

CONCEPT NOTE Fifth RSO Border Forum

Turning Regional Cooperation into Operational Capability

Wednesday 7 – Thursday 8 October 2026
Pullman Bangkok King Power

BACKGROUND

The Regional Support Office (RSO) of the Bali Process was established in 2012 to provide technical support to Bali Process Members and to strengthen cooperation on trafficking in persons, people smuggling, and related transnational crime.

The Border Forum is the RSO's largest capacity development event for the Bali Process membership, gathering senior-level operational officials from immigration, border management, law enforcement, maritime, and related agencies to strengthen practical cooperation against people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime. Its fundamental purpose is to enhance practical knowledge sharing and strengthen cooperation necessary to effectively disrupt people smuggling and trafficking networks. It serves as a crucial space for practitioners to discuss operational challenges, share experiences, and build the trust required for coordinated responses.

Past RSO Border Forums have built progressively on each other. Each forum has deepened the region's shared understanding of the challenges it faces. The Fifth Forum asks a different question: given what the region now understands, and given the cooperation mechanisms, tools, and networks built in response — what operational capability has been produced, where does it fall short, and what must still be built?

2022	2023	Jan 2025	Nov 2025	Oct 2026
Technology	Information sharing	Routes-based approach	Cooperation beyond borders	Cooperation into capability

CURRENT AND EMERGING BORDER CHALLENGES

Across the Bali Process region, the border environment has become more complex and more interconnected than at any previous point in the forum series. Migration flows involve more source countries, more transit points, and more overlapping threat types than the routes mapped at the Third and Fourth Forum. Criminal networks have become more adaptive - operating simultaneously across people smuggling, trafficking in persons, document fraud, financial crime, and cyber-enabled recruitment, often through the same logistical infrastructure and the same individuals. The challenges confronting border agencies are no longer discrete or sequential. They converge.

The specific challenges the region has identified across previous forums remain present and in many cases have intensified:

- **Movement across the region now involves multiple jurisdictions and phases of travel** — pre-border, at-border, and post-border — requiring coordination that is predictable and activated before incidents occur, rather than improvised in response to them.
- **Organised crime groups increasingly rely on digital tools** — encrypted messaging platforms, social media, and cryptocurrency — to advertise routes, recruit victims, collect payments, and coordinate movements in real time, outpacing enforcement systems designed for earlier operating environments.
- **Automated border controls and e-gates have improved processing efficiency**, but reduced face-to-face interaction has narrowed the window in which frontline officers can identify victims, detect impostors, and act on behavioural indicators that no automated system currently captures.
- **Trafficking victims** — frequently young jobseekers with no prior vulnerability — are recruited through fraudulent online advertisements and coerced into forced criminality in scam compounds across mainland Southeast Asia and beyond, sometimes later transferred into other forms of exploitation. The profiles of victim and perpetrator have converged in ways that challenge conventional identification frameworks.
- **Frontline officers continue to encounter situations — mixed flows, ambiguous document presentations, and individuals showing trauma indicators** — for which their training, tools, and referral pathways are insufficient. The gap is not motivation; it is capability.

Against this landscape, the Bali Process region has over the past three years built a significant body of cooperation infrastructure: regional networks, information-sharing mechanisms, operational protocols, capacity-building initiatives, and practices that support cross-border coordination and investigation. The existence of this infrastructure is itself a meaningful achievement. The challenge the Fifth Forum addresses is what that infrastructure has produced in practice — where it is reaching frontline officers and changing how borders are managed, and where it remains underused, inconsistently applied, or simply unknown to the agencies it was designed to serve.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FIFTH BORDER FORUM

The Fifth RSO Border Forum offers a timely opportunity to:

- **Take stock of what the Bali Process region has built**

Since the Fourth Forum, the region has developed new cooperation mechanisms, operational tools, and information-sharing networks specifically designed to address people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime. Delegates will examine what those investments have produced in practice and where the gap between design and daily operation remains widest.

- **Share and evaluate practical solutions across the full range of border management challenges**

People smuggling and trafficking networks are disrupted through many different operational levers — document fraud detection, risk profiling and passenger targeting, cross-border information and intelligence sharing, investigation, screening and referral of vulnerable persons among others. Through a structured peer-to-peer exchange, delegates will contribute the tools, protocols, and practices their own agencies have developed and engage directly with what counterparts across the Bali Process region have found effective.

- **Examine what integrated response to converging threats requires in practice**

People smuggling, trafficking in persons, document fraud, cyber-enabled recruitment, and financial crime converge through the same criminal networks, the same routes, and the same border points simultaneously. Delegates will examine what the architecture of integrated response requires — the legal mandates, data-sharing arrangements, intelligence protocols, and coordination mechanisms that allow agencies to act on a shared picture rather than competing fragments of one.

- **Build capability through delegate-led learning**

The forum is designed so that delegates leave with knowledge, practical tools, and connections they can apply directly in their own agencies and operational contexts.

- **Strengthen the cooperation infrastructure that makes disruption possible**

Effective action against people smuggling and trafficking networks depends on relationships and cooperation mechanisms that function under operational pressure. The forum promotes the bilateral and multilateral connections.

- **Set the region's priorities for the next programming cycle**

Delegates will translate the forum's discussions into concrete, action-oriented recommendations — identifying the most significant gaps in regional capability to address people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime, and setting the priorities carried forward to the Constructive Dialogue.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The Fifth RSO Border Forum brings together senior-level operational officials from across the Bali Process region who are directly engaged in managing borders, countering people smuggling and trafficking in persons, and disrupting related transnational criminal networks.

The forum is designed for those whose daily work involves one or more of the following: traveller assessment, document verification, and risk profiling at air, land, or maritime borders; victim identification and protection referral; cross-border investigation and intelligence sharing; financial investigation linked to transnational crime and people smuggling networks; inter-agency coordination and border governance; or capability development, training, and operational policy in border management.

Delegates should hold positions that allow them to implement operational improvements, influence procedures, or make decisions within their agencies. Equivalent titles that delegates may hold include, but are not limited to:

IMMIGRATION AND BORDERS	LAW ENFORCEMENT	MARITIME	POLICY AND LIAISON
Director/Controller General	Superintendent	Commander	Counsellor
Deputy Controller	Commissioner	Lieutenant	Director
Assistant Controller	Commander	—	Deputy Secretary
Senior Officer	—	—	First Secretary / Attaché

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The forum's expected outcomes are both practical and strategic, reflecting the dual focus on immediate application and long-term cooperation.

INDIVIDUAL	INSTITUTIONAL	REGIONAL
• Clearer understanding of what integrated border response requires and where their agency's arrangements fall short. • Direct knowledge of practical tools, protocols, and mechanisms developed by peer agencies across the region.	• A documented assessment of their agency's most significant current challenge and the solutions that would address it. • Access to practical tools and mechanisms contributed by member states, available for adaptation or replication	• A curated catalogue of practical tools, protocols, and cooperation mechanisms from across the Bali Process region, made available to all member states after the forum. • Prioritised recommendations from member states and organisations for regional

• Strengthened relationships and trusted contacts with counterparts from other member states and organisations.	nationally. • Recommendations from the forum's priority-setting session that can be elevated to national policy discussions ahead of the Constructive Dialogue.	cooperation and capability development. • An honest assessment of where the tools and mechanisms built since the Fourth Forum are working and where the region must prioritise next.
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ABOUT THE RSO

The RSO was established in 2012 to provide technical support to Bali Process Members and to strengthen cooperation on trafficking in persons, people smuggling, and related transnational crime.

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 Members and other key stakeholders to develop practical initiatives.

The RSO works to strengthen cooperation across member states to translate ambitions into action and realworld impact through knowledge transfer, capacity building, and the sharing of information and best practice. It draws on internal expertise as well as the knowledge and experience of Bali Process Members and international agencies to foster practical collaboration and achieve greater impact.

Contact: info@rso.baliprocess.net

The RSO provides technical support to Bali Process Members to strengthen cooperation on refugee protection and international migration, including combatting people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime. Get in touch to find out more and discuss new activity proposals.



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Regional Support Office
of the Bali Process



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