Overseas Criminal Investigations

The DSS Overseas Criminal Investigations program has the largest investigative global footprint of any federal law enforcement entity, at 120 locations around the globe.

Overseas criminal investigation units include assistant regional security officer-investigators (ARSO-Is), special agents who target and disrupt terrorist and transnational criminal organizations that attempt to exploit U.S. travel and identity documents.

**AS OF DECEMBER 2021:**

- 133 ARSO-Is at 120 posts in 85 countries
- 138 criminal fraud investigators
- 77 investigative assistants
- 17 partner nation vetted police units

**LIAISON WORK**

In addition to cooperating with U.S. federal and local law enforcement authorities, ARSO-Is work with foreign law enforcement officials, prosecutors, immigration authorities, airline personnel, and tourism officials to combat transnational organized crime. Human trafficking, terrorism, and human and weapons smuggling are some of the transnational crimes that often involve U.S. visa and passport fraud.

- ~21,000 requests for assistance fulfilled
- ~650 assisted arrests
  - 50+ document vendor arrests
  - 15+ human trafficking arrests
  - 140+ human smuggling arrests
  - 1 terrorism-related arrest
- ~250 fugitive returns

**TRAINING**

ARSO-Is provide training for DSS, U.S., and foreign partners on travel document security features, fraudulent document and imposter detection methods, and suspect traveler profiles.

As a result of ARSO-I program training and guidance, foreign officials have disrupted human smuggling rings, interdicted foreign terrorist fighters, and captured high-profile fugitives.

- 21,000 foreign partners trained
- 8,800+ State Department personnel trained

**INVESTIGATIONS**

Because of DSS’ global reach, ARSO-Is can target document vendors, smugglers, and traffickers at the source of their illicit operations overseas, deterring fraudulent practices that disrupt criminals’ and terrorists’ mobility and protect the U.S. homeland.

- 140 Approximately recommended passport and consular report of birth abroad denials
- ~4,250 Recommended visa revocations and refusals
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December 2021
CASE EXAMPLES

Brazil ARSO-Is Fugitive Project identifies violent criminals for arrest and deportation.
In mid-2020, the ARSO-I team in Rio de Janeiro initiated the Brazil Fugitives Project (BZF) with an open-source search of criminal records related to violent crimes. The team entered these records into databases and cross-referenced them among other agencies. In 2021, Brazil's ARSO-I teams further developed the BZF by collaborating with the Brazilian Federal Police, Interpol, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and other U.S. agencies. This initiative resulted in six arrests worldwide, including in Brazil, Portugal, Colombia, and New Zealand; six deportations from the United States; 31 U.S. visa revocations; three Interpol Red Notice issuances; three wanted individuals denied at U.S. ports of entry; and three visa denials by consular officers with one resulting in a same-day fugitive turnover to Brazilian police.

ARSO-I Santo Domingo's Operation VIP dismantles major document vendor ring.
After months of investigating conducted by ARSO-I Santo Domingo team and the Dominican National Police (DNP), the ARSO-I's vetted police unit led a team of over 200 officers from the DNP to simultaneous execute 18 arrest warrants and 13 search warrants, which led to the dismantling of a large document vendor ring. Included in the arrests were several passport and immigration officials who had furthered the scheme through issuance of valid travel documents under fraudulent identities. ARSO-I teams in Managua, Nicaragua, and San Jose, Costa Rica, provided invaluable assistance to the case as many individuals traveled across borders using the fraudulent documents obtained through the vendor.

ARSO-I Bogota’s Operation Coyotes nets seven arrests in human smuggling bust.
In 2021, ARSO-I Bogotá's vetted police unit, in conjunction with Colombian National Police and other Colombian law enforcement and military units, identified and dismantled a large human smuggling network as part of Operation Coyotes. The network smuggled migrants from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Venezuela, Haiti, China, Eritrea, and Nigeria, into Colombia through illegal border crossing points. This sophisticated human smuggling network had an established process to bring migrants illegally across the Ecuadorian border and then into Colombia, where they would then board boats to be taken to Panama to continue onward travel to the United States. The Colombians arrested seven individuals involved in Operation Coyotes.

ARSO-I Kolkata educates Indian officials in document fraud and human trafficking.
In late 2020 and 2021, ARSO-I team Kolkata provided training to more than 500 Indian officials, non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, and hotel personnel on techniques to detect fraudulent U.S. travel documents, and to identify and prevent human trafficking. ARSO-I team Kolkata also enhanced anti-trafficking in persons efforts by organizing over 40 meetings with local experts and partnering with NGOs like the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) and the International Justice Mission. These efforts helped to establish an ICMEC unit in West Bengal region, which will be a frontline force against child exploitation.

Contact the Office of Overseas Criminal Investigations:
Email: DS_OCI_Admin@state.gov