



# BREAKING THE CYCLE

Key Interventions to PREVENT Fraudulent Recruitment and Strengthen PROTECTION for Victims of Trafficking into Cyber Scam Operations



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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At least 300,000 people originating from some 66 countries have been drafted into scam operations across the region, as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) [report](#) estimates.<sup>1</sup> Coined a "wicked problem" because of its interconnected causes, competing stakeholder interests, and the absence of a single definitive solution, the report integrates behavioural science and systems thinking, centering the lived experience of victims subjected to abuses within these scam operations and who in many cases continue to suffer human rights harms after their release.

## KEY FINDINGS REVEAL:

### TRUST-BASED RECRUITMENT:

Nearly 75 per cent of victims interviewed were recruited through trusted sources.

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### LOW AWARENESS:

79 per cent of victims interviewed across multiple regions were unaware of the existence of such scam operations prior to being trafficked.

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### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PRESSURES:

The majority of survivors interviewed described poverty, debt, health care and education costs as well as limited employment opportunities as key drivers.

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### PERSISTING HUMAN RIGHTS HARMS:

In addition to serious human rights abuses suffered in scam compounds, nearly 70 per cent of released survivors interviewed faced penalization instead of protection, underscoring critical protection gaps in the application of the non-punishment principle.

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The multi-stakeholder meeting held on 24 February 2026 deliberated possible interventions around the pillars of **prevention** and **protection** and emphasised that a **multi-layered, whole-of-society approach** is needed. Rights-based responses for preventing trafficking and strengthening protection of survivors require:



**Targeted interventions to disrupt fraudulent recruitment pathways.**



**Meaningful engagement of individuals with lived experience.**



**Comprehensive and enhanced systems to identify, protect, and assist victims.**



**Stronger cross-border and multilateral collaboration, including through Communities of Practice, to address trafficking for forced criminality.**

The role of OHCHR in driving rights-based and survivor-led strategies to complement law enforcement efforts was emphasised, alongside its focus on convening key stakeholders to build the partnerships essential for tackling this multidimensional issue. However, additional resources to OHCHR and other stakeholders are crucial to ensure the success of these initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> See also the interactive OHCHR [Story Map](#).

# DEEP-DIVE MEETING

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On 24 February 2026, OHCHR and ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT), in partnership with BehaviourWorks Australia at Monash University organized a **Deep-dive Meeting: Towards Effective Responses to Trafficking for Forced Criminality – Understanding Vulnerabilities to Fraudulent Recruitment and Exploitation by Cyber Scam Operations**. The meeting sought to develop priority interventions for States and other stakeholders to prevent fraudulent recruitment into cyber scam operations and protect victims of trafficking for forced criminality, harnessing the expertise of participants and drawing on the key findings and behavioural insights of the OHCHR report. The meeting brought together experts from governments (relevant ministries and embassies), businesses, civil society organizations (CSOs), UN agencies, and survivors.

**THERE WERE TWO MAIN DELIBERATIONS:**

1

**What are possible interventions to reduce fraudulent recruitment and trafficking into cyber scam operations?**

2

**What are possible interventions to increase the protection of victims of trafficking for forced criminality?**

The following section outlines the behavioural model presented to help inform intervention design and implementation. While this model and other frameworks were not the primary focus of the deep-dive meeting, their principles helped shape the deliberations, providing valuable insights to assess proposed interventions and their alignment with the challenges described in the report.

This section is then followed by a summary of the discussions of the meeting, including existing interventions, identified areas for improvement, and potential new opportunities that may directly or indirectly contribute to reducing deceptive recruitment and strengthening the protection of victims of trafficking into cyber scam operations.

***This discussion marks the beginning of an ongoing dialogue, and while not exhaustive, it provides a valuable opportunity to build connections, open dialogue, and surface potential areas for collaboration across both deliberation areas.***

## Section 1

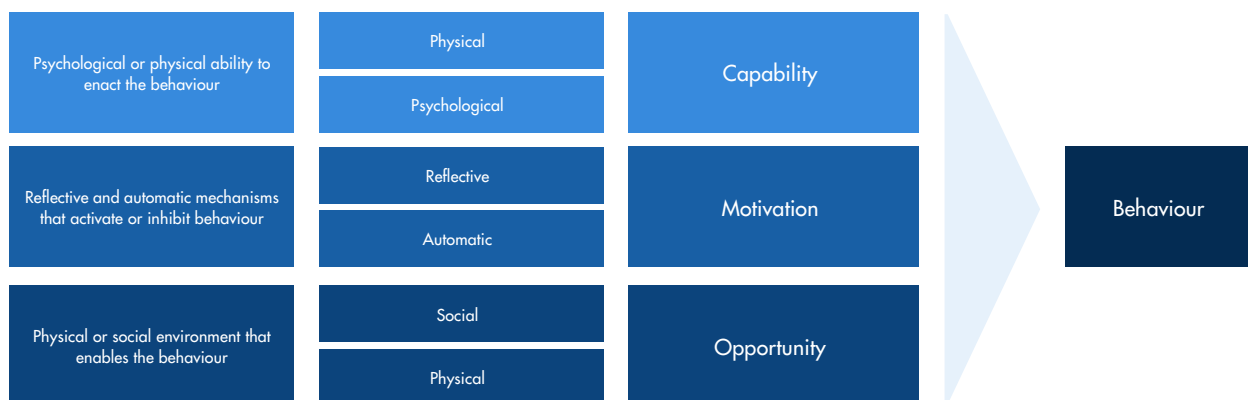
# UNDERSTANDING DRIVERS OF BEHAVIOUR

OHCHR's approach leverages the **Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation Model of Behaviour (COM-B)** to identify and understand behavioral drivers to inform evidence-driven interventions.

A critical step linking the target behaviour and audience with the choice of behaviour change technique (i.e. the intervention) is an understanding of the influential variables or causal determinants underlying the behaviour. The COM-B model suggests that for a particular behaviour to occur, three essential components below are required.<sup>2</sup>

- **CAPABILITY** is defined as the individual's psychological and physical capacity to engage in the activity concerned. It includes having the necessary knowledge and skills.
- **MOTIVATION** is defined as all those brain processes that energize and direct behaviour, not just goals and conscious decision-making. It includes habitual processes, emotional responding, as well as analytical decision-making.
- **OPPORTUNITY** is defined as all the factors that lie outside the individual that make the behaviour possible or prompt it.

Understanding the underlying drivers of behaviour (barriers and enablers) provides an opportunity to identify potential barriers to specific behaviours. Targeting interventions to address known (rather than assumed) barriers through best evidence-based practice can be more effective in facilitating practice change.<sup>3</sup>



Michie et al. (2011) Implementation Science

Each of the COM-B components are mapped to **intervention functions** and **policy categories** that can inform behaviour change strategies. Intervention functions are potential ways to address deficits in one or more of the COM components (e.g. education or training could be used to address a lack of psychological capability), where policy categories are decisions made by authorities that enable intervention functions to occur (e.g. legislation or service provision). Using this model, and the related frameworks, can support targeted evidence-driven behaviour change interventions.

<sup>2</sup> Michie, S., Van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: a new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation science*, 6(1), 42.

<sup>3</sup> Atkins, L., Francis, J., Islam, R., O'Connor, D., Patey, A., Ivers, N., Michie, S. (2017). A guide to using the Theoretical Domains Framework of behaviour change to investigate implementation problems. *Implementation science*, 12(1), 77.

Section 2

# KEY PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS



There was consensus that prevention of fraudulent recruitment into cyber scam operations requires **multi-layered, multi-stakeholder, coordinated action** at the local, national, regional and international levels through **targeted awareness-raising** alongside strengthened policy and legal frameworks, complementing enforcement measures. Particularly the meaningful **engagement of individuals with lived experience** and placing them at the centre of responses was recognized as a critical cross-cutting element. Drawing on existing measures and initiatives, discussions identified a number of areas and potential interventions. These are summarized and organized by levels of priority.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS

| Intervention area   | Priority  | Key action point   |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>TARGETED AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS</b></p> <p>Behavioural messaging for at-risk individuals and groups, including migrants, students and family members</p> | <p><b>Now</b></p> <p>covers actions that can be initiated with existing tools and structures. These actions do not require new legal or institutional infrastructure to begin.</p>        | <p>Develop and adapt existing, behaviourally informed campaigns integrating survivor storytelling, realistic exposure techniques, and tailored messaging delivered by trusted messengers.</p>  |
| <p><b>SURVIVOR-LED ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Co-designed campaigns and the voice of lived experience</p>  |   | <p>Ensure the early involvement of survivors in co-designing interventions through ethical and remunerated participation; create safe spaces for meaningful engagement and systematically integrate lived experience into decision-making processes.</p> |
| <p><b>COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH</b></p> <p>Linking online messaging with offline support structures</p>  |   | <p>Connect online outreach with accessible community-based support including civil society referrals and strengthened local government, police, and community leader networks.</p>   |
| <p><b>ACCESSIBLE REPORTING MECHANISMS</b></p> <p>Hotlines, community dialogue, family/network engagement</p>  |   | <p>Integrate clear reporting and support pathways into all awareness campaigns; promote community-level dialogue to encourage early help-seeking.</p>  |
| <p><b>CHATBOT AND TECHNOLOGY TOOLS</b></p> <p>Job-search framed tools linked to hotlines and support services</p>   | <p><b>Next</b></p> <p>captures medium-term buildouts that include interventions that need some groundwork first with new partners or actions that will influence the desired outcome.</p> | <p>Explore development of chatbot tools for job-search guidance that integrate safe recruitment information and link to support services.</p>  |
| <p><b>UNIVERSITY AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Career fairs, counsellor networks, partnerships with civil society</p>                             |   | <p>Integrate targeted education on deceptive recruitment into universities and schools through career services and civil society partnerships.</p>   |
| <p><b>REGULATION OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS</b></p> <p>Strengthen measures to counter fraudulent online recruitment tactics</p>                                   |   | <p>Improve evaluation of practices and trends of online job advertisements and develop policies to address fraudulent online recruitment practices, recognising that methods are increasingly sophisticated.</p>   |

## KEY INTERVENTIONS (CONTINUED)

| Intervention area  | Priority   | Key action point  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION</b></p> <p>Coordination between origin, transit, and destination countries</p>            | <p><b>Future</b></p> <p>reflects the longer-term structural shift of embedding change, which depends on policy change and reform cycles.</p> | <p>Strengthen cooperation and coordination between countries to prevent recruitment and improve cross-border responses to organized crime.</p>  |
| <p><b>ROBUST MIGRATION AND RECRUITMENT POLICIES</b></p> <p>Legal frameworks to support cooperation between countries</p> |  | <p>Promote access to safe and legitimate employment opportunities both domestically and abroad, including by providing clear and transparent legal and policy guidance on safe migration pathways to individuals.</p> |

### TARGETED AWARENESS-RAISING INTERVENTIONS:

Acknowledging the report's findings pointing to low awareness levels, cognitive biases<sup>4</sup> and COM-B drivers among victims, concerns were raised around too general and blunt campaigns facing challenges in 'reaching potential victims where they were'. Discussions highlighted the need for evaluating existing campaigns and integrating more targeted and behaviourally informed approaches. In line with behavioural insights, messaging should be tailored to different audiences, including migrants and those who are aspiring to migrate, individuals who are at key life transition points, for e.g. from university to first employment, students, family members and vulnerable communities and should be delivered by trusted messengers. Entry points such as communities known to be at risk, passport offices and border and immigration screening interactions as well as pre-departure orientation trainings, were noted as places that can provide opportunities to reach individuals who are at high risk. However, given that scam operations exploit deep-rooted economic, social, and psychological vulnerabilities, it was noted that awareness alone is insufficient to prevent recruitment.

#### *Shared example\*:*

Requiring passport applicants to read out cautionary messages before signing application documents.

### INCREASED EXPOSURE TO THE PROBLEM AND DIGITAL LITERACY:

Exposure techniques were discussed as a way to demonstrate how scams operate and increase awareness of available support services. Even when individuals do not seek help immediately, the information may be useful later. Successful approaches to warn and train individuals on digital literacy and recognizing financial scams could be adapted to target individuals at risk of recruitment into scam centres and other exploitative recruitment. Such interventions could also target family and community members.

#### *Shared example:*

In the context of financial scam prevention, a pilot "Scam-paign" experiment, implemented with a government-run digital agency, used a fake advertisement on social media platform, offering a 75% discounted coffee machine that directed users to a realistic scam website, where many entered their credit card details. As part of the experiment, some individuals received an awareness message with targeted training on the red flags of financial scams. Two weeks later, a follow-up scam-paign showed that those who received the training were less likely to fall for the scam.

<sup>4</sup> UN Human Rights study identified the influence of at least four cognitive bias that are relevant to the context of fraudulent recruitment into scam operations, including confirmation bias (finding reasons to believe the offer is safe), sunk cost bias (continuing once time/money/emotion are invested), information avoidance (ignoring unpleasant facts), and optimism bias ("it won't happen to me"), which often override warning messages.

\* These examples shared by participants are not exhaustive nor do they suggest that they are based on the COM-B model, and information on the effectiveness of many of those initiatives, including through evaluation, is generally lacking.

## DELIVERING MESSAGES VIA REPUTABLE, TRUSTWORTHY MESSENGERS:

Trust is critical and campaigns were considered particularly effective when they involve trusted individuals with lived experience from the same communities, speaking the same languages and able to provide practical advice, helping build trust and encouraging early advice-seeking.

### *Shared examples\*:*

- Awareness raising on fraudulent recruitment through Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) at the sub-national level, where community members accessed services and information.
- Government authorities implemented community-level caravan campaigns as joint initiatives between national and local government units, often involving survivors of trafficking sharing their experiences of seeking employment overseas, raised awareness of the risks associated with overseas employment and supported community discussions on assessment and selection of job opportunities.

## ENGAGING PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SCAM CENTRES IN CAMPAIGNS:

Spotlighting stories and survivor testimonies in, for example, brochures, documentaries, games and other media pieces, and meaningful involvement of survivors in co-designing campaigns is crucial. Such engagement should ensure that survivors are engaged in an ethical manner, including fair remuneration and protection of their safety and wellbeing, and capacitated in their knowledge and confidence to perform their roles. Survivors who are empowered, capacitated, and remunerated could provide advice through live chat or hotline services for those who are contemplating working overseas and want to sense-check their decisions.

### *Shared examples\*:*

- Survivors sharing their experiences through short videos on social media platforms provided relatable warnings about deceptive recruitment and unsafe migration pathways.
- CSOs developing initiatives such as podcast series featuring survivors amplifying lived experiences and raising awareness.
- Regional awareness campaign featuring survivor testimonies, disseminated through social media, national-level launches, and partnerships with schools, universities, and community networks.

## BRIDGING ONLINE OUTREACH AND LOCAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS:

The importance of linking online outreach and awareness interventions with offline and community-based awareness and support mechanisms was emphasised, involving CSOs that can provide guidance and referrals. Strengthening local support systems, including local government structures, such as police and immigration authorities, and community and village leaders, was also highlighted.

### *Shared example\*:*

Proactive public messaging from law enforcement emphasizing availability to provide support helped build public trust.

## FACILITATING INCIDENT REPORTING:

It was noted that awareness efforts should be accompanied by clear and accessible reporting mechanisms to enable and encourage individuals who encounter suspicious recruitment or potential exploitation to report concerns and seek assistance. Providing safe, community-level spaces for dialogue were also highlighted as an important factor for strengthening community resilience, particularly given that recruitment often occurs through family members or other trusted networks. Suggestions included looking to lessons learned from domestic violence or other areas where stigma, risks of revictimisation and family ties had to be overcome to encourage incident reporting.

## **INCORPORATING TECHNOLOGY TO RAISE AWARENESS:**

With the purpose of reaching individuals 'where they are', it was proposed that chatbot tools providing support to job-seekers, such as guidance on CV preparation, recruitment processes, verification of contracts and credibility of the recruiter and employer, and working overseas. This approach may be more effective as individuals are more likely to engage with services that support employment opportunities, while prevention messages and risk information and reporting and referral options can be integrated into the guidance provided.

### ***Shared example\*:***

Chatbots have been tested in other contexts involving stigma and vulnerability as a private and accessible way for individuals to seek information, for example, to support COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in South America and to provide information on intimate partner violence in Southern Africa, particularly where individuals may feel unable to speak to family, friends or authorities. Chatbots allow users to ask specific questions and receive tailored information, which is difficult to achieve through one-way awareness campaigns.

## **TARGETING INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO RAISE AWARENESS:**

Education was identified as a key entry point to reach individuals at risk of becoming future targets, particularly through universities, which can contribute via recruitment fairs, career counsellor networks, alumni networks and other outreach channels.

Civil society and survivor-led organizations were identified as key actors to deliver practical guidance on recognising deceptive recruitment risks and red flags in job offers, particularly in targeted locations and groups, while education ministries were encouraged to integrate this topic into national education curricula in the longer term.

### ***Shared example\*:***

Discussions on fraudulent recruitment took place with universities through existing career counsellor networks.

## **REGULATED DIGITAL PLATFORMS:**

Ensuring rights-based regulation of digital platforms and related actions were identified as medium- to longer-term interventions. Strengthening transparency around advertisers and evaluation of existing national approaches to develop policies to address online fraudulent recruitment tactics were highlighted as areas for action, while recognising that recruiters continue to adapt to existing measures and that recruitment methods are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

## **CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION:**

Existing cross-border collaboration was found to be insufficient to effectively address recruitment into scam operations. Current challenges include the difficulty of preventing harm, providing support, or holding traffickers accountable when abuses occur in another country. The need for stronger cooperation and coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination, including through a multi-stakeholder arrangement, was emphasized to prevent recruitment and improve responses to cross-border organized crimes.

## **LEGAL AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS:**

Longer-term efforts, including putting in place robust rights-based migration policies and legal frameworks were highlighted. Ensuring access to legitimate job opportunities both domestically and abroad was seen as an important preventive measure, alongside governments providing transparent legal and policy guidance on safe migration pathways to individuals.

## **DISRUPTING THE EXPLOITATION ENVIRONMENT:**

Targeting the exploitation environment itself was also highlighted as important, including approaches such as ethical/white hacking or authorized cybersecurity interventions to support the disruption of scam networks, legal actions to freeze assets of criminal networks, and efforts to dismantle mule accounts to disrupt scam operations and limit their ability to recruit and exploit individuals. A strong focus was also placed on high-level government engagement to create pressure on countries where scam operations take place and to generate political will to act.

Section 3

# KEY PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS



There was consensus that ensuring effective protection for victims of trafficking into cyber scam operations contributes to prevention and law enforcement efforts. This requires stronger systems for identification, referral and assistance, as well as clearer legal and operational frameworks, particularly with regard to the implementation of the non-punishment principle. A range of priority measures, including the establishment of a community of practice to support coordinated action at regional and international levels, to address gaps in protection and assistance alongside supporting civil society, independent media and safeguarding civic space was discussed. These are summarized and organized by levels of priority and further elaborated below.

## KEY INTERVENTIONS

| Intervention area   | Priority   | Key action point   |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>HUMANITARIAN AND RIGHTS-BASED PROTECTION RESPONSES</b></p> <p>Immediate assistance for large-scale rescues and releases from scam compounds</p> | <p><b>Now</b></p> <p>covers actions that can be initiated with existing tools and structures. These actions do not require new legal or institutional infrastructure to begin.</p> | <p>Ensure preparedness for humanitarian emergency responses to large-scale movements of individuals leaving scam compounds, enabling timely and effective protection and assistance.</p>   |
| <p><b>VICTIM IDENTIFICATION AND SCREENING</b></p> <p>Implement the non-punishment principle, screening processes, referral pathways</p>               |  | <p>Strengthen victim identification by ensuring consistent application of the non-punishment principle and improving screening so victims can be promptly identified and referred to protection mechanisms.</p>  |
| <p><b>REFRAMING NARRATIVES</b></p> <p>Survivors as agents of change; employ the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus</p>                              |  | <p>Reframe the narrative to recognise victims and survivors as agents of change and strengthen UN advocacy highlighting States' obligations under human rights, humanitarian and development frameworks.</p>   |
| <p><b>TRAINING DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE</b></p> <p>Implement existing training resources; enhance peer learning</p>                  |  | <p>Promote wider dissemination of existing training resources on the protection of victims of trafficking, support a community of practice for peer learning, and encourage cross-agency case study development to inform advocacy and donor dialogue.</p> |
| <p><b>PROTECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICE MAPPING</b></p> <p>Including physical and mental health, reintegration, and gender-responsive services</p>       |  | <p>Map existing services, strengthen coordination, and address gaps — including expanding assistance available for men — ensuring a non-discriminatory and gender-responsive approach.</p>   |
| <p><b>INCREASED FUNDING FOR GRASSROOTS ACTORS</b></p> <p>Cost-benefit analysis, direct funding to local organizations</p>                             |  | <p>Conduct cost-benefit analyses of protection systems and increase direct funding flows to grassroots and local organizations to address the gap between actual costs and available resources.</p>  |
| <p><b>SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN CIVIC SPACE</b></p> <p>Civil society and independent media</p>   |  | <p>Safeguard civic space to enable these actors to safely support the identification, protection and assistance of victims, while contributing to awareness-raising, investigative reporting and accountability efforts.</p>                               |

## KEY INTERVENTIONS (CONTINUED)

| Intervention area  | Priority  | Key action point   |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>CIVIL SOCIETY INTEGRATION</b></p> <p>Formalise roles in rescue, screening, referral and national referral mechanisms</p>       | <p><b>Next</b></p> <p>captures medium-term buildouts that include interventions that need some groundwork first with new partners or actions that will influence the desired outcome.</p> | Formally recognize and integrate CSOs into national referral mechanisms and relevant legislation, recognising their essential role in rescue, screening, and referral processes.   |
| <p><b>EMBASSY AND CONSULATE COORDINATION</b></p> <p>Consolidated focal point contact lists for cross-border cases</p>                |   | Establish consolidated contact lists of embassy and consulate focal points and circulate them widely with key stakeholders to strengthen coordination and enable more timely support in cross-border cases.  |
| <p><b>NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS</b></p> <p>Ensure legal recognition of trafficking for forced criminality</p>                        |   | Strengthen national legal frameworks by clarifying and reinforcing legal recognition of trafficking for forced criminality where gaps in domestic law persist.   |
| <p><b>VICTIM FUNDS FROM ASSET SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION</b></p> <p>Coordination between origin, transit, and destination countries</p> | <p><b>Future</b></p> <p>reflects the longer-term structural shift of embedding change, which depends on policy change and reform cycles.</p>  | Establish dedicated victim funds capitalised through criminal asset seizures and court-ordered restitution, creating a financing stream for protection services that reduces donor dependency and links accountability directly to remedies for victims. |

### HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PROTECTION RESPONSES:

There was a strong call to adopt emergency response frameworks and a human rights-based approach to people leaving situations of exploitation, including in large numbers. This is paramount to ensure preparedness and effectiveness in the response and that individuals receive the protection and support they need.

### STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NON-PUNISHMENT PRINCIPLE:

The urgent need to make victim identification and screening processes more robust was highlighted. Ensuring the application of the non-punishment principle was agreed as a critical starting point to enable victims to be screened, identified and able to access protection and support services. Screening processes can be informed by survivors with lived experience who can provide additional insights and case studies to help inform cases requiring enhanced screening.

In addition, strengthening the legal recognition of trafficking for forced criminality in national law remains important in contexts where gaps persist.

### REFRAMING NARRATIVES ON VICTIMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

There is a need to reframe the narrative to recognise victims and survivors as agents of change and contributors to prevention and protection efforts. In addition, application of the presumption of victimhood and innocence, ensuring individuals are recognized primarily as victims of exploitation, serves to counteract cognitive biases and uphold safeguards against wrongful identification or prosecution as offenders. Treating the issue of online scam operations within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus would help to highlight States' obligations under human rights, development and humanitarian frameworks and enable stronger advocacy, early warning, coordination and protection responses by UN agencies.

## TRAINING DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:

Existing training modules and resources developed by ASEAN and other entities were considered valuable, but dissemination and uptake remain a major challenge. Establishing a community of practice was proposed to support implementation, peer learning and systematic sharing of tools and guidance for the protection of victims. The development of studies drawing on survivor testimonies and lived experiences across organizations was identified as a practical step to support advocacy and dialogue, including with donors, to demonstrate how survivor perspectives and protection pathways contribute to prevention and more holistic and effective responses.

### *Shared examples\*:*

- Following from the launch of the [ASEAN Guideline on the Implementation of the Non-Punishment Principle for Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons](#) in 2025, the practical guidance for ASEAN Member States on implementing the non-punishment principle will be complemented by a set of indicators and training modules for the identification of trafficking in persons for forced criminality.
- The Australian government's Counter Trafficking in Persons Centre of Excellence (CTIP COE) at the DSI Academy in Thailand provides and sustains a cadre of professionals equipped to respond to all forms of trafficking in persons, including trafficking for labour, sex, forced marriage and forced criminality.

## PROTECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICE MAPPING:

Challenges remain in the availability and coordination of protection services. Mapping existing services in areas such as health care, including maternal care, child-focused support, psychosocial health and reintegration support was identified as an important step to better understand and address these gaps. While support services for women remain essential, a significant gap was identified in the availability of assistance, such as shelter services, for men, who represent the majority of victims of trafficking for forced criminality in the context of cyber scam operations.

### *Shared example\*:*

The expansion of shelter services to accommodate male victims of trafficking including the provision of counselling and empowerment support.

## FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL GAPS:

The real cost of effective protection is significantly higher than the current level of available funding. The need for cost-benefit analysis was discussed to assess the potential benefits if governments fully funded effective protection responses. Challenges also include the limited flow of funding to organizations. Greater emphasis should be placed on direct funding to local and grassroots actors.

## PROTECTING AND STRENGTHENING CIVIC SPACE:

Civil society is often first points of contact when victims are seeking help and information and thus plays a critical role in providing services and facilitating contact with government processes. In many contexts, however, national referral mechanisms (NRMs) do not clearly assign a role to CSOs, suggesting the need to formalise civil society involvement both within NRMs and in national legislation.

### *Shared examples\*:*

- One CSO worked with the Embassy to facilitate the return of victims to their home country and the screening process upon arrival.
- Another CSO supported the establishment of a survivor network in the region and facilitated their engagement with the public.

The need to strengthen civil society and independent media and ensure that these actors are not placed at risk was highlighted, including the importance of protecting civic space as an enabling condition for effective identification, support and protection of victims. The role of investigative and high-quality media working on this issue was also emphasised, particularly in raising awareness, exposing abusive practices and supporting accountability.

#### **EMBASSY AND CONSULATE COORDINATION:**

Unclear contact points and inconsistent access to information were identified as impacting communication and coordination. Consolidated updated focal point lists were suggested to improve coordination and enable more timely responses in cross-border cases.

#### **VICTIM FUNDS FROM ASSET SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION:**

Participants highlighted funding measures including the need to establish victim compensation funds, which could be capitalised in part through criminal asset seizures and court-ordered restitution. Such mechanisms would help reduce dependence on donor funding and ensure resources are more directly tied to remedies for victims and accountability outcomes.

## Section 4

# CONCLUSION

It is clear that addressing this 'wicked problem' requires a concerted, multi-sectoral effort. Victims endure ongoing exploitation while traffickers operate with impunity, underscoring the pressing need for targeted investments in prevention, protection, and accountability systems. Such investments in key interventions can act as disruptors to recruitment networks, more effectively protect victims, and build stronger systems to prevent future exploitation.

Meeting participants, representing governments, grassroots organizations, survivors, UN partners, donors, and private sector actors, emphasized the importance of leveraging their respective strengths, expertise, and influence. Development partners have a critical role in scaling effective interventions, providing necessary funding, and empowering civil society and survivors. Governments must prioritize survivor-centered policies and implementation. Civil society organizations and survivors bring indispensable perspectives and on-the-ground experience, while private sector actors can strengthen human rights due diligence processes and curb technology misuse.

The meeting also highlighted the role of OHCHR in fostering cross-sector collaboration to ensure a human rights-based and victim-centred response to cyber scam operations and trafficking for forced criminality. OHCHR was encouraged to advocate for the role of civil society and participatory, survivor-led approaches in implementing prevention and protection efforts. Suggestions included enhancing partnerships with governments, ASEAN, the broader UN as well as with private sector. It was further recommended that OHCHR convene follow-up meetings, sustain on the ground monitoring, address misconceptions, and integrate its report findings on behavioural drivers into prevention initiatives.

Progress demands sustained shared commitment, strategic funding, and cross-border collaboration. By empowering victims and survivors and building accountability measures and systemic reforms, stakeholders can drive transformative change against trafficking into scam operations while strengthening protections for those at risk.

## RESOURCES

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[Report: A “wicked problem” - Seeking human rights-based solutions to trafficking into cyber-scam operations in South-East Asia \(2026\)](#)

[StoryMap: A “WICKED PROBLEM” \(2026\)](#)

[Report: Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response \(2023\)](#)

[WebStory: Held by a thread: Surviving forced labour in cyber scam centres \(2026\)](#)

[WebStory: A matter of survival: The human cost of cyber scam operations in South-East Asia \(2026\)](#)

[Compound Crime: Cyber Scam Operations in Southeast Asia \(2025\)](#)

[Changing Behaviour for Sustainable Development: Free SDG Academy course](#)

