



PRESS RELEASE

NEW REPORT SHOWS HOW SCAM CENTRES HAVE BECOME A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Scam centres – in different shapes and sizes – are present around the world, benefiting from advanced technological tools, political protection and sophisticated money laundering techniques to steal US\$1 trillion a year – equivalent to almost 1% of global GDP.

Geneva, March 2026 – A new report by the GI-TOC titled ‘A World of Deceit’ provides a global assessment of the scam centre phenomenon, mapping the variety of forms scam centres take – from prison cells to compounds – and the ‘ingredients’ that are key to their success. What emerges is a complex criminal industry that is evolving at pace, powered by high-tech tools, corrupt state actors and a multitude of workers in various states of exploitation. Only by addressing this system as a whole can the world hope to turn the tables on scammers.

Today nearly everybody has a scam story or knows somebody who has. This report examines how scam centres manifest in four regions – Latin America, Europe and Eurasia, South East Asia and Africa. It finds that while scam centres have unifying underlying principles, they are highly diverse in their physical footprints, organizational logic and economic models. The familiar image of a workforce seated at desks with headsets and a list of clients holds true in many places, but by no means all. Prisons, apartments, houses, hotels, office spaces and compounds can all host scam centres.

Beyond their physical ‘footprint’, scam centres draw upon six ‘glocal’ force multipliers that enable them to operate, scale, migrate and target victims with relative impunity: networked groups; technology and crime-as-a-service; money; political protection; people; and geopolitics.

These six force multipliers allow scammers to transcend their often-modest physical footprint and inflict harms on a global scale. And today, it is easier than ever to become a scammer.

“The tools and infrastructure provided through crime-as-a-service providers are lowering the barriers to entry to the industry,” said Kristina Amerhauser, Head of the Mekong Observatory and co-lead on illicit financial flows. “Today, a would-be scammer can buy everything they need off the internet, from data to scripts to software.”

To tackle scam centres, it is vital to address the holistically interconnected nature of their operations, taking into account these six ‘glocal’ factors.

“Shutting down individual scam centres will stop scammers, but will not meaningfully affect the operating environment in which they flourish,” said Alex Goodwin, Senior Analyst. “As with all forms of organized crime, if the business model remains sound, new participants will not be in short supply.”

Key points:

1. Scam centres are a truly global phenomenon, present around the world in various shapes and sizes. They are economically driven but also politically shaped.
2. Many scam centres are highly networked. Some pursue a multinational-style strategy, with core management opening new branches in different countries. Others are essentially dispersed scam centres, with small nodes of only a few people linked to a much larger operation. This allows lessons, techniques and technology to be shared.
3. Technology is critical. At the most basic level, it allows scammers to reach people around the world at minimal cost. It also offers a range of tools for scammers to circumvent cyber defences; lure victims through deepfakes, auto-translation, cloned apps and fake investment sites; and conduct precise social targeting of victims.
4. Money is handled through mules, crypto, fintech and cash and physical assets collected by courier. Victims, members of a diaspora, the elderly, the vulnerable and the young may all find their accounts being used by scammers to move money, in some cases unwittingly. The range of these approaches, often used in combination, means that tracing the money is a time-consuming endeavour for law enforcement as well as a race against time, though not impossible.
5. Political protection is fundamental for the scaling of scam centres. Such protection can range from low-level bribery to the active collusion of corrupt state actors and political elites. This poses a major challenge to international law enforcement efforts, which may flounder against a wall of limited cooperation.
6. People are the lifeblood of scam centres. They may be drawn as willing and, in some cases, highly remunerated employees from the local population, or trafficked from abroad and forced to work in extremely exploitative conditions. As well as being a human tragedy, there are questions as to the future of these trafficked scammers and whether they may fall back into scamming should alternative survival pathways not materialize.
7. Geopolitics also creates fertile opportunities for scammers, both in terms of generating confusion and urgency that scammers take advantage of, and in compromising coordinated international efforts to shut down scam operations. The rise of authoritarian rule across the world may further insulate scammers and hamper the efforts of civil society and investigative journalists who seek to expose them.

ABOUT THE GI-TOC

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the front lines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network, and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative's Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local non-governmental organizations working in areas where crime governance critically undermines people's safety, security and life chances.

For more information or to interview the report's authors, please write to: newsroom@globalinitiative.net

