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CASE TYPOLOGIES:

NEW TRENDS OF INBOUND TIP FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA TO CAMBODIA



This report has been developed as a training aid for responders addressing the emerging trend of trafficking for forced criminality in Cambodia and the broader Mekong region. It is not intended to provide an in-depth exploration of the complex trafficking typologies involved in the recruitment, placement, and exploitation of victims, as well as the online scamming prevalent in the country today.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to produce the below Typology of inbound trafficking patterns from Southeast Asia for online scams into Cambodia. The Typology will benefit different stakeholders, whose services are utilised in one way or another by the organised criminal groups undertaking this enterprise. It is only through understanding the problem and intricacies involved that stakeholders could effectively work together to dismantle the highly coordinated networks carrying out the human trafficking and online scamming at the expense of innocent victims.

Approach

The approach taken in the research underpinning the Typology and this report has been to follow the journey of the potential human trafficking victims – i.e., from the moment they are lured through deceptive recruitment advertisements to their travel to and arrival at highly secure scam compounds in Cambodia, to their forced interactions with online scam victims, and in the cases of the luckier ones, to their escape from the compounds. In collecting and reviewing potential victim accounts of these journeys from capture to rescue, particular attention has been given to the illicit financial flows connected to the human trafficking victims, online scam victims, and those responsible for these crimes.

Methodology

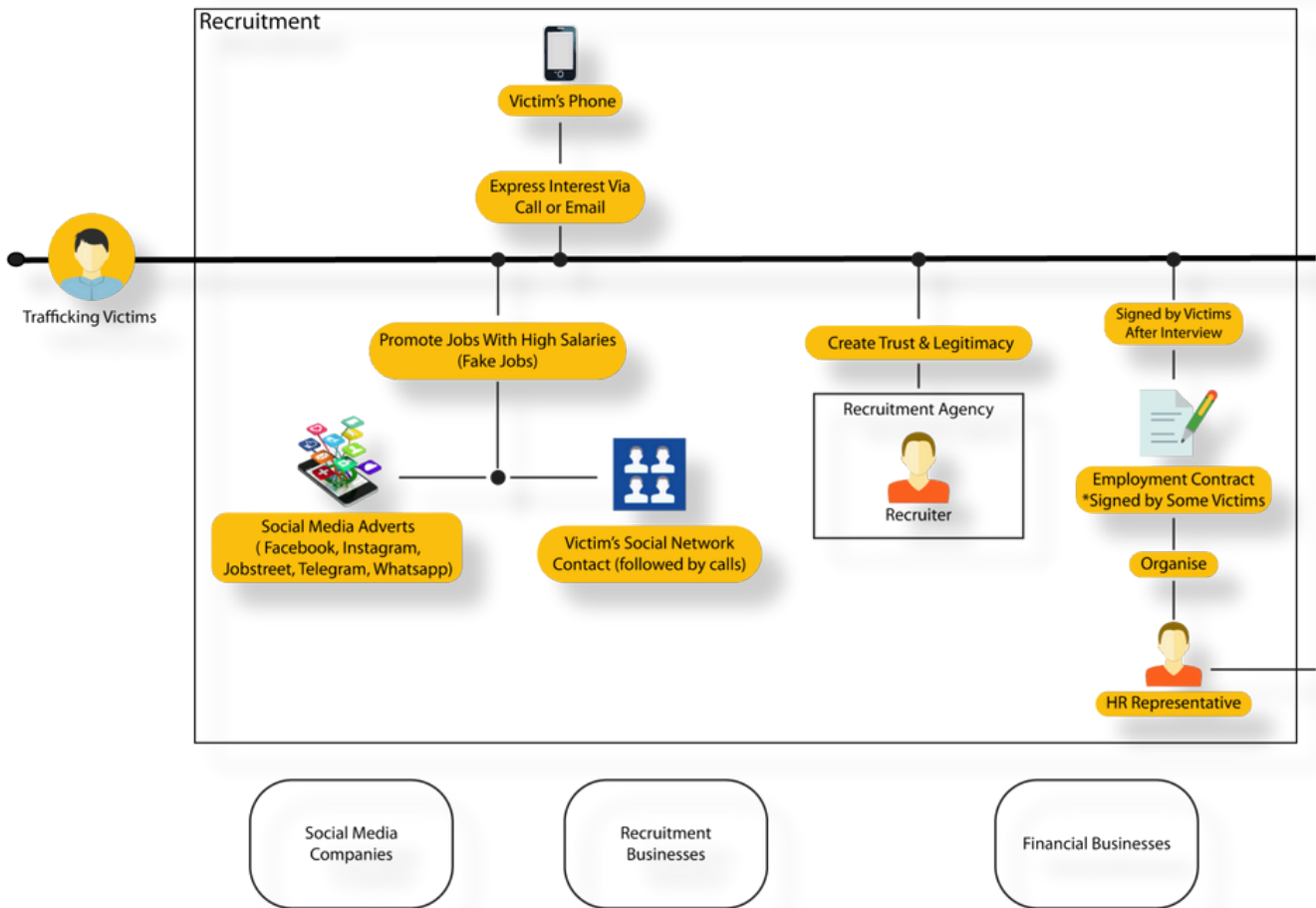
The research undertaken for this typology has been multidisciplinary, and has included open-source research; interviews with partners who have been working on assisting both potential human trafficking and online scam victims, whether through provision of direct rescue assistance or providing assistance upon return to their countries of origin; interviews with partners who have been working on the dismantling of organised criminal networks responsible for the scamming operations in Cambodia and its neighbouring countries; interviews with prosecution agencies and members of law enforcement directly working on this issue; as well as discussions and collaborations with members of the banking sector and cryptocurrency intelligence organisations.



Victims



Male



RECRUITMENT

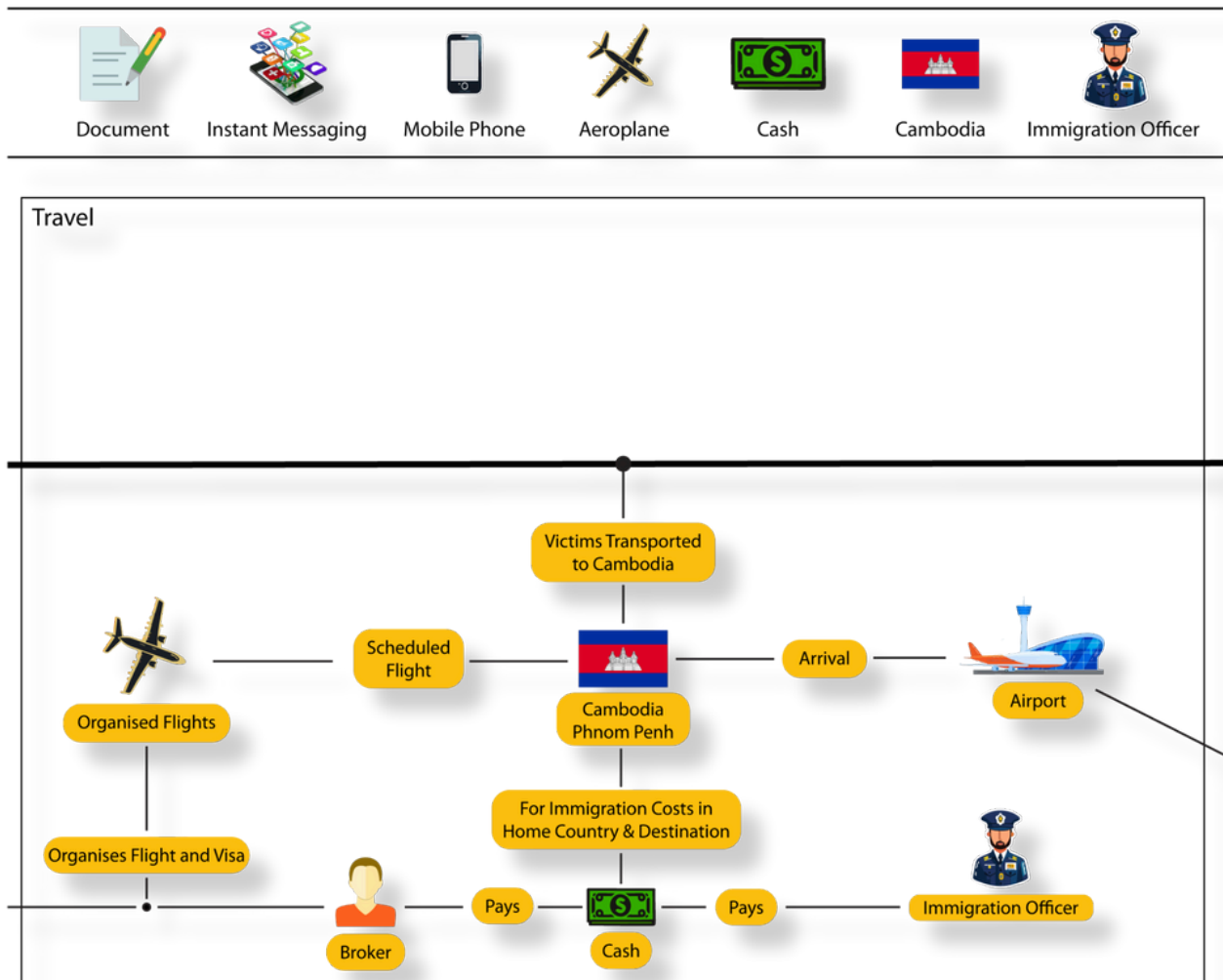
Victims are lured by seemingly legitimate job advertisements on social media, or through their personal networks, promising relatively high salaries for a variety of jobs in overseas locations. After expressing their interest, victims are connected to a recruiter or recruitment agency, and thereafter:

- Undertake the formal recruitment process which often includes interviews for the positions advertised by a human resources representative. Victims then sign an “offer letter” or “employment contract”.
- Do not undergo the recruitment process in the home country but pay the recruitment fees and agree to travel to Cambodia for work.

TRANSPORTATION

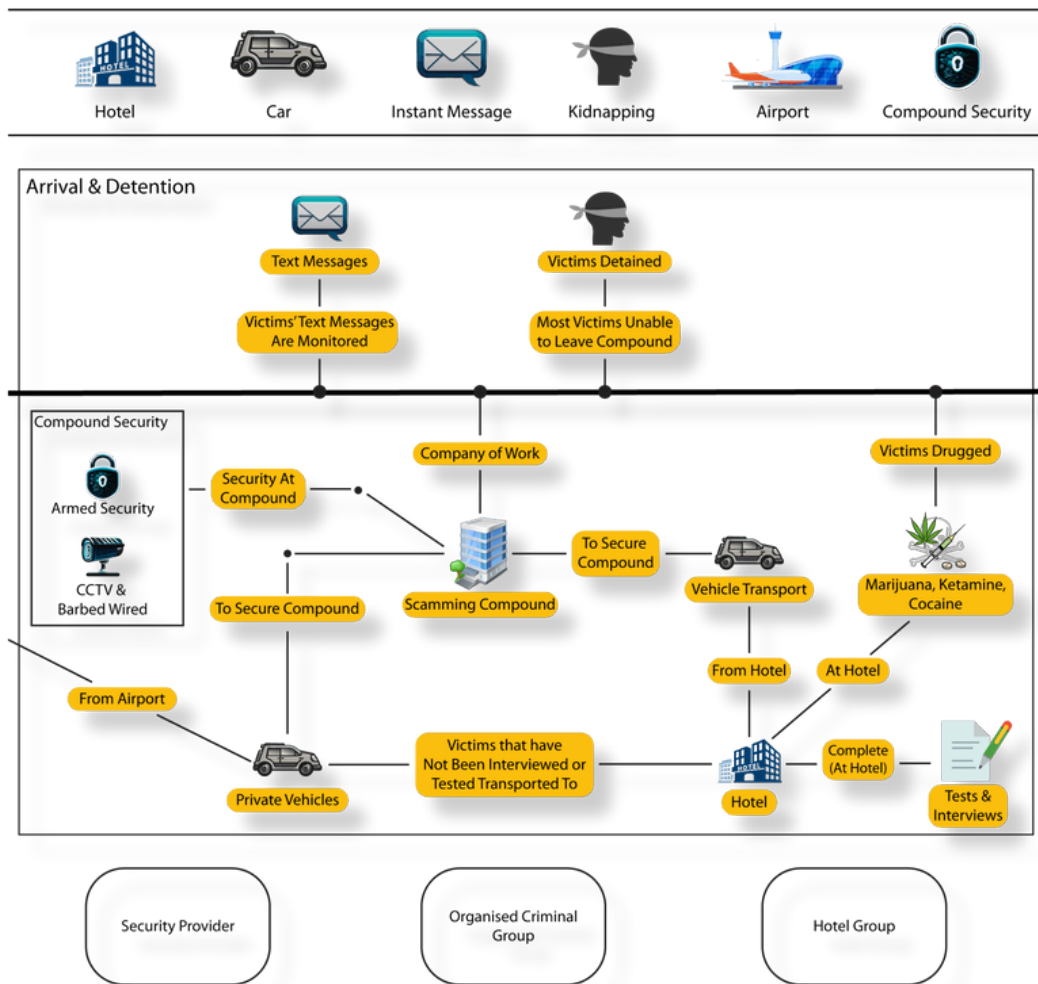
Victims are provided their flight tickets, and in some cases, visa documentation (Note: some ASEAN countries do not require visas to enter Cambodia, even if they do require work visas).

In some cases, brokers make payments to immigration officers (on either or both ends of the journey) to enable the victim to depart the country of origin and enter Cambodia.



Flight Companies
and Immigration
Departments





Arrival & Detention

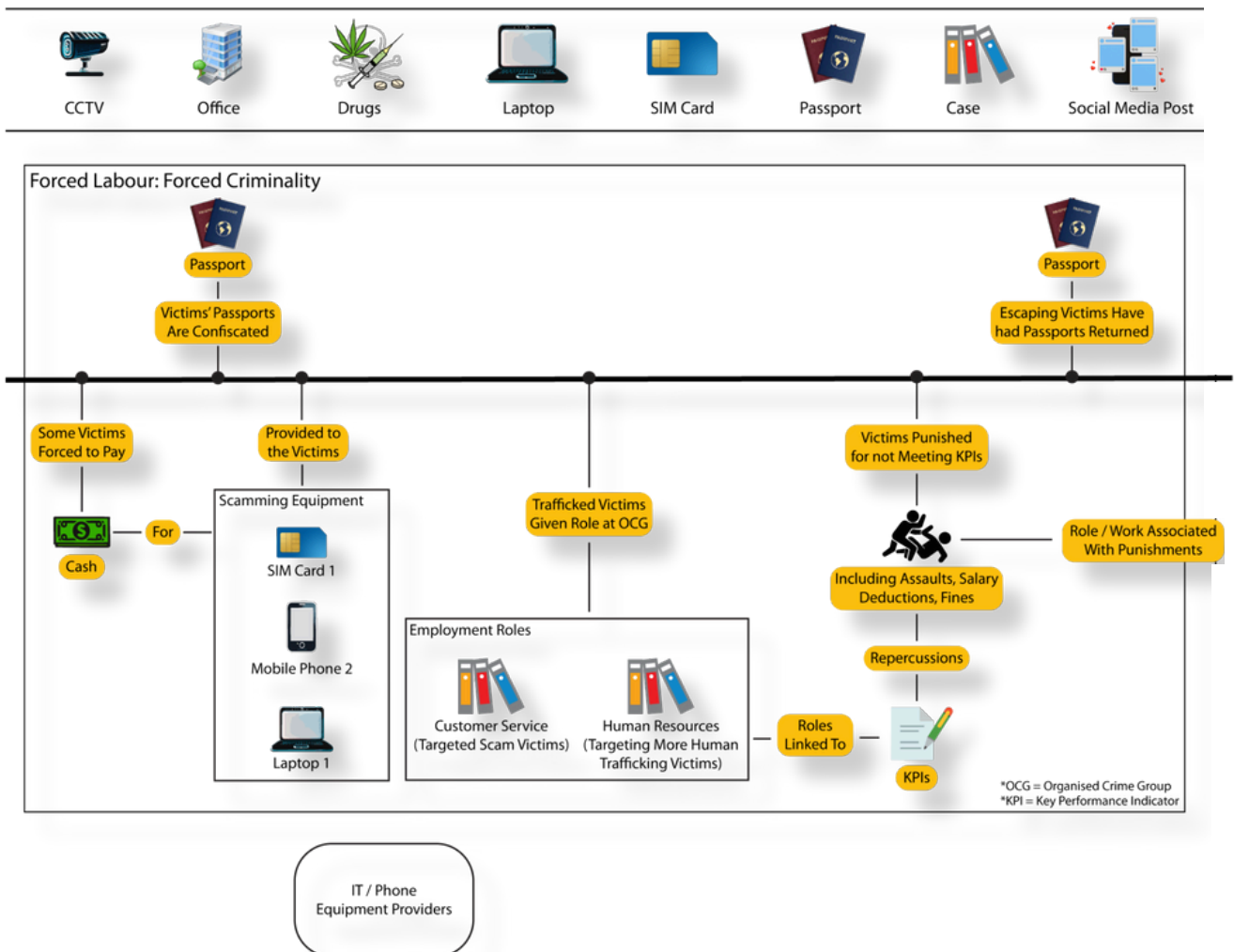
Victims pass immigration, sometimes with the assistance of the brokers. Immigration officers permit entry to the potential human trafficking victims, based on previously provided information from the brokers.

After passing immigration, the victims are taken into the custody of representatives of the recruitment company or the scamming company. In some cases, victims are transported via road immediately to the highly secured scamming compounds. In other cases, victims, who travelled before finalising their employment or placement with a company, are brought to a hotel room where they undertake certain tests or interviews. After that, they are placed with a scam company and transported via road to the scamming compound where the company they have been placed with is located. Some victims are drugged, kidnapped and taken directly to the scamming compound against their will.

In most cases, victims are not allowed to leave the compound. In some cases, all text messages that victims send are monitored so they are also not able to send messages requesting for help in a safe manner.

Forced Labour

Upon arrival at the scamming compound, potential human trafficking victims have their passports confiscated. They are then taken to the company where they will work and then given mobile phones, computers, and SIM cards. In some cases, the victims pay for these items. They are also assigned their role in the company, e.g., customer service (these individuals speak to potential scam victims, gain their trust, and execute the scams) or human resources (these individuals focus on identifying and targeting more human trafficking victims). These roles are not the jobs advertised or what the victims applied for. Victims are given “KPIs” and are informed that failure to meet these KPI goals would result in salary deductions, fines, or other punishments, including physical abuse.



START OF THE SCAMMING OPERATIONS (“PIG BUTCHERING”)

Potential human trafficking victims are required to train for up to a week for their position. After the training, they commence the work under threat of punishment. They are forced to build multiple personalities across various social media platforms which they use to communicate with the potential scam victims. They are also provided a list of potential targets’ contact details. In some cases, the potential human trafficking victims are provided full biographical data of their scam targets, including information on their interests and financial health. In other cases, the victims are required to compile this type of data from online sources. They are forced to build relationships with these targets based on scripts provided by the company about alleged investment opportunities available to them.



Online Identity



Financial Note



Social Media User



Scam List



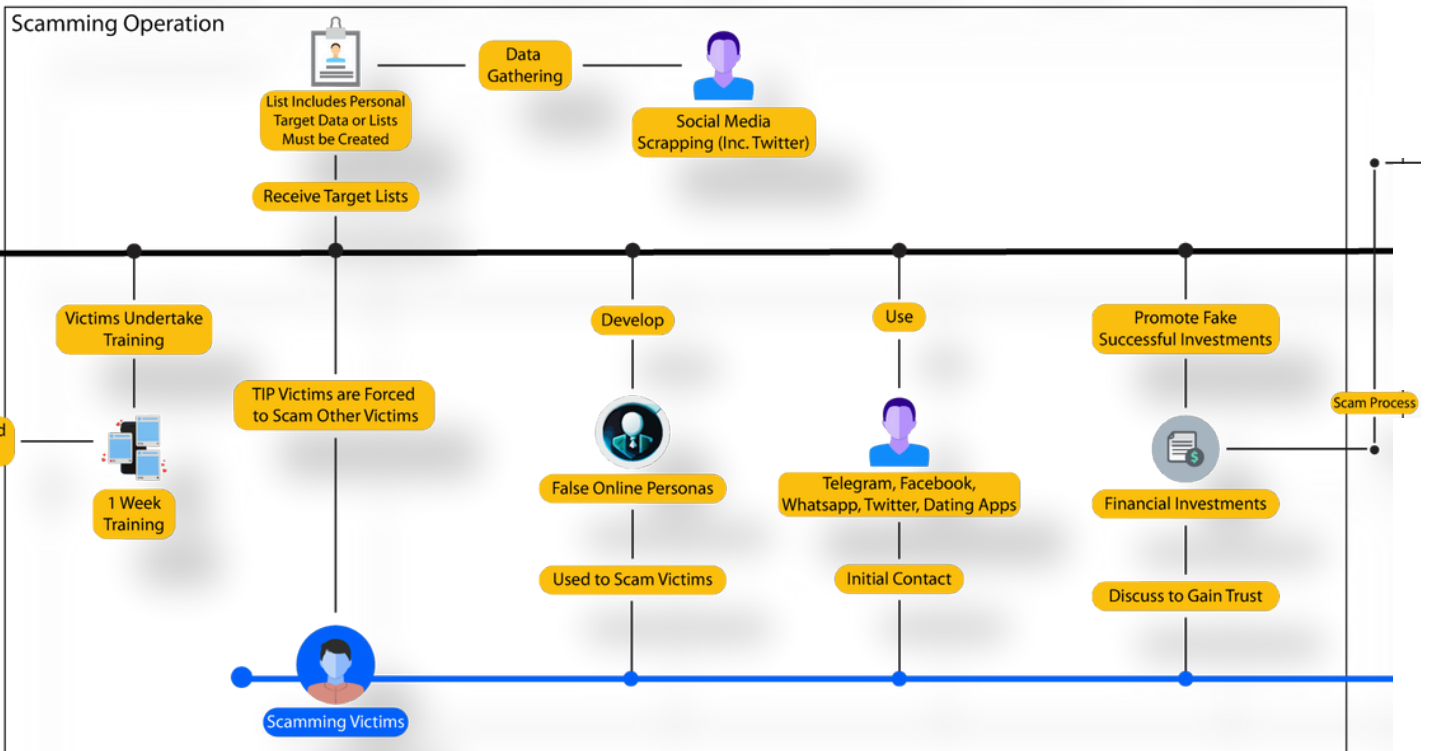
Money Transfer



Web Page

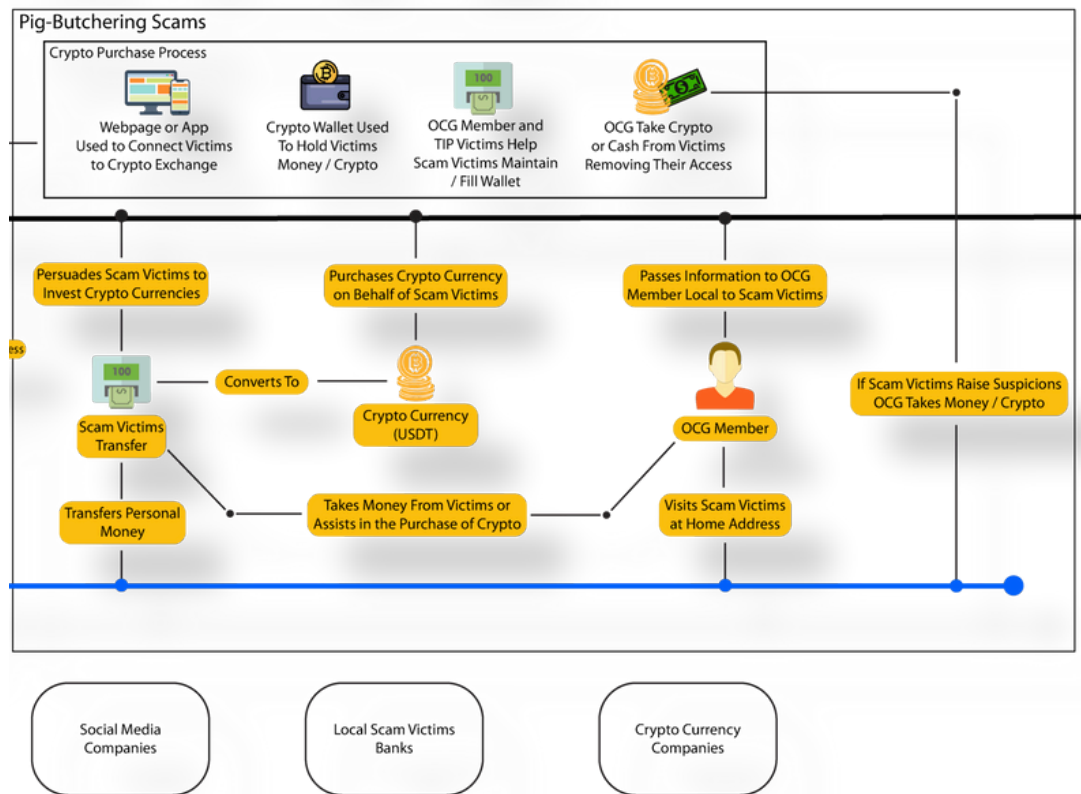
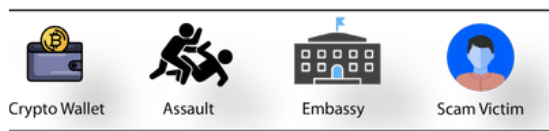


Crypto Currency



Social Media Companies

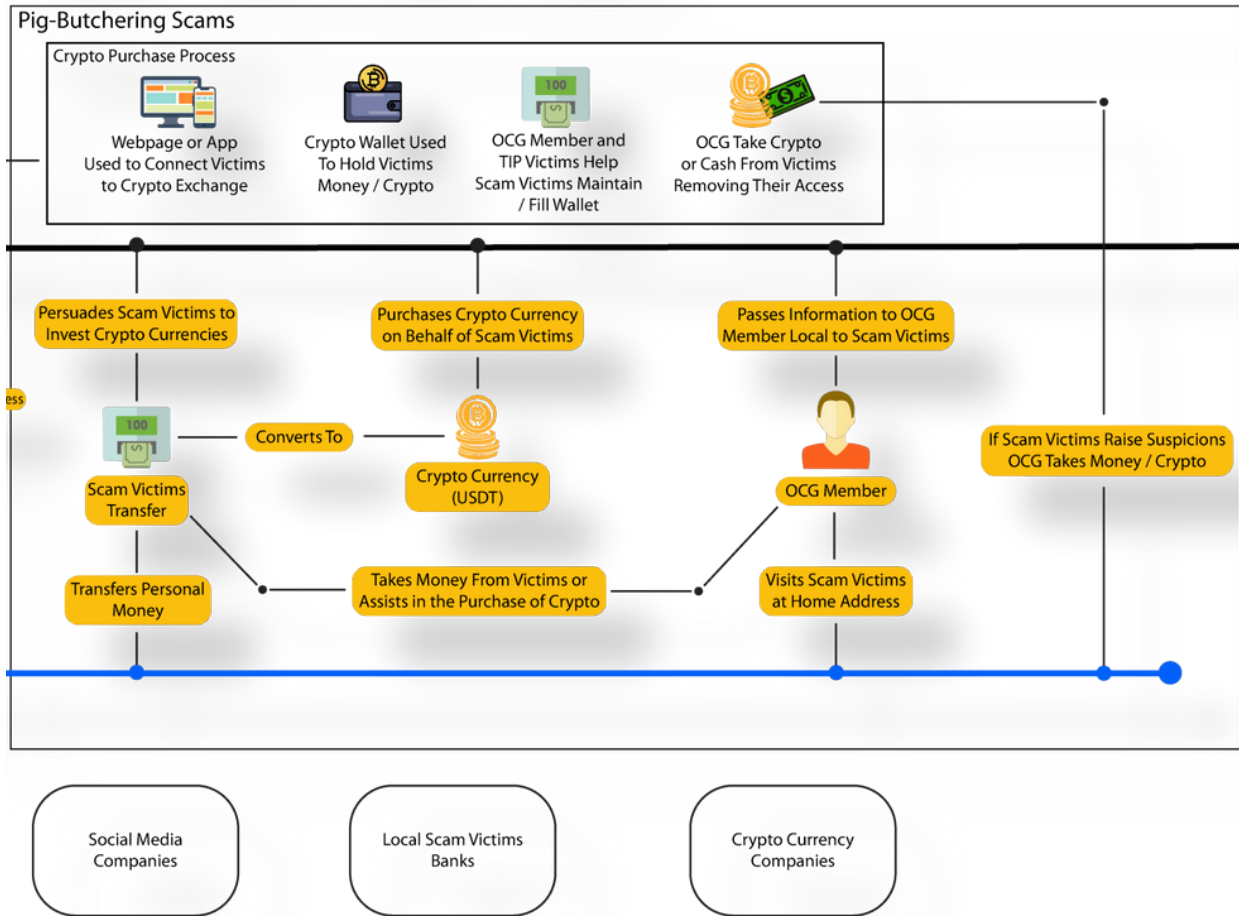
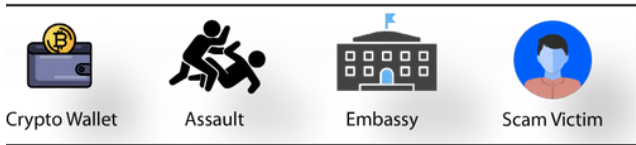
Local Scam Victims Banks



INVESTMENT OF USDT

Once the scam victims are comfortable with the “scammers,” i.e., the potential human trafficking victims, they may make small investments as a “test.” Cryptocurrency scams utilise USDT, and the scam victims first must acquire an account (if they do not already have one). If the scam victim is not familiar with cryptocurrency, then the scammer guides them through the process of opening an account with an exchange and teaches them how to purchase the cryptocurrency. In other cases, there are people in charge of collecting money from the scam victims, e.g., physically at their homes or via bank account transfers. These individuals then exchange these funds for USDT on behalf of the scam victims.

Next, the scam victims are either directed to a website or told to download an application available on a mobile application store e.g., Google or Apple. Once the scam victim has the USDT, the scammer would provide them with a link to use within the downloaded application, or otherwise, provide them with a wallet address. In the case of third parties who assist the scam victims in acquiring the USDT, the latter makes the transfer in USDT to the relevant wallet address. Through this process, the USDT will be transferred to the scam company. The scam victim is led to believe that they are making money from this investment and is usually given the chance to withdraw their money at least once. This incentivises the scam victims to continue to invest further because they believe they are earning profits.



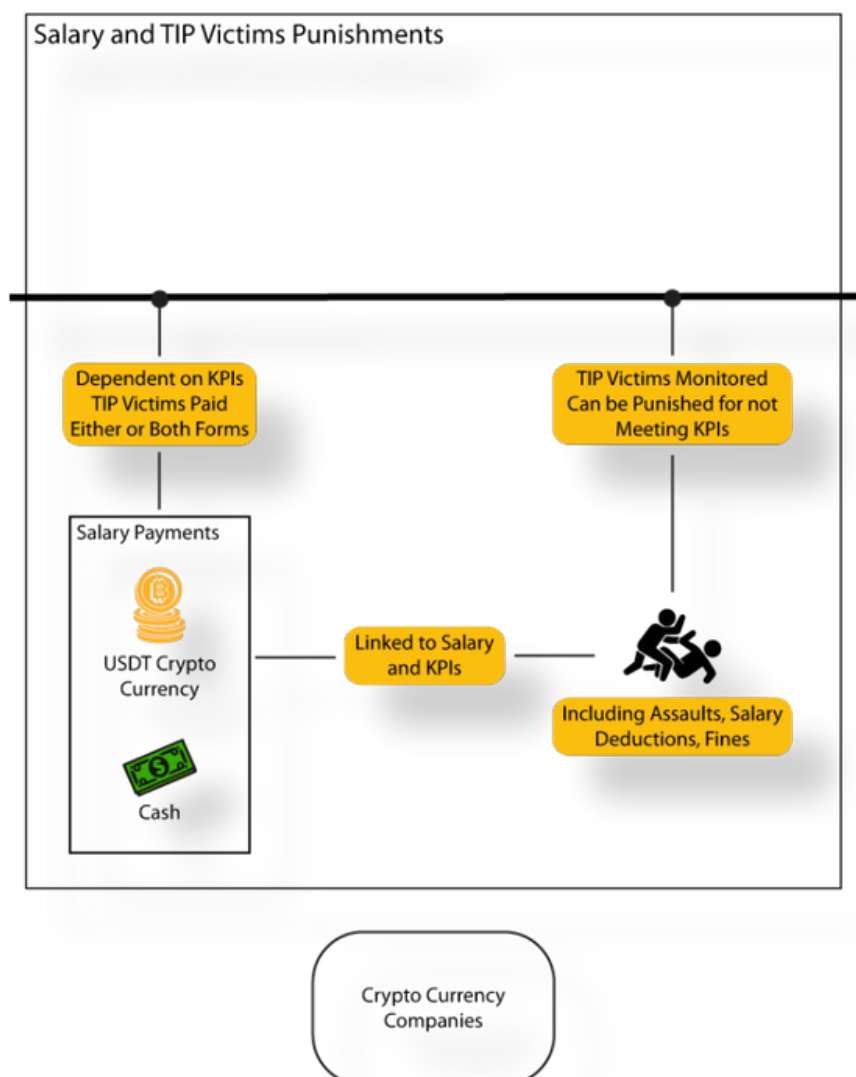
Access to Account, Funds Blocked, and Loss of Savings

At some point, the scam victims are no longer able to withdraw their funds, and they are blocked out from their accounts. At this point, they have the option to pay more to regain access to their accounts. Some scam victims realise at this point that they have been scammed. Others put more money in, believing they could eventually withdraw their funds, which turns out to be false.

Forced to Meet KPIs for Salaries and / or to Avoid Punishments

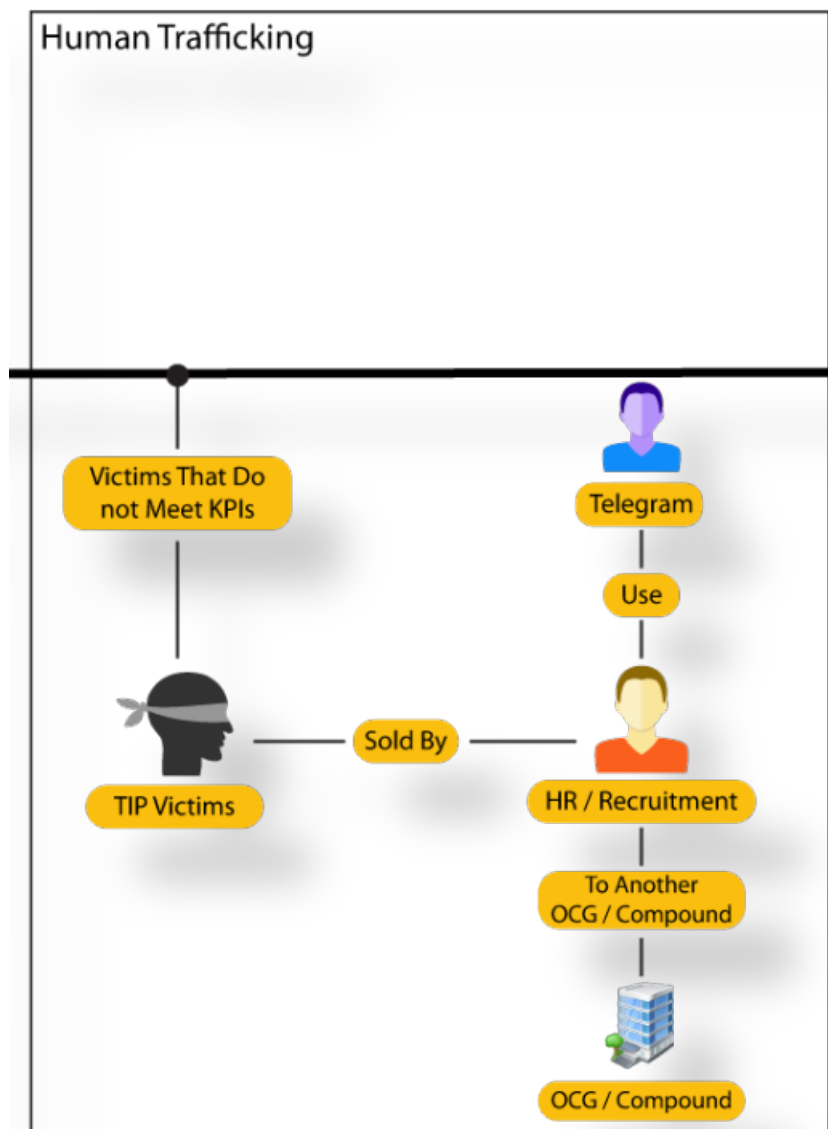
Depending on whether KPIs are met, potential human trafficking victims are paid salaries, in some cases in cash, while in other cases, in USDT, or a combination of the two. For USDT payments, the scam bosses ask for the QR codes of the potential human trafficking victims' cryptocurrency accounts (e.g., with Binance) and then make the transfers there.

Potential human trafficking victims who do not meet their KPIs are punished through fines (including deducting or withholding of salary) or physical abuse. Scamming companies are able to control the activities of these potential victims by monitoring their communications.



SALE OF POTENTIAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS TO OTHER SCAM COMPANIES OR COMPOUNDS

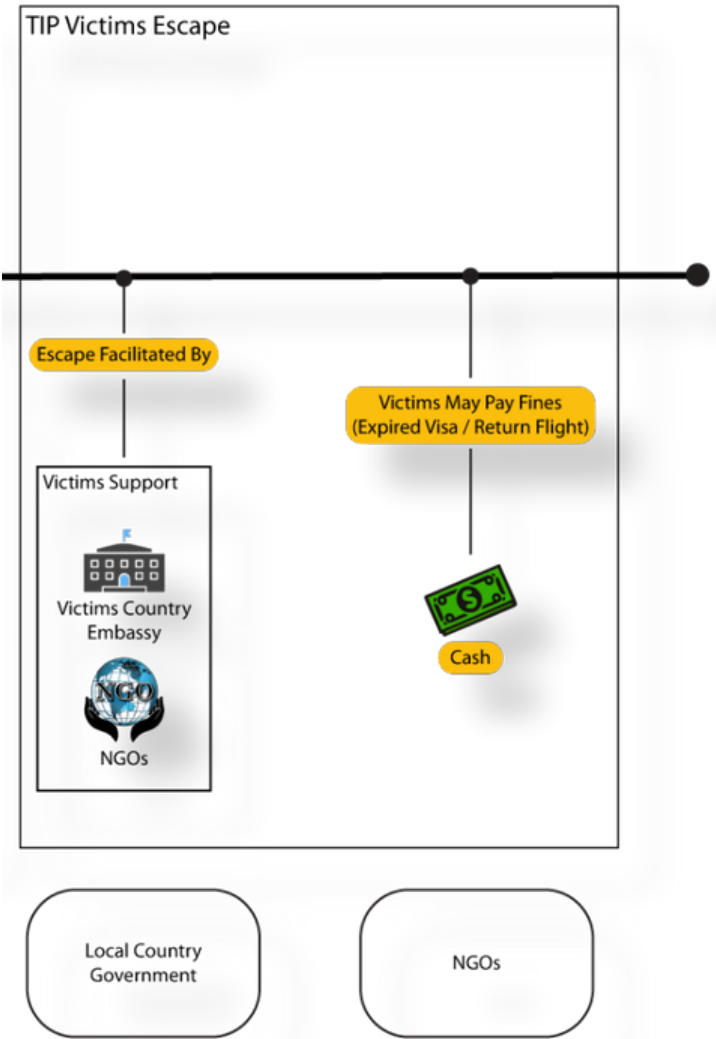
Potential human trafficking victims, who do not perform up to the standard of the scam company, are generally sold to different companies or compounds. This process is arranged by the human resources representatives of the various scam companies, typically via Telegram and WhatsApp. These sales are conducted through various means, including cash, wire transfers, and likely also cryptocurrency.



RELEASE, ESCAPE, OR RESCUE FROM SCAM COMPOUNDS

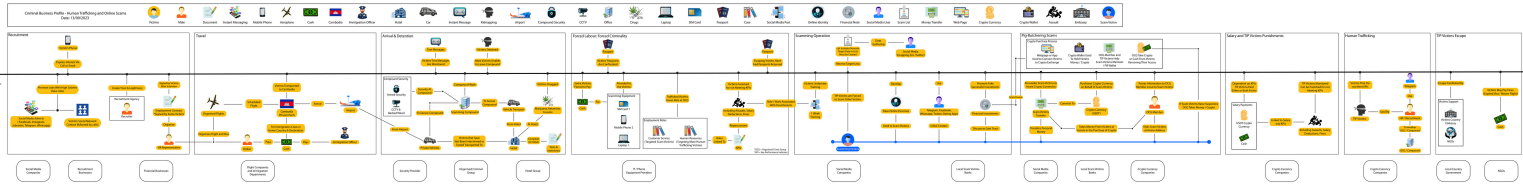
Despite the constant tracking undertaken by the scam company, some potential human trafficking victims have contacted their families, their embassies, or NGOs that helped to rescue them. One potential victim also explained that he sent messages on social media to high officials to alert them of his situation. When the potential human trafficking victims are released or rescued, the scam companies generally return their passports. The victims return or leave all the devices used in the scam activities, and the scam company deletes all their data from the phones to avoid leaving any evidence behind.

In some cases, potential human trafficking victims are released from scam compounds after paying ransom demands. In other cases, no ransoms are paid, and the potential victims are released after intervention from NGOs or embassies in Cambodia. In these situations, the potential victims may still be required to pay penalties to immigration officers, e.g., for expired visas and / or flight tickets to return home.



THE FULL TYPOLOGY DESIGN

This typology is a vital component of an ongoing investigative report, scheduled for the second phase in September 2024. Please stay tuned for the complete findings of the investigation in 2025



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This report is based on research conducted by a partner organization of the USAID Asia CTIP project that has chosen to remain anonymous.

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