# UN report reveals global spread and growth of Southeast Asian scam farms



The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has released a report highlighting the widespread and expanding nature of the scam industry, which primarily originated in Southeast Asia but is now proliferating globally. According to the findings reported by Tech Radar and Cybernews, this industry is a multibillion-dollar enterprise involving hundreds of large-scale scam farms, primarily located in remote and impoverished areas of Southeast Asia.

These scam farms, which employ tens of thousands of workers, generate tens of billions of dollars annually. Alarmingly, some workers have been trafficked and forced into labour within these operations. Despite ongoing efforts by local governments in countries such as China, Thailand, and Myanmar to conduct raids and disrupt these criminal networks, the impact has been limited. The scam operations tend to relocate to other less regulated or remote regions once disrupted, making eradication difficult.

Benedikt Hofmann, the UNODC acting regional representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, described the situation by saying, “It spreads like a cancer. Authorities treat it in one area, but the roots never disappear; they simply migrate.” John Wojcik, a regional analyst with the UNODC, added that the “regional cyberfraud industry... has outpaced other transnational crimes, given that it is easily scalable and able to reach millions of potential victims online, with no need to move or traffic illicit goods across borders.”

The report specifically notes that as authorities crack down on scam operations in “lawless areas” along borders such as the Thai-Myanmar frontier and parts of Cambodia, these fraudulent groups simply move into neighbouring regions like Laos, Myanmar, and other remote parts of Southeast Asia that are more vulnerable and less prepared to tackle the issue.

Furthermore, the illicit proceeds from these scams require laundering. This necessity has led criminal syndicates to expand their activities into Africa and South America, where they are reportedly partnering with drug cartels. The UNODC cites new scam operations emerging in countries including Zambia, Angola, and Namibia, as well as in Eastern European countries such as Georgia.

The report underscores the complex and transnational nature of the scam industry, which continues to grow despite governmental efforts to control it, highlighting a significant challenge for law enforcement and regulatory agencies worldwide.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/researchers-warn-asian-scam-operations-spreading-rest-world-121017401> - Corroborates the $40 billion annual profit estimate for Asian-led scam centers and their spread to Africa, South America, and other regions, including specific cases in Nigeria, Zambia, and Angola.
3. <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2023/TiP_for_FC_Policy_Report.pdf> - Provides context on trafficking for forced criminality in cyber fraud operations, supporting claims about coercive labor practices in scam centers.
4. <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/40bn-southeast-asia-scam-grow/> - Supports the $37 billion fraud figure for 2023, the use of generative AI in scams, and Benedikt Hofmann's 'spreads like a cancer' analogy regarding regional expansion.
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