



OUTCOME REPORT

THIRD RSO BORDER FORUM

BORDER MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES: A ROUTES-BASED APPROACH

28-29 JANUARY 2025



REGIONAL SUPPORT OFFICE
THE BALI PROCESS

FOREWORD

The Third RSO Border Forum, held over 28–29 January 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, convened more than 120 delegates representing government agencies, law enforcement, border management authorities, international organisations, and private sector partners.

This year's theme, *'Border Management Priorities and Challenges: A Routes-Based Approach,'* underscored the need for enhanced cross-border collaboration in managing international migration challenges, including people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime. Discussions reinforced the importance of understanding migration as a process that can span multiple jurisdictions and requires coordinated intervention at each stage of travel—pre-border, at-border, and post-border.

Over the two days, delegates highlighted key challenges that continue to hinder effective border management and migration governance across the Bali Process region. The rise of cyber-enabled trafficking operations—where victims are recruited through fraudulent online job offers—remains a pressing regional challenge. Frontline officers spoke to operational challenges around detection and management of fraudulent travel documents, information-sharing and data exchange. The continued shift toward automated border controls, whilst improving efficiency, is reducing face-to-face interactions between travelers and immigration and border officers, removing a level of traditional human oversight, and adding new considerations around technology and infrastructure disparities between countries, privacy concerns, cybersecurity risks, and ethical considerations.

A Mapping Exercise provided valuable insights and discussions between frontline officers, on common irregular migration flows and high-risk transit routes seen in their daily work, and emerging trends in trafficking in persons and people smuggling.

As Co-Managers of the RSO, we recognise that forums such as this must go beyond discussions. The RSO presented insights from the Third Border Forum to Senior Officials at the Third RSO Constructive Dialogue—as inputs that could support policy makers in their prioritisation of activity across national and institutional work plans. We encourage all participants to also take back insights gained to your agencies, operational units, and policy teams—to inform future efforts and continue the conversation to advance a more secure, coordinated, and victim-centred approach to border management across the Bali Process region.



A black ink signature of David Scott, featuring a stylized 'D' and 'S'.

David Scott

RSO Co-Manager (Australia)



A blue ink signature of Fuad Adriansyah, written in a cursive style.

Fuad Adriansyah

RSO Co-Manager (Indonesia)

KEY OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Detailed discussions over the two days—chaired by Bali Process Member States and Organisations—allowed for focused insights and identification of where operational barriers exist at a day-to-day level. Frontline opinions were sought on where a prioritisation of resources or effort could make the most impact—to be presented back to Senior Officials and those with ability to influence national and institutional ways of working at the [Third RSO Constructive Dialogue](#).



- **Enhancing Cross-Border Information Sharing and Cooperation:** Delegates called for formal bilateral and multilateral agreements to streamline information-sharing. At an operational level, joint investigations and taskforces provide an effective route to support cross-border coordination.
- **Leveraging Technology for Border Security:** Some countries had already implemented biometric verification, e-gates, and AI-powered fraud detection, but many lacked the financial and technical resources to scale such initiatives. Knowledge exchange programmes were proposed to help less technologically advanced nations adopt similar tools.
- **Prioritising Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Training programmes on document fraud detection, behavioral profiling, and inter-agency cooperation were identified as critical to improving border management efficiency.
- **Reviewing legal and regulatory frameworks:** Delegates noted that inconsistencies across national legislation and regulatory frameworks hinder coordination and cross-border cooperation.

The Border Forum, as the RSO's flagship capability development event, provides participants with the opportunity to discuss and share border management strategies related to international migration, including as it relates to people smuggling and trafficking in persons.

Insights gained can support regional policy and operational guidelines, fostering a comprehensive approach to safeguarding vulnerable populations and strengthening international partnerships.

The remainder of this Outcome Report sets out in detail discussions from a Mapping Exercise, conducted at the Border Forum, and key challenges and recommendations identified across the course of the two-day dialogue. It is hoped that these will support forward discussions on where to prioritise efforts, resources and improvements across ways of working.

IDENTIFIED IRREGULAR MIGRATION CORRIDORS IN THE BALI PROCESS REGION

The Border Forum mapping exercise engaged delegates to analyse people smuggling and trafficking in persons routes across the region, and identify irregular migration flows, enforcement challenges, and regional vulnerabilities. Delegates charted origin, transit and destination points; profiled migrants and victims; and captured push-pull drivers and criminal modus operandi.

The following corridors were reported by delegates at the Third Border Forum as driving much of the irregular movements in the Bali Process region. Visa loopholes and forged-document supply chains are some of the methods employed by transnational crime groups to keep people-smuggling and trafficking networks active and adaptable.

East/South-East Asia to Europe & North America corridor

Migrants exploit visa-free or no-transit-visa hubs such as Istanbul, Kuala Lumpur, São Paulo and Mexico City to reach the US, Canada and the EU/UK.

Mekong cyber-scam centre route

Tens of thousands of victims are funneled into forced criminality, in cyber-scam compounds across Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR—an alarming surge that adds to the region's traditional labour- and sex-exploitation markets.

Pacific Island staging points

Visa-waiver schemes in some Pacific jurisdictions provide a 'soft door' for onward smuggling to Australia, New Zealand and North America.

Bay-of-Bengal / Andaman Sea maritime route

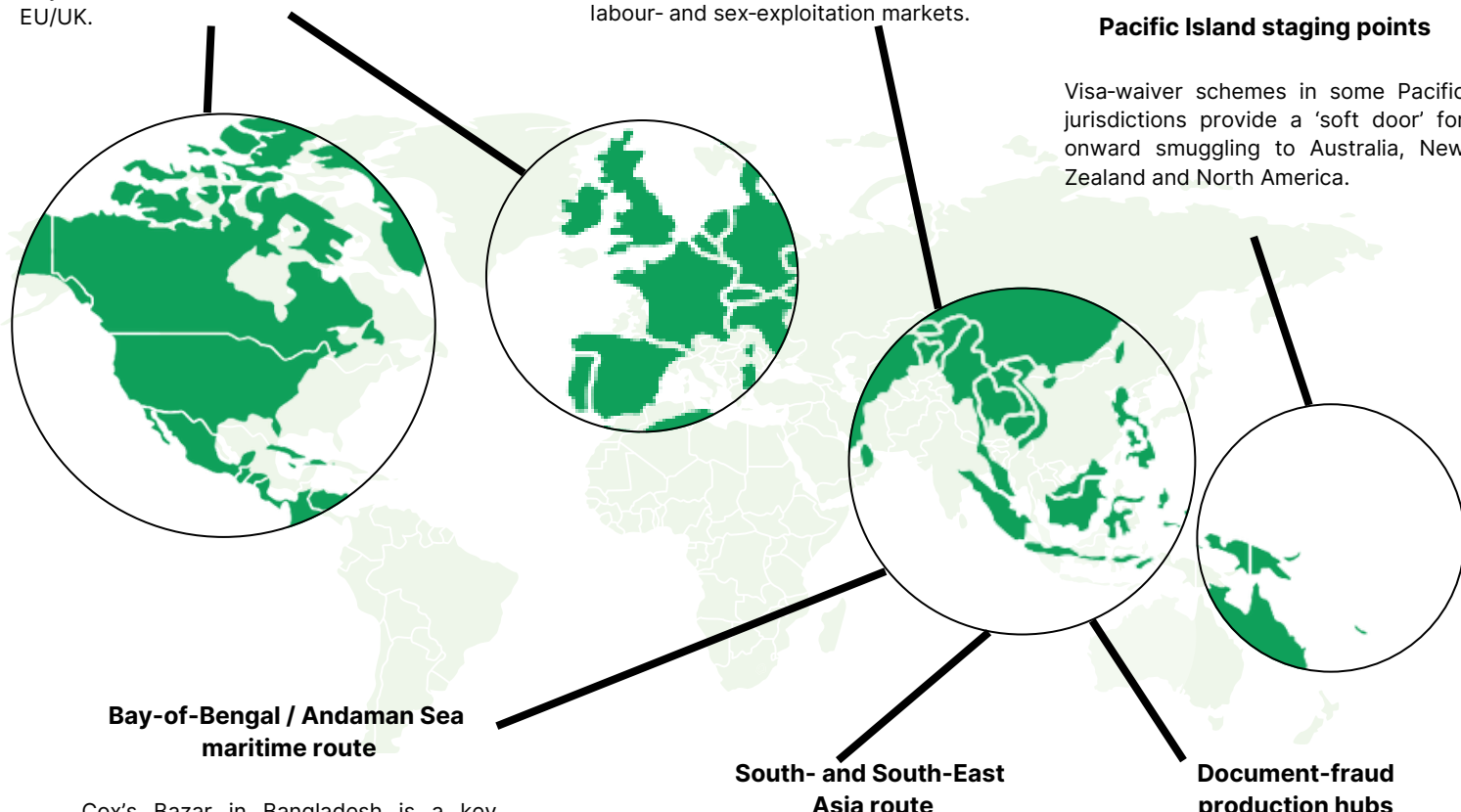
Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh is a key maritime departure point for irregular journeys. The maritime Bay-of-Bengal corridor remains the region's deadliest route: overcrowded vessels, monsoon weather and limited search-and-rescue capacity generate regular loss-of-life incidents.

South- and South-East Asia route

Migrants originating from South Asia attempt to transit Indonesia and Malaysia often embarking on risky journeys, with Australia or New Zealand the intended destination.

Document-fraud production hubs

Greater Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta were identified as key forgery centres; upstream joint operations here could effectively disrupt operations.



KEY TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ROUTES IDENTIFIED

This map traces common routes used by traffickers in the movement of victims coerced, deceived, or forced into exploitation, as identified by delegates at the Third Border Forum. Journeys are shown to cross South and Southeast Asia, spanning the Middle East, Europe, and the Pacific Islands. Victims—often drawn from young people or marginalised groups—are trafficked for forced criminality into cyber-scam centres, and for traditional exploitation including sexual and forced labour.



Forced Criminality

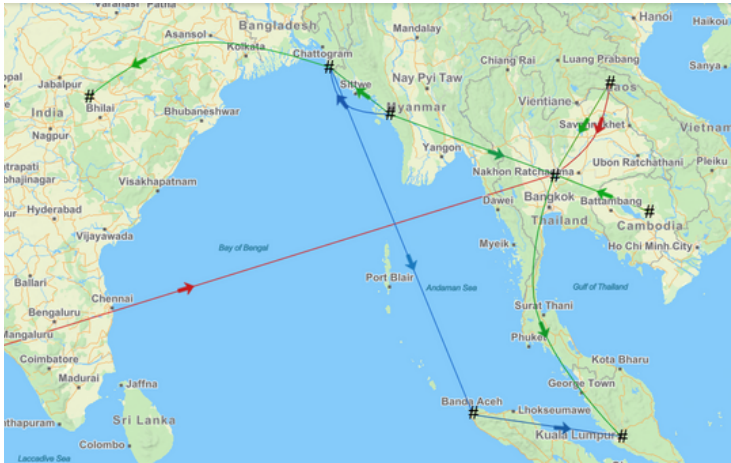
Driven by billions of dollars in illicit capital inflows, cyber-scam centres have taken on industrial proportions across Southeast Asia. The 'Myanmar-Cambodia-Laos triangle' has become notorious as a hotspot for a new form of trafficking in persons—often of educated young people searching for employment online—who are deceived into forced criminality in cyber-scam centres. Victims are usually recruited online and often trafficked using legal air travel routes via regional travel hubs such as Bangkok, Thailand—before being transported onwards overland to work in cyber-scam compounds.



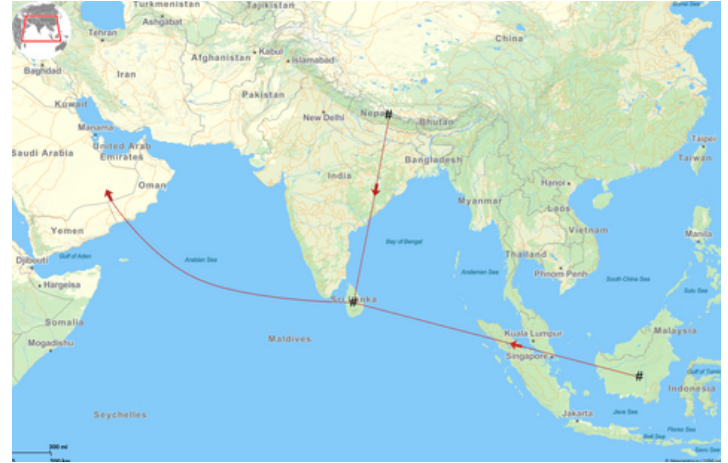
countries have reported cases of their citizens being trafficked to Southeast Asia's scam compounds to the RSO

Sexual Exploitation, Forced Labour and Forced Marriage

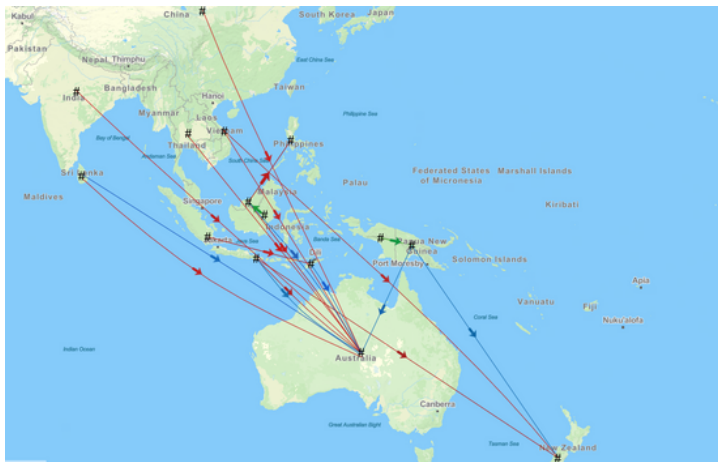
Delegates indicated that victims were most frequently trafficked from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and parts of Africa to work in Thailand, Malaysia, Gulf States, Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations. Recruitment was often facilitated through **social media** and **fake job advertisements**, with victims entering legally using tourist or student visas before being trapped by their traffickers and exploited.



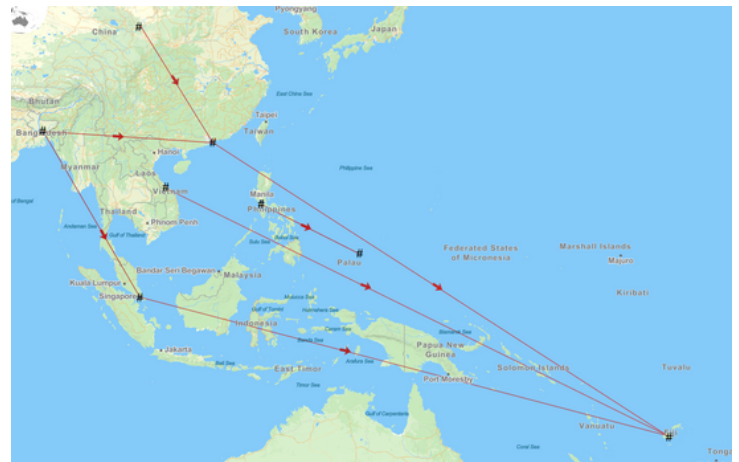
Victims from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and African countries including Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda are often trafficked towards Thailand and China for sexual exploitation.



Victims are trafficked from source countries including Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, and Bhutan to Gulf State countries. A majority are female domestic workers between 20-45 years old.



Victims trafficked to Australia or New Zealand originate in highest numbers from China, Viet Nam, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia.



Victims from the Philippines, Viet Nam, China, and Bangladesh are trafficked to Pacific Island countries, including Fiji, Palau, and other Pacific Islands. Travel often includes a transit through Hong Kong and Singapore. Visa-waiver schemes in Pacific jurisdictions were noted as providing a 'soft door' for onward smuggling to Australia, New Zealand and North America.

KEY SMUGGLING ROUTES IDENTIFIED

This map illustrates common transnational routes indicated by delegates at the Third Border Forum, used for people smuggling across Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Journeys often involve a complex mix of land, sea, and air pathways.



Europe-bound routes

Delegates noted that individuals from South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia frequently transited through various regional hubs such as UAE, and Egypt en route to Europe. Common tactics employed to facilitate travel included visa fraud, boarding pass swaps, and forged documents.



Australia/New Zealand bound routes

Delegates noted that attempted journeys to reach Australia and New Zealand often originated from Sri Lanka, Myanmar, or China, passing through multiple transit points including Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia.



US/Canada bound routes

Delegates noted that routes towards the United States and Canada were made up of complex, multi-country journeys, often originating from Viet Nam, Myanmar, and South Asia. Many journeys involved long-distance air travel, followed by irregular land crossings through Mexico.



1. Gaps in Information Sharing and Trust

Information and intelligence sharing remains an enduring challenge in the region

- Lack of formal systems and MOUs, unclear protocols, capacity issues and lack of trust can act as barriers to timely information sharing across regional counterparts
- Differing privacy laws and jurisdictional issues complicate information exchange, hindering cooperation between countries.
- Joint investigations and taskforces provide an effective route to support cross-border coordination.

2. Technology as a Double-edged Sword

While technological advancements promise enhanced efficiency of border control and improved border security, delegates raised concerns regarding potential vulnerabilities and unintended consequences.

- Transnational organised crime groups increasingly utilise advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI), encrypted communications, and digital currencies to improve their operations and complicate detection
- Gaps in border systems, institutional frameworks, and regulations continue to be exploited by criminal networks. Document fraud remains a major tool for traffickers and smugglers.
- Inconsistent use of biometric screening systems across the region, and differing technological capabilities, is a limiting factor in effective cross-border cooperation.
- Automated systems (e-gates) are an important development in enhancing cross-border security, but human oversight remains important to detect errors and manipulation.

3. Limitations of Human Resource Capacity and Training

Delegates noted resource and skill gaps limiting responses, especially regarding victim identification, intelligence, and document verification.

- Frontline officers, including from Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, called for enhanced resourcing and focus on capacity development at border crossings—including at more rural or remote crossing points.
- Canada, Malaysia, and the Philippines stressed the urgent need to build analytical capacity within border agencies, noting that the lack of trained analysts hampers timely, intelligence-led decision-making.

4. Fragmented Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Inconsistencies across national legislation and regulatory frameworks hinder coordination and cross-border cooperation.

- Delegates pointed to legal and regulatory inconsistencies—particularly around passenger data, privacy laws, and biometric screening—as key barriers to timely and coordinated information sharing across borders.
- Delegates spoke to the importance of cross-border regional or bilateral agreements

ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS AND COLLECTIVE PRIORITIES

1. STRENGTHEN INFORMATION SHARING MECHANISMS

Propositions from Member and Observer States



The **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)** proposed prioritisation of bilateral or multilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to facilitate exchange of information relating to trafficking in persons and people smuggling cases.



AUSTRALIA recommended the establishment of dedicated focal points from national border and law enforcement agencies to enhance coordinated cross-border responses to trafficking in persons and people smuggling cases. Australia advocated for strengthening informal channels, such as the Airline Liaison Officer (ALO) network, to supplement formal coordination mechanisms.



AUSTRALIA and **SRI LANKA** proposed starting with the exchange of non-sensitive data using standardised templates, and developing shared contact lists and levels of classification, to gradually build trust and formalise exchange mechanisms.



THAILAND encouraged Member States to attend and actively participate in regional forums to expand opportunities for operational information-sharing.



BANGLADESH, NEW ZEALAND, and the **UNITED STATES** emphasised the importance of transmitting passenger screening data to receiving countries ahead of arrival to enable targeted, risk-informed interventions.



LAO PDR, MALAYSIA, the **PHILIPPINES, THAILAND,** and **TIMOR-LESTE** advocated for regular bilateral and multilateral meetings with neighbouring partners to support knowledge exchange and updates across current trends and emerging risks.



MONGOLIA raised the challenge of balancing strong data protection laws with the need for timely information exchange, particularly with neighbouring countries at key land crossings.



The **PHILIPPINES, THAILAND,** and the **UNITED STATES** recommended the formation of specialised joint task forces to coordinate responses across immigration, law enforcement, and victim protection services.

2. BALANCE TECHNOLOGY WITH HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Propositions from Member and Observer States



The **UAE** and the **UNITED KINGDOM** emphasised that frontline officers must be trained to identify behavioural indicators of trafficking that automated systems may overlook and suggested incorporating human-led risk assessments into screening frameworks.



THAILAND highlighted the need for double-layered checkpoints on border approaches, combining the strategic placement of trained personnel with technology such as surveillance and biometric tools.



SRI LANKA and the **UAE** recommended incorporating multiple touchpoints throughout the travel process—for example by drawing on flight attendants and airport personnel—as an additional target point for intervention away from official checkpoints.



FIJI, SRI LANKA, and the UAE spoke to the benefit of joined-up Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems to screen travellers before arrival, helping to identify potential threats early.



SRI LANKA noted that pre-departure watchlists and trafficking risk indicators can support more proactive identification of high-risk individuals or networks.



SRI LANKA and the **UNITED STATES** encouraged deeper collaboration with airlines and aviation regulators, including through the International Air Transport Association (IATA), to address gaps in oversight and risk identification at pre-departure stages.

3. EXPAND REGIONAL CAPACITY AND STANDARDISE APPROACHES

Propositions from Member and Observer States



CAMBODIA noted that it had formalised MOUs between its national police and NGOs working to support victims of trafficking, enabling effective information-sharing and also facilitating capacity-building from NGOs for frontline responders around victim identification and support.



CAMBODIA, together with **CANADA**, **SRI LANKA**, and **THAILAND**, called for regional trainings focused on document fraud detection and victim identification.

Several delegations encouraged the **development of standardised training materials** that can be translated and adapted to local languages and operating environments.

Delegates spoke to the importance of **regional platforms and dialogues such as the Bali Process** for sustained knowledge exchange.

4. REVIEW LEGISLATION AND CLOSE POLICY GAPS

Propositions from Member and Observer States



The **UAE** encouraged the development of bilateral or multilateral legal agreements to harmonise definitions, procedures, and enforcement powers related to people smuggling and trafficking in persons. The UAE also called for airlines to adopt consistent regulations for unaccompanied minors to prevent exploitation.

5. INVEST IN PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MEASURES

Propositions from Member and Observer States



BANGLADESH advocated for formal engagement with NGOs to support case detection and enhance community-based awareness campaigns.



THAILAND proposed installing multilingual awareness signage in international airports to warn of the risks of trafficking in persons and people smuggling, helping vulnerable travellers make informed choices and recognise red flags.

LOOKING AHEAD

This Outcome Report is intended to provide an active snapshot and guide to priority issues and recommendations as relating to international migration management, as identified by frontline officers and policy officials across the Bali Process region. It is hoped that these can in turn prompt and support forward discussions on where to prioritise efforts, resources and improvements across ways of working at national and institutional levels.

Readers are also referred to The Outcome Report from the Third RSO Constructive Dialogue, which brought together Senior Officials across the Bali Process shortly after the Border Forum, and where challenges identified were presented for discussion.

The RSO will consider discussions captured in this Outcome Statement against the 2024-2026 RSO Work Plan—and identify opportunities to refine or readjust proposed activity in line with the needs and priorities identified. The document will also provide a blueprint for reference at the Fourth Border Forum, and the RSO will invite updates and reflections from members accordingly.

The RSO remains committed to working alongside members to further recommendations shared through this forum, through continued opportunities for dialogue, capacity-building support, and practical cooperation.

PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT

The RSO extends its sincere gratitude to all participants in the Third RSO Border Forum for their continued partnership and valuable contributions, and acknowledges core funding support from the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs and additional funding contributions from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which made this forum possible.

The Third Border Forum was attended by Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Canada, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

Organisations represented include the ASEAN Chiefs of National Police (ASEANAPOL), ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Program, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), INTERPOL, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), the Pacific Immigration Development Community (PIDC), the Pacific Links Foundation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the United State Institute of Peace (USIP).

GLOSSARY

ABF	Australian Border Force
ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ALO	Airline Liaison Officer
ASEANAPOL	ASEAN National Police
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PIDC	Pacific Immigration Development Community
RISP	Regional Information Sharing Platform (used in Pacific countries)
RSO	Regional Support Office of the Bali Process
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime



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