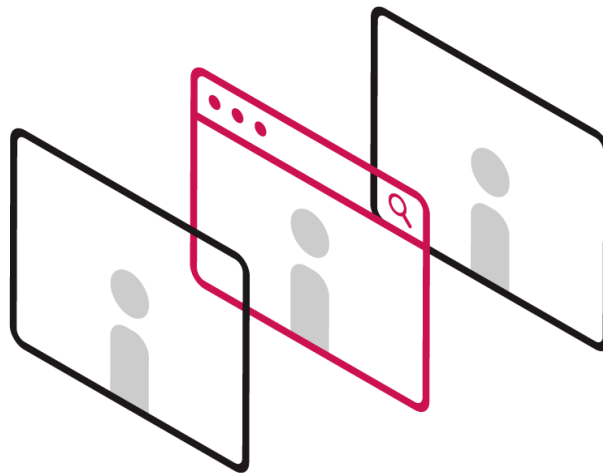


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Improving and sharing knowledge on the Internet role in the processes of human trafficking and smuggling

ISEC 2013 Action Grants (HOME\2013\ISEC\AG\THB) \ 24 months (02.11.2014 - 01.11.2016)



surf and sound

National Report – Bulgaria



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European Commission - Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs



BULGARIAN-SWISS COOPERATION PROGRAMME
БЪЛГАРО-ШВЕЙЦАРСКА ПРОГРАМА ЗА СЪТРУДНИЧЕСТВО

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Abbreviation list

CSD	Center for the Study of Democracy
EU	European Union
LEA	Law-enforcement agency
NCCTHB	National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
NGO	Non-government organisation
SHB	Smuggling in human beings
THB	Trafficking in human beings
VOIP	Voice over Internet Protocol
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Introduction

The rapid development of information technology and the expansive use of Internet in everyday life are inevitably linked to some considerable security risks and the increasing potential for particular criminal violations. More specifically, researchers have warned of the role which different websites and various social networks could play in facilitating the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings (THB).¹ Countries which fall in the category of a source for victims provide a fertile ground for offenders to use chat rooms and advertisements to recruit women into trafficking situations.² More recent research has revealed that Bulgaria and Romania are among those Member States topping the list of countries of origin for victims of trafficking in the European Union.³ In the timeframe between 2004 and 2015, the number of Bulgarian citizens who have been trafficked to Western Europe ranges between 3000 and 4500 people. Nevertheless, this figure does not correspond to the number of actual victims, because it only refers to registered cases of trafficking. Differing estimations indicate that the number of victims who have reported to the relevant state institutions varies between 8 % and 10 % of all persons who have been subjected to that particular crime.⁴ Moreover, in the last years, a negative trend is observed of a decrease in the total number of the pre-trial proceedings on THB cases: with a quarter between 2013 and 2015. The number of minor and under-aged has dropped significantly faster: with a half in the same period. Simultaneously, the share of female victims increased from 88 per cent in 2013 to 93 per cent in 2014 and 2015.

Table 1. Number of THB victims who took part in pre-trial proceedings in a given year

		Adults	Minors and under-aged	Total
2013	Male	46	18	64
	Female	427	49	476
	Subtotal	473	67	540
2014	Male	17	14	31
	Female	433	31	464
	Subtotal	450	45	495
2015	Male	23	5	28
	Female	353	28	381
	Subtotal	376	33	409
2013-2015	Total	1299	145	1444

Source: Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office – Reports on the Application of the Law and the Activities of the Prosecutor's Office and the Investigation Bodies in 2013, 2014 and 2015

¹ Dixon, H.B. (2013) Human Trafficking and the Internet* (*and Other Technologies, too).

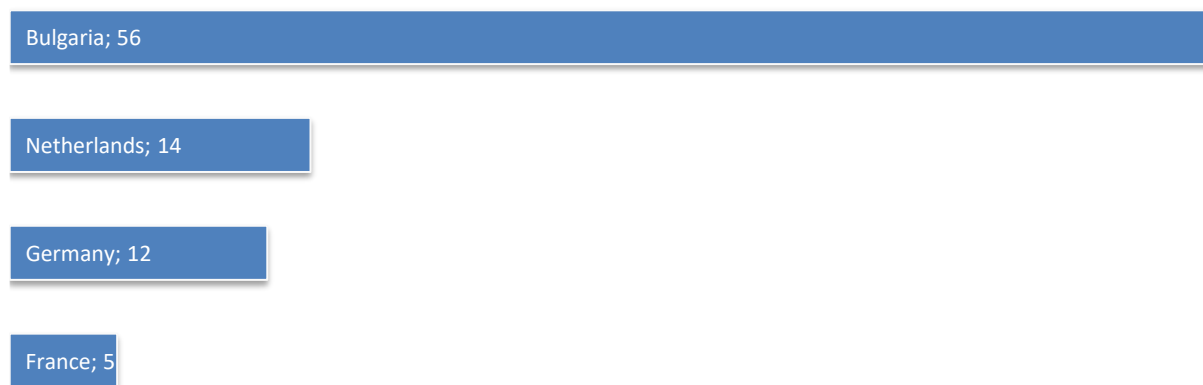
² Vienna Forum to fight Human Trafficking (2008) Background Paper – Workshop 017: Technology and Human Trafficking. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/BP017TechnologyandHumanTrafficking.pdf>

³ Eurostat (2015) *Trafficking in Human Beings*, p. 34. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eurostat_report_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_-_2015_edition.pdf

⁴ CSD (2007) *Organized Crime in Bulgaria: Markets and Trends*. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=9120>

The key destination countries for trafficked Bulgarians include EU Member States from Western and Southern Europe – Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Austria, France, Cyprus, Poland, Italy and the Czech Republic.⁵ However, more than a half of Bulgarian victims were trafficked internally, in their own country, and nearly a third of them were trafficked to top 3 destination countries: Netherlands, Germany and France.⁶

Figure 1. Top destination countries for Bulgarian THB victims (per cent of victims registered in EU countries between 2010 and-2012)



Source: Eurostat (2015) *Trafficking in Human Beings*

In the majority of cases of THB in the EU between 2010 and 2012, the suspected offenders were EU citizens (69 per cent of the suspected persons); and among them Bulgarian and Romanian citizens keep the greatest shares of 21 and 20 per cent respectively.⁷ However, the population of Romania in this period was more than twice bigger than the Bulgarian population; that means substantially higher incidence rate of suspected traffickers from Bulgaria.

The legal framework in Bulgaria differentiates between various types of exploitation which enables researchers and other relevant stakeholders to gather differentiated data. The most common criminal violation of this kind in the country is the trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁸ The share of registered persons trafficked who were subjected to sexual exploitation slightly increased between 2013 and 2015, from 80 to 83 per cent, and over 95 % of them were women and girls.

However, according organisations working with and informally identifying THB victims, the share of persons suffered trafficking for labour exploitation increased in the last years and currently is

⁵ Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking In Human Beings –(GRETA) (2016) Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Bulgaria. Second Evaluation Round, p. 4. <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680630d6c>

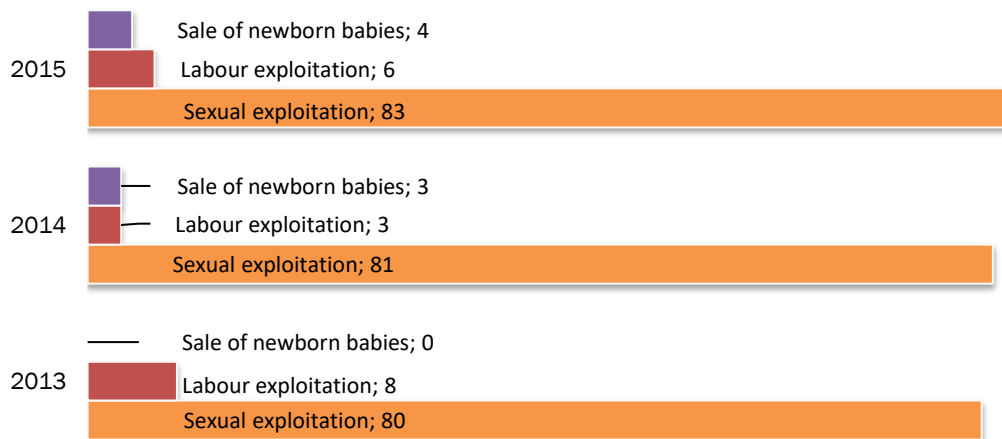
⁶ Eurostat (2015) *Trafficking in Human Beings*, p.35 https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eurostat_report_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_-_2015_edition.pdf

⁷ Eurostat (2015) *Trafficking in Human Beings*, pp. 47-48. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eurostat_report_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_-_2015_edition.pdf

⁸ National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTB) (2016) *Annual Report 2016 for the Activity of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Counteraction against Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Victims in Bulgaria*, pp. 8-9. <http://antitrafficking.government.bg/>

practically equal to those of THB victims of sexual exploitation.⁹ Their assessments reveal systematic challenges for the authorities to identify and support victims of labour trafficking.

Figure 2. Bulgarian THB victims by type of exploitation and year (per cent of registered victims)



Source: NCCTHB (2016) *Annual Report 2016 for the Activity of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTB) and the Counteraction against Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Victims in Bulgaria*

Having identified this criminal phenomenon as the main purpose for trafficking, it is crucial to review the legal status of prostitution, because sex workers are particularly vulnerable to become victims. According to Bulgaria’s Criminal Code, providing sexual services for material gain is not criminalised, but all other related activities are considered as illegal - pimping, running brothels, providing premises for lewd acts.¹⁰ Nevertheless, sex workers are often forced to pay fines for having earned their revenue in an illegal or immoral manner or for not possessing identification documents.¹¹ Moreover, persons involved in prostitution reveal that they have been racketeered by police officers to pay bribes, and refusals led to repeated 24-hour arrests. These arrests prevented the victims to earn money for the pimps and as a result, they have been exposed to additional physical torture and maltreatment.¹² Thus, although prostitution is not considered as a criminal offence, those selling their sexual services in Bulgaria are often treated as offenders and not as victims of crime.

Similarly to other EU member states, Bulgaria’s economy and society have benefited considerably from the revolution in information and communication technology and the fast Internet speed in the country.

⁹ NCCTHB (2016) *Annual Report 2016 for the Activity of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Counteraction against Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Victims in Bulgaria*, p. 9. <http://antitrafficking.government.bg>

¹⁰ Bezlov, T., M. Yordanova and N. Stoyanova. *Exploring links between corruption and trafficking of women: the case of Bulgaria*. Sofia: CSD, 2016. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17928>

¹¹ Dobрева, N. (2013) *Protecting the Rights of Trafficked Persons in Bulgaria: A Human Rights Based Approach*. <http://www.animusassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Promotion-of-the-rights-of-the-trafficked-persons-in-Bulgaria.pdf>

¹² Interview with a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation, July 14, 2015

However, these developments also lead to growing security risks of various kinds – including to a facilitated process of trafficking in human beings. Given that this particular criminal violation requires high levels of coordination in the course of the initial planning, recruiting, transporting and collecting of the victims in the destination country, the use of new technologies and the Internet allows the offenders involved to ease the communication between them and avoid police attention.¹³ As a result, the extensive use of Internet, social networks and modern technologies have made trafficking in persons an easier criminal offence to commit.¹⁴ In the context of Bulgaria, its status of a source country means that Internet is most commonly used as a tool for recruitment and advertisement of the services offered by victims of trafficking. While in the majority of the cases the end goal of the traffickers is to supply the demand for sexual exploitation, there have also been various instances of trafficking for labour exploitation – predominantly in agriculture, construction and hospitality industries.¹⁵

In the light of the growing scale of the issue of trafficking, the Bulgarian authorities have made several important steps to improve the relevant legislation. Back in 2002 the Criminal Code was amended to adopt new texts categorising both national and trans-border trafficking in human beings as a separate offence.¹⁶ In addition to elaborating and later enforcing new legislative proposals and criminal regulations, Bulgaria has also focused on developing specific measures to improve the protection mechanisms for victims of trafficking.¹⁷ Considerable institutional progress has also been achieved with the establishment of a new special body to counter THB – the National Commission for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (NCCTHB). Its mission is to engage in the prevention of human trafficking and to provide efficient protection, assistance and reintegration for victims of the phenomenon.¹⁸ Furthermore, since 2005, annual National Plans for combatting human trafficking are adopted which are based on the relevant programmes elaborated by the NCCTHB.¹⁹

¹³ Vienna Forum to fight Human Trafficking (2008) Background Paper – Workshop 017: Technology and Human Trafficking. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/BPO17TechnologyandHumanTrafficking.pdf>

¹⁴ Council of Europe (2002) Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation. https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/group_of_specialists_on_the_impact_of_the_use_of_new_information_technologies_1.pdf

¹⁵ La Strada International (2016) European Network Against Trafficking in Human Beings. <http://lastradainternational.org/Is-offices/bulgaria>

¹⁶ Bezlov, T., M. Yordanova and N. Stoyanova. *Exploring links between corruption and trafficking of women: the case of Bulgaria*. Sofia: CSD, 2016.. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17928>

¹⁷ Bezlov, T., M. Yordanova and N. Stoyanova. *Exploring links between corruption and trafficking of women: the case of Bulgaria*. Sofia: CSD, 2016. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17928>

¹⁸ Ilareva, V. (2014) Severe Forms of Labour Exploitation Supporting Victims of Severe Forms of Labour Exploitation in Having Access to Justice in EU Member States. Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/severe-labour-exploitation-country_bg.pdf

¹⁹ NCCTHB - National Programmes for Combating Traffic in Human Beings and Victims Protection 2005-2016. <http://antitraffic.government.bg>

The project

Project “www.surfandsound.eu. Improving and sharing knowledge on the Internet role in the human trafficking process” (hereinafter also referred to as “www.surfandsound.eu” or “Surf and Sound”) is coordinated by the eCrime research group of the Faculty of Law of the University of Trento (Italy), in cooperation with the Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and the Teesside University (United Kingdom). The project is co-financed by the European Commission (EU contribution: € 305.707,10; Total income: € 339.757,10) within the ISEC 2013 “Prevention and Fight against Crime – Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)” programme of the Directorate-General Home Affairs (HOME/2013/ISEC/AG/THB).

Project www.surfandsound.eu refers to priorities 4 and 5 of the targeted “Call for proposal”, which foster the “prevention of trafficking in human beings, in particular through education programmes and targeted training for officials”, requesting “research into, and development of tools to prevent and address different forms of trafficking in human beings” with a focus “on the use of internet and social networks for recruitment of all forms of trafficking in human beings”.

In this context, the Project addresses the following EU needs about the use of Internet in the process of trafficking in human beings (THB):

1. More knowledge on the use of Internet in the THB process, e.g. how it facilitates recruitment, communications, guarantees anonymity, accelerates victims’ exchange, favours the match between demand/supply for the services provided by victims;
2. Developing tools and methods to investigate/prosecute the abuse of the Internet as a medium to facilitate the THB process;
3. Spreading knowledge with Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and other key actors/agencies in the fight against THB (e.g. citizens, employers), in order to develop more effective preventative/contrast strategies to reduce the demand/supply of services provided by victims.

The Project aims to improve the knowledge on the use of Internet (including social networks) in the THB process in four key EU member states (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom) and spread such a knowledge through workshops for LEAs and NGOs and dissemination activities. The following specific objectives have been identified:

1. To explore visible/dark Web to draft a research protocol about the use of Internet in the THB process in 2 origin/transit (i.e. BG and RO) and 2 destination countries (i.e. IT and UK), by identifying potential at risk Web contents and/or other abuses of the Internet (e.g. use of chats, VOIP) in the THB process;
2. To use the research protocol to collect and organize a significant number of information from the Web;
3. To understand the use of Internet in the THB process by analysing collected data, in order to: a) draft guidelines to identify potential at risk Web contents and other abuses of the Internet (e.g. use of chats, VOIP) in the THB process and to develop awareness raising

campaigns in order to reduce THB victimisation via Internet and alert Internet users; b) spread the knowledge and guidelines via workshops for LEAs/NGOs involved in the prevention and fight against THB and dissemination activities.

In light of the Special meeting of the European Council of 23 April 2015 on smuggling of migrants, European Union considers as a priority "use EUROPOL to detect and request removal of internet content used by traffickers to attract migrants and refugees, in accordance with national constitutions". To this aim, the project Surf and Sound will address this need by broadening the aim of the research to the phenomenon of smuggling of migrants and asylum seekers, with reference to the recruitment/transportation phase of the trafficking process.

The project activities distributed by work packages were as follows:

Table 2. Project activities within Work Package 1: Exploring the use of Internet in the THB process to draft a protocol for further Web contents collection

Activity	Objective	Results/products
1.1 Exploration of the Web	Exploration of both visible and dark Web by native-speaking researchers from both origin/transit (i.e. BG and RO) and destination countries (i.e. IT and UK) through qualitative techniques and virtual ethnography, to get information on the links and contents of Websites, Web-forums, social networks, use of online chats, VOIP, etc. employed in the THB process	Knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the THB process The information gathered will be employed to create a research protocol for further collection of Web contents (see activity 1.5)
1.2 Administration of in-depth interviews	Administration of in-depth interviews to key actors in human trafficking (e.g. traffickers, victims, LEAs, NGOs) for each key MSs (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK), in order to obtain primary data on the use of Internet in the THB process and to fine tune qualitative techniques/virtual ethnography	Knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the THB process The information gathered will be employed to create a research protocol for further collection of Web contents (see activity 1.5)
1.3 Elaboration and administration of a Web-survey	Elaboration and administration of a Web-survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating Websites, Web-forums. In specific, information could be requested about visited at risk Websites and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on human trafficking-related actions	Online questionnaire (BG/EN/IT/RO)
1.4 Design of the Project- Website	Design of a dedicated Website to collect information (i.e. Web-survey; see activities 1.3 and 2.2) and disseminate the findings of the Project (see activity 3.5)	Project-Website (EN)
1.5 Draft of a research protocol	Drafting a research protocol backed upon the information collected in activities 1.1-1.3 to collect further Web contents to be used by researchers (see workpackage 2)	Research protocol (EN)

Table 3. Project activities within Work Package 2: Collection of a significant number of Web contents and their organisation

Activity	Objective	Results/products
2.1 Collection of further Web contents	Use of the research protocol (see activity 1.5; deliverable 1.1) to investigate visible/dark Internet in order to collect a significant number of at risk Web contents and/or information on other possible abuses of the Internet in the THB process from Websites, Web-forums, social networks, chat, VOIP, etc. of both origin/transit and destination countries (i.e BG, IT, RO, UK) thanks to native-speaking researchers	Deeper knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the THB process The information retrieved from Web content analysis (activity 2.1) and from the Web-survey (activity 2.2) will improve the knowledge on the use of internet in the THB process. Nonetheless, this knowledge can lead to the creation of novel studies to support future works/analysis
2.2 Implementation of the Web-survey	On the basis on of the results of WP1, the online questionnaire will be revised.	Revised online questionnaire (BG/EN/IT/RO)
2.3 Design and deploy of an electronic database	Organisation of the collected Web contents and/or information on other possible abuses of the Internet in the THB process from Websites, Web-forums, social networks, chat, VOIP, etc. (see workpackage 1; activities 2.1, 2.2). Design and deploy of an electronic database in which the above-mentioned data will be stored so as to systematise both textual information and Web metadata.	Electronic database (EN)

Table 4. Project activities within Work Package 3: Data analysis and dissemination of the results

Activity	Objective	Results/products
3.1 Data analysis	Conduct analysis of the data included into the electronic database (see activity 2.3; deliverable 2.2), i.e. potential at risk Web contents and/or information on other possible abuses of the Internet (e.g use of chats, VOIP) in the THB process, in order to identify and understand the dynamics of the recruitment/transport of victims and the advertising of services by victims of trafficking via the Internet	Improved knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the THB process. The information retrieved from WP1 and WP2 will improve knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the THB process (e.g. better preventative/investigation skills for LEAs and NGOs; deeper knowledge for other key institutions; higher awareness for Internet users, citizens, employers). Nonetheless, this knowledge can lead to the creation of novel studies to support future analyses/research
3.2 Draft national research reports	Draft 4 national research reports (in BG, EN, IT, RO) containing: 1) the results of data analysis (see activity 3.1) on the use of Internet in the recruitment/transport of victims and the advertising of services by victims of trafficking for each key MS (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK); 2) guidelines a) for LEAs to identify potential at risk Web contents and/or information on other possible abuses of the Internet (e.g use of chats, VOIP) in the THB process, and b) for NGOs to develop awareness raising campaigns in order to reduce THB victimisation via Internet and alert Internet users	National research reports (BG/EN/IT/RO)
3.3 Workshops for LEAs and NGOs	Organisation of workshops, held at National level in each key MS (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK), on the use of Internet in the THB process (see activities 3.1; 3.2) for LEAs and NGOs involved in the prevention and fight against THB	Workshops for LEAs and NGOs
3.4 Draft final EU research report	Draft a final research report (in EN) containing: 1) the results of data analysis (see activity 3.1; 3.2) on the use of Internet in the recruitment/transport of victims and the advertising of services by victims of trafficking for each key MS (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK); 2) guidelines for a) LEAs to identify potential at risk Web contents and other possible abuses of the Internet (e.g use of chats, VOIP) in the THB process; b) NGOs to develop awareness raising campaigns in order to reduce THB victimisation via Internet and alert Internet users	Final EU research report (EN)
3.5 Dissemination	Dissemination of the findings of the Project through the final conference in Trento dedicated to LEAs, NGOs, other agencies (e.g. local institutions) and actors (e.g. citizens, employers), presentations at relevant international and national conferences, and dedicated Website	Final conference in Trento Presentation at relevant international and national conferences Final Project- Website (EN)

Methodology

The current report represents the main results of a web-based research on the use of Internet in the course of trafficking of human beings and in-depth interviews conducted with key groups of informants.

The web-based research was based mainly on a comprehensive sample of offers for women and girls to become sex workers for escort agencies abroad. In addition, the research has also focused on instances of recruitment offers for cheap labour abroad. Contents potentially referring to smuggling of illegal migrants and asylum seekers were searched as well, but not found.

The search method included elaboration of list of keywords and list of websites specific for each country (incl. social networks and Google) where the search by key words to be implemented. The keywords were translated into national languages and in Bulgaria the search was done in Bulgarian. It encompassed the recruitment and transportation phases of THB and SHB processes.

The following types of websites were searched:

1. Social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
 2. Marriage agencies websites
 3. Escorts' websites
 4. Dating websites
 5. Job offering websites for activities, such as:
 - Home assistance
 - Waitress/bartender
 - Au Pair/Care
 - Modelling/Entertainment (e.g. dancer, hostess)
 - Construction/factories/agriculture
 - Educational courses
 - Matrimonial offers
 - Tourism
 - Work in the sex market
 6. Advertising websites
 7. Travel agency websites
 8. Porn websites and forums
 9. Streaming websites
-

Most of the job advertisements – both for sexual services and cheap labour – were dubious and unclear in content and were thus considered as risk web links. While direct evidence for trafficking could not be obtained from this research process alone, it contributes to the enhanced identification of online sites which potentially facilitate the recruitment and transportation of victims of THB, and serve as effective communication channels between traffickers.

The in-depth interviews aimed at preliminary exploration of the use of Internet in the two processes: trafficking of human beings, and smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants. They included four groups of respondents:

- Traffickers/smugglers (3 respondents),
- Victims of trafficking/illegal migrants/asylum seekers (5 respondents),
- Representatives of law enforcement agencies (4 respondents), and
- Representatives of NGOs working in the field of THB (3 respondents).

During the interviews, each interviewer followed the definition of THB as per *Article 2 of the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims*; and definition of smuggling of migrants/asylum seekers as per *EU Commission Fact Sheet on Smuggling of Migrants of 13 January 2015 and article 3 of the Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 2000*.

The interviews in Bulgaria were focused predominantly on the recruitment and transportation phases, but also paid attention to the exploitation phase of the THB process, as far as the recruitment, the internal and the external trafficking are closely connected. The questions were customised according the type and background of the specific groups of respondents, their experiences and professional capacities. They encompassed topics as:

- Recruitment methods used in general;
- Transportation methods used in general;
- Methods of advertising victims' services and methods for matching demand and supply;
- The role of Internet and mobile applications among all methods used;
- Specific Internet and mobile modalities and options used for each phase – recruitment, transportation, advertising, and running THB and SHB "businesses" in general;
- Possible use of deep web.

The fieldwork period encompassed 10 months, between June 2015 and March 2016.

Executive summary

This concise report is based on a deep exploration of the Bulgarian web and in-depth interviews with key informants. It provides a specific focus on the use of Internet in the recruitment, transportation and advertisement of services in the processes of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of human beings (THB and SHB). Analysed are the life and the professional experiences of the key informants interviewed, as well as online contents predominantly with job advertisements for sex workers and cheap labour abroad. After outlining a more general country profile for Bulgaria's experience with and legislation combatting the process of trafficking in human beings, the report has identified common trends in the tactical approach to online recruitment and the potential risks of trafficking related to it. The disproportionately larger focus on the virtual search for Bulgarians to offer their sexual services abroad (and potentially to become victims of trafficking and exploitation) is necessitated by the much greater frequency of criminal cases of trafficking related to sexual exploitation compared to the instances of trafficking for labour exploitation. In a nutshell, this report and the research it is based on are aimed at improving the knowledge of the use of Internet in the trafficking of human beings process, and more specifically – on the tactics for recruiting victims.

The recruitment process in the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation is estimated as Internet assisted in greater and greater extent. Some of the respondents among traffickers, victims and NGO representatives are inclined to say that majority of cases are Internet-assisted yet, while other victims and NGO representatives, as well as the LEAs representatives, tend to estimate the share of Internet recruitments up to half of the cases.

Regardless the share of Internet-related recruitments, all respondents commented this issue are unanimous that the recruitment process could not be implemented entirely through Internet. The interviewees describe several types of situations where Internet might be used:

- When the victims tried on their own to earn from prostitution and used profiles in dating sites and Facebook, the initial contact with traffickers is made there in private chats; then transferred in Skype, mobile applications like WhatsApp and Viber, or conventional phone conversations, where personal meetings and prices are arranged; and then these personal meetings are used by the traffickers as a "test" of the "qualities" of the victims representing thereby the third phase of the recruitment;

When the victims have not been engaged nor considered to engage in prostitution, traffickers could:

- Spot them at public places; then ask acquaintances about their Facebook profile; make a contact there and after that play the "lover boy" role;
- Search at Facebook and dating sites for girls with "suitable" profiles and play "lover boy" as well;
- Use real or false job sites to attract potential victims misleading them regarding the nature of the job.

The recruitment through Internet for labour exploitation is estimated by majority of respondents as far less probable than recruitment for sexual exploitation, due to the characteristics of the majority of potential victims (low-educated, Roma, from small settlements), characteristics of the majority of the jobs (low-skilled labour in construction and agriculture), as well as the well-established existing mechanisms (through relatives, acquaintances, neighbours, etc.). Nevertheless, the usage of Internet in the process of recruitment for labour exploitation, is practically proved with the interviews with victim and trafficker and are admitted in principle by LEAs representatives and one of the NGO representatives. Like the recruitment for sexual exploitation, Internet is estimated as just one of the phases of the recruitment, followed by phone conversations, personal meetings, etc. Used are legitimate job sites, as well as sites especially customised to attract victims, and Facebook profiles of the companies created by traffickers.

Regarding the recruitment of refugees and illegal migrants to be smuggled through Bulgarian territory, it seems that smugglers could hardly be defined as the more active agents in this process. Both sides – migrants and smugglers, use internet, and Facebook specifically, to make an announcement that they offer/seek transfer through Bulgaria: by creation of groups, pages, statuses, etc. The connections made by the smugglers offline with representatives of different Arab Diasporas are already known by potential migrants; and they use Internet for preliminary contacts with persons in Bulgaria who might help them to search smuggler "services". According the LEAs representative with the biggest professional experience with smuggling cases, however, recruitment for smuggling is done entirely offline in the countries of origin; and the local smugglers in the transition countries like Bulgaria just work as a "subcontractors" of smugglers based in Turkey.

Almost all respondents stated that Internet is irrelevant to the transportation phases of smuggling and trafficking. Only one LEA representative supposed that sites like Trivago and Booking.com might be used by the smugglers, without having any evidence supporting this hypothesis.

Internet is also estimated as irrelevant to the advertisement of services of the victims of labour exploitation, again only one respondent (NGO representative) supposed without evidence this principal possibility.

In terms of trafficking for sexual exploitation, Internet could be used for advertising, but only in specific types of prostitution connected with specific skills and characters of the victims:

- In the case of victims with high educational level, especially in mastering foreign languages, for online or in-home "services", through dating sites; social media profiles (especially Facebook ones) and mobile applications as Skype, Viber and WhatsApp ;
- In case of victims with required physical appearance, for exploitation through porn websites.

As a general observation, Internet is used as far as it provides anonymity and security/ inability to prove criminal act. As far as a risk is created for traffickers and smugglers, Internet communication is transferred offline, to the more traditional means as phone conversations and personal meetings.

Results

The results of the exploration of the web has gathered examples predominantly from job offering websites, social networks, marriage agencies' websites and escorts' websites, due to the more significant incidence and accessibility of potential risky contents there. In the course of the research process about 190 cases have been identified as a potential risk for trafficking of human beings. The majority of the samples are related to recruitment for sex services abroad, but there is also a brief focus on recruitment and transport for cheap labour.

According to the majority of the interviewed key informants, Internet is largely used at recruitment and advertisement/exploitation phases, in a greater extent in trafficking compared to smuggling. The web exploration, however, encountered only potentially dangerous contents in respect of recruitment for the purposes of THB, and among them, the examples concerning sexual exploitation prevail. There are several types of reasons for the absence of smuggling-related contents in the web search:

- The search is implemented in Bulgarian, as envisaged by the methodology, while the smuggling-related contents are expected to appear in English and national languages of migrants, as Arab, Pashtu, etc.
- These contents might not include the key words envisaged in the methodology, as potential smuggling "services" are very cautiously advertised, if at all.
- The contents existed in the past might be deleted because of security reasons.
- Similar contents might be not publicly available but hidden in private online conversations.

The smuggling phases

The recruitment

The evidences gathered through in-depth interviews with smuggler, asylum seeker and LEAs representatives confirm the above considerations.

At the recruitment phase, smugglers use Internet but the interviewed person is not inclined to define it as a main recruitment mechanism. It is rather used to attract those who have not reached Bulgaria yet, through a dedicated webpage in Facebook. The page was written in English and aimed to attract people who have not crossed the Bulgarian border yet:

"Facebook used to help me as far as through my site the information could reach some migrants still before they come in Bulgaria, during their stay, for instance, in Turkey." (Smuggler)

The risks of using Facebook are fully realised by the interviewed person. He shared that the page was not publicly available and stood on the opinion that the manner of dissemination of the page gives some safety guarantees:

"Facebook allows you to communicate freely; however there is a risk in it, as you don't know who is in front of you. This page, though, is disseminated in the right way – through friends." (Smuggler)

Regarding those who already reside in Bulgaria, regardless their status (illegal or seeking protection or with refugee status), the methods of recruitment are not shared with the interviewer but is mentioned that they are "simpler" than Internet. This could mean that connections are made by phone and/ or through trusted people only; but in all cases reveals the usage of offline methods.

The interviewed immigrant involved in smuggling, generally confirmed the statements of the smuggler regarding the role of Internet. The person is a Syrian asylum seeker who had considered illegal arrival from Bulgaria to Germany, but changed his mind at the last moment. He evidenced that the process of finding of smugglers and all arrangements with them have been implemented entirely "offline": through persons with Syrian nationality residing in Bulgaria for longer periods:

"To accommodate, helped me one of my friends from Bulgaria. I did not understand Bulgarian, but with him I spoke the native language. He introduced me to some guys who spoke English, and I speak it well. We have not used the Internet - the connection was direct. I could turn to them on any matter." (Refugee)

However, the person admitted that before leaving Syria, he searched in Internet information about different EU countries, to choose where to go, and connected through Facebook with acquaintances that already lived in Bulgaria for years. Therefore, in the initial phase, Internet in

general and Facebook in particular still play very important role, although the immigrant persons and not the smugglers are the active side at this phase. Moreover, with or without using Internet, the national migrant Diasporas have very important functions, as informers and mediators with the local smugglers:

"The Internet helped me to see where I can emigrate ... In Bulgaria I have friends, Syrians who have been married for Bulgarians and settled well. I connected with them through Facebook, even before I came to your country." (Refugee)

The opinions of the LEAs representatives regarding the role of Internet in the recruitment process for SHB differ in some extent, but generally they confirm, enrich and explain the information received from the persons directly involved in the process.

One of the interviewed four LEAs representatives expressed the opinion that Internet facilitates the smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants, without giving approximate quantitative estimations regarding the share of cases in which Internet is used.

"Very much (is used), especially Facebook and Twitter. There are different sites created where there are many publications about the "beautiful" life in Europe and somewhere in lowercase talk about possible assistance. These pages are distributed carefully; it is sometimes difficult to understand that this is about." (LEA representative)

Regarding the recruitment for smuggling, another LEA representative is categorical that it is initiated by the potential migrants and asylum seekers and is done entirely in person.

"Refugees from Syria and Iraq, who want to go to Europe, connect with a local man who is known to be involved in smuggling. For example, Iraqis - 10 people, a father and all generations. They set a price of 8000 dollars per person to Germany. I wondered why, if you have 80 thousand dollars, you will want to emigrate? But how does it actually happen? The father and his brother mortgage the house they live in, but the brother who stays there, will sell it only when they get to Germany. They do not pay anything except food and sleep somewhere." (LEA representative)

The other two representatives of LEAs stated that they can't answer about the smuggling process, as it is not within their powers anymore after the change of legislation several years ago. However, they admitted that Facebook might be used:

"It is highly probable Facebook to be used here as well; but we could nothing state for sure." (LEA representative)

The usage of mobile applications is clearly described only by one of the respondents of this group, for the purposes of smuggling, and along with the traditional telephone conversations:

"Those refugees located in Bulgaria who wish to emigrate in Europe, publish on their wall desire to leave the country. They criticise our country for inhospitality. With them directly connect our traffickers, as on Facebook there are created groups... In the created groups on Facebook or Twitter go "smugglers" who then were in direct contact with those willing (to leave). From there, communication is transferred to the phone...

(The mobile apps) ease the direct communication. In addition, the smugglers frequently change the numbers that makes it harder to be caught." (LEA representative)

The same respondent was also the only one among the interviewees from all groups who gave chances, although minimal ones, deep web to have been used by Bulgarian smugglers:

"At least I have not had occasion with usage of deep networks. As far as I know from colleagues, they are used rarely". (LEA representative)

And the explanation why deep web is rarely used, if at all, is that "the job" could be easily and safely done through traditional Internet means, or offline.

Among NGO representatives, only one of the commented on the recruitment process in cases of smuggling. However, she admitted that her knowledge of the smuggling is entirely based on publications in the media. According her statements, it is pretty easy to find a smuggler through Internet, in specialised forums written in Arab language. Like the interviewed refugee, she confirmed the participation of persons from old Arab Diasporas in Bulgaria in this process:

"If you open Internet, yesterday there was a publication about a Syrian who has lived in Bulgaria for 20 years." (NGO representative)

It should be noted here that in general, NGO representatives relatively less frequently in comparison with LEAs representatives get known details regarding the exact ways in which immigrants and asylum seekers had come to the country. Their role is exclusively humanitarian and their primary aim is to help and support vulnerable migrants. In addition, those migrants who would like to receive support are not always interested in revealing the actual facts of their journey to Bulgaria.

The transportation

In the case of smuggling, the mobile applications might be used by migrants to arrange the details with the smuggler; but having in mind the illegal character of their crossing of the border, traditional phone calls are more feasible, according the opinion of the interviewed smuggler:

"I've not been interested in how they would reach Bulgaria. I've left a phone number for them to connect with me in order to know when they would arrive... When the connection is made and the approximate day of their arrival is known we wait for them near the border, I'm not saying where exactly." (Smuggler)

The interviewed asylum seeker, himself, has not used Internet or mobile application for his travel to Bulgaria.

The statements of LEAs representatives regarding the role of Internet in transportation/ entering in other countries of refugees and illegal migrants again differ. According one of the respondents from this group, Internet facilitates this process; but as far as it facilitates the connection between the smugglers and their "clients" (e.g., the recruitment process). The other two LEAs representatives refused to give definite answers on the topic out of their powers; however, one of them supposed that transportation means might be used through sites like Trivago and Booking.com. With the same reasons, respondents did not comment on the possible use of deep web for advertising and transportation purposes. And the fourth respondent, like the interviewed smuggler, suggested that mobile applications might be used, but gathering of evidence is not possible:

"It is possible the major organisers to use mobile applications between them, because they know that there is no way to be controlled. They keep conversations in Kurdish and Arabic, which further hinders the investigation. Payment by customers occurs in countries of origin and in Turkey with the money in cash, no bank accounts and transactions." (LEA representative)

And the only one NGO representative who commented the use of Internet in the smuggling process, stated that it facilitates transportation, as far as facilitates the initial connection with the smuggler (the recruitment).

The THB phases

The recruitment

Unlike the process of smuggling, where Internet is used only in the part of cases but could exhaust the whole process of recruitment, in the process of trafficking both for sex and labour exploitation, online contacts represent only the first phase of the recruitment. It is followed by offline meetings in person aimed at further selection of "candidates":

"I arrange a meeting with the girl and we preliminary agreed the payment. But another man goes for me to estimate whether she fits. When the things are done, I usually appear as well with direct "job" offer." (Sex trafficker)

"Once they have transferred the first charge we call them for direct meeting in the office or on the spot - that is our man goes into their town for a meeting. If from a city 20 people called a general meeting is made to advertise the job." (Labour trafficker)

Sexual exploitation

According to the interviewed sex trafficker, does not only Internet has replaced the old outdated methods, but also facilitates in a great extent the process of recruitment of potential victims and speeds it up significantly:

"It is the main mean for recruitment of girls, helps me a lot. It's not necessary to persuade the girl, she wants herself... Years ago I have used the old methods as well: I liked a girl, sent a boy to court her – I used to choose pretty ones from poor families – overwhelmed her with gifts and then she "worked" them back." (Sex trafficker)

Also, the new Internet-facilitated methods seem quite widespread, at least among the circle of "colleagues" of the interviewee:

"All who engage in it, which I do, use the Internet and mobile applications." (Sex trafficker)

According to the interviewed person, now he recruits exclusively girls who independently engage in prostitution, and for this reason checks the dating sites where they could be frequently met:

"We regularly follow the dating sites (Elmaz, Twoo, Gepime, etc.)... I most frequently seek girls in Elmaz and Facebook... I play it a man who needs companion and try to be cautious, but they disclose their selves alone that they seek sex for payment." (Sex trafficker)

Although Facebook is largely used, it is perceived as a bit harder way for recruitment in comparison with the dating sites:

"But in Facebook the girls who offered themselves are more cautious. I judge whether they are fit and whether I can count on income from them. I'm careful not to be minors, there are many." (Sex trafficker)

The interviewed person shared that the girls recruited from the mentioned sites are used for exploitation and trafficking within the country, while the girls for international trafficking are recruited through Tinder, because those who have registered there speak at least two European languages, and the profits they bring, respectively, are double in comparison with profits made in the home country.

Regardless whether Facebook or dating sites are used, in all cases the communication is made through private chats, and then transferred to applications like Skype or Viber, or directly to mobile phones.

Unlike the general coincidence of information provided by the both sides in cases of smuggling and labour trafficking, the victims of sex trafficking represented more diverse picture than those presented by the trafficker. Only one of the three interviewed victims was recruited through Internet and estimated it as a main recruitment method:

"It all started with my registration in dating sites - Twoo, ELMAZ... The second month of my registration I met my current pimp. He introduced himself as a man seeking adventures. The photo that was placed on the site did not correspond to his true vision." (Victim – sex trafficking)

"Almost all more intelligent girls who are looking for income in this way use Internet. It's much easier, and so you have access to more people. I know at least 6 girls who do it that way. But some work for themselves." (Victim – sex trafficking)

The second victim was recruited through the "lover boy" method, and the third – through false information from friends regarding the nature of the work:

"I met a boy. He offered me a job. He told me what the job is, that a lot of money are made and I agreed because there was nothing to do, plus also I believed he is in love with me and we will do something together." (Victim – sex trafficking)

"They placed the ad like that - maids sought. However, not maids, but prostitutes sought." (Victim – sex trafficking)

The difference in recruitment could be connected with victims' socio-demographic status. The first victim is about 23-25 years old, with Bulgarian ethnic background, with secondary education completed and at least average knowledge of foreign languages. The second one is few years

older, has not completed secondary school (left it to arrive with the "boyfriend"), Roma. And the ethnicity of the third one could not be clearly defined, but she is about ten years older than the first two victims, with apparently lower educational level and expression skills. She has never used Internet nor mobile apps. However, usage of Internet as recruitment method could not be ethnic-defined. The Roma victim has evidenced internet recruitment of girls with Roma ethnicity:

"A man, whom I know - when I was pregnant I was with him - and he was busy with other girls, he was trying to take 2-3 girls and it worked. They obviously knew what type he is, they needed work or simply have been of that sort. Just the first week they were chatting on Facebook and next week they came to him to work. Knowing what it is about..." (Victim - sex trafficking)

The opinions of the LEAs representatives regarding the role of Internet in the recruitment process differ in some extent. One of the interviewed four representatives expressed the opinion that Internet facilitates the recruitment both in trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, as well as in smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants, without giving approximate quantitative estimations regarding the share of cases in which Internet is used.

"In a great extent, they allow free communication, which in definite cases facilitates the recruitment of victims of trafficking. It is hard to follow all cases because not one but many networks are used." (LEA representative)

According another LEA representative,

"Internet hardly has a role"

He explained that recruitment in the process of trafficking for sexual exploitation is usually done in person, through acquaintances. Victims are usually from small poor settlements and know in advance the nature of the "job".

The LEAs representatives estimate the share of recruitments through Internet for sex trafficking to approximately half of the cases, while the respective share for labour trafficking is perceived as much lower, or insignificant:

"Through Internet is about 50-60 per cent of the cases... For labour exploitation it is done without Internet, because predominantly Gypsies are recruited, for low-qualified labour." (LEA representative)

"Internet is used in less than 50 per cent of cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation and in much less in cases of trafficking for labour exploitation." (LEA representative)

Also, the interviewees from this group of respondents specify:

"In both types of traffic, the process of recruitment may not be performed only through the Internet." (LEA representative)

They explain that the initial contact between traffickers and victims might be done through Internet, but to complete the recruitment, a personal meeting is needed as well. In another type of recruitment described, Internet is the intermediary phase of the process:

"Also there is a scheme in which victims are first spotted in places where they go - at school, in malls, in bars and discos. Then the names of those spotted are asked from their acquaintances and their contacts are searched on Facebook." (LEA representative)

Regarding the question, what Internet options are used for recruitment, the LEAs representatives do not fully agree about the predominant model. One of them puts the stress on the circumstance whether it is internal or external trafficking:

"I will dare to say that dating sites are used mainly for recruiting of girls for "work" abroad." (LEA representative)

Another one outlined the Facebook as a main instrument:

"They create pages on Facebook that are closed groups, and they are added by the girls as a working place. The recruiter finds potential victims, he identifies them; and then he writes in a personal chat. Then they might also use Viber, WhatsApp and the like, but we cannot know that. Such opportunities exist in Twitter, and Google Books, but are not used for the purpose of trafficking; in Bulgaria the main social network is Facebook. Websites of dating agencies and for studying abroad are used, but very rarely." (LEA representative)

And the third respondent of this group stated that advertisements at different websites are the main Internet instrument for recruitment, but also gave a concrete example when the Facebook and Skype have been used as well.

All of the three interviewed NGO representatives estimated the role of Internet in the recruitment process for sex trafficking as increasing; but their assessments regarding its current role, as well as the mechanisms of involvement they described, differed substantially.

The representative according to whom the current role of Internet is already the major one described a mechanism very close to those described by the sex trafficker and the victim

recruited through Internet: that the primary target are girls who already try to use Internet to earn from prostitution.

"She has decided that she will earn money this way and he gives her ... He pays her and he shares, "I sleep with her, judge her how she is like and naturally I propose her (to work for me)..." (NGO representative)

She puts the stress on the existing dating sites for the primary connection that is further transferred to Skype or phone and followed by a personal meeting. According to her statements Facebook is also used, including for checking whether some person has registrations at dating sites. Regarding the type of victims who had not been engaged in prostitution (and the respondent stated they become smaller and smaller share of all), the traffickers infiltrate within school groups of girls and play "lover boys", e.g., the recruitment happens entirely offline.

The other two NGO representatives stated that, the primary recruitment method is still the "lover boy" and Internet just assists the traditional methods. They paid attention to victims who hadn't had the preliminary idea to prostitute.

"As a profile with regard to recruitment of victims most popular method is "Lover Boy", in which he wins the trust of the victim, builds a romantic relationship that ends with a proposal to go abroad and thus starts the exploitation. There are also other options - acquaintances, acquaintances of the victim, relatives abroad." (NGO representative)

According to one of the respondents-NGO representatives, both job ads and social media are used for recruitment, and equally for sex and labour exploitation:

"For recruitment, that through job sites is one of the most popular methods. They can have sites specifically for this purpose, and also are used forums and all those job advertisement. All these things are used a lot; social media are also used by methods that include - it is offered someone to become your friend and from there it starts. If done through Facebook, they send an invitation for friendship, establish a contact, win confidence and from there on begin - offer jobs at one point ... Applications like Skype, Instagram are also used." (NGO representative)

The same interviewee paid attention to Internet as a blackmail instrument for recruitment:

"If there is already an established intimate relationship through extortion for posting photos on the Internet; or people who engage in prostitution, but do not know they are photographed, or have a relation with the trafficker and then can be blackmailed, to be threatened with sending to relatives, friends, with spreading these personal photos or videos online." (NGO representative)

The third respondent from the group of NGO representatives was able to answer the questions about sexual exploitation only. According to her opinion the role of Internet in the recruitment process is rather indirect, consisting of creation of favourable environment for trafficking, and representing "sexualising" of girls and boys (making sex a thing of primary value):

"Porn sites and regular network - Twitter, Viber, mail, Facebook - are facilitating mechanism, especially for the sexualisation of girls. The fact that these people bring security; and are the only ones who tell the girls, especially girls that they are beautiful, that are nice and they have wonderful experiences with them. Parents do not say that ... Sex and sexualised behaviour as the only way to enter into relations with the other. These children are usually grown up in families of emotional, at least emotional isolation, and they do not know another way to get into relationships with other people." (NGO representative)

According the results from the exploration of the web that could not account the contents of the private chats, the most frequently encountered way to recruit women online for sexual exploitation in a foreign country is through job advertisements on websites specifically designed for that purpose. Among offers for various kinds of jobs, a lot of the online platforms outline a separate category for escorts (or in some cases for dating). The greater majority of such publications provide women with the chance to become sex workers in various EU- member states – the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Austria, Portugal, Denmark and Monaco – and in non-EU countries including Switzerland, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and New Zealand. While some of the advertisements also specify the actual city in which the applicants would have to operate, others do not; and a few of them do not even mention the country's name, but vaguely refer to travelling to and working in "exotic destinations". The locations in which the sex workers would be expected to offer their services also vary depending on the authors of the advertisements, but the more detailed of them point out at night and sauna clubs, bars, brothels, single rooms or apartments, luxury hotels, etc.

The contents gathered through the exploration of the web are identified as risky in terms of THB based on several criteria, when at least one or more of them are present.

The authors of the advertisements in question do not always reveal their actual identities or provide accurate contact details. Indeed, recruiting individuals online and trafficking them for sexual exploitation in other countries requires a certain level of anonymity which serves the potential offenders well, since it helps them avoid detection. The option to operate through the use of Internet allows the traffickers to convey publicly as much personal information as they wish to, in order to attract respondents to their offers. Some of the "advertisers" provide a first name and a surname, but there is no evidence to confirm whether these identities are fictive or not. The seemingly more legitimate job advertisements among those identified in the course of the research process also specify the name and the website of an agency or a hotel where the sex workers would be employed. *More often than not they would also leave a phone number, an email, a Skype address or a WhatsApp account*, for the candidate employees to be able to contact them. This leads us to another serious advantage of recruiting through the web – *at a very early stage of the process, the traffickers could guide the communication through a private*

channel, in order to avoid attracting the unwanted attention of third parties. In this way, it becomes particularly hard for any researchers, for the law-enforcement officials and for all other relevant stakeholders to gather enough evidence for actual trafficking and the more specific ways in which the online communication could set the stage for it. *Additional option for private contacts between the advertisers and their target group are the chat rooms or personal messages in the online platforms where the job offers have been published.*

The nature of the sample advertisements collected is also subjected to variations. **Most of them are designed in an unprofessional manner – with poor grammar and spelling, and a lack of clear details** regarding the actual offer. More than 95 % of the offers listed are in Bulgarian, but there are also several in English and even such which have apparently been translated in Bulgarian – most likely through the relevant Google services. The most dubious advertisements promise **unrealistically high revenues and do not set out any clear criteria for the type of candidates they are looking for** – all they require is for the candidate to email several personal photos. Other offers **do not state directly that they aim to employ sex workers**, but claim to focus on a job hunt for erotic dancers, waiters, masseurs and actors in front of a camera crew. A good deal of the publications are **allegedly authored by women** who claim to be sex workers themselves in a search for colleagues to join them and share their working premises and profit. The reasoning behind this tactical approach for online recruitment is the fact that it makes the candidates feel relatively more secure because they are targeted by women who could share useful experience and support them if needed.

The entire recruitment process itself bears some resemblance with the job market and the companies and individuals competing within it. The review of the samples of advertisements indicates that the majority of them **attempt to look as attractive and promising as possible** for potential candidates for sex workers abroad. Indeed, the latter have seemingly a great variety of options to choose from. Different escort agencies, night clubs, brothels and individual fellow sex workers compete to offer various advantages to those whose services they need. Besides the frequent high profits and financial benefits, the actors involved in the recruitment process also promise the candidates to enjoy:

- Full access to social and health security;
- Luxury working environment and high-profile clients;
- A legal license for operating as sex workers;
- Guaranteed safety and discretion;
- Cheap (or in some cases free) accommodation without other roommates;
- Food and a free means of transport from the source countries;
- Free language and massage courses;
- An option to have a conversation with a manager or a pimp before traveling;
- Flexible working time and a right of a paid annual leave or a trip to exotic destinations like Thailand.

In return, some of the offers appear to have quite strict and high standards for the profile of people they are aiming to employ – full CVs with at least one photo of the candidates' faces and bodies; satisfying level of English or another relevant foreign language; minimal previous (or in some cases even none) experience as sex workers; attractive physical appearance and full abstinence from alcohol or drugs; decent education, intelligence, responsible attitude and excellent communication skills; availability for an immediate transfer to the destination country;

and even a driving license. **Only a handful of the advertisements point out that the candidates must have taken their own and independent decision** to travel to a foreign country, in order to offer their sexual services. This serves as a yet another indicator that the researched web content could be related to the risks and facilitating the process of trafficking in human beings.

Some particular advertisements are quite vague and broad in terms of the candidate profile they are looking for. Several Austrian and Swiss brothels from the research dataset are on a job hunt for “students, ladies, women, girls, mothers and even transsexuals” in need of a lot of money and a high standard of living. In some cases, the applicants are simply able to secure those through an online or an email interview, or by forwarding a single photo of theirs which further facilitates and significantly speeds up the recruitment process. **Very often the advertisers publish the same offer on different platforms**, in order to increase their web reach and get to as many people as possible. In some cases, the recruiters insist that the applicants specify the name of the website or the social network group where they came across the offer, whereas in some cases the online design of the platform itself invites the respondents to mention this.

More often than not the advertisements define a particular age group of the sex workers they are aiming for. The bottom line is usually 18 years, but it cannot be ultimately verified that no minors have been recruited in the course of the process. The age limit is subjected to variations and could go up to 45 years but most commonly the escort agencies and the brothels seem unwilling to pay for the sex services of women above the age of 30-35. Another important element is the financial revenues and benefits promised to those who would potentially be employed as sex workers. Many of the samples indicate that the candidates would earn a percentage from the total profit, whereas in other cases they are promised a particular daily or a monthly income. The most dubious advertisements once again point at unrealistically high salaries of up to 10,000-20,000 CHF/EUR, including additional bonuses. Several of the Dutch escort agencies and nightclubs even announce that the earnings of their sex workers would “be relative to their physical attractiveness”. Furthermore, it is important to point out that some of them specify the length of the potential contract to be eventually signed by the employees – from three or six to nine or ten months, with an option to extend it if both parties are satisfied with the conditions. Also, many of the advertisers pledge that they would assist with the preparation of the documents necessary for the sex workers to sell their services legally, **but usually they do not mention if this process would involve any additional expenditure**. In regards to that particular aspect, it is important to distinguish between the legal statuses of prostitution in the destination countries where the sex workers are being transferred to.

One particularly interesting case study identified in the course of the research process provides a clearer picture of how the private online communication between the recruiter and the candidate employee develops. A user in a local forum claims to have created a fake profile which led to a private conversation with a trafficker to Germany, who offers a job as a sex worker. The communication itself goes through the channels of one of the dozens dating websites in Bulgaria which traffickers frequently use to recruit girls and to convince them to offer their sex services abroad. While the authenticity of the dialogue copied in the forum cannot be verified, some of the details deserve more particular attention, as the user claims that the registration status in a dating website allows its administrator to keep track of the contact details provided by the users and potentially to link them to traffickers or recruiters. The communication between the “fake” user and the trafficker itself confirms some of the details disclosed in the report thus far – the main effort of the advertiser is to earn the candidate’s trust and compare the lower levels of profit for sexual services in Bulgaria to the much higher revenues in Western Europe amounting to 500

EUR a day. In addition, he also promises to secure a free transport to the destination country, a job in an elite night club, and a safe return back to the source country if the conditions are deemed unsatisfying for the sex worker but only after the “initial investment” has been returned. It is also important to stress out that the recruiter outlines his personal links and family relationship to the pimp in Germany – his brother who is responsible for “running the business” there.

Labour exploitation

According to the interviewed labour trafficker, recruitment is always done through Internet. He shared a practice in which job sites and Facebook are different parts of one and the same method:

"Generally it is done in this way: an ad is published that people are sought for work in construction or agriculture. From there, people connect through the email, or the same ad is published in Facebook as well. My girls offer it to be liked and in this manner, more people have access to the ad." (Labour trafficker)

The most used job sites, according to the person, are *jobs.bg* and *rabota.bg*, as they are the most frequently visited ones.

The person trafficked for labour replied to an ad in one of the job sites mentioned by the labour trafficker: *jobs.bg*, and after talking with an official of the company looked at their Facebook profile as well. Also, he sent his CV by email. After that, Internet and mobile apps have not been used:

"Primary connection flowed over the phone. She told me that I can look at their page on Facebook to convince myself that everything is legal." (Victim – labour trafficking)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interviewed LEAs representatives were rather skeptical regarding the use of Internet in the recruitment phase of trafficking for labour exploitation. They expressed opinions that either Internet is not used at all, or is used in a limited share of cases. The main reason for this estimation is the most common socio-demographic background of the victims:

"In Bulgaria, most of those who go abroad to work are for low-skilled labour in agriculture and construction. Generally in the small settlements almost all know each other, so there Internet is not needed, even in sexual exploitation." (LEA representative)

One of the LEA representatives interviewed observed that the recruitment for labour abroad is most frequently done through ads, including ads in job websites. However, he expressed suspicion whether those cases represent trafficking or not; and stated that in the majority of cases he is acknowledged with, this is quite questionable:

"It is contestable if it is about trafficking. The discrepancy is not between the announced and the real terms; but between the real terms and the expectations of the people." (LEA representative)

Only one representative of NGO commented the use of Internet for recruitment for THB for labour exploitation. She expressed confidence that Internet is used for recruitment for labour exploitation and gave a specific example:

"There was a case recently in which a woman was introduced to American man through Internet, through dating site. The woman is Russian. She departed to the USA, got married and afterwards was subjected to exploitation: servitude and forced labour." (NGO representative)

According to the results from exploration of the web, albeit relatively more limited in scope, the recruitment and trafficking of people for labour exploitation is another similar criminal phenomenon where the use of Internet has played an important facilitating role. With the wide entry of information technologies in Bulgaria and the country's membership in the European Union, more and more Bulgarian citizens are looking for decent and well-paid employment opportunities abroad and the virtual world serves as one of the quickest and easiest means to that end.

The web content in Bulgaria is practically flooded with various advertisements for job positions available in other countries. Previous investigation in the field has identified several specific types of websites with risk content that could potentially lead to trafficking activities. Among them are job offering websites for activities, such as:

- Home assistance,
- Au pair/care,
- Waitresses/bartenders,
- Modelling/entertainment,
- Construction,
- Factories,
- Agriculture,
- Educational courses,
- Matrimonial offers,
- Tourism, etc.

Therefore, this research has tried to limit its focus predominantly to the kinds of websites listed and the job advertisements available on them. Similarly to the online recruitment for the

purposes of sexual exploitation, it is not feasible to identify instances of trafficking at such an early stage, but the samples collected exemplify relatively suspicious contents and methods of advertising.

Some of the most popular destination countries where Bulgarian people could pursue jobs through online platforms include the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Greece, Spain, Austria, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Cyprus, etc. In line with some of the aspects observed in the cases related to sexual exploitation, the advertisements included here also differ in their **quality, content, design and message**. Yet again the more dubious and controversial ones are poorly written, unclear, overpromising and too broad. Most commonly, they would be simultaneously targeting employees in more than one area without outlining any specific criteria for the profile of workers they are looking for. Such advertisements also do not necessarily specify a single country where those recruited would be transferred to, but vaguely mention that there are plenty of positions available in many EU Member States. The contact persons for these types of offers would usually not leave their full names, but only their Skype address and in some cases a telephone number. Also, there would rarely be any details regarding the potential recruiting agency or the company/individuals which would employ the candidates.

The conditions outlined in the different job advertisements are also subjected to variations and depend on the type of profession in question. For the purposes of this research it is important to note that the majority of the recruiters promise payments in advance (prior to the transfer abroad); health insurances and social security; salaries with an amount ranging between 800 and 1200 EUR; secured working contract, accommodation and in some cases even nourishment and free transport to the workplace. The ability to speak the relevant foreign language is rarely outlined as a requirement in contrast to the physical strength and stamina of the workers.

In regards to the online recruitment it is all the more vital to stress that some of the recruiters instruct the potential candidates that the application process could only go through Skype. Some of the recruiters pledge that the workers would not need to pay any additional taxes, whereas others warn them that they might have to cover some fees, without specifying what their actual purpose would be. In reality, once the candidate workers are transferred to the destination country, the conditions often turn out to be quite different from what was initially promised to them. On many instances they are deceived and forced to pay additional fees or enter into unforeseen expenditure for housing and other urgent needs.

The transportation

For both types of trafficking, Internet is hardly related to the transportation phase. According to the traffickers interviewed, they use mobile apps but for advertisement and for matching demand and supply. In case of trafficking for sexual exploitation, mobile apps are used in the transportation phase only to arrange dates and time of arrival of new victims with the international partners.

The exploitation

Sexual exploitation

According to the interviewed sex trafficker, the mobile applications, as WhatsApp and Viber, along with more traditional means like Skype, phone calls and emails, are used for several different purposes:

- Communication with partners within the country and abroad;
- Communication with clients abroad;
- Communication with victims.

The victims receive updated profiles in the same websites they've been recruited from, or in another websites relevant for respective countries, with "professionally" made photos and video-presentations. Their profiles are also used by traffickers for "loyalty" control within the exploitation phase.

Respectively, the advertisement of services is Internet-facilitated only in the case of the girl who used it to start that "job". Her evidence regarding this topic also generally coincides with the statements of the sex trafficker. She uses both Facebook profile and profiles in dating sites:

"We own advertise our services on the sites. What makes my pimp is to provide me with a boy who is a good computer specialist and who is processing photos and some videos for a good quality." (Victim – sex trafficking)

Skype and mobile application are not fully excluded from the advertising process, but are used only as a second stage, when a "client" is already interested:

"WhatsApp and Viber do not fit for initial advertising. They are only for the direct connection with customers. With them you could send erotic videos and to negotiate the price. But this is also a kind of direct advertising ... Even on the camera of Viber, but here and Skype too works perfectly. I will only say that it is impossible to work without these applications." (Victim – sex trafficking)

Again, similarly to the interview with the sex trafficker, only the girl recruited through Internet had some knowledge what deep web is, but has never used it, as unnecessary.

The interviewed representatives of LEAs generally do not estimate the role of Internet as substantial, but consider that it could be used in the cases of sex trafficking:

"In the case of sexual exploitation yes, in some extent." (LEA representative)

"I do not know what is the role of the Internet in the case of highly paid elite prostitutes - may play a role, but there are no complaints there." (LEA representative)

Regarding the specific Internet instruments for advertising, one of the respondents mentioned Facebook profiles and Skype; second stressed on the profiles in Facebook and dating sites; and the third mentioned dating sites, Facebook and Viber.

"For example, by uploading "beautiful" pictures in the Facebook profiles of girls; used are sites for free ads, headings "She and He." In isolated cases are offered video chat and webcam." (LEA representative)

The fourth respondent cited only one case where a web site of agency for models has been used.

"There is an example of disguised prostitution from 2012 in a site for photo models and mannequins. Girls have their profiles there and numbers of those who have agreed to prostitution are promoted to potential clients in private meetings. They enter the site, view profiles and choose. This is the case of agency FH1 of Rossen Cholov." (LEA representative)

Regarding the advertising of services of the victims of sex trafficking, one of the NGO representatives pleaded she is not aware how it might be done, and that even the victims do not have full idea.

The second NGO representative stated that dating sites are used for advertisement by the girls themselves, but mainly in the cases of girls who speak foreign languages.

"According the level - then we talk about vision, for intellectual level - those with vision, speaking languages, for example ... If she speaks two foreign languages, what better? Right ... it makes her class up. So in their case the money they generate are much more. While those of a lower level, they are at street level. There for example it is known that so-and-what-is their place - either parking or a small motel, or whatever it is, they will work, for example, on this street." (NGO representative)

And the third NGO representative stated that the advertisement is done through the porn sites, with or without the knowledge, and with or without the consent of the victim:

"There are customised porn sites and there is quite difficult to detect and dismantle because trafficker somehow remains much more out of the picture... Victims in the case of a site, they are not on the street; sold is the site to use, customers pay accordingly on the internet and thus is difficult to know whether the victims were minors. It is more difficult to understand if victims agree the whole thing because for example, there are cases whereas I said were filmed videos that are used without the consent of the victim or if the exploiters are forcing the victim to strip etc. in front of cameras and customers pay; it is also very difficult to be felt." (NGO representative)

Labour exploitation

According to the interviewed labour trafficker, Internet is not used in the exploitation phase. Mobile applications are used in communication with employers abroad, e.g. for matching demand and supply:

"Basically I use Viber, WhatsApp in a lesser extent. In this manner I negotiate with the employers abroad: directly." (Labour trafficker)

Besides the mobile apps, the person also uses his friends and acquaintances abroad as mediators:

"But in this, my assistants help, and my friends living in Spain, Italy, Germany... They search for me employers there." (Labour trafficker)

The interviewed LEAs representatives are unanimous that usage of Internet for advertisement of the services of the victims is irrelevant to the labour trafficking:

"In the case of labour exploitation definitely no, there is no sense." (LEA representative)

"In the case of labour exploitation they rather use old business contacts abroad." (LEA representative)

Only one respondent from the group of NGO representatives commented advertisement of services of labour traffic victims. According her opinion, in Bulgaria, it is exclusively offline because of the profile of the victims and type of labour they are exploited in:

"If you remember the cases of entire villages that do not know what pick somewhere, but it's on other channels. There is off line, they are communities where from person to person happens and is very regionalised, in Bulgaria and abroad. For example village of Vratsa region, from there they go so and where in Germany and do this. And it's such a network of people, which is quite off line." (NGO representative)

However, the possibility to advertise through Internet in the case of labour trafficking is not completely excluded:

"But on the other hand I cannot think of a particular case, but there is no obstacle that can be used for labour exploitation of whatever it is, order brigades and for babysitters ..." (NGO representative)

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