

Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator
for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Mapping the online landscape of risks of trafficking in human beings on sexual services websites across the OSCE region



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Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade (UK)
DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (United States)
EU	European Union
EUROPOL	The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
FOSTA-SESTA	‘Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act’ (FOSTA) and ‘Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act’ (SESTA) (US)
GFE	Girlfriend experience
HMICFRS	Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
ICAT	Inter-agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons
ICT	Information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOCTA	Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (Europol)
IP address	Internet Protocol address
KMS	Knowledge Management Systems
LDCA	Live Distance Child Abuse
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCG	Organised crime group(s)
OCRTEH	Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSR/CTHB	Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
Palermo Protocol	The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000 (see below)
THB	Trafficking in human beings
UK	United Kingdom
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
URL	Uniform Resource Locator (web address)
US	United States

For the purposes of this report, references to trafficking in human beings (THB) and subsets of that, including trafficking for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation refer to acts defined within the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000 (the “Palermo Protocol”).¹

This publication uses terms and definitions which are politically sensitive and the use of which not all anti-trafficking stakeholders are in agreement. These terms mirror the actual terminology used on the analyzed websites and do not reflect the official position or language of the OSCE.

¹ Article 3: Use of terms

- (a) “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;
- (b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;
- (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;
- (d) “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

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Andrea Salvoni

Acting OSCE Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Executive Summary

Criminals misuse technology during all the stages of the human trafficking crime. One of the most frequent examples is the use of online platforms² to advertise victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation at scale. Traffickers advertise victims on a variety of platforms, but the most commonly used are websites offering sexual services, escort services, and massage services, as well as broader ‘classifieds’ advertising platforms, advertising aggregators, hobby boards³, and sugar daddy sites.

Since trafficking in human beings is a financially motivated crime, online platforms play a central role in the human trafficking criminal operations because of their capacity to spread information to a wide audience and attract an enormous number of buyers of sexual services, which in turn leads to increased illegal revenues.

From an anti-trafficking perspective, acknowledging the role of online platforms in facilitating human trafficking, especially for sexual exploitation, is crucial. However, more important is to transfer this understanding into a systemic institutional response by mapping websites with high risks of trafficking, analysing data and information they contain, and developing a process of monitoring websites for human trafficking indicators and referral to competent authorities.

In line with this objective, this report seeks to address the information gap existing in the anti-trafficking community about websites with high risks for facilitating sexual exploitation across the OSCE area. There are many online platforms that are misused for sexual exploitation of victims and different platforms are differently exposed to the risk of human trafficking. This report focuses on sexual services websites⁴ which, based on a number of characteristics discussed below, are considered to be exposed to the highest risks of trafficking for sexual exploitation and which should be prioritized by anti-trafficking stakeholders.

The report assesses the landscape of websites facilitating sexual services in a number of OSCE

participating States and provides detailed information about how these websites operate, information and data associated with the sites, and a discussion of whether they display potential indicators of human trafficking.

There is an intense debate in the anti-trafficking community regarding how much human trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution overlap and how much these topics need to be analysed together. As pointed out throughout this report, there is a clear understanding that not all advertisements for sexual services on websites can be categorized as human trafficking cases and that a large portion of these ads refer to people willingly selling sexual services. Nevertheless, there is a strong evidential base which confirms that sexual services websites are one of the main venues for traffickers to advertise their victims for sexual services in order to earn criminal profits. And exactly for this reason, sexual services websites have to be analysed and understood by the anti-trafficking community with the purpose to be able to differentiate between the consensual provision of sexual services and cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Countries analysed in this report were selected based on criteria such as geographical distribution within the OSCE area, evidence of an established online sexual services marketplace, and prevalence of trafficking in human beings. The OSCE is not providing the names of the specific countries researched in order to avoid the possible erroneous interpretation that only these particular countries have online marketplaces which serve as a venue for possible exploitative practices. Instead, the OSCE intends to highlight that the existence of platforms facilitating possible exploitative sexual activity is a common feature of the majority of OSCE participating States. Websites in each country have been identified through search engines and scanning of online discussion forums, cross advertising from other sexual services sites, affiliation lists, media, and civil society materials.

² This report uses the terms “online platforms” and “websites” with the same meaning

³ Hobby boards are websites for sex buyers where they can share their experience with other sex buyers and review specific sex services they purchased

⁴ This report uses the term “sexual services websites” referring to sites that feature or allow offers – whether covert or overt – of sex acts in exchange for a fee. Other sources might use different terminology such as adult services websites, prostitution websites or pimping websites.

The report provides evidence that all OSCE participating States have online markets for sexual services with high risks of exploitation, albeit different in size, format and norms. The report provides specific analysis on multinational sites facilitating sexual services with risks of exploitation identified by the research and other country-specific websites. For the websites analyzed in this report, individual analysis is provided including who is advertised on the websites, how buyers can contact people engaged in prostitution, prices for services, and affiliation of websites with other platforms, information which is important to

gather and analyse in order to conclude if indicators of exploitation are present on these sites.

Finally, the report recommends systematic mapping of sexual services websites, building the capacities of law enforcement to initiate pro-active investigations in case of finding trafficking indicators on these websites, enhancing co-operation across jurisdictions, creating standards for data collection, and incentivizing websites to prevent their services from being misused for exploitative purposes.

Introduction

Background

Trafficking in human beings (THB) is increasingly occurring online.⁵ The crime takes two main forms online: technology-facilitated trafficking, and technology-enabled (or, cyber) trafficking. The first form is more ‘traditional’ trafficking for which traffickers use the interconnectivity and services of online platforms to increase their capacity:

“Digital and networked technologies impact visibility, coordination, transaction, exchange, and organization. These technologies therefore can impact various aspects of trafficking, from grooming, recruitment, and control of victims, to advertising, movement, and financial transactions. An understanding of how technology is facilitating trafficking is a crucial component for counter-trafficking efforts in the 21st century.”⁶

For example, social media sites, online video games and instant communication platforms have been used to facilitate child grooming and recruitment by broadening traffickers’ opportunities for victim selection, providing new instru-

ments of victim subjection and deceptive opportunities.⁷ Recruitment methods that existed long before information and communications technology (ICT) advancements – loverboy tactics,⁸ false offers of gainful employment – are seen online now and at greater scale.⁹ Likewise, sextortion through online channels is frequently used as a means of recruitment and coercion.¹⁰ Recruiters for trafficking for forced labour often use online platforms to post misleading advertisements for work. Detecting recruitment attempts for forced labour can be a more difficult task than detecting sex trafficking,¹¹ though recently there have been more concerted efforts to do so.¹² Not only do the initial advertisements appear genuine (even if perhaps too good to be true in some cases), there is no subsequent need for traffickers to re-emerge online:¹³ the services of forced labourers do not usually need to be advertised to third parties in the same way that sexual services do.¹⁴

Technology-enabled trafficking involves the exploitation of victims through online means; live streaming the sexual abuse of children is a primary example, also known as “live distant child abuse”.¹⁵ These can be transnational crimes, de-

- 5 Mark Latonero, ‘Technology and human trafficking: The rise of mobile and the diffusion of technology-facilitated trafficking’ (2012) *Research Series on Technology and Human Trafficking SSRN* 2177556 iv.
- 6 Mark Latonero, ‘Technology and human trafficking: The rise of mobile and the diffusion of technology-facilitated trafficking’ (2012) *Research Series on Technology and Human Trafficking SSRN* 2177556 p 10.
- 7 Anita Lavorgna, ‘Organised Crime goes online: realities and challenges’ (2015) 18(2) *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 153, 155.
- 8 Europol, ‘Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the EU’ (October 2018) The Hague, Document Ref No: 1001370, p 6.
- 9 For extensive research into use of these tactics and other in online recruitment of trafficking victims, see: Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, ‘Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking’ (2017) *eCrime – Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wNSEpCOHFJaWfTelk/view>. See also: Athanassia P. Sykiotou, ‘Cyber trafficking: recruiting victims of human trafficking through the net’ (2017) *Essays in Honour of Nestor Courakis* (Ant. N. Sakkoulas Publications L.P. 2017) p 1561.
- 10 “After an accommodation period, traffickers ask the women to take indecent photographs of themselves and then use them as blackmail material. If victims refuse their propositions, recruiters threaten to publish the photographs online or to send them to her friends and relatives creating a situation that is difficult to manage by the victims, especially by the youngest (so-called ‘sextortion’).” Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, ‘Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking’ (2017) *eCrime – Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wNSEpCOHFJaWfTelk/view> p 97.
- 11 “The technology world has not yet figured out how to best hone in on labor indicators.” In Stephanie Hepburn, ‘Technology and Human Trafficking’ (September 2016) *National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors* p 6.
- 12 For a recent attempt, as well as thorough analysis of issues, see: Ada Volodko, Ella Cockbain, and Bennett Kleinberg, “Spotting the signs” of trafficking recruitment online: exploring the characteristics of advertisements targeted at migrant job-seekers’ (2019) *Trends in Organized Crime*. See also Latonero M, Wex B, and Dank M, ‘Technology and Labor Trafficking in a Network Society.’ (2015) *Los Angeles: Center for Communication Leadership and Policy, University of Southern California’ Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism* <https://communicationleadership.usc.edu/files/2015/10/USC_Tech-and-Labor-Trafficking_Feb2015.pdf>. See also: Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, ‘Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking’ (2017) *eCrime – Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wNSEpCOHFJaWfTelk/view>.
- 13 Mark Latonero, ‘Human trafficking online: the role of social networking sites and online classifieds’ (2011) *SSRN* <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2045851>> p 18.
- 14 There are exceptions to this however, such as in the case of victims of domestic labour trafficking being re trafficked online in the Gulf states. Facebook and Instagram were being used for selling maids under the Arabic hashtag “#خدمات للتنازل” [“#maidsfortransfer”]: BBC, ‘Slave markets found on Instagram and other apps’ (31 October 2019) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50228549>>.
- 15 “Live Distant Child Abuse (LDCA), facilitated by growing internet connectivity worldwide, continues to be a particularly complex form of online CSE to investigate due to the technologies and jurisdictions involved.” In Europol, *INTERNET ORGANISED CRIME THREAT ASSESSMENT (IOCTA) 2018* (2018) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/iocta2018.pdf>> p 7.

defined as trafficking in some jurisdictions.¹⁶ They usually involve young victims in impoverished circumstances in one country, a paying customer livestreaming and directing the exploitation from another (usually wealthy) country, and a criminal who facilitates the contact between the customer and the exploited victims and family or close friends of the victim undertaking the exploitation for a fee.

THB, including when facilitated or enabled by technology, can be viewed as a marketplace, although illegal, where people (or explicit services extracted from those people) are treated as commodities.¹⁷ Various online platforms provide the infrastructure for such markets. For example, on classifieds sites,¹⁸ sex services are sold as a commodity alongside second-hand smartphones and used cars; these ‘marketplaces’ have their own dynamics and trends much like other online commercial spaces. THB has in the past been characterized as a marketplace responding to the usual commercial rules of supply and demand:¹⁹

“The utility of this market-based perspective is grounded in its economic approach and is based on the (rational choice) assumption that traffickers primarily and most importantly engage in trafficking because it generates huge profits.”²⁰

The movement of the sex trade online into eBay-style marketplaces is then a predictable occurrence: much like other more mundane commercial transactions, it is more convenient to shop

online, and traffickers are innovating with how best to advertise within this ‘market system’.

Central to this illicit marketplace are sexual service websites that have proliferated across the OSCE region and beyond, and serve as a primary venue for commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. These sites facilitate sexual exploitation at a specific point in the trafficking cycle: websites where traffickers and their victims intersect with sex buyers through the advertisement of sexual services online.²¹ In a US-based survey conducted by the NGO Thorn of two hundred and sixty survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking, 75 percent of surveyed survivors whose exploitation began in 2004 or later reported being advertised online for sex.²² Also in the U.S. in 2020, the primary business model for solicitation involved the internet in 83 percent (356) of the active criminal sex trafficking cases. Sixteen percent (14) of the cases involved advertisements posted on the Skip the Games website²³, 14 percent (12) were posted on Mega Personals, 9 percent (8) were posted on Backpage.com and 8 percent were posted on Craigslist.²⁴

This aspect of the market is not confined to the United States, although data from other countries is more limited. The 2018 Europol report on *Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the EU* reported an “increasing phenomenon” of online advertisements of sexual services including underage trafficking victims within the EU.²⁵ A 2019 study from Scotland found that the majority of female survivors of trafficking interviewed said their ser-

16 For the Norwegian approach, see; Politiet, *Human Trafficking in Norway – Criminal Actors: A Situational Picture Based on Police Sources* (2017) <<https://www.politiet.no/globalassets/03-rad-og-forebygging/menneskehandel/human-trafficking-in-norway---criminal-actors>> p 23.

17 See OSR-CTHB, UN.GIFT, *Analysing the Business Model of Trafficking in Human Beings to Better Prevent the Crime* (Vienna: OSR-CTHB, UN.GIFT, May 2010), p. 33.

18 A classified website is one of the platforms for online advertising to promote products or services, connecting both buyers and sellers in one single entity.

19 Alexis Aronowitz, Gerda Theuermann and Elena Tyurykanova, *Analysing The Business Model Of Trafficking In Human Beings To Better Prevent The Crime* (2010) OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings <www.osce.org/secretariat/69028?download=true>.

20 “The market in exploited workers for commercial sex is therefore similar to other illicit markets: the goods are human beings, the demand is for prostitution and other forms of cheap and malleable labor, the goods (supply) and demands are dynamically matched, and there is a complex social network operating to make this happen” in Alexis A. Aronowitz and Anneke Koning, ‘Understanding Human Trafficking As A Market System: Addressing The Demand Side Of Trafficking For Sexual Exploitation’ (2014) 85(3) *International Review of Penal Law* 669, 672.

21 “As the affordances of the virtual environment have become more widespread, trafficked persons are often advertised online as well as on the street” in S Kreyling, C West, and J Olson, ‘Technology and research requirements for combating human trafficking: Enhancing communication, analysis, reporting, and information sharing’ (2011) *Pacific Northwest Laboratory* <https://www.pnnl.gov/main/publications/external/technical_reports/PNNL-20258.pdf> p 18.

22 “Those who entered the life in or after 2004, street advertising had dropped to 61% and online advertising had increased to 75%” in Dr. Vanessa Bouché, ‘Survivor Insights: The Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking’ (2018) *THORN* <https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Thorn_Survivor_Insights_090519.pdf> p 7.

23 www.skipthegames.com - website containing explicit content.

24 Feehs & Currier Wheeler, 2020 Federal Human Trafficking Report, Human Trafficking Institute (2021), p. 48.

25 “Online advertisement of sexual services is reported as an increasing phenomenon in child trafficking for sexual exploitation. Suspects in many instances create the online profile of the victims on specific websites and manage accounts and prostitution services, while other times victims are convinced to do it by themselves, provided with forged documents to register as adult users. Suspects often force victims to produce sexually explicit photographs to be posted online and to take part to video-chat meetings with clients.” (October 2018) The Hague, Document Ref No: 1001370, p 29.

vices had been advertised online, with the study further mentioning classifieds sites like Vivastreet as a common venue for advertisement.²⁶ And in Austria, in 2017, the Internet was used as the most common criminal infrastructure by perpetrators in 74 percent of human trafficking cases.²⁷

The online advertisement of sexual services offers many benefits to exploiters. It allows traffickers to expose victims to a geographically broader customer base, and it is correlated with higher numbers of buyers per day compared to street solicitation: “One in seven respondents who were advertised on the street reported more than 10 buyers per day. By comparison, one in four respondents who were advertised online reported more than 10 buyers per day.”²⁸ This increase in the frequency of transactions is well described in a 2017 report that looks at the use of the Internet in human trafficking and smuggling processes in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom. The report quotes one of the traffickers as follows: “Facilities on the Internet (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Viber) are the easiest and quickest ways to communicate. [...] The internet is faster than any other method. I have customers daily, between 10-50 people.”^{29 30}

Media review: Cases of trafficking in human beings facilitated by websites offering sexual services

The findings of these reports have been subsequently further supported by media reports of

specific instances within the OSCE area. Online advertisements in particular have been a prominent feature of a number of publicized trafficking cases. For example, one case involved Ukrainian women who were trafficked and then exploited through online advertisements in Israel.³¹ In Canada, a case in Calgary exposed the use of online advertisements to sell the sexual services of trafficking victims, the proceeds of which were entirely kept by the accused traffickers.³² In Moldova, a young girl was recruited by her trafficker through the social network “Odnoklassniki” and then advertised for sexual services to clients on websites.³³ Cases of sex trafficking in the US have also demonstrated the use of online advertisements to exploit victims.³⁴ Even after the shutdown of market-leading site Backpage.com for facilitating trafficking for sexual exploitation, human trafficking and money laundering investigations into new sites seeking to move into the same market space are ongoing.³⁵

In this context, the United States has also witnessed the first federal prosecution of a website for trafficking following the enactment of legislation targeting sexual service websites. In June 2020, the website cityxguide.com (“CityXGuide”) – a leading platform for online advertisements for prostitution and reportedly the venue of numerous instances of sex trafficking – was seized by Homeland Security Investigations pursuant to a warrant. The owner of the website had aspired to make CityXGuide the largest commercial sex advertising website after Backpage.com was taken offline in 2018, and was consistently unresponsive to law enforcement inquiries and subpoenas related to sex trafficking cases. Charges included promotion of prostitution and reckless disregard

26 Norman Silvester, ‘Sex slaves in almost every Scottish town as gangs force trafficked women into prostitution’ *Daily Record* (19 May 2019) <www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/sex-slaves-almost-every-scottish-16166552>.

27 See OSCE, “19th Alliance against Trafficking in Persons. Using Technology to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: Turning a Liability into an Asset” [website] (Vienna: OSCE, 2019), start at min. 19:20. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXWuspTbg4o> (accessed 8 May 2020).

28 Dr. Vanessa Bouché, ‘Survivor Insights: The Role of Technology in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking’ (2018) *THORN* <https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Thorn_Survivor_Insights_090519.pdf> p 41.

29 See Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto and Elisa Martini, Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking (Trento, Italy: eCrime, Department Faculty of Law, University of Trento, March 2017), p. 61.

30 See also Stephanie Hepburn, ‘Technology and Human Trafficking’ (September 2016) *National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors* p 5.

31 Times of Israel, ‘Police bust sex crime ring that trafficked dozens of Ukrainian women to Israel’ *Times of Israel* (18 January 2020) <www.timesofisrael.com/police-bust-sex-crime-ring-that-trafficked-dozens-of-ukrainian-women-to-israel/>.

32 James Keller, ‘Calgary police look for additional victims in human-trafficking case’ *The Globe and Mail* (07 February 2020) <www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/alberta/article-calgary-police-look-for-additional-victims-in-human-trafficking-case/>.

33 Police of the Republic of Moldova, ‘Young woman accused of exploiting a teenager for sexual purposes’ (06 March 2020) <politia.md/ro/content/tanara-invinuita-de-exploatarea-unei-adolescente-scop-sexual?fbclid=IwAR0o62dUpjlvX-Bk_8Y852dUdC-l-isPSIbKNNkQWgpWK-WWAmX69ypvhtE>.

34 “[The trafficker] met a minor via social media who had run away from home. Jones transported the girl to a home on Coventry Avenue in Toledo, where he took nude photographs of her and posted them online, offering commercial sex acts in the Toledo area in January.” in US Department of Justice, ‘Toledo man sentenced to 35 years for sex trafficking of a minor’ (30 August 2019) <<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndoh/pr/toledo-man-sentenced-35-years-sex-trafficking-minor>>. See also US Department of Justice, ‘Pearland Man Convicted of Sex Trafficking of a Minor’ (1 August 2019) <<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdtx/pr/pearland-man-convicted-sex-trafficking-minor>>.

35 Lalita Clozel, ‘After Backpage, U.S. Investigates Massage, Escort Websites That Now Dominate Market’ (15 September 2019) *Wall Street Journal* <www.wsj.com/articles/after-backpage-u-s-investigates-massage-escort-websites-that-now-dominate-market-11568548800>.

of sex trafficking, interstate racketeering conspiracy, interstate transportation in aid of racketeering, and money laundering. In August 2021, Wilhan Martono, the owner of the website, pled guilty to Promotion and Facilitation of Prostitution and Reckless Disregard of Sex Trafficking.³⁶

In the UK, survivors have reported the use of online advertisements for exploitation, including in a case reported by the Guardian: “As a teenager she fell under the control of county lines gangs who advertised her for sex on escort websites and used her as a drugs mule. She was also forced to commit petty crimes and her social media account was used to advertise sexual services.”³⁷

A major 2019 Europol case ‘Operation Webmaster’ brought down a Finnish organised crime group (OCG) operating across fifteen countries which engaged in human trafficking for sexual exploitation and money laundering:

“The main suspect, based in Marbella, Spain, was allegedly managing websites advertising sexual services. The operation was triggered by an investigation into an organised crime group trafficking victims of predominantly Nigerian origin. The website was advertising services of victims from different countries based in Sweden and Finland. Other organised criminal groups involved in similar activities were also advertising the services of their victims on these websites.”³⁸

Sixteen websites were shut down as part of the operation, which involved cooperation between Europol and Eurojust, and a Joint Investigation Team set up between Finland, Spain and Sweden.

The case also illustrates the transnational nature of any response to this crime: 14 countries were involved in the investigation with law enforcement from Finland, Hong Kong, Malta, Romania and Spain acting simultaneously to carry out arrests and seizures.³⁹ This case also highlighted the large-scale, systematic use of sexual services websites by organized crime to traffic human beings.

These are not isolated cases, nor are the platforms where such cases arise at the margins of the Internet: from mainstream social media and classifieds sites to sites selling exclusively sex services, traffickers are utilising a range of platforms to exploit their victims.

Based on the diversity of online venues where trafficking cases have been identified as well as the frequency with which such cases have occurred, there is little evidence that meaningful deterrents or prevention mechanisms are in place to stop online trafficking on the surface web; this is particularly true on websites that feature dating, physical interaction (massage, etc.), or sexual services where trafficking for sexual exploitation appears unchecked.⁴⁰

Literature review

There is a substantial body of literature⁴¹ concerning the online sex market and trafficking in human beings.⁴² The risk of traffickers utilising emerging technologies to recruit and exploit trafficking victims was flagged in 2002 by the Council of Europe,⁴³ and again in 2008 and 2015 by

36 See U.S. Attorney’s Office, Northern District of Texas, “United States v. Wilhan Martono (CityXGuide) Case No. 3:20-CR-00274-N” [website] (USDJOJ, 26 October 2021). Available at: www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/united-states-v-wilhan-martono-cityxguide (accessed 29 November 2021).

37 Annie Kelly, ‘British woman repeatedly trafficked for sex after Home Office failures’ The Guardian (16-Feb-20) <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/16/british-woman-repeatedly-trafficked-for-sex-after-home-office-failures>>.

38 Europol, ‘Parallel Investigations Bring Down Sexual Exploitation Network and Freeze Criminal Profits In 12 Counties’ (10 July 2019) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/parallel-investigations-bring-down-sexual-exploitation-network-and-freeze-criminal-profits-in-12-counties>>.

39 Europol, ‘Parallel Investigations Bring Down Sexual Exploitation Network and Freeze Criminal Profits In 12 Counties’ (10 July 2019) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/parallel-investigations-bring-down-sexual-exploitation-network-and-freeze-criminal-profits-in-12-counties>>.

40 See, e.g., Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Scottish Parliament, Online Pimping: Inquiry Findings Launched [website] (CPGCSE, 19 March 2021), p. 17. Available at: www.cpg-cse.com/post/inquirylaunch (accessed 22 August 2022)

41 See above, see also: boyd d, Casteel H, Thakor M, and Johnson R, ‘Human Trafficking and Technology: A Framework for Understanding the Role of Technology in the Commercial Exploitation of Children in the U.S.’ (2011) *Microsoft Research* <<http://research.microsoft.com/enus/collaboration/focus/education/htframework2011.pdf>>; Wang H, Cai C, Philpot A, Latonero M, Hovy EH, Metzler D, ‘Data integration from open internet sources to combat sex trafficking of minors’ (2012) *Proceedings of the 13th annual international conference on digital government research*. ACM, New York, pp 246–252; Michelle Ibanez, Rich Gazan, ‘Detecting sex trafficking circuits in the U.S. through analysis of online escort advertisements’ (August 2016) ASONAM ‘16: Proceedings of the 2016 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining, pps 892–895.

42 Not without controversy: “Classifieds websites have become new battleground spaces upon which longstanding disagreements about sex work, human trafficking, and the sexual exploitation of youth are enacted.” In Mitali Thakor, danah boyd, ‘Networked trafficking: reflections on technology and the anti-trafficking movement’ (2013) 37 *Dialect Anthropol* 277, 285.

43 Council of Europe, ‘Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation’ (17 February 2003) Strasbourg, Document EG-S-NT 9, p 27.

the UNODC.⁴⁴ A foundational study from 2011 by Mark Latonero with University of Southern California⁴⁵ examined the role of online classified ads and social networking sites in facilitating trafficking in human beings. Latonero reviewed US federal trafficking case law to determine patterns in the use of online platforms. In 2012, US-based NGO Polaris conducted a study of the US market for domestic minor sex trafficking which exposed the role of social media and online classifieds at different stages of the trafficking process.⁴⁶ The Hawaii International Conference on System Science has resulted in multiple research outputs in this area, including a 2014 report in which Ibanez and Suthers developed an index of virtual indicators to identify potential trafficking activity on online forums, translating indicators previously identified by the UNODC for the online environment.⁴⁷ Related research has also been undertaken on behalf of the Council of the Baltic Sea States into risks and behavioural patterns which increase vulnerability to becoming a victim of sexual abuse, and the identified behavioural patterns of becoming an offender.⁴⁸

While most of the existing studies into online advertisements have been US-based, in 2007 Shared Hope International completed a comparative study of the trafficking marketplaces in Jamaica, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States. This study incorporated the analysis of

an internet surveillance firm, which searched for English language websites that appeared to facilitate sex trafficking of women and children; this resulted in 5,094 websites “exhibiting highly likely indicators of sexual exploitation facilitation on the webpage.”⁴⁹ A 2017 comprehensive eCrime study into the role of internet and communications technology in people smuggling and THB provided further insight into practices in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and the UK.⁵⁰

A recurring issue that has emerged during this research is the challenge faced by law enforcement to manually filter through thousands of advertisements for sexual services in order to identify high-risk cases.⁵¹ Technology, in particular machine learning technology, is the often-proposed solution. In answer to the scale issue, Dubrawski and associates with Carnegie Mellon University presented a variety of data analysis methods that could be used to process advertisements on the open web.⁵² A considerable body of work has subsequently been developed concerning the use of machine learning to detect trafficking in human beings online.⁵³ Over three years of research conducted within the DARPA Memex program resulted in multiple outputs, including a bias mitigation program.⁵⁴

How best to develop an ontology⁵⁵ for the identification of trafficking online has been a consistent

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- 44 United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, ‘Background Paper 017 Workshop: Technology and Human Trafficking’ (15 February 2008) The Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT B.P.:017), p 3; UNODC, *Study on the Effects of New Information Technologies on the Abuse and Exploitation of Children* (May 2015), Vienna <https://www.unodc.org/documents/Cybercrime/Study_on_the_Effects.pdf> p 6.
- 45 Mark Latonero, ‘Human trafficking online: the role of social networking sites and online classifieds’ (2011) SSRN <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2045851>>.
- 46 Polaris, ‘Domestic minor sex trafficking: The criminal operations of the American pimp’ (2012) *Polaris Project* <<http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-bytopic/sex-trafficking>>.
- 47 Michelle Ibanez and Daniel D. Suthers, ‘Detection of Domestic Human Trafficking Indicators and Movement Trends Using Content Available on Open Internet Sources’ (2014) *47th Hawaii International Conference on System Science*.
- 48 Council of the Baltic Sea States, *Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse. Literature Report* (Stockholm, 2010) <www.childrenatrisk.eu/robert/public/Online_behaviour_related_to_sexual_abuse.pdf> p 32.
- 49 Shared Hope International, ‘Demand: A Comparative Examination of Sex Tourism and Trafficking in Jamaica, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United States’ (2007) <<http://www.sharedhope.org/files/DEMAND.pdf>> p 20.
- 50 Coordinated by eCrime, a research group from the University of Trento, in partnership with the Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and the Teesside University (United Kingdom), see <www.surfandsound.eu> for more information. Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, ‘Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking’ (2017) *eCrime – Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wNSEpCOHFJaWftelk/view>.
- 51 “Without some technological solutions to narrow the pool of potential advertisements, the task of manually reviewing these ads exceeds the limits of what investigators can reasonably expect to achieve” in Mark Latonero, ‘Human trafficking online: the role of social networking sites and online classifieds’ (2011) SSRN. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2045851>
- 52 Artur Dubrawski, Kyle Miller, Matthew Barnes, Benedikt Boecking & Emily Kennedy, ‘Leveraging Publicly Available Data to Discern Patterns of Human-Trafficking Activity’ (2015) 1(1) *Journal of Human Trafficking* 65-85.
- 53 For further studies using Intelligent Systems to counter trafficking online, see: Portnoff, RS, Huang DY, Doerfler P, Afroz S, and McCoy D, ‘Backpage and bitcoin: Uncovering human traffickers.’ (2017) *Proceedings of the 23rd ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining* 1595; Nagpal C, Miller K, Boecking B, and Dubrawski A, ‘An entity resolution approach to isolate instances of human trafficking online’ (2015) arXiv preprint, arXiv:1509.06659.; Mattmann, CA, Yang GH, Manjunatha H, Gowda T, Zhou AJ, Luo J, and McGibbney, LJ, ‘Multimedia metadata-based forensics in human trafficking web data. Second Workshop on Search and Exploration of X-Rated Information (SEXI’16)’ (2016) *Proceedings of the Ninth ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining* 10.
- 54 Machine learning applied toward automatically detecting indicators of trafficking online, like many forms of AI, requires a level of intervention to ‘de-bias’: Kyle Hundman, Thamme Gowda, Mayank Kejriwal, Benedikt Boecking, ‘Always Lurking: Understanding and Mitigating Bias in Online Human Trafficking Detection’ (3 Dec 2017) *AAAI/ACM First conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society*.
- 55 Knowledge Management Systems are “systems that promote the successful capture, storage, retrieval, transfer, and reuse of knowledge knowledge. A KMS is designed and implemented using a variety of Information Technology (IT)/Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools. One such tool that supports the design of a KMS is the creation of an ontology. Ontologies are a sub-domain of KM, defined by Noy

question throughout this research, and developments have often been specific to the US market. In the US, traffickers continually evolve their techniques to avoid detection, including resorting to coded means of communication such as emojis which are now also being considered as potential indicators: as one study noted, “the use of a combined ontology of emoticons and keywords associated with known sex trafficking indicators for filtering ads led to the identification of additional potential instances of trafficking.”⁵⁶

States’ policy responses to technology-facilitated and enabled trafficking in human beings

A 2010 assessment by Kunze of existing laws, policies and international agreements concerning technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation found that the market was developing faster than laws to protect victims. She proposed that an international law needed to be developed to adequately respond to traffickers’ increased capabilities:

“[I]t is vital that the international community adopt both domestic legislation and international treaty provisions to target sexual predators and human traffickers who use technology and the Internet to enslave minors and adults alike.”⁵⁷

In the intervening period, very few international law or domestic laws with specific focus on technology-facilitated THB have been developed across most of the OSCE region.⁵⁸ One example is in the US, where laws imposing liability on online platforms for facilitating trafficking have been passed: the U.S. Senate and House bills ‘Stop

Enabling Sex Traffickers Act’ (SESTA) and ‘Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act’ (FOSTA) became law on April 11, 2018. Over five years later, SESTA-FOSTA is still one of the few examples of legislation which tries to specifically combat human trafficking facilitated by technology and online platforms.

French prosecutors launched a case in 2018 against Vivastreet France for aggravated pimping; however, although the investigation follows a preliminary analysis by the Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings,⁵⁹ the charges are related to facilitation of prostitution rather than trafficking specifically.⁶⁰ The French authorities were able to take action against Vivastreet under comprehensive anti-pimping laws enacted earlier in France. More specifically, the Law 2016-444 of 13 April 2016 aimed at strengthening the fight against the system of prostitution and supporting people engaged in prostitution amended existing legislation and prescribed that websites supporting the prostitution activity are illegal and the publisher of the site can be considered as a pimp.⁶¹ French legislation on the misuse of electronic services, including websites, for sexual exploitation has been strengthened in 2021, when the Law 2021-478 of 21 April 2021 to protect minors from sexual crimes and offenses and incest was adopted, which established separate penalties for the dissemination or transmission of images, videos or pornographic representations of minors.

Elected officials in the UK and Scottish parliaments have formed cross-party working groups on commercial sexual exploitation to perform inquiries and research, as well as to make recommendations for new policies to combat sexual exploitation. Both the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation have

and McGuinness as a formal explicit description of concepts in a domain of discourse, properties of each concept describing various features and attributes of the concept (slots), and restrictions on the slots. The purpose of an ontology is to build a general representation of domain knowledge to facilitate a common understanding of the domain that can be shared across KM applications and groups.” In Jessica Whitney, Aaron Elkins, Murray E. Jennex and Eric Frost, ‘Don’t Want to Get Caught? Don’t Say It: The Use of EMOJIS in Online Human Sex Trafficking Ads’ (2018) *51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, p 4274.

⁵⁶ Jessica Whitney, Aaron Elkins, Murray E. Jennex and Eric Frost, ‘Don’t Want to Get Caught? Don’t Say It: The Use of EMOJIS in Online Human Sex Trafficking Ads’ (2018) *51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, p 4280.

⁵⁷ Kunze, E. I., ‘Sex trafficking via the Internet: How international agreements address the problem and fail to go far enough’ (2010) July *The Journal of High Technology Law*, 241, 253.

⁵⁸ This does not refer to laws related to production, viewing and distribution of child sexual abuse and exploitation material, which is already criminalized in most of OSCE participating States, but rather refers narrowly to the crime of THB committed with the help of technology

⁵⁹ See *L’office central pour la répression de la traite des êtres humains* <www.police-nationale.interieur.gouv.fr/Organisation/Direction-Centrale-de-la-Police-Judiciaire/Lutte-contre-la-criminalite-organisee/Office-central-pour-la-repression-de-la-traite-des-etres-humains>.

⁶⁰ AIM group, ‘Paris prosecutors investigate prostitution activity on VivaStreet’ (04 June 2018) <aimgroup.com/2018/06/04/vivastreet-faces-aggravated-pimping-charges-2/>.

⁶¹ See Murielle Cahen Cabinet d’avocats Paris, “LA PROSTITUTION SUR INTERNET” (14 January 2022). Available at: [https://www.murielle-cahen.fr/la-prostitution-sur-internet/#:~:text=Le%20raccrochage%20ne%20se%20trouve,par%20la%20loi%20\(\)](https://www.murielle-cahen.fr/la-prostitution-sur-internet/#:~:text=Le%20raccrochage%20ne%20se%20trouve,par%20la%20loi%20()).

performed inquiries into exploitation on websites posting advertisements for sexual services.^{62 63}

In Israel, the Powers to Prevent Online Offences Act (2017) enables a district Judge to issue a warrant directing a website to be blocked, in whole or part. A warrant may be granted if there are sufficient grounds to believe that the website offers prostitution services or child sexual abuse images. In Israel purchasing sex is considered a criminal offence. The Israeli competent authorities are using the provision of the Act to address online-facilitated trafficking. In 2020 alone, action was taken against thirty-six (36) major websites that published prostitution services in Israel; nearly 3500 websites depicting child sexual abuse and exploitation were also blocked.⁶⁴

The EU has reached a political agreement for the Digital Services Act (DSA) to enter into force on 1 January 2024.⁶⁵ The DSA establishes new rules to provide a structure of accountability for online platforms. Among other requirements, the Act requires online platforms to remove illegal online content such as child sexual abuse material and publish bi-annual transparency reports detailing their content moderation. It also creates a new mechanism that gives priority to “trusted flaggers,” including individuals and entities such as law enforcement, that online platforms must cooperate with in order to identify and remove illegal content. Very large online platforms, which are categorized as those with more than 45 million monthly active users, must also conduct annual risk assessments to gauge impacts on rights, including upon those of children. In addition, on 11 May 2022, the European Commission proposed new EU legislation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse online. The proposed rules would oblige providers to detect, report and remove child sexual abuse material on their services. Providers will need to assess and mitigate the risk of misuse of their services and the measures taken must be proportionate to that risk and subject to robust conditions and safeguards. A new, independent EU Centre on Child Sexual Abuse will facilitate the efforts of service providers by acting as a hub of expertise, providing reliable information on identified material, receiving and analyzing reports from providers to identify erroneous reports and prevent them from reaching law enforcement, swiftly forwarding relevant reports for

law enforcement action and providing support to victims. Importantly, it appears unlikely from the draft language – which is specifically focused on child sexual abuse material (CSAM) – that the legislation would cover the advertisement of minors on sexual service websites since those advertisements often would not meet the definition of CSAM.

States’ responses to the technology-facilitated THB, especially at the policy level, usually differ based on the *modus operandi* of the traffickers and the statutory system in a particular country. For example, if prostitution is legal, traffickers will use the legalized system as cover for their activity particularly since regulations of sexual services online are often more limited in this context.⁶⁶ On the other hand, if any of activities like selling sex, buying sex or benefiting from the prostitution of another person are illegal, some governments have demonstrated that there are policies that can significantly impact the online THB landscape by prohibiting online platforms from facilitating sexual services that traffickers use as cover for their business. With the expansion of Internet connectivity and increase in the use of devices connected to Internet, states around the world will have to decide how best to respond to the increased risk of online-facilitated THB.

Aim of this report

The overarching goal of this report is to respond to the threat of technology-facilitated trafficking by building increased awareness about websites that facilitate sexual exploitation and potential responses to the misuse of online platforms among policy makers, lawmakers and anti-trafficking practitioners, particularly law enforcement.

In order to respond to the challenge of online advertisement of trafficking victims, states must understand the scope, scale, and features of the online marketplace. This online mapping report was designed to identify — in selected OSCE participating States — the market-leading online sites and platforms for the explicit and non-explicit selling of sexual services where victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation could be advertised with the objective of informing and mobilizing a concerted and strategic response to

⁶² Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, “News.” <https://www.cpg-cse.com/>

⁶³ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, “Inquiry on Pornography.” <https://www.appg-cse.uk/>

⁶⁴ Meeting of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners

⁶⁵ See *The Digital Services Act package* <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package#:~:text=The%20Digital%20Services%20Act%20and,level%20playing%20field%20for%20businesses.>

⁶⁶ See Europol, ‘*Situation Report: Trafficking in human beings in the EU*’ (February 2016) The Hague, Document Ref No: 765175, 12.

online exploitation. One of the added values of this mapping report is revisiting and revising on-tologies for the identification of trafficking online for non-US markets.

While many platforms can be misused by criminals for trafficking purposes and platforms are exposed to trafficking risks in different ways, the focus of this report is targeted to sexual service websites specifically. Such sites offer tremendous value to exploiters through the possibility to advertise victims to a global audience and thus carry high risks for facilitating exploitation. At the same time, these websites have been given less attention by researchers and policy makers than other platforms, and thus warrant further scrutiny from the anti-trafficking community.

Limitations

The potential challenges in a study of this nature are readily apparent; however, these have been mitigated as much as possible. For example, on-line sites often rise and fall in popularity, so the market captured during this mapping may look different a short time after the initial data gathering. For this reason, this report does not purport to document every online platform where the risk of trafficking is high in the selected OSCE participating States, but instead strives to highlight overarching features of the online marketplace as well as the leading sites and platforms that can be easily identified on the open web with the use of certain keywords.

Moreover, while this risk cannot be entirely mitigated, large fluctuations in the online landscape have generally not been observed over the course of the research. This is likely attributed to the need for stability to maximize profits and the perception of a lack of law enforcement surveillance and legal risk: well-established sites have little reason to move or rebrand, and customers appear to largely be returning to the same stable markets and policy makers are not focused on them. Indeed, part of the value of online platforms is giving market actors a reliable venue to visit for business. Much like how legalised prostitution systems make it “much easier for traffickers who wish to use a legal environment in order to exploit their victims”,⁶⁷ these sexual service websites provide a reliable and stable environment for traffickers as well as customers and other market actors.

Though such sites have repeatedly been identified as venues for trafficking based on afore-mentioned survivor testimony, media reports, studies, and real investigations, another vulnerability of this study is the challenge in definitively detecting trafficking cases on sex services sites throughout the OSCE region. However, while it is difficult to point to an advertisement on a forum and conclusively identify it as a trafficking case without further investigation, based on the extensive body of research in this field it is reasonable to proceed under two guiding assumptions.

Firstly, these types of forums (sites advertising sexual services) clearly have the potential to be used to facilitate trafficking, as evidenced by their extensive history of being used precisely for this reason. Consequently, a portion of the advertisements on these sites have the *potential* to be – and very likely are – trafficking cases. However, any sites or advertisements identified can only be termed “suspect” until further investigations are conducted.⁶⁸ This issue will be discussed further in the section regarding ‘red flags’ entitled *Indicators*.

Secondly, ads featuring victims of human trafficking often have elements which make them different from other advertisements promoting sexual services provided willingly, and that they exhibit certain characteristics which, analysed at macro scale, can allow anti-trafficking stakeholders to identify concrete THB cases.

Structure of the report

The report is comprised of four chapters. The **first chapter** discusses the methodology and the scope of the report. The **second chapter** discusses a list of indicators which could help in identifying trafficked victims advertised on websites, such as inconsistent ages of those advertised, inconsistent aliases, frequent movement of persons advertised, third party involvement or indications of restricted movement. The **third chapter** discusses the findings of the mapping and analysis of sexual services websites identified in specific OSCE participating States. Finally, **chapter four** provides a number of conclusions and recommendations stemming from the analysis of websites in OSCE participating States selected for this research.

⁶⁷ Europol, ‘*Situation Report: Trafficking in human beings in the EU*’ (February 2016) The Hague, Document Ref No: 765175, 12.

⁶⁸ “In a report for the Council of Europe, researchers conducted an Internet search for potential trafficking sites and emphasized that a website can only be termed “suspect,” since there is no evidence that the girls featured in ads for sex services or marriage are in fact trafficking victims. What is clear is that the Internet has changed the methods used to recruit and market victims, and it has “certainly contributed to the rise of trafficking in human beings.” In Athanassia P. Sykiotou, *Trafficking in human beings: Internet recruitment* (2007) Council of Europe, 32. EG-THB-INT p 22.

1 Chapter

Methodology and scope

The overarching approach of this report is to select a group of countries, assess the landscape of relevant websites within each country, and then analyse the sites individually. Each of these steps is discussed in further detail below.

Country selection

Countries for the initial stage of the mapping were selected from the regions of Western Europe, Northern Europe, Southern/South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia, respectively, based on the following criteria:

- a. Population, total (larger market)
- b. Gross Domestic Product
- c. Size of foreign tourism to the country (higher demand)
- d. Prevalence of trafficking in human beings

An average of three to four countries per region were selected based on the factors listed above. From this stage, the identification of sites was more fluid, depending on following leads, including across international platforms. The data provided below are meant to serve as an example; as noted, the list of platforms identified is not comprehensive, but provides a general landscape to guide the development of a response strategy within each country and across regions, including

those OSCE participating States not included in the below analysis.

Websites selection and scanning methods

Based on the above literature review, media review, OSCE expertise and experience, and reports by international organisations and academia, websites advertising sex services, including prostitution sites, 'escort sites' and online classifieds, are considered at a high risk for trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁶⁹ Specifically, the factors which support this conclusion include the following:

- a) the sites are related to an industry that has been consistently identified as high risk for exploitation (e.g. prostitution);⁷⁰
- b) there is strong evidence based on comprehensive research and analysis and numerous examples that these platforms are regularly misused by traffickers;⁷¹
- c) The Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (OSR/CTHB) has not found any evidence that such sites have reliable protection features such as effective age-verification or "consent" protocols verifying that the person being advertised is not being exploited;⁷² and

⁶⁹ "Human beings are primarily sold on easily accessible websites because traffickers want to ensure their ads are accessible to the greatest number of clients, many of whom may not be technologically proficient... In the United States, for example, websites such as *Craigslist*, *Reddit*, *adultsearch.com*, *meet4fun.com*, and *backpage.com* have all been used by traffickers to advertise victims. On these and other advertisements, and escort and dating websites, traffickers advertise their victims' services under the guise of legitimate work (e.g. massage service) so that they are almost indistinguishable from the legitimate advertisements they appear alongside." in UNODC, 'Technology facilitating trafficking in persons' (May 2019) *E4J University Module Series: Trafficking in Persons & Smuggling of Migrants* <<https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tip-and-som/module-14/key-issues/technology-facilitating-trafficking-in-persons.html>>.

⁷⁰ Europol, 'Situation Report: Trafficking in human beings in the EU' (February 2016) The Hague, Document Ref No: 765175, 12.

⁷¹ "Whole catalogues of exploited women are placed online containing pictures and contact details. Clients can order these women directly online and are also able to pay online in some cases. Clients and victims meet at a specific location or the victim is sent to the client's location. Some victims are exploited on specialised websites offering webcams or sex chats. Victims forced to offer services on these websites are also often exploited financially by being coerced to pay additional fees to have their advertisements displayed online... Websites for escort services are used as a legitimate façade to offer services associated with sexual exploitation." in Europol, 'Intelligence Notification 15/2014: Trafficking in human beings and the internet' (October 2014) The Hague <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/trafficking-in-human-beings-and-internet>> 2.

⁷² During the course of this project, many sites were observed advertising 'verified' profiles to assure customers that the images were of the 'real' advertised person, however there is evidence that many sites do not require age-verification as part of this process, and verification is not mandatory.

- d) the sites are a significant source of intelligence about sex trafficking for law enforcement, meaning the intersection between the activity online and exploitation is strong.⁷³

Typically, the sites are catalogues with pictures, text and a unique identifier for contact (such as a phone number, email address or social media profile). Examples of platforms may include sites advertising escort services, massage services, broader 'classifieds' advertising platforms, advertising aggregators, hobby boards, sugar daddy sites, dating and social networking websites, and other forums as appropriate to the local market.

Private/restricted groups on social media are outside the scope of the project at this initial stage. Likewise, while the dark web might be a growing space for those investigating child sexual abuse and exploitation imagery,⁷⁴ most trafficking for sexual exploitation gravitates to open markets to attract as many customers as possible. Therefore, this project is limited to surface-level web mapping.

The websites have been identified through Google searches, and scanning of online discussion forums (both seller-run and buyer-run), cross advertising from other sex services sites, affiliation lists, media and civil society materials. Google Translate and Deepl were used for non-English research. Back-searching individual escorts' profiles also proved to be an effective approach to identify further sites: people in these industries will usually know best which sites are popularly used in that market and advertise across them.

In order to validate the selection/identification methodology, the results were also compared to a mapping exercise conducted by other organizations, particularly one carried out by the Thompson Reuters Special Services, and observed a high level of similarity in country-level results, thereby further validating the results.

Websites analysis

Once identified, the following data points were gathered:

- a. Name
- b. URL
- c. Size – number of advertisements, evidence of use (such as recent and relatively high volume of new advertisements being added)
- d. Services – range, types available and prices when advertised
- e. Geographical scope: International/national/regional/local – including regional prevalence (for example, to determine whether a site's popularity and use differs regionally)
- f. Denotation of ethnicity/national origin: whether advertised providers are primarily local or foreign
- g. Links to social media profiles (Instagram, Facebook etc.), or phone numbers
- h. Notes on the site
- i. Any connections between sites – some will look exactly the same but have different names
- j. Any company affiliation
- k. Language
- l. Category – e.g. hobby board, catalogue, brothel
- m. Particular lingo
- n. Whether advertising space is owned or rented

⁷³ See Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Scottish Parliament, Online Pimping: Inquiry Findings Launched [website] (CPGCSE, 19 March 2021), p. 22. Available at: www.cpg-cse.com/post/inquirylaunch (accessed 21 October 2021).

⁷⁴ "[D]edicated bulletin boards on the Darknet are increasingly popular among offenders as a channel for the distribution of [Child Sexual Exploitation Materials]. This is especially the case for offenders with niche interests, including CSEM with infants and non-verbal children and demeaning material depicting torture and severe cruelty against children" in Europol, *INTERNET ORGANISED CRIME THREAT ASSESSMENT (IOCTA) 2019* (2019) <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/iocta_2019.pdf> p 31.

2 Chapter

Indicators

Indicators are clues or signals that an advertisement for sexual services could feature or relate to an exploited person. Indicators can be critical for law enforcement or other anti-trafficking stakeholders to prioritize investigations in an environment featuring a high volume of potentially risky circumstances. This Chapter explores the concept of indicators of trafficking related to sexual service websites and provides a basic list of indicators used in this mapping project.

Development

Identifying the marketplaces that are high-risk is an essential first step. However, what emerges is a vast amount of data including thousands of ads for people selling sexual services (who may or may not be victims of trafficking). Law enforcement need tools to begin to identify potential trafficking cases within that high volume marketplace, and so the next step is to develop a coherent set of indicators that can act as ‘red flags’ of potential trafficking in human beings.⁷⁵ Indicators are a “starting point for investigation,” not evidence in themselves of trafficking in persons.⁷⁶

The working list of red flags (see below) was built from reviewing studies that compiled indicators through review of trafficking legal cases and survivor interviews.⁷⁷ The 2017 eCrime study also drew upon survivor interviews, perpetrator interviews, civil society and further surveys; one output was red flags to identify ‘at-risk’ advertise-

ments for sexual services.⁷⁸ These are all drawn from the markets of less-studied OSCE participating States and have also been integrated into the indicator list.

Studies typically have drawn online indicators from known indicators in the physical environment, and developed indicators specifically for the virtual environment.⁷⁹ For example, Ibanez and Gazan utilized this approach and conducted an automated audit of escort advertisements on Backpage.com (when it was still a market leader in the US):

“Data fields were extracted from the ads and analysed for indicators of sex trafficking to identify the subset of escort ads with potential links to sex trafficking... The virtual indicator analysis measured the number of indicators present in an advertisement and the frequency of an indicator type across the sample. Of the 600 advertisements analysed, 75 percent of the ads contained one or more of the primary indicators and 15 percent of the ads contained three or more of these indicators.”⁸⁰

The practice of looking for multiple indicators to determine risk of trafficking is a common one. ‘Weak signals’ should not be considered in isolation; rather, there is greater significance when multiple indicators appear to accumulate, “grouped under certain conditions, such as temporal or geographic proximity to a specific location and type of activity.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ Discussing minor victims of trafficking: “Although advertisements frequently misrepresent the age of victims, certain keywords meant to serve as signals for the purchasers who drive the demand for sex with minors make detection a possibility. Although the signals and terms change frequently, the nature of advertising a minor’s sexual services to purchasers with particular age and characteristic preferences makes it possible to detect common themes across online classified ads.” In Mark Latonero, ‘Human trafficking online: the role of social networking sites and online classifieds’ (2011) SSRN <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2045851>> p 18.

⁷⁶ UNODC, *Anti-human trafficking manual for criminal justice practitioners* (2009) <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/TIP_module2_Ebook.pdf> p 13.

⁷⁷ See Literature Review (above), also UNODC, *Anti-human trafficking manual for criminal justice practitioners* (2009) <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/TIP_module2_Ebook.pdf> p 11.

⁷⁸ Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, ‘Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking’ (2017) *eCrime – Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wN5EpCOHFJaWftalk/view>.

⁷⁹ Michelle Ibanez, Rich Gazan, ‘Virtual indicators of sex trafficking to identify potential victims in online advertisements’ (2016) *2016 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)* p 3.

⁸⁰ Michelle Ibanez, Rich Gazan, ‘Virtual indicators of sex trafficking to identify potential victims in online advertisements’ (2016) *2016 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)* p 3.

⁸¹ “The concept of weak signals has been abstracted from the Canadian Criminal Intelligence Service’s (CISC) definitions of primary and secondary indicators, and the perception that in reality there is little tangible value to be extracted from isolated indicators as there is potential for them to be symptomatic of a variety of phenomena, many of which are not necessarily in any way indicative of the presence or threat of organised crime. However, when these indicators are grouped under certain conditions, such as temporal or geographic proximity to a specific location and type of activity, they can begin to provide insight into the presence or emergence of crime.” in Simon Andrews, Ben Brewster and Tony Day, ‘Organised crime and social media: a system for detecting, corroborating and visualising weak signals of organised crime online’ (2018) *7(3) Security Informatics*. p. 2.

Typology of indicators

Attempting to compile and categorise concrete visual and textual manifestations of the “deep and dense sociological abyss”⁸² that is human trafficking is a uniquely complex challenge. The listed red flags (see below) are possible manifestations of an unsophisticated, violent form of physical coercion and restricted freedom of movement. However, many trafficking victims do have freedom of movement.⁸³ Coercion is context-specific, and social norms impact vulnerability;⁸⁴ as a result the developed list might be very useful for some markets, but of limited utility in other markets.

Based on experience gleaned through country visits, the OSR/CTHB has observed that traffickers in Central Asia, Western and Eastern Europe utilise different forms of both physical and psychological coercion. Traffickers themselves come in different forms: from unsophisticated individual enterprises, to middle-sized and family groups, to multi-national networks. Mechanisms used by different networks, from different societies, to exert control over the victims vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.⁸⁵ Individual and family debt bondage; threats of violent reprisals against family; threats of exposure to the victim’s community through photos or videos of sexual acts - these are all potent tools that are coercive, but do not

necessarily manifest in restriction of movement or immediate violence against the victim. Unfortunately, there are not many visual indicators of psychological coercion.

One solution to this issue is to look for networks in the data.⁸⁶ A number of OSCE participating States use data scraping and analysis software to compare phone numbers, email addresses, even IP addresses when accessible. This data allows law enforcement to identify patterns and networks. If an advertisement for a person in prostitution has the same contact details as multiple other advertisements, this is a strong indicator that the advertised persons are part of a group and may not be in control of their circumstances.⁸⁷ Some technology projects have already experimented with drawing patterns and networks from escort ads data in order to detect trafficking:

“[These] methods allowed prominent hubs and circuits of this activity to be observed, by providing a tool to uncover covert network structures and activity, yielding a method to capture movement trends of potential trafficked persons.”⁸⁸

Another benefit of this approach is that the geo-spatial data gathered can allow maps to be created, visualising the movement patterns.

82 Marcel van der Watt, ‘Human Trafficking in South Africa: An elusive statistical nightmare’ (2015) *The Conversation* <theconversation.com/human-trafficking-in-south-africa-an-elusive-statistical-nightmare-43949>.

83 “Even victims who have some freedom of movement, or those who escape captivity, can be reluctant to seek help from the authorities. Reasons for this reluctance may include:

- threats made to the victim or to his or her family (in this country or abroad);
- concerns about immigration status;
- a perception that the individual’s current circumstances, for example in labour exploitation, are better than those which would be encountered in his or her home country in the event of deportation;
- myths promulgated about the action that authorities may take, or wariness of authorities based on the victim’s previous experiences in his or her home country;
- language or cultural barriers, including a lack of understanding of how authorities can help;
- other vulnerabilities, such as age, drug or alcohol dependency, or learning difficulties. These can make a victim more prone to exploitation but less able to seek help;
- loyalty and attachment to, or emotional or material dependency on, the offender; and
- lack of self-identification as a victim, despite the level of exploitation involved.”

in Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, ‘Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking’ (October 2017) *HMICFRS* <www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/stolen-freedom-the-policing-response-to-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking.pdf> p 16.

84 For more information, see: UNODC, ‘Issue Paper Abuse of a position of vulnerability and other “means” within the definition of trafficking in persons’ (April 2013) <www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2012/UNODC_2012_Issue_Paper_-_Abuse_of_a_Position_of_Vulnerability.pdf>.

85 Van der Watt and van der Westhuizen characterise trafficking from a complex-systems perspective, as a ‘complex living system’ due to the nature of the crime, range of perpetrators, vast range of forms of exploitation and varying contextual factors: Marcel van der Watt & Amanda van der Westhuizen, ‘(Re)configuring the criminal justice response to human trafficking: a complex-systems perspective’ (2017) 18(3) *Police Practice and Research* 218, 219.

86 “In most cases, the assumption in identifying trafficking-related case studies is that escorts represented in the case study ads are being trafficked in a similar context, i.e. by a single individual or an organization” in Kyle Hundman, Thamme Gowda, Mayank Kejriwal, Benedikt Boecking, ‘Always Lurking: Understanding and Mitigating Bias in Online Human Trafficking Detection’ (3 Dec 2017) *AAAI/ACM First conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society*, New Orleans, USA, February 2018, p 1.

87 A UK study by the Police Foundation identified ‘suspect’ profiles on a UK-based sex services site based on the “numerical closeness of the phone numbers displayed”. The researchers observed that “the majority of these online profiles showed additional indicators of being linked or vulnerability to control by a third party.”: APPG, ‘Behind Closed Doors: Organised sexual exploitation in England and Wales’ (2018) *All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade* <<https://appgprostitution.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Behind-closed-doors-APPG-on-Prostitution.pdf>> p 6.

88 Michelle Ibanez, Rich Gazan, ‘Detecting sex trafficking circuits in the U.S. through analysis of online escort advertisements’ (August 2016) *ASON-AM ’16: Proceedings of the 2016 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining*, pps 892–895.

Example list of red flags

Below is a list of signals in online ads for sex services that might indicate exploitation or trafficking:⁸⁹

Inconsistent Ages	The advertised age changes within or across ads of the same provider across platforms.
Inconsistent Aliases	The advertised alias changes within or across ads of the same provider.
Frequent Movement	Language indicating recent or imminent movement; foreign phone number; same provider posting in different locations; “new in town”, “new girl”.
Third party involved/ managing	Shared phone/repeated phone number across multiple ads for different providers; one post advertising multiple providers; third person language used in ad; same wording/text used across multiple ads for different providers; same phone number being used across multiple ads; same grammar, spelling, punctuation or syntax errors across multiple ads featuring different women.
Ethnicity/Nationality referenced	Ethnicity known to be at higher-risk of being trafficked in that region (can also be determined through languages spoken); provision of services to clientele of a particular ethnicity or nationality; disparity in pricing between local and foreigners/particular ethnic groups.
Restricted Movement	In-call only; references to a handler; other restrictions; availability (advertised working hours) indicates long hours or few days off.
Unconventional Sex Advertised	Unprotected sex and/or broader range of services allowed (subjection); passive roles.
Physical attributes	Low weight of person advertised (<50kg); pubescent body OR surgical augmentation; tattoos/ branding on the neck and/or lower back.
Photo de-humanised/ suspicious	Face obscured or hidden; denigrating pose (photo of the back, on a bed); pixilation to remove context/visual clues of location; photos not well staged or edited (no marketing of a ‘character’).
Behaviour	Reviews by clients indicate that subject does not smile; low enthusiasm; mention of a handler; fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid, shows signs of substance use or addiction; lack of or difficulty in engaging in social interactions; dissociation; does not speak the local language.

⁸⁹ Based on mapping thus far, outside consultation and previous studies, including: Michelle Ibanez and Daniel D. Suthers, ‘Detection of Domestic Human Trafficking Indicators and Movement Trends Using Content Available on Open Internet Sources’ (2014) *47th Hawaii International Conference on System Science* p 1559; UNODC, ‘United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Human trafficking indicators’ (2012) <http://www.unodc.org/pdf/HT_indicators_E_LOWRES.pdf> p 2.; Kyle Hundman, Thamme Gowda, Mayank Kejriwal, Benedikt Boecking, ‘Always Lurking: Understanding and Mitigating Bias in Online Human Trafficking Detection’ (3 Dec 2017) *AAAI/ACM First conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society*, New Orleans, USA, February 2018.

3 Chapter

Analysis and Findings⁹⁰

All OSCE participating States are believed to have online markets for sexual services, although they may differ in size, format and norms. The below country studies are merely illustrative examples from around the OSCE region, and represent the initial findings of the mapping exercise. While these examples refer to specific country contexts, other countries and markets will likely share some of these characteristics. The OSCE is not providing the names of the specific countries researched, in order to avoid the possible erroneous interpretation that only these particular countries have online marketplaces which serve as a venue for possible exploitative practices. Instead, the OSCE intends to highlight that the existence of platforms facilitating possible exploitative sexual activity is a common feature in the majority of OSCE participating States.

Although the sites are globally accessible and their domains can be transferred to different jurisdictions, the 1000+ sites identified in this project are still highly localized in that they are specific to cities, markets and the individuals involved – an example of a ‘glocal’ phenomenon.⁹¹ Norms within each country’s marketplace can differ substantially, and yet are still going to be tied to the social norms, demand, and legal and political context of the region concerned. As a result of this, what looks like trafficking, and the mechanisms that will be required to detect it online, will vary country to country, and region to region.

The sites encountered thus far fit into the following categories: escort services catalogue/directory, escort agency, brothel, classifieds site, hobby board, booking app, site directory, dating site, social network, ‘sponsorship’/sugar daddy site.

The overall online market observed primarily consisted of women, however, larger and multi-national sites also had catalogues of men adver-

tising sexual services. Reports referenced during preliminary research included little observation of the market for male sex trafficking victims online; for example, any reference to the sex trafficking of boys usually involves reference to unstructured informal exchanges in public spaces (this does not include child sexual exploitation materials, for which there has been extensive study of the prevalence of male victims within identified exploitation materials). While this study includes some interim observations, further work needs to be undertaken to determine the level of risk of male and other trafficking victims in these online spaces, and whether indicators would be different for detecting these groups.

Contact and communication through social media was observed to be uncommon; the primary means of communication for booking appointments across all observed jurisdictions are private messaging applications. Email is rarely a preferred option but it is occasionally available, especially as a central point of contact for ‘agencies’ or brothels. If a market participant has a specialised website, occasionally contact can be made on the website itself, but this is less common.

Prices vary significantly across jurisdictions; while the prices for ‘elite’ advertisers are similarly expensive across the board, the more competitive section of the market - lower to middle-range prices - can vary drastically from market to market. For example, the equivalent of fifty euros will acquire intercourse in one country, and be insufficient for a massage in another. Knowing the general mean price of a standard set of services in a given market could be of interest to those investigating potential trafficking cases, since an advertisement offering services at a price outside of the norm (higher or lower) could be a red flag for further investigation.

⁹⁰ This publication, and especially this chapter, uses terms and definitions which are politically sensitive and with the use of which not all anti-trafficking stakeholders are in agreement. These terms are being reflected as used by websites analysed during the development of this publication and does not necessarily reflect OSCE position on the use of these terms and definitions.

⁹¹ In this way, online sites for sexual services fit the ‘glocal’ idea pioneered by Robertson: that neither the global nor local exist in isolation anymore, that only the hybrid ‘glocal’ remains, the sociological concept of the simultaneous presence in globalisation of both global ‘homogenising’ and local ‘particularising/heterogenising’ forces. See Roland Robertson, ‘Globalisation or Glocalisation?’ (1994) 1(1) *Journal of International Communication* 33–52.

The length of time that advertisers can be contracted for also varies significantly from hourly to days (up to 21 days in one instance). The majority of ads refer to services provided for short periods of time. The ads for longer periods like 7, 14 or 21 days are an exception. There are different perspectives on whether advertisements that provide the possibility to contract services for 7 days or more could be an indicator of human trafficking. From one point of view persons contracted to provide sexual services for longer periods are potentially restricted in their movement, under control of buyers and could be forced to carry out acts against their will. From another point of view, it might not be in traffickers' interest to lose control over the victims for longer periods of time, as they could attempt to escape or report their exploitative situation to third parties. In these cases, advertisements that provide the possibility to contract services for 7 days or more should be thoroughly analysed by law enforcement taking into account other risk indicators that could help to validate potential exploitation.

Multinational websites

Multinational sites that cover many markets were frequently encountered. These have a number of shared characteristics, and fit into two main categories: firstly, multinational sites (like Eurogirlsesort) which have a single host and then pages for each country, and, secondly, affiliated groups of sites under (apparent) single ownership but with different hosts for each country, such as classified sites Locanto and Vivastreet.

In some countries these multinational brands will host the largest concentrated market for advertisements. There is also evidence - through cross advertising - of local affiliate sites with more specialised offerings. Similar formatting is used across the board, with some sites appearing to be straight duplicates of others. A common theme is a diversification of offerings: some sites will pair advertisements with live sex cams and chats, pre-recorded videos, whilst others also link with sex buyer forums/hobby boards and reviews of advertisers. Blogs are also a common feature but offer little original insight. They are usually generic and likely contain plagiarised content on the benefits of solicitation, 'how to book a date with an escort', how to dress for a 'date', sex tips for men, and other filler content.

'Verification' is a mechanism used by larger sites to ostensibly provide greater assurance to consumers that the advertisements feature real people and accurate photographs. How thorough this verification process is seems to vary site-to-site, with some apparently asking for official identification. Whether this verification process also screens out minors is not clear, but there are few guarantees that the process is trust-worthy: there have been observed cases of verified profiles being 'swapped out' by the controller of the profile who changes the pictures to different women.⁹² The OSR/CTHB also received reports from national authorities of verified profiles being sold on some social media platforms.

The sites charge advertisers to promote their profiles as VIP or 'featured', while others (apparently with prior experience in pornography) can be labelled 'Pornstar'; others on "tours" are sometimes featured in a separate 'Visiting' or 'Tour' category. The remaining categories are typically "escorts" (female), "male", "transgender", and "pairs" (often male/female, or female/female). Depending on the market, sites often also distinguish between independents and agency-based profiles.

It does not appear to be common practice to advertise exclusively on one of these platforms. Rather advertisements for the same provider can be found across multiple international sites. Discussion boards indicate that levels of activity on the sites can peak and trough frequently, and both customers and advertisers have to be flexible and mobile across the major platforms.

Country profiles

The following countries are merely indicative of different markets across the OSCE and are presented here as illustrative examples; evidence and research indicate that all OSCE participating States have similar online markets. Therefore, policymakers and law enforcement in each participating State aiming to combat trafficking in human beings are urged to explore and map the online landscape of high-risk websites in their countries.

⁹² Andrea Di Nicola, Gabriele Baratto, Elisa Martini, 'Surf and Sound: The role of the Internet in people smuggling and human trafficking' (2017) *eCrime - Università degli Studi di Trento* <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2_WDgmdB2wNSEpCOHFJaWFtelk/view> p 90.

Western Europe

Country A

Twenty-nine websites advertising sexual services in Country A have been identified during the research. Country A's market bears a number of similarities to Country B's market for the most part, however some key differences exist. Higher-end sites can be contrasted with a multitude of low-end, cheaper sites. Perhaps because solicitation and pimping are not permitted under Country A law, 'kisses' or 'roses' are sometimes used in place of euros to indicate prices (i.e. '200 roses an hour'). Prices are seemingly only advertised at the higher end of the market, usually among advertisers with professional photoshoots, more expensive-presenting websites; these providers will pitch at minimum 200 to 300 euros an hour, escalating from there. Otherwise, the price is revealed or negotiated via phone call. Some providers refuse to text, accepting only calls, while others utilise private messaging applications in addition to phone calls. Other means of communication have not been observed.

There is a second online space for 'libertines', people placing online profiles to meet up with strangers for sex acts, sometimes in public or under specific conditions. These profiles appear to be mostly distinct from those advertising paid sex acts, however, there is an observed level of crossover between these spaces, including for "plan cul" (sexual relationship without further emotional attachment) which do not explicitly set prices or terms but are highly likely to be paid arrangements. A Country A hobby board indicated that these plan cul sites and dating sites were partially replacing overt escort sites due to law enforcement crackdowns on a particular website and other prominent escort directories for aggravated pimping. Scams are evidently a recurring issue in the market, with reports of scams involving pre-payment or vouchers across different platforms, with some sites also proactively warning users to be alert to potential fake profiles and scammers.

Country B

Twenty six websites advertising sexual services in Country B have been identified and analysed during the research. Moreover, a 'group' of 1293 sex services sites are run under one umbrella. This entity also publishes a magazine and runs a video and webcam site. Not all 1293 sites were analysed during the research due to capacity constraints. The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that there is a large market online for sex services in Country B. Prostitution is le-

gal, but not government regulated. The sites all run similar mechanisms for searching their catalogues, usually initially dividing by city, and then under physical characteristics. Those advertising online charge (usually) from 200 EUR and up for an hour, with deals for longer appointments and overnight stays. Only 2 sites of the 26 studied mentioned in-call or out-call services. While there are some profiles advertising ethnicity as 'Latin' and non-European, the marketplace is predominately white European, with a Baltic/Eastern European minority. This does not reflect the commonly-reported ethnicities susceptible to trafficking in Country B (Nigerian, Chinese etc).

Advertised people typically appear in 'professional', staged photoshoots, usually with their face observable. While some participants in the market might not have the budget for these, there is still usually a higher level of presentation/salesmanship than in other markets.

Country C

Twenty six websites advertising sexual services in Country C have been identified during the research. Country C is a very large market: although the number of sexual services websites is relatively small, the number of advertisements is very large compared to other countries as the market is extremely concentrated. A number of prominent sites have links with sites in other countries in Europe and South-East Asia; multinational sites with a strong Country C presence will usually also have a strong presence in a specific Western European country, or appear to be linked with that country's operations. The online market is comparably diverse to other European markets. Asian women account for a large portion of the market, as well as categories such as "black", "Latino", "white" and "Eastern European women".

The legality of prostitution varies throughout Country C. In some regions, prostitution is legal, but related activities, like operating a brothel, are illegal. Other regions have their own laws. In one particular region, all forms of prostitution are legal. In another region prostitution is decriminalized, but purchasing sexual services is illegal.

On the sites dedicated to sex services advertisements, a majority of the women are advertised in agency 'brothels'. Photoshoots and written profiles appear to be organized by the agencies and not the women themselves, and language patterns emerge. Independent advertisers are a comparative rarity on escort directories. Observed terms used for higher-priced capital city-based escorts include 'full-service party girl'. On

the other hand, the classifieds sites are a large market in Country C, especially for independents who may not be affiliated with the agencies. These advertise cheaper sex services as well as profiles for casual hook-ups (without mention of consideration).

Northern Europe

Country D

Eighty-five websites advertising sexual services in Country D have been identified during the research. The Country D market is comprised of non-discrete advertising for brothels, escort services, and in-home sexual services. Apart from advertisements for physical establishments, such as brothels, those advertising “independent” activities offered to “arrange a meeting at your place” to provide a more “comfortable and relaxed” experience to the buyer. Some advertisers are based in Country D, but the majority (68 percent) are outside of the country. Many of these websites act as “aggregators” providing links to related services from other sites. There is evidence from Google Analytics that multiple websites are in fact operated by only a few administrators. Most of the websites analyzed offer services in English, however, other languages include Bulgarian, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian and Portuguese.

In Country D, prostitution is legal, and the state does not regulate the industry. Websites in Country D offer the services of individuals advertised as “women”, “men”, “transgender women” and “bisexual boys and girls” as selections for buyers. These websites claim to source “escorts” from both rural and urban areas of Country D. Many offer services in the capital city and also offer to connect buyers in other cities by sending “girls” from the capital city to them. The websites advertise to foreign customers visiting the capital city and to locals travelling between cities within Country D. The websites also cater to buyers’ stated wishes (e.g., a companion for a business dinner, a public date, or explicitly stating services such as “hard sex” offered in a hotel room). A limited number of websites contain search filters for users to sort by “Appearance”, “Nationality”, and “Ethnicity” where presumably some of the women come from abroad.

Advertisements in Country D cater toward buyers of multiple income levels, however, tend to target business travelers with features of “luxury companions providing escort services”, catering to their preferences of person (e.g., individuals advertised as “man”, “woman”, “transgender

woman”, etc.). The majority (53 percent), however, advertise women only. Only 3 of 87 websites mention in-call or out-call services. The average cost advertised is 150 EUR per hour with hourly rates ranging from 40 EUR to 500 EUR.

Potential indicators of human trafficking were observed. For example, an escort agency offers the services of a person for a period of seven days, although as previously explained this requires additional investigation. Websites that are hosted outside of Country D mostly publish pictures of the escorts, with approximately 50 percent of them hiding faces, making them difficult to identify. Local websites mainly publish poorer quality photographs that do not allow for identification of facial features, which makes it difficult to identify those featured in the depictions.

Country E

Eighty-one websites advertising sexual services in Country E have been identified during the research. Under Country E law, prostitution is both legal and regulated. The market in Country E is made up of 80 percent escort services catalogues or directories. The other 20 percent of resources include classifieds sites, escort agencies, and hobby boards. Of the 81 websites identified, 71 percent were international, and 29 percent were local. The targeted audiences include tourists and locals. Some websites mention people traveling to Country E specifically, while others are more general. Most websites were written in English. Many were also translated into Russian and the national language, sometimes alongside multiple other languages on international sites. Sixteen identified websites were administered from 3 Google Analytics accounts, which may indicate a network of interlinked websites.

Search filters for “Appearance,” “Nationality,” and “Ethnicity,” where one can find women of different ethnicities who may have come from abroad, appeared on 11 percent of the observed websites. The most common categories found were “Asian”, “Black”, “European (white)”, “Indian”, and “Latin”. Hourly rates started at 30 to 60 EUR. 500 EUR was the highest rate observed for VIP services. Of the 81 sites observed, only 3 mentioned in-call or out-call services. One mentioned hotel visits as the only option for location. Twitter, WhatsApp, and Viber are the most commonly mentioned contact methods.

Potential indicators for human trafficking were observed across the websites. Some sites, specifically advertise “travel girls,” indicating the girls are likely moving around often. An escort agen-

cy offers the services of a woman for a period of seven days, whereas another escort's site offers the services of a woman for a period of 14 days. These long-term services need to be analysed together with other risk indicators which could validate the exploitative angle. The international websites mostly publish professional photos while local resources tend to publish amateur photos of the models. In both cases, roughly 40 percent of images obscure or hide the faces of models. These red flags identified across multiple websites provide a strong indication of potential trafficking in the market and should be investigated further.

Southern / South-Eastern Europe

Country F

Fifteen websites advertising sexual services in Country F were identified during the research. Country F market is predominantly found on multinational websites. Prostitution is illegal under Country F law. There is a large prevalence of foreign women advertised, including many Russian or Ukrainian women, and rarely local persons. Listed countries of nationality also include Germany, Mexico, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkiye, Latvian, the U.S., Serbia, Japan, Australia and the Philippines. Advertisements featuring men, though significantly fewer, are included on both Country F's local and multinational websites. Although research was conducted in the national language, most websites advertise in English, indicating a foreign audience. Based on a close observation of multinational websites, the advertisements of those websites did not appear to be connected to local agencies or brothels; the market is generally organized around individual people in prostitution.

Although prostitution is criminalized in the country, it is not difficult to find escort or prostitution services online. The geographical coverage is generally limited to the main cities, with the exception of an website, which has the highest number of ads and widest territorial coverage. Unlike other sites, this site has a notably poorer organization and offers a huge number of people in prostitution across all districts of Country F. A few sites offered country-wide or worldwide travel of advertised women, but most advertised local services. Prices are similar across the local and multinational sites. Average prices ranged from 100 to 250 EUR an hour. Although male ads are rare, male services observed were cheaper than women, at 300 or 400 EUR for a full day compared to 1200 or 1500 EUR a day for a woman. A third of the websites listed in-call, outcall, or video as

options. Only a few websites featured well-advertised contact methods. Of the ones that did, most were able to be contacted from WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Twitter, Facebook or Skype.

Multiple red flags which may indicate possible human trafficking were observed across the websites. Foreign phone numbers in advertisements were observed on most of the websites. In some cases, the same phone number is used as contact information for different women. This may indicate that women are managed by someone and do not have the ability to select their clients or working hours or negotiate the prices. Very rarely the use of an Country F phone number is observed in ads for women on multinational websites. By contrast, ads for male escorts do not always provide contact numbers and include fewer or no working hours. Four reviews of clients of a Japanese prostitute indicate that she is moved within the region to offer sexual services. There is no information provided about who is organizing transportation, unlike some sites where an extra charge for transportation is required. In addition, one site, offers "virginity auctions" for club members only. Several visibly young girls were observed on this page. More information is only available if one is a club member. Other advertisements on this site include arranged marriage. These two indicators suggest possible exploitation of vulnerable boys or girls.

Country G

Sixteen websites advertising sexual services in Country G were identified during the research. The market in Country G mainly caters to tourists. All sites advertise in English, with a few also listing in local languages. The schedules provided by most sites show availability as '24/7', potentially also an indicator of exploitation, with a few exceptions advertising shorter hours of operation. Based on a single visit, there were 168 ads with most located in the capital city. Unlike other countries, most of Country G websites do not give details on the nationalities of the people advertised, but when they list nationalities, local prevail.

Since prostitution is legal in Country G, but solicitation, procurement and enticement of prostitution constitute criminal acts, some websites feature statements of non-solicitation and user sign-ins to protect themselves from prosecution. Most websites contain no limitations on age or warnings on provisions of domestic legislation. The websites presents themselves merely as a host exempted from prosecution for soliciting or procuring sexual services.

Most of the websites display two categories - 'independent' and 'agency escorts'. Independent escorts prevail over agencies. All websites observed offered individuals advertised as "female" and "transgender escorts", while men's ads are limited. Places where services are offered range from private apartments to 5-star hotels. Almost all the websites list in-call and out-call services, and a few offer travel. Prices range mostly between 60 USD to 100 USD an hour, with one site listing VIP services starting at 500 USD an hour. Only some sites list contact information, usually email or phone. One phone number listed was French.

Several potential indicators of exploitation were identified among the sites, such as the young appearance of women advertised, prolonged working hours, and persons travelling within the region and beyond. Many photos did not include faces or had blurred out faces. One female was found advertised on multiple sites with a foreign phone number listed.

Country H

Ten websites advertising sexual services in Country H have been identified during the research. Prostitution is legal in state-licensed brothels and illegal elsewhere. There are three main online marketplaces in Country H, which occasionally intersect: 'escort catalogues', 'escort agencies', and sites advertising the site-specific services and schedules of 'studios' (a form of brothel) or massage salons providing sex services.

'Escort agencies' are not location-specific, but have a cohort of women who are advertised on their own sites and also across larger platforms, (the remainder are 'independent' women, unaffiliated with either an agency or studio). Agencies typically conduct their own photoshoots and write the profiles of the catalogue of (typically) women; it is unknown whether the women advertised have personal agency over the images or words used to advertise them online.

Europe-wide and multi-national sites such as *Eurogirlsestort*, *TopEscortsClub* and *TopEscortBabes* have sub-sites for Country H, with over 1000 advertisements on each (there is a high potential that listings are replicated across sites). These all have similar mechanisms for searching their catalogues, usually initially dividing by city, and then under physical characteristics. These appear to be unaffiliated with the brothels/studio system, as there is no cross-advertising between websites, and the advertised prices are sometimes lower. Unlike some other markets, in-call

services on these sites are more expensive; this is likely because the women have to pay a fee for the room (per use) unlike those with fee-sharing agreements with brothels (typically, half the take).

Studios operate typically in 'chains' of 4-5 brothels, with the same catalogue of women across the different locations. Each website corresponds with the brothel's real-life street address. It is not clear what the distinction is between a studio, a brothel, and massage parlour, and these are all advertising in the same manner. A 2017 study recorded 798 brothels operating in the capital city (only a few legally); at the time it cost an average of 17 EUR for a client to hire a prostituted person in a brothel, a 56 percent decrease from 2012 prices, with some offering 10 EUR for 10 minutes.

The women's profiles on each site also include their individual schedules, including links to other brothels at which they will be available that week. Some studios also feature all the medical examination certificates of the advertised women, which are reportedly updated every 15/20 days. Other than this exception, the sites provide very little information about the women. There apparently is a 'rarity' of Country H nationals according to one hobby board – the most prominent demographics appear to be Russian-speaking and Latin American.

While there are clear smaller networks of studios, the similarity of the sites (these are near-identical) indicates that either the parties are all utilising a common template, or (more likely) a large portion of the market is coordinated by a single organisation.

In other countries' markets, perhaps given high competition in the higher-end market place, advertised people typically appear in 'professional', staged photoshoots, usually with their face observable. However, in Country H almost all faces are obscured and photoshoots are conducted ad hoc inside the brothel. This style of marketing relies on the women being anonymous interchangeable stock, rather than distinct individuals. This is consistent with the brothel-model of business: customers typically will come to the studio and select based on whoever is available at the time, rather than a specific woman. In other online markets, these types of pictures – faceless, low budget - could potentially be indicators of trafficking, however, this style is the norm in this market.

Country I

Forty-four websites advertising sexual services in Country I were identified during the research.

Prostitution is illegal in Country I. The virtual market is made up of mostly international websites that allow users to sort results based on the name of the country in which they are seeking services. Most websites act as escort services catalogues or directories, with only a few classifieds sites, dating sites or hobby boards. A few websites advertise specifically to business travellers visiting Country I. Most sites contain listings in English, with Russian being the second most common language used.

Search filters for “Appearance,” “Nationality,” and “Ethnicity” appeared on 5% of websites observed. The majority of advertisements were for women. Hourly rates for male models start at 40 EUR and 50 EUR for female models. Prices between 500 and 800 EUR per hour are a characteristic of the “VIP escorts” services advertised. Only two sites surveyed mention in-call or out-call services. Most sites included contact information through WhatsApp, Telegram, or Viber.

Potential indicators of human trafficking were observed across the websites. Amongst both professional and low-quality photos, faces of advertised persons are hidden. Three sites advertise “travel girls” or the ability for them to travel to clients. Another three sites highlight “long time” services.

Eastern Europe

Country J

Four hundred and thirty websites advertising sexual services in Country J were identified during the research. While prostitution is illegal in Country J, the online market is very diverse and caters to a variety of buyers. From classifieds sites with low-cost advertisements for ‘cheap whores’ to ‘exclusive escort’ agencies with participants being ‘run’ by either pimps or ‘agencies’, the sophistication of marketing varies with a price range that is also broad.

The majority of websites are categorized as ‘escort services’, with 70 percent of sites advertising services exclusively within the country. Eighteen percent of sites have search filters by “Appearance”, “Nationality”, “Ethnicity”, where one can find women of different ethnicities who may have come from abroad. The majority of the market is advertised under the categories of “Russian”, “Asian” or “black women”. Services are mostly provided in the largest cities, administrative centers and spa towns. Three percent of websites mention in-call or out-call services. The hourly rates vary mostly within the range of 17 EUR –

22 EUR, especially in the regions. Premium hourly rates would go as high as 450 – 900 EUR. Twenty-two percent of sites provide WhatsApp for contact, 13% have Viber listed, and 11% provide Telegram and the rest are phone numbers.

Most pictures are made professionally, showing the advertised persons at various angles against the props intentionally arranged in the background. Blurred faces are extremely rare. Amateur, poor quality pictures with blurred faces mostly abound on sites categorized as “classifieds site”, a “dating site” or a “hobby board”.

There is also a market of ‘mistresses and sponsors’, which are set up like dating sites but specifically are angled to connect young women with older ‘successful’ men; these are then called ‘kept women’, and the arrangement is known as ‘sponsorship’. The norm appears to involve a monthly stipend for the woman, with dates (with the understanding of sexual intercourse) at an agreed-upon frequency, each at an additional charge, and the requested amount paid varies wildly. In other markets, these are known as ‘sugar daddy’ arrangements, or an extended ‘GFE’ (girlfriend experience).

Culturally, this might be a normalised arrangement between parties in differing socio-economic circumstances, considered distinct from the rest of the sex services industry. Sites pitch a ‘sponsor’ as the way to a ‘beautiful life’, and then questionnaires shown on the girls’ profiles indicate if the arrangement would include sex on the ‘first date’. The arrangement does not appear to fit well with a trafficking situation: the level of interpersonal contact beyond just sexual relations and the trade of money for emotional as well as physical investment from the women does not quite fit well with common understanding of how trafficking victims interact with customers. It is however a possibility that this forum could be used for connecting trafficking victims with clients under less consensual conditions than publicly advertised. More research would be required, ideally involving survivors who had been advertised online in this market.

Country K

Sixty-five websites advertising sexual services in Country K have been identified during the research. The market features predominately multi-national websites with specific pages for Country K. Only 8 percent of sites solely focus on advertisements in Country K. Some sites target tourists and business travellers specifically. Most websites are written in Russian and English. Others

are also translated into German, French, Italian, and other languages, likely because 92 percent of sites are internationally focused. Prostitution is an administrative offense in Country K. The most frequently listed nationalities and categories include “Russian”, “Asian”, “Ukrainian”, “European”, and “Black”. Four websites found were administered by the same Google Analytics account, indicating there may be a network of interlinked websites.

Of the Country K-specific sites, the city for which services are advertised is typically listed in the website URL, allowing users to target individual cities via separate sites. Larger multinational sites also feature city listings. Ninety-five percent of the websites observed are aggregators of advertising messages like escort services catalogues/directories, classifieds sites, hobby boards, and dating sites. Twelve percent of websites have search filters by “Appearance”, “Nationality”, and “Ethnicity”, where one can find women of specific ethnicity who may have come from abroad. Most sites (86 percent) advertise escort services. Professional and amateur pictures of the models appear at the same rate across sites. The most common hourly rate started at 50 USD, and the highest rate was 300 USD. Only one website advertised in-call services.

Potential indicators for human trafficking were observed across the websites. One site, for example, advertises the services of a girl for a period of 14 days, which is substantially longer than most sites. As noted above, these cases should be thoroughly analysed by law enforcement taking into account the existence of other risk indicators that could validate the exploitative angle. Another site advertises the services of women for “a few days.” On both professional and amateur photographs, faces of the models were hidden. Some sites advertise the services of “travel girls” indicating frequent movement across the country. The red flags spotted should indicate further investigation is necessary to determine if trafficking is being facilitated through these websites.

South Caucasus

Country L

Thirty-seven websites advertising sexual services in Country L have been identified during the research. The Country L market predominantly features multinational websites with specific pages for services provided in Country L (95 percent),

while only 5 percent of sites are local. In Country L, prostitution is an administrative offense, but purchasing sexual services is not a crime. Promoting prostitution is a crime under national law. Over 92 percent of the market in Country L is for escort services. The majority of those advertised were individuals advertised as “women” followed by “men” and “transgender persons”. Only three percent of sites offer search filters by “Appearance”, “Nationality”, and “Ethnicity” where one can find persons of specific ethnicity who may have come from abroad. Only 2 sites out of 38 mention in-call or outcall⁹³ services.

Five websites were administered by the same Google Analytics account, indicating there may be a network of interlinked websites. Many advertisements, however, feature amateur, poor-quality pictures where one is simply unable to make out the advertised person’s face, which may be indicative of a disorganized nature of services provided in the location where the women reside.

Local sites advertise services for 20-30 EUR per hour, clearly targeting a local clientele. International sites typically charge an hourly rate of 100 EUR, and can be as high 700 EUR. On these sites, based on the prices, the clientele is likely expected to be foreigners. The services are mostly provided in the capital city. Many sites feature links to inquire about services on social media sites. The most common referenced are WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, and Twitter.

Country M

Thirty-three websites advertising sexual services in Country M were identified during the research. In Country M, prostitution is an administrative offense and operating a brothel is a criminal offense. The observed online market in Country M is primarily aimed at tourists, and meetings are located in the capital city. While there might be a more local market targeted at locals, this is hidden and likely using local/code terms to avoid detection by those outside of the scene (and authorities). Russian language sites are also available in English, and frequently refer to the customer’s stay in capital city and other terms indicating a transient clientele. Forums for people in prostitution indicate that there is a small marketplace in capital city small marketplace; they are instead going elsewhere, including neighbouring and non-neighbouring countries, to find clients. Dating sites are also used to find potential clients.

⁹³ Incall - a visit by a client to a person involved in prostitution. Outcall - a visit (by a person involved in prostitution) to a customer to perform a service

Perhaps due to the small marketplace, and the transience of clients coming to the capital city as tourists, local sites often include the ‘tours’ of people in prostitution, and profiles include the dates on which the advertised person is in a particular city/country: an observed common tour includes the capital city, the capital city of a neighbouring country, cities within a non-neighbouring country and cities in another neighbouring country. These tours are a predictable part of the commercial sex industry in this region, however transience and frequent movement can also be an instance of potential human trafficking.

Central Asia

Country N

Sixty-nine websites advertising sexual services in Country N were identified during the research. Prostitution is legal in Country N’s, but unregulated. The majority of sites in Country N market are specific to the country and fewer are multinational. The websites associated with Country N are unique in that they feature ads related to Country N next to ads for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. The sites in Country N are mostly written in Russian, with additional languages, like English, provided in a few cases. In terms of ethnicity, the people advertised are mostly locals and “European” type (self-identified). There are also mentions of Russian and Ukrainian nationality. Most (70 percent) are advertised as individuals; half of the individuals are advertised solo and the other half as part of salons. Sex parlours and salons do not have specific websites and instead place profiles on dating sites or on other websites advertising adult services. Country N has a distinctive feature of its own: some websites have a certain private messaging application bots to promote automated ordering of and payment for services.

In addition to sites focused on advertisements, profiles of sexual service providers can also be found on some dating sites. The prices observed were usually quoted in local currency, US Dollars, Euro or Russian Rubles. The minimum quoted price is 23 EUR per hour.

Potential indicators of human trafficking were observed across the websites. On the sites that host profiles of service providers, there may be 5-10 women advertised offering services with the same phone number for a parlour listed. If there are any pictures in profiles, the models’ faces are usually blurred, painted over, or turned away. Profiles like these usually charge less for the services. Based on the observed sites, the lower the price shown in the profile, the more diverse services listed that the person would provide.

Country O

Sixty-five websites advertising sexual services in Country O were identified during the research. Prostitution is illegal in Country O, and the market seems to largely target locals and regional tourists. The websites observed feature ads almost entirely in Russian. Ads often declare the languages spoken by the advertised persons, usually the local language and Russian and sometimes Turkish. Services are mostly located in the three most populated cities in the country. The most frequently featured categories highlighted were European, nationals, and another specific Central Asian ethnicity. The age of adults shown ranged from 18 to 42, although some images featured younger looking individuals. Some websites added a symbol to photos that are real images of the person advertised. No websites used local domains. Most sites were multinational and used foreign domains.

Prostitution is the main category of services offered, followed by massages. Some platforms advertise adult services under the guise of erotic massage. Only 6 out of 65 websites referenced a physical location to meet operated by an outside party, like a salon, club, or massage parlour. Most ads were for individuals, with a few mentioning two people available.

Potential indicators of human trafficking were observed across the websites. In some pictures, persons being advertised appear to have traces of bruising, which may indicate coercion into prostitution. One site advertised an abnormally low price for services.

4 Chapter

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the scale of the online market for sexual services that has been analyzed through this project, as well as the frequent correlation with trafficking in human beings, it is recommended that law enforcement shift to a more proactive approach when monitoring websites with high risks of THB in order to identify instances of exploitation. At the same time, it appears there is a need for policymakers to design market-based interventions at policy and operational levels in order to ensure that online platforms are not misused for trafficking purposes. The need for constant monitoring and pro-active investigation has long been the recommended approach to identifying trafficking cases⁹⁴: the crime of human trafficking is a process, not an isolated event⁹⁵ and thus investigations may look different to other crimes such as assault or murder. This crime is perpetrated by a plethora of actors, from individuals, to family groups to multinational organised crime groups, and as discussed earlier, this can impact how the crime manifests and can be detected.⁹⁶

The first step is for relevant institutions, especially law enforcement and policymakers, to be cognisant of the existence, and extent, of online markets. This can be accomplished by implementing the following recommendations:

Law enforcement:

- i. Explore and map at a basic level the online market within the jurisdiction with input from survivors to inform the local context and search criteria;
- ii. Investigate THB cases online, adapting online indicators based on this casework;
- iii. Supplement pure casework with more pro-active interventions at operational levels through investigation and prosecution of platforms which are knowingly facilitating human trafficking;

Policymakers:

- iv. Provide capacity building for law enforcement to undertake online investigations and gather admissible evidence from online sources;
- v. Ensure co-operation/collaboration across departments to ensure that cybercrime resources and expertise are being put toward CTHB investigations;
- vi. Ensure co-operation/collaboration across jurisdictions – most observed cases have involved cross-jurisdictional actors and websites;
- vii. Create standards for data collection of information from online platforms with high risks of trafficking and ensure the ability to share data across agencies and regions;
- viii. Find mechanisms under national laws, or adopt provisions as needed to effectively incentivise legitimate platforms to assume an active role in combating the use of their sites to facilitate trafficking;
- ix. Establish a mechanism to prosecute platforms, and their owners, for failing to prevent trafficking and exploitation on their site;
- x. Incentivize more pro-active, market-based interventions through the development of policies and legislation which would require online platforms to operate taking into account certain online safety standards.

Further recommendations for policy-makers were compiled in the ICAT ‘Human Trafficking And Technology: Trends, Challenges And Opportunities’ 2019 issue brief⁹⁷ and the OSCE Report “Policy responses to technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings: Analysis of current approaches and considerations for moving forward”.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, ‘Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking’ (October 2017) *HMICFRS* <www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/stolen-freedom-the-policing-response-to-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking.pdf> p 13.

⁹⁵ Kevin Bales, *Understanding global slavery* (University of California Press, 2005) in Marcel van der Watt & Amanda van der Westhuizen, ‘(Re)configuring the criminal justice response to human trafficking: a complex-systems perspective’ (2017) 18(3) *Police Practice and Research* 218, 219.

⁹⁶ Marcel van der Watt & Amanda van der Westhuizen, ‘(Re)configuring the criminal justice response to human trafficking: a complex-systems perspective’ (2017) 18(3) *Police Practice and Research* 218, 219.

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