



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China Regional Cooperation Roadmap

to

Address Transnational Organized Crime and Trafficking in Persons Associated with Casinos and Scam Operations in Southeast Asia

September 2023

A. Rationale

1. Over the past fifty-six years, ASEAN has seen relative peace and stability, continued growth, and sustainable development. It is one of the fastest growing regions in the world. The important lesson learnt over the past five decades is that regional peace, stability, and prosperity reinforce one another. Consequently, the ASEAN Community's security, political, economic, and social agendas are mutually reinforcing.
2. ASEAN has shown great commitment in combatting transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons (TIP) as one of the eight main areas under the frameworks of ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC). In 2017, the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025) was established to follow up the mandate of the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration in Combating Transnational Crime and contribute to the realization of the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025.
3. At the 42nd ASEAN Summit in May 2023, under the Chairmanship of Indonesia, leaders underscored the "need to strengthen cross-sectoral and cross-pillar cooperation to combat transnational crimes and the contribution of the various ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, led by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC)". Strong commitment was also expressed to address the growing concern of TIP and the associated misuse of technology through ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Combating Trafficking in Persons Caused by the Abuse of Technology.
4. Casino and scam operations run by transnational organized crime groups have become a significant and growing problem in Southeast Asia. Major organized crime groups have established extensive criminal operations in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and other countries. They have taken advantage of the existing casino and Special Economic Zone (SEZ) infrastructure and unemployment present in the region to set up sophisticated online scam operations that defraud people around the world, and utilize trafficked victims to perform various criminal acts.
5. Consequently, thousands of people from across the Asia region and around the globe are being trafficked to work in casinos and other scam compounds, lured by the prospect of lucrative employment opportunities. Yet, TIP is only one form of transnational organized crime associated with these criminal businesses. Related digital technology fraud, extortion, money laundering, and corruption are creating challenges for authorities across the region. Associated illicit financial flows have grown to a point that they are impacting governance and the stability of some parts of the region.
6. Thus, to help ensure a more integrated and interconnected ASEAN Community remains safe and secure, ASEAN Member States need to work closely with Partners, including the People's Republic of China and relevant external and international agencies, to address the transnational organized crime groups exploiting the Southeast Asia region and their people.
7. On 28 June 2023, the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, as the ASEAN Lead Shepherd on Trafficking in Persons, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, as global custodian of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime or UNTOC, co-hosted a High-Level Dialogue among ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China in Bangkok to initiate the development of a strategic Roadmap to respond to transnational organized crime and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations in Southeast Asia.
8. Considering the cross-sectoral and cross-pillar nature of transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons, the development of this paper underlines the need to synergize the work of various regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN Directors-General of Immigration Departments, the

Heads of Consular Affairs Divisions of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (DGICM), the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), ASEAN Chiefs of Police (ASEANAPOL) Conference, and the ASEAN Law Ministers Meeting (ALAWMM), among others. This paper also recognizes other relevant instruments, including the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) and Bohol Multi-Sectoral Work Plan Against Trafficking in Persons 2023-2028, among others.

9. The implementation of ASEAN and the People's Republic of China Regional Cooperation Roadmap shall be guided by principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, in particular, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of the ASEAN Member States, consistent with the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, and in accordance with their respective domestic laws, rules, regulations and policies. Participation and contribution shall therefore be flexible, non-binding, and voluntary, and decisions made shall be based on consensus.

B. Synopsis of the Regional Cooperation Roadmap

10. By its very nature, transnational organized crime and TIP associated with casinos and scams cannot be efficiently addressed by each state on its own. It requires a targeted, comprehensive, coordinated, and regional approach to address all forms of poly-criminality that feed into the transnational organized crime threat.
11. To ensure the safety and prosperity of the region, it is in the interests of ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China to work towards establishing a region-wide holistic strategic regional Roadmap, taking into account existing laws and regulations, existing bilateral and multilateral extradition treaties, and other legal cooperation agreements to which the ASEAN Member States are parties.
12. The proposed Roadmap would promote enhanced cooperation and coordination around four broad pillars:
 - **Preventing** organized crime from (re)infiltrating communities, the economy and political institutions.
 - **Pursuing** organized criminal groups and their illicit gains through criminal justice processes to increase business accountability and reduce risks of illegal operations.
 - **Protecting** vulnerable persons and victims from (further) harm.
 - **Promoting** partnerships and cooperation at all levels, including across international borders, and adopting a whole-of-society approach in the development and implementation.
13. These pillars align with the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025), which calls for close cooperation to prevent and combat transnational crimes under the purview of the AMMTC and SOMTC, including TIP, money laundering, and cybercrime. Furthermore, the goal of enhanced cooperation against TIP caused by the abuse of technology is also affirmed by ASEAN leaders at the 42nd ASEAN Summit.
14. In conclusion, an effective ASEAN and People's Republic of China Regional Cooperation Roadmap aimed at responding to transnational organized crime and trafficking in persons associated with casinos and scam operations in Southeast Asia will help address, in a timely manner, the transboundary challenges and threats that have the potential to undermine the stability and prosperity of ASEAN Member States and the region. This can only be achieved through close cooperation between ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders, both within ASEAN and beyond, such as the UNODC, the International Crime Police Organization (INTERPOL), and ASEANAPOL.


C. Regional Cooperation Roadmap

I. Increase national and regional prevention efforts as a key strategy to addressing transnational organized crime (TOC) and trafficking in persons (TIP) associated with casinos and scam operations.

15. Strengthen research activities and evidence gathering to inform policy and decision making on transnational organized crime responses, particularly TIP.
16. Develop public awareness campaigns to educate individuals about the risks and tactics used by criminal groups to prevent them from being victims of scams or victims of trafficking to commit scams, fraud, and other illegal acts.
17. Leverage the power of peer influence by engaging youths in the planning and development process of a public awareness campaign, including through collaboration with schools, universities, and youth organizations, where appropriate.
18. Review the content of public awareness campaigns on TOC and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations periodically to ensure that information disseminated remains relevant to the target audience.
19. Invest in improving financial and technological literacy, particularly among communities who are most likely to be targeted by criminal groups associated with casinos and scam operations.
20. Utilize social media platforms and engage with technology companies to develop and implement prevention campaigns.

II. Increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies and criminal justice practitioners to respond to TOC and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

21. Establish national inter-agency Focal Point Network in ASEAN countries and the People's Republic of China that brings together the relevant government agencies involved in the implementation of the Roadmap.
22. Convene an annual regional Focal Point Network meeting to ensure bilateral and regional cooperation in the implementation of the Roadmap, including through the sharing of information, coordination of law enforcement investigations, and timely delivery of requested assistance.
23. Equip national Focal Point Network members with specialized knowledge and skills required to investigate and disrupt criminal activities associated with casinos and scam operations, including through technical training and capacity building in cybercrime investigations, digital forensics, handling of digital evidence, virtual assets, and conducting parallel financial investigations (e.g., money laundering) alongside TIP investigations.
24. Equip frontline law enforcement officers with guidance on procedures for investigating TOC and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations, including standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to processing of victim complaints/cases, interviewing/screening of victims, and referral to support services.
25. Strengthen efforts to better understand illicit financial flows to address money laundering as an element of dismantling transnational organized crime networks operating scam operations.


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26. Catalyze cooperation between states to address TOC in a comprehensive and harmonized way, including through existing formal (e.g., MLA) and informal (P2P) mechanisms.
 27. Encourage parallel or joint investigations on cross-border transnational crime cases associated with scam operations.
 28. Enhance capacity of criminal justice practitioners to engage and support cross-border prosecution of criminal networks, by utilizing the UNTOC and other relevant tools and platforms, such as the South East Asia Justice Network (SEAJust).

III. Increase identification of potential TIP victims and strengthen mechanisms to protect, assist, and repatriate victims of forced criminality to their countries of origin.

29. Enhance screening of potential victims based on UNODC indicators and safeguard their rights by ensuring victims have immediate access to necessary support and services including shelter services, legal aid, trauma counselling, and mental health support.
30. Increase capacity of embassies and consular officers to respond to reported cases of TIP and provide assistance and support to presumed victims, including through liaising with immigration and police authorities, ensuring access to safe accommodation (i.e., not detention facilities), arranging emergency travel documents, offering interpretation when possible, providing advice and assistance in navigating law enforcement and justice systems, and repatriating victims from countries of transit and destination.
31. Uphold the non-punishment principle for presumed and identified victims of trafficking associated with casinos and scam operations so that victims are not punished or prosecuted for unlawful acts they commit as a consequence of being trafficked. Victims who are protected from prosecution and assisted are more likely to engage in the criminal justice process (e.g., provide crucial evidence for investigation and prosecution).
32. Strengthen networks of service providers, including among civil society organizations (CSOs), non-government organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations and community-based organizations that fill service provision gaps to victims of trafficking in persons.
33. Help build service provider awareness, detection, and response to human-trafficking-indicative posting and communications on their web platforms.

IV. Review and strengthen, as required, the implementation of relevant legislative and policy frameworks to address transnational organized crime, including TIP, cybercrimes, money laundering, and other crimes linked to casinos and scam operations.

34. Make anti-money laundering and wider anti-corruption efforts a higher priority and invest resources and political capital accordingly.
35. Review and revise legislation related to money laundering, asset forfeiture, gaming, SEZs, and cybercrime to ensure that it meets international standards and global best practices.
36. Revise and strengthen legislative and regulatory frameworks that govern the licensing, operations, and provision of entertainment industries such as casinos, gaming, and online betting, and other establishments and technologies that are at risk of being used to facilitate transnational organized crime, including cybercrime.

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37. Develop national strategies and action plans to address organized crime, money, laundering, trafficking in persons, cybercrime, and related criminality in casinos, special economic zones (SEZs), and other entities operating as scam operations.
 38. Establish mechanisms to review profiles of investors in casinos, including online platforms and junket operations, and SEZs, to determine if there are associations with organized crime, and to determine beneficial ownership.
 39. Strengthen systems and infrastructures for protection of data and information to minimize risks of criminal groups exploiting personally identifiable information (PII) to target vulnerable individuals.

V. Enhance cooperation with private sector, regional bodies, and civil society to strengthen transnational organized crime and TIP responses associated with casinos and scam operations.

40. Enhance engagement with telecommunications, technology companies, and the private sector to address the misuse of their services and products for criminal activities associated with casinos and scam operations.
41. Leverage new and advanced technologies more quickly to detect and respond to transnational organized crime and poly-criminality associated with online scamming and laundering of illicit profits, including criminal uses of virtual assets.
42. Strengthen regional and international cooperation with police organizations, such as INTERPOL, ASEANAPOL, and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to facilitate cross-border police cooperation.
43. Build inter-regional networks between ASEAN and the Middle East through regular dialogues to discuss TOC and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations.
44. Enhance relationships with CSOs, NGOs and other organizations that raise awareness and advocate for better responses to TOC and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations.

D. Implementation Arrangement

45. This Roadmap was circulated for discussion among the ASEAN Member States and the People's Republic of China that participated in the High-Level Dialogue on 28 June 2023 in Bangkok, and consensus was reached.
46. Taking into account the cross-pillar and cross-sectoral nature of transnational organized crime and TIP associated with casinos and scam operations, the Roadmap will be implemented, as appropriate, by relevant sectoral bodies in line with their respective mandate. The Working Group on TIP, through the Voluntary Lead Shepherd mechanism under SOMTC (held by the Government of the Philippines), as the body overseeing issues of transnational crime, is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Roadmap with support from UNODC.



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