivation of the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism at the 8th Bali Process Ministerial Conference, in response to increased irregular migration in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal.⁶

IV. Bali Process and RSO anniversary events



BALI PROCESS 20TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT: CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE ON IRREGULAR MIGRATION, PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Bali Process Members gathered to mark the [Bali Process' 20th Anniversary](#) held in Bangkok over 7-8 September 2022. Delegates representing 40 Member and Observer States and Agencies of the Bali Process marked 20 years of collaboration and progress through a Constructive Dialogue – designed to elicit reflections from Dialogue participants on the value and achievements of the Bali Process in its 20th year, to reflect on the contributions made by the RSO since its establishment in 2012, and to seek inputs on priorities for future cooperation and activities.

The Dialogue discussed current and emerging trends in irregular migration, trafficking in persons, people smuggling and related transnational crime in the Bali Process region, and the priorities of Bali Process Members for addressing them. The Dialogue also welcomed proposals from Member and Observer States and Agencies on a refreshed Bali Process Strategy for Cooperation.

Delegates agreed the following as priority issues, around which Member States should focus efforts:

- The need to strengthen border management systems, in response to the changing patterns of trafficking in persons in the region.
- The regional dimension of migration flows and exploitation of migrants.
- The growing role of technology as a facilitator for irregular migration, people smuggling and trafficking in persons.
- The transnational crime threats faced by the region, and the issue of fraudulent documents for irregular migration.
- The continued challenges around identification of and assistance for victims of trafficking in persons .
- Safety of life at sea and the ongoing challenges in combating people smuggling by sea.
- The need for collective efforts in analysing emerging trends of irregular migration in the Bali Process Region.
- Corruption as a facilitator of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.
- The need to strengthen regional cooperation relating to investigation and prosecution to effectively combat people smuggling and trafficking in persons.

Member States also suggested where the RSO could focus efforts to best support capacity building and effectiveness of response across the region. Inputs from Member States has been used to shape the RSO's 2023 Annual Work Plan.

REGIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE 10TH ANNIVERSARY BORDER AND TECHNOLOGY FORUM

The RSO marked its tenth anniversary with the [Border and Technology Forum](#) held in Bangkok, Thailand over 26-27 October 2022, with some 88 delegates working across law enforcement, border security, human rights and policy coming together from 35 Bali Process Member and Observer States and Organisations.

In this practical two-day event, delegates discussed how technology, data and innovative tools can be used in prevention, disruption, investigation and response activities – and how governments and law enforcement can best work collaboratively to strengthen effective uptake and implementation of digital technology solutions at borders and across law enforcement activities.

Delegates identified emerging key issues and priorities across the following themes:

- Understanding and harnessing latest technology and online trends.
- Staying one step ahead – equipping frontline law enforcement and border management agencies with the necessary tools to stay ahead of organised crime groups.
- Ensuring legislation evolves to meet new challenges.
- Accessing and sharing data across borders.
- Building public awareness around trafficking risks online.



V. In Focus: Regional issues and priorities



ONLINE SCAM CENTRES

Online scam centres, which have long been present across Asia, have proliferated since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Using increasingly refined techniques such as cryptocurrency scams, or the multifaceted 'pig-butcher scam', scammers, or more often teams of scammers, work to defraud victims of significant sums of wealth.

Scam centres operating largely out of low-law enforcement capacity regions of Southeast Asia and weakly regulated special economic zones (SEZs), extract money from victims over periods of months, with the support of specialised teams working in shifts, who have clearly defined technical roles (finance expert, language expert, voice 'actor' etc).

- These schemes target victims in higher income countries, as well as middle and high-income individuals in developing countries. Victims of scams are reported across many Bali Process Member States including countries such as Australia, China, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States.
- Scams operate largely out of resorts, apartment blocks and casinos. A key driver of the emergence of scam centres during Covid-19 was the need to generate income out of casinos and resorts which were otherwise sitting unused, particularly those which already had ties to transnational crime groups.
- The scams themselves are being operated in large part by trafficking victims who are forced to operate the scams, while living in squalid conditions, and who are reportedly beaten and tortured regularly in some facilities when their scam earnings fail to meet expectations or when they try to escape.
- The extent to which labour in these scam centres is voluntary remains contested, with those working in scam centres often blurring the lines between offender and victim, potentially even crossing between the two categories over time. For example, some workers may begin their employment under forced labour, but later, potentially incentivised by the profits from the scams, choose voluntarily to continue working at the scam centres. Some scam centre workers may begin working voluntarily but later become trapped in forced labour when 'managers' at the scam centres prevent them from leaving.
- While discussions noted the number of trafficking in persons victims is difficult to confirm, one estimate put forward by December 2022 was that 100,000 individuals are engaged in the scam centres (victims of trafficking and voluntary labour combined) in Cambodia alone.⁷

The Bali Process and the RSO are well placed to bring together Member States through regular discussions on online scam trends and responses – with a first Thematic Dialogue taking place in January 2023, bringing together 31 member and observer states and partner organisations, and speakers from across national law enforcement, INTERPOL, civil society and tech actors. This work is being delivered through a new programme of activity for the RSO focusing on transnational crime and technology - with the RSO releasing a new [Policy Brief](#) in April 2023 calling for a coordinated international response to the huge and growing impact of online scam centres.

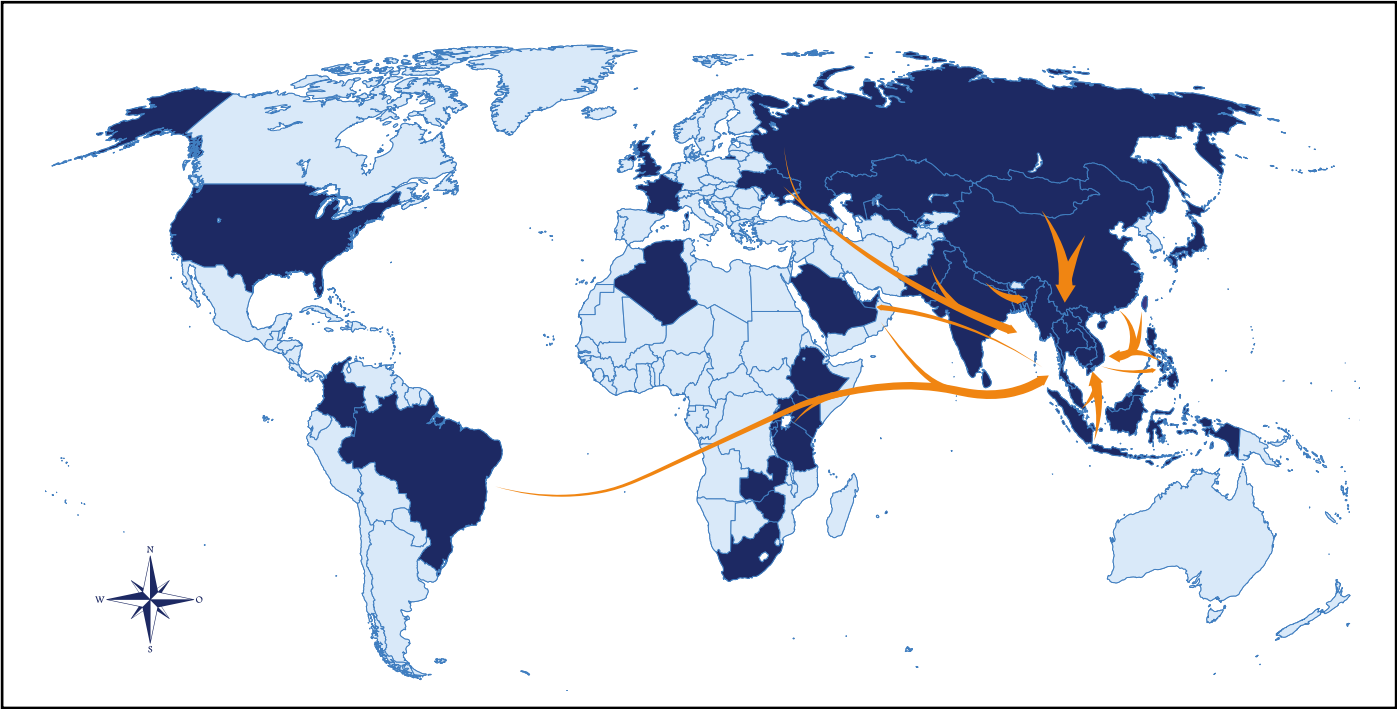


Figure I. Reported countries of origin for online scam centre trafficking victims (dark blue) alongside generalised trafficking in persons patterns towards online scam centres.



Figure II. The RSO's April 2023 Policy Brief on Online Scam Centres

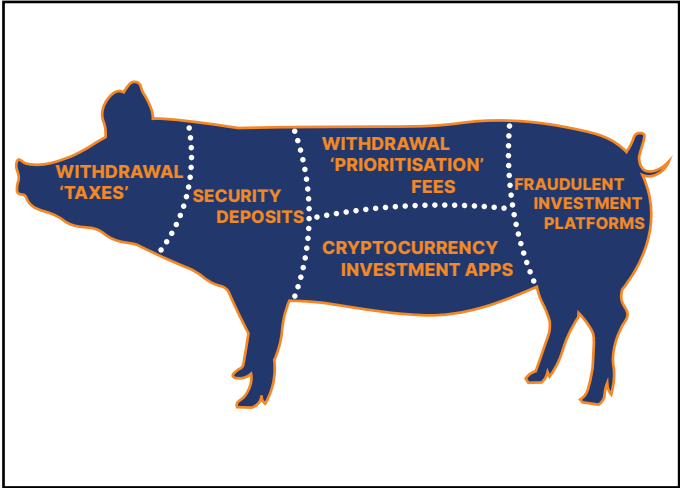


Figure III. Representation of several common strategies used to defraud scam victims.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION BY SEA

In 2022, more than 3,600 Rohingya refugees were adrift in the sea, with over 340 dead or missing.⁸ Many of the refugees are Rohingya men, women and children, who fled persecution in Myanmar for Bangladesh in 2017.⁹

At the 8th Bali Process Ministerial Conference, Co-Chair Ministers tasked the Senior Officials Co-Chairs to reactivate the Bali Process Consultation Mechanism in response to this, to explore options for Bali Process engagement and support.¹⁰

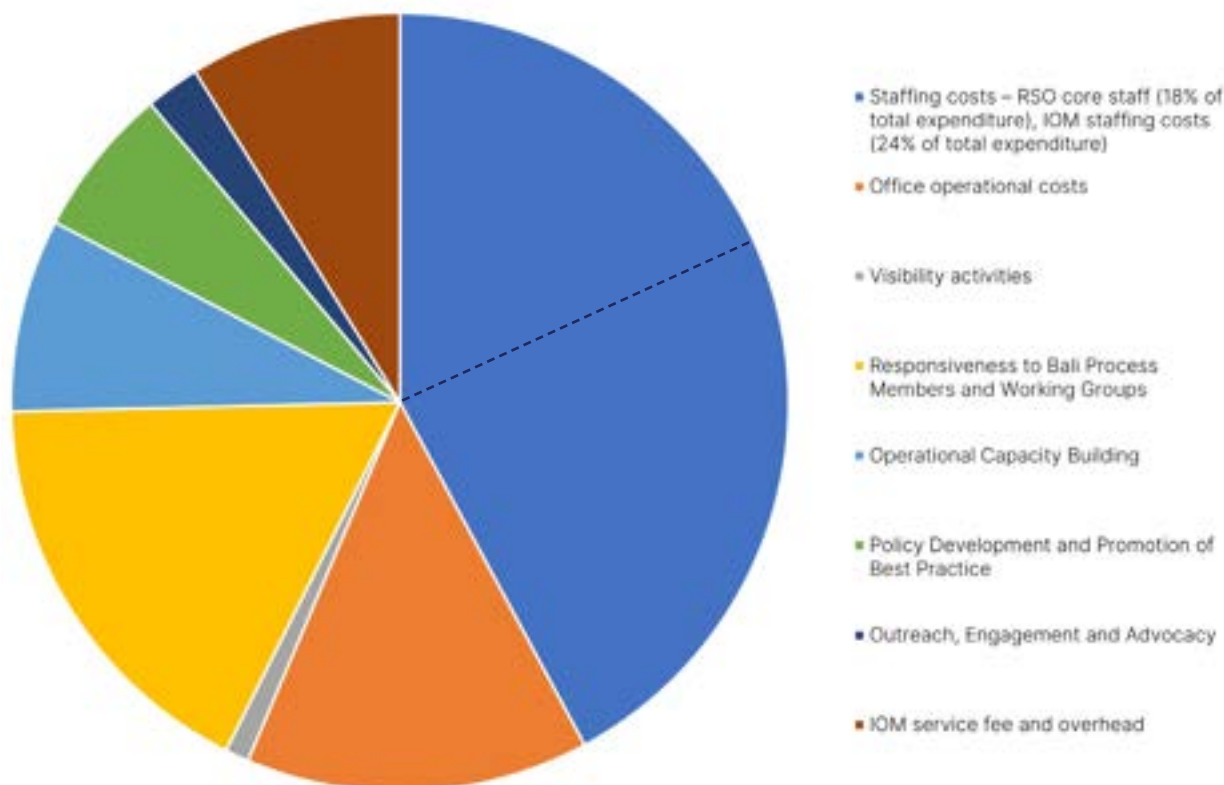
A one-off funding injection to the RSO from Australia for 2.7M Australian Dollars will bolster RSO capacity to support Member States in addressing this critical issue, through new research and enquiry, and with an increased focus on our work around victim protection and support. The RSO will also support regional efforts around public information campaigns to promote safe migration, to support a common approach and ensure messaging is aligned.



VI. RSO funding and 2022 expenditure



RSO Expenditure 2022 Financial Year



A breakdown of RSO expenditure over 2022 is represented in this pie chart. Programme costs are reported against each of the RSO core purposes: 1) Responsiveness to Bali Process members and Working Groups, 2) Operational Capacity Building, 3) Policy Development and Promotion of Best Practice, and 4) Outreach, Engagement and Advocacy. Programme costs include RSO consultancy support fees where relevant for RSO programme staff. Delivery of a new website for the Bali Process and RSO materials are represented under visibility activities.

Staffing and operational costs are broken down by staffing costs (RSO core staff costs represent 18% of total expenditure, and staffing costs for IOM colleagues who provide administrative and operational support represents 24% of total expenditure), general office operational costs, and service fee and overhead costs to IOM for its hosting of the RSO in Bangkok, Thailand. Day to day operations are overseen by two RSO Co-Managers funded by the Australian and Indonesian Governments.

Spend across 2022 was impacted by the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a return to in-person activities delayed until September 2022, when Member States gathered in Bangkok, Thailand for the Bali Process 20th Anniversary Constructive Dialogue event – the first in-person activity for Member States in over three years. The restrictions on in-person activity inevitably had a significant impact across programme delivery and spend – and the RSO will continue to build on the momentum that has come through a return to in-person activities as we move forwards in 2023.

The announcement of a one-off funding injection in 2023 to the RSO from the Australian Government's Department for Home Affairs for 2.7M Australian Dollars will further bolster RSO capacity through new research and enquiry and support an increased focus on our work around vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking and exploitation protection and support. The additional funding represents roughly a third of the RSO's total operating budget for the period covering March 2021 to June 2024, and as such, represents a significant boost to the RSO's resourcing to expand its capacity and capability to deliver on its mandate to provide practical and technical support to the geographically dispersed Bali Process Member States.

In 2022, the RSO in cooperation with primary funder the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs and host organisation IOM, successfully established a new pathway for Bali Process Member States to support the RSO with direct funding assistance, which was announced at the 8th Bali Process Ministerial Conference on 10 February 2023.

By expanding the scope of Member States who can provide funding assistance to the RSO, the RSO aims to grow as an influential regional contributor on behalf of Bali Process Member States, enhancing RSO efforts in 2023 and beyond. The RSO actively encourages interested parties to get in touch to further discuss potential models for support.

The RSO acknowledges and thanks the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs for its generous support and funding for the RSO, and government officials from the Republic of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for their strategic guidance and ongoing support for RSO-delivered activities. The RSO thanks IOM for its hosting of the RSO in Bangkok, Thailand and administrative support, and the Royal Thai Government for its ongoing support for the RSO to operate in Bangkok, Thailand. The RSO thanks colleagues across the wider Bali Process membership for their ongoing input, partnership and contributions. The RSO looks forward to working closely across Member States over the coming year, building on momentum through our ambitious 2023 Work Plan.



ENDNOTES

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- 10** Governments of Australia and Indonesia, *The Bali Process Eighth Ministerial Conference, Co-Chairs' Statement- Joint statement* (13 February 2023), available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/bali-process-eighth-ministerial-conference-co-chairs-statement>



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