



03

eCRIME RESEARCH REPORTS

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# SURF AND SOUND

## THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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### Beneficiaries

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## 03

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# 02

## Smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings



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The smuggling of migrants (hereinafter also referred to as ‘people smuggling’) and trafficking in human beings (hereinafter also referred to as ‘human trafficking’ or ‘THB’) have become agenda-topping issues over the past twenty years, since global geopolitical changes have exacerbated conditions conducive to clandestine population flows and the development of transnational illegal enterprises associated with those flows. According to Europol (2016), over 90% of the more than one million undocumented migrants who entered the EU in 2015 used some form of ‘facilitation service’, generally provided by smuggling networks.

The increased awareness of the issue, and the recognition that it presents a major area of focus for the effort to address and suppress transnational organised crime, has resulted in the formation of a new global prohibition regime (Andreas and Nadelmann, 2006; Papanicolaou, 2011), by means of the introduction of two major international instruments (supplementing the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime), namely the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, and the *Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air*.

Often combined or confused with each other, trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants are substantially diverse. According to Article 3 of the Trafficking Protocol, trafficking in human beings is ‘*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*’ (United Nations, 2000a:2). In a nutshell, victims of trafficking are displaced and forced into sexual exploitation, labour, slavery, servitude or other forms of exploitation.

On the other hand, Article 3 of the Protocol against people smuggling states that ‘*smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident*’ (United Nations, 2000b:2). Unlike THB, smuggling always traverses national boundaries and only occasionally the migrants, in the destination country, are sent to work in the drug market, the sex market, as beggars or as black labour.

Although smuggling migrants and trafficking in human beings are not new phenomena (see Morrison, 2002), over the past decades or so, they have experienced an unprecedented boom due to the development, advancement and proliferation of digital technologies (Di Nicola and Musumeci, 2015; Hughes, 2014; Latonero 2012; Latonero et al., 2011; Sarkar, 2015). According to a recent Europol report regarding the trafficking in human beings in the European Union, online interactions and encounters have been observed as facilitating ‘*several aspects of human trafficking and exploitation: targeting of potential victims; access to personal data; arrangement of logistics and transportation; recruitment through social media, chat forums and other websites; advertisement of victims; their exploitation and surveillance*’ (Europol, 2016b:12). A group of specialists engaged by the Council of Europe found that ‘*the Internet industry and the sex industry are closely interlinked and the scope, volume, and content of the material on the Internet promoting or enacting trafficking in human beings for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation [...] are unprecedented*’ (Council of Europe, 2003:107).

The burgeoning dissemination of digital technologies, in particular the Internet, has afforded new, creative opportunities for individual criminals and collectivities of criminals. As such, these groups have been empowered to operate with greater efficiency and anonymity, given that they are able to instantly communicate with potentially large audiences over extensive distances and across geographic boundaries (see Hughes, 2014; Latonero et al., 2011; Mendel and Sharapov, 2014; Sykiotou, 2007). The expeditious dissemination and usage of the Internet and other digital technologies such as smartphones have added a new dimension to the trafficking and smuggling of human beings, creating new ways and means of facilitation, as well as affecting various aspects of trafficking, including the recruitment, control and exploitation of victims (Sarkar, 2015). For instance, it has been underlined how the Internet facilitates the role of traffickers because it ‘*can rapidly connect buyers of commercial sex with trafficking victims while simultaneously distancing the perpetrator from the criminal transaction*’ (Finklea et al., 2015:2).

Despite this, at present, there is relatively limited scholarly work investigating the role that digital technologies play in the processes of people smuggling and human trafficking or the particular ways in which the Internet has been used to shape the criminal strategies of traffickers and smugglers (see, for example, Di Nicola, Cauduro and Falletta, 2015; Latonero 2011; Latonero et al., 2012).



# 03

## Project Surf and Sound

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## 3.1 The project

Project 'www.surfandsound.eu – Improving and sharing knowledge on the Internet's role in the human trafficking process' (hereinafter also referred to as 'Surf and Sound') was coordinated by the eCrime research group of the Department '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) and with the support of the Romanian Center for European Policies and at the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy. The project was co-financed by the European Commission 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 Surf and Sound 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 light of the Special meeting of the European Council of 23 April 2015 on the smuggling of migrants, the European Union considers as a priority to '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, project Surf and Sound addressed this need by broadening the aim of the research to the phenomenon of smuggling of migrants.

The project aimed to improve the knowledge on the use of the Internet (including social networks) in the THB and the smuggling process in four key EU member states (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom) and spread such knowledge through workshops for LEAs and NGOs and dissemination activities. Specific objectives were:

1. To explore visible/Dark web to draft a research protocol about the use of the Internet in the THB and smuggling processes by identifying potential at-risk web contents and/or other abuses of the Internet (e.g. use of chats, VOIP) in the THB and smuggling processes;
2. To use the research protocol to collect and organise a significant amount of information from the web;
3. To understand the use of the Internet in the THB and smuggling processes 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) and to raise awareness for them; b) spread the knowledge and guidelines via dissemination activities and workshops for LEAs/NGOs involved in the prevention and fight against THB and smuggling.

## 3.2 Methodology

A preliminary exploratory analysis of the visible and Deep/Dark web was conducted in the four member states involved in the project. Specifically, online searches were conducted on Google and Torch, on social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), and on web forums by using a list of keywords related to trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants retrieved by Council of Europe reports and Latonero's research (see Table 1). Keywords were translated in the four languages of member states involved in the project as well as in Arabic. Once defined the keywords, a snowball-like search on the web, also using Boolean operators, was carried out. A preliminary analysis of web elements was conducted to identify those keywords leading to web contents potentially related to the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings. Further keywords that, during the period of exploration, resulted to be often related to the concerned phenomena, were later added to the list.

**Table 1. Suggested list of keywords for a snowball-like search on the web including the use of Boolean operators**

| THB                         |                                       |                    | Smuggling of Migrants |                     |  |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--|
| General process             | Recruitment and transportation phases | Exploitation phase | General process       | Recruitment phase   | Transportation and entry into another country phases |
| Human trafficking           | Job offer                             | Sex                | People smuggling      | Movement of persons | Smuggler   |
| Trafficking in human beings | Job agency                            | Sex tourism        | Smuggling of migrants | Transfer            | Passenger  |
| Trafficking in persons      | Travel agency                         | Prostitute         | Migrant smuggling     | Transport           | Migrant  |
| Sex trafficking             | Temp agency                           | Sex worker         | People smuggling      | Move                | Seasonal   |
| Labour trafficking          | Foreign job                           | Brothel            | Illegal migration     | Borders             | Boat driver  |
| Sex market                  | Advertising agency                    | Massage parlour    | Recruitment           | Financial gain      | Pontoon  |
| Labour market               | Dating service                        | Escort             | Transport             | Money               | Lorry  |
| Trafficking process         | Matchmaking service                   | Dancer             | Migrant               | Asylum seekers      | Truck  |
| Recruitment                 | Dancer                                | Dancing-girl       | Migrant worker        | Refugees            | Cargo van  |
| Transport                   | Dancing-girl                          | Au-pair girl       | Asylum seekers        | ID                  | Airplane   |
| Exploitation                | Au-pair girl                          | Model              |                       | VISA                | Vehicle  |
| Coercion                    | Student                               | Wedding            |                       | Residence permit    | Driver   |
| Fraud                       | Model                                 | Wife               |                       | Fee                 | Pilot  |
| Trafficker                  | Waiter                                | Worker             |                       | Payment             | Sea  |
| Victim                      | Bartender                             | Waiter/bartender   |                       | Debt                | Land   |
|                             | Home assistant                        | Home assistant     |                       |                     | Air  |
|                             | In-home nurse                         | In-home nurse      |                       |                     | Borders  |
|                             | Caregiver                             | Caregiver          |                       |                     | Transit  |
|                             | Wedding                               |                    |                       |                     | ID   |
|                             | Wife                                  |                    |                       |                     | VISA   |
|                             | Farmer                                |                    |                       |                     | Residence permit                                     |
|                             | Bricklayer                            |                    |                       |                     | Fee  |
|                             |                                       |                    |                       |                     | Payment  |
|                             |                                       |                    |                       |                     | Debt   |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

The information gathered during the preliminary exploratory phase was then employed to develop a research protocol to fine tune the collection of data on the use of the Internet in human trafficking and people smuggling. More in detail, the research protocol contains:

- Working definitions of trafficking in human beings and of smuggling of migrants;
- A list of websites (per typology) and keywords that shall be used to facilitate the search of relevant data on the web;
- Suggested methods to search data on the Dark web (e.g. using Tor).

The research protocol was used to investigate the visible and the Dark web in order to collect a significant number of at risk web contents and information on the use of the Internet in in the trafficking in human beings

and smuggling of migrants processes (from websites, forums, social media websites, etc.). More in detail, during research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project, 939 web contents were identified and stored in a database in order to elaborate ad hoc risks indicators.

National-based virtually ethnography<sup>1</sup> was conducted to acquire primary data on the role played by the Internet in the recruitment, transportation/entry into another

<sup>1</sup> As a research method, virtual ethnography extends the ethnographic field and situated observation from the examination of face-to-face researcher-informant interactions (Lenihan and Kelly-Holmes, 2016) and 'transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the internet' (Hine, 2008: 257). In this regard, the virtual ethnographer immerses themselves in a virtual environment, observing and interacting using media relevant to that site for an extended period of time (Turney, 2008).



country phases of the process of migrant smuggling and in the recruitment/transportation and exploitation phases in the process of trafficking in human beings, and in particular: 1. how the Internet facilitates recruitment and communications, guarantees anonymity, and accelerates exchanges between victims/migrants; 2. how the Internet favours the match between demand/supply for the services provided by victims (i.e. for sexual purposed and forced/black labour).

Specifically, the research questions were:

- What are the main types of websites used by traffickers/smugglers to recruit and transport their victims/clients (favouring their entry into another country)?
- What are the main types of websites used by traffickers/smugglers to exploit their victims/clients?
- What are the main modalities used by traffickers/smugglers to recruit and transport their victims/clients (favouring their entry into another country) in the web (or Dark web)?
- What are the main modalities used by traffickers to offer the services provided by their victims in the web (or Dark web)?
- What are the observable common patterns in the traffickers/smugglers behaviours?

With regards to the smuggling of migrants, an active virtual ethnography research was also conducted. Facebook accounts were created in order to observe pages, groups and people that were advertising smuggling services, such as ways and means of transportation and aiding one's entry into another country. During this activity researcher interacted directly with smugglers by using social media chats, web forums, as well as telephone services provided by mobile applications (such as Viber and WhatsApp). Moreover, part of the virtual ethnography was conducted on the Dark web. In addition, the role of the Internet and digital technologies in facilitating THB for labour recruitment and exploitation of victims was examined, by investigating popular online classified and recruitment websites that were advertising jobs and employment in each labour markets of the four member states involved in the project. Furthermore, we captured and attained screenshots of images and text from websites, online classifieds, forums and social networking sites.

For instance, the following types of websites were searched and analysed:

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:
  - a. Home assistance;
  - b. Waitress/bartender;
  - c. Au Pair/Care;
  - d. Modelling/Entertainment (e.g. dancer, hostess);
  - e. Construction/factories/agriculture;
  - f. Educational courses;
  - g. Matrimonial offers;
  - h. Tourism;
  - i. Work in the sex market (the fact that a woman is already a prostitute does not exempt her from being trafficked).
6. Advertising websites (e.g. Kijiji);
7. Travel agency websites;
8. Porn websites and forums;
9. Streaming websites.

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

The period of passive observation offered evidence of the fact that both the observed phenomena exploit digital communication channels; however, it brought about the need to develop appropriate tools that can be used to identify online contents related to the observed crimes. Hence, to facilitate the exploration and the collection of information, we developed indicators to identify potentially at-risk web contents and other forms of abuses on the Internet (for instance: chats, VOIP). These same indicators were divided in relation to the crime and the respective phase they referred to.

**Table 2. Prospectus of stakeholders interviewed in each member states involved in the project**

| Stakeholders interviewed                       | Country  |         |       |                    |
|--|----------|---------|-------|--------------------|
|  | Bulgaria | Romania | Italy | The United Kingdom |
| Traffickers/smugglers                          | 3        | 4       | 4     | 2                  |
| Victims of trafficking/migrants/asylum seekers | 5        | 4       | 5     | -                  |
| Representatives of LEAs                        | 4        | 4       | 2     | 6                  |
| Representatives of NGOs                        | 3        | 2       | 4     | 4                  |
| Experts on cyber-crime                         | -        | -       | -     | 2                  |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

In order to integrate the information gathered from the exploration of the web, 58 semi-structured interviews were also undertaken to accumulate data, which took place with a variety of key actors in the key member states, including non-governmental organisation representatives (NGOs), law enforcement agents (LEAs), smugglers of migrants, traffickers of human beings, and experts on cyber-crime.

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face, by telephone or through Skype/Viber/WhatsApp, with the participants' responses being recorded with a digital voice-recorder. An interview guide was used as the basis for the questions, which was conditional to the particular participant interviewed (see Annex B). During the interview process, however, these interview guides were not followed slavishly.

Table 2 shows the prospectus of stakeholders interviewed in each country involved in the project.

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 Organised Crime of 2000.

The interviews focused predominantly on the recruitment and transportation phases, but also paid attention to the exploitation phase of the THB process. With regard to the recruitment, the internal and

the external trafficking are closely connected. The questions were customised according to the type and background of the specific groups of respondents, their experiences and professional capacities. They encompassed topics such 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 the 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 the Dark web.

Finally, a web survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums, was administered in each member states involved in the project (N=995). In specific, information was requested about at-risk websites visited and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on actions related to the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. More in detail, the final version of the online questionnaire was composed by 4 sections (see Annex C):

- Section I – Introduction: this section provided respondents with general information about the project, the aim of the questionnaire, some general instruction on how to fill out the questionnaire, contacts detail to receive further information, etc.);
- Section II – Information about you: this section was aimed at collecting socio-demographic information about the respondents;
- Section III – THB: this section was aimed at collecting respondent experience on web contents potentially linked to human trafficking (e.g. suspicious online job advertisements);
- Section IV – Smuggling: this section was aimed at collection respondent experience on web contents linked to people smuggling (e.g. online advertisements of illegal travel services to Europe).

The online questionnaire was translated in the four languages of the member states involved in the project (i.e. Italian, Romanian, Bulgarian and English) and then uploaded in the LimeSurvey platform for the administration phase.

Research activities were carried out with strict respect for ethical research principles, as well as all laws applicable. Specific suggestions concerning research ethics was provided to the partners and researchers involved in the project. Moreover, any action to overcome factors delaying research ethics was discussed with the Steering Committee and/or via telephone, email, Skype.



# 04

## The role of the Internet in the smuggling of migrants



---

The expression ‘smuggling of migrants’ refers to a criminal activity aimed at the transportation of persons across national borders, for the sake of economic profit (or other kinds of benefit). The smuggling of migrants is an activity that entails two phases: recruitment and transportation, and it normally follows an ‘agreement’ between the smuggler and the wannabe migrant. In fact, the migrant autonomously contacts the smuggler or the criminal organisation of smugglers in order to plan his travel, agree on the price and plan the transportation.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by smugglers to reach specific users and by the migrants to search for smugglers who can help with migrating to Europe through criminal channels. Facebook and Instagram play a significant role in this criminal activity. On these social networks, in fact, there are dedicated Pages and Groups explicitly used to spread information and advertise travels and documents.

This Chapter presents the results of research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project (i.e. Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom) concerning the role of the Internet in the smuggling of migrants and asylum seeker. Specifically, for each country the results related to recruitment and transportation phases are presented. Finally, the main results of the web survey designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums are briefly provided to support the research findings.

## 4.1 Bulgaria

### 4.1.1 Recruitment

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

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

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

The risks of using Facebook are fully realised by the interviewee. He shared that the page was not publicly available and stood on the opinion that the manner in which the page is disseminated 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

Regarding those who already reside in Bulgaria, regardless of their status (illegal, seeking protection, or with refugee status), the methods of recruitment are not shared with the interviewer but is mentioned that they are ‘simpler’ than the 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 the 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 smugglers and all arrangements with them were implemented entirely ‘offline’: through persons with Syrian nationality residing in Bulgaria for longer periods:

“ To accommodate, one of my friends from Bulgaria helped me. 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Migrant)

However, the person admitted that before leaving Syria, he searched the Internet for 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, the Internet in general and Facebook in particular still play a very important role, although the immigrant persons and not the smugglers are the active side at this phase. Moreover, with or without using the 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 married Bulgarians and settled well. I connected with them through Facebook, even before I came to your country. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Migrant)

The opinions of the LEA representatives regarding the role of the Internet in the recruitment process for the smuggling of migrants 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 four LEA representatives interviewed expressed the opinion that the Internet facilitates the smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants, without giving approximate quantitative estimates regarding the share of cases in which the 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 wording about possible assistance. These pages are distributed carefully; it is sometimes difficult to understand what it is about. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Regarding the recruitment for smuggling, another LEA representative is categorical that it is initiated by the potential migrants 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 8,000 dollars per person to Germany. I wondered why, if you have 80 thousand dollars, do you 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 for food and shelter. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

The other two representatives of LEAs stated that they could not provide answers regarding the smuggling process, as it is no longer within their powers after the change in legislation several years ago. However, they admitted that Facebook might be used:

“ It is highly probable Facebook is used here as well; but we could not say so for sure. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 to Europe, post on their wall their desire to leave the country. They criticise our country for its inhospitality. They directly connect with our traffickers, as on Facebook there are groups... ‘Smugglers’ in the groups on Facebook or Twitter then directly contact 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, which makes it harder to get caught. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

The same respondent was also the only one among the interviewees from all groups who gave clues, although minimal ones, that the Dark web had been used by Bulgarian smugglers:

“ At least I have not had the occasion to use the Deep networks. As far as I know from colleagues, they are used rarely. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

And the explanation why the Dark 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 them 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 to her statements, it is pretty easy to find a smuggler through the Internet, in specialised forums written in Arabic. Like the interviewed refugee, she confirmed the participation of persons from old Arab Diasporas in Bulgaria in this process:

“ If you open the Internet, you see that yesterday there was a publication about a Syrian who has lived in Bulgaria for 20 years. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 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.

## 4.1.2 Transportation

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

“ I’ve not been interested in how they would reach Bulgaria. I 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 won’t say where exactly. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

The interviewed asylum seeker did not personally use the Internet or any mobile application for his travel to Bulgaria.

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

“ It is possible the major organisers might use mobile applications between them, because they know that there is no way to be monitored. 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 or traceable transactions.. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

## 4.2 Italy

The expression ‘smuggling of migrants’ refers to a criminal activity aimed at the transportation of persons across national borders, for the sake of economic profit (or other kinds of benefit). The trafficking of migrants is a crime that entails two phases: recruitment and transportation, and it normally follows an ‘agreement’ between the smuggler and the wannabe migrant. In fact, the migrant autonomously contacts the smuggler or the criminal organisation of smugglers in order to plan his travel, agree on the price and plan the transportation.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by smugglers to reach specific users and by the migrants to search for smugglers who can help with migrating to Italy or to Europe through criminal channels. Facebook and Instagram play a significant role in this criminal activity. On these social networks, in fact, there are dedicated Pages and Groups explicitly used to spread information and advertise travels and documents.

While the web contents collected on Instagram and Twitter are mostly single images and text contents, on Facebook there are Pages, Groups and Profiles entirely or almost entirely dedicated to the advertisement of illegal migration. Some of these Facebook pages have been active for many years and count hundreds or thousands of members/followers. Other pages are more recent and are used in a less systematic and structured manner. Some of these groups and profiles are ‘public’: any user can visualise their content. Others are ‘closed’ or ‘private’, meaning that any users must obtain an ‘approval’ from the administrator (‘friendship’ or ‘membership’) to access the content. For this crime, the use of keywords in the Arabic language has been fundamental to identify and track the development of the crime on the Internet. However, during the exploration period, the importance of also using keywords in the English language emerged to identify contents related to the smuggling of migrants, especially on social networks. These keywords, in fact, allowed us to reach pages and profiles related to the various phases of the criminal activity.

Even if the relation of the contents to illegal migration (to Europe and to Italy) was clear for most of the time, the research showed that there are some elements that more than others denote the relation with illegal migration.

The indicators that we identified are:

- Specific images (i.e. European flag, visa, etc.);
- The wording ‘visa Schengen’ in the name or title of the page/profile/post;
- Offer of documents to purchase;
- Offer of travels towards Europe;
- Explicit contents related to specific routes or destinations;
- Request from the author of the advertisement to be contacted only through the social network or mobile applications.

These indicators and the analysis of the web contents allowed for the differentiation of the two phases characterising the criminal activity: recruitment and transportation.

### 4.2.1 Recruitment

The research referred to the recruitment phase those web contents (pages, groups, social networks’ posts, etc.) that provide (1) information on the travel towards Europe, (2) offers of documents to purchase (especially, visa), and (3) information on the asylum request. Internet and social networks play a significant role in this phase: the continuous advertisement and exchange of information on travels to Europe facilitates the recruitment of persons and represents an important push factor for illegal migration.

*“ Usually, Internet is really the starting point [...] Internet does facilitate the travel; it facilitates the departure and the recruitment. ”*

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

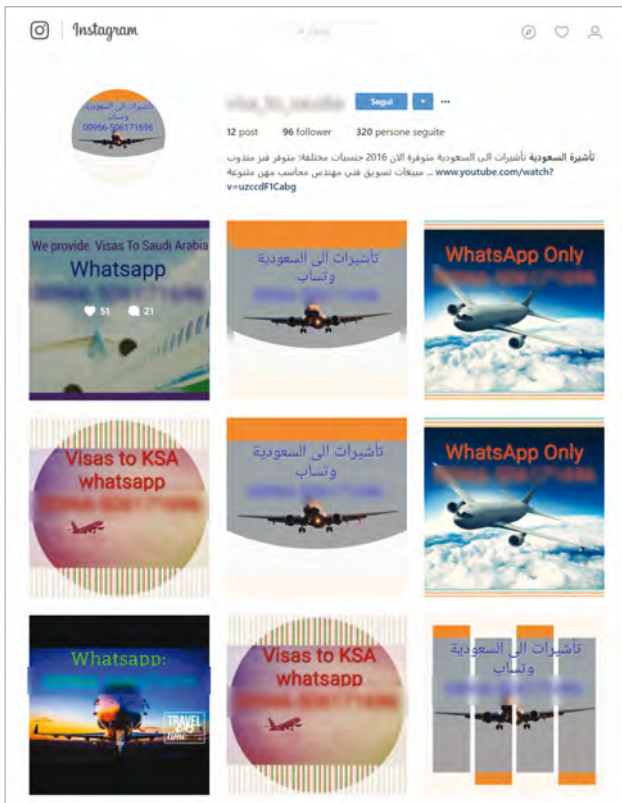
In general, the analysis of the Internet contents showed that the criminals involved in this business are highly informed on visa requirements and procedures for asylum requests, and this expertise allows them to exploit the weaknesses of national and international regulations.





On Instagram, on the other hand, images of airplanes and visa documents contain contact information (phone numbers) and advertise the possibility to purchase specific falsified documents. See, for some example, Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Example of Instagram images advertising the selling of European visas**



Source: Instagram. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

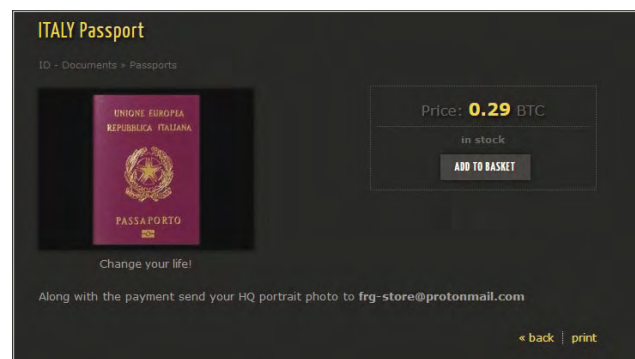
On the Dark web, websites dedicated to the selling of false documents were found, not only for Italy and Europe but also for the US and Canada. In particular, researchers found many websites and advertisements dedicated to the production and the selling of Italian documents. Figures 5 and 6 show the advertisement of falsified Italian passports, while Figure 7 displays the selling of a forged electronic Italian ID. These elements were easily found using the search engine 'Torch'<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 5. Forged Italian passports on sale**



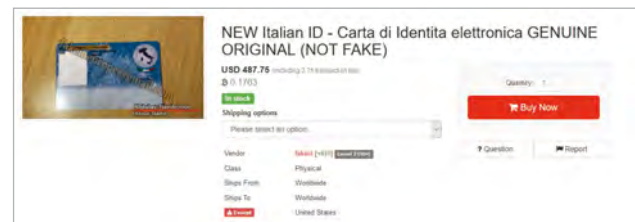
Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Figure 6. Forged Italian passports on sale**



Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Figure 7. Forged Italian ID card on sale**



Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound


Moreover, in the context of the research on migrants smuggling on the visible web, a fake Facebook profile was created in order to interact with users linked with profiles and pages related to the smuggling of migrants. Initially, a request of information was posted regarding travels toward Italy, on some pages that are accessible without the need of 'friendship' or 'following' confirmation. After a few hours, the profile created had received many offers related to the travel requested. After having opened and observed the profiles of some of the users sending us the offers, researchers decided to contact them through the Messenger chat. All the con-

<sup>3</sup> Torch is one of the most popular search engines on the Dark web.

versations were conducted initially on the Messenger chat and then through Viber, a mobile-app that resulted to be commonly used in this context, together with WhatsApp. Figure 8 shows an advertisement identified on Facebook and a piece of conversation between the researchers and a smuggler. The conversation regards the various offers of travel and the related costs that

the smuggler can offer to the user. Moreover, the attention is focused on the Moroccan origins of the person who needed to be transported: this could determine the repatriation of the migrant in the case he arrives in Italy or Greece. The smuggler proposes to solve this problem using fake Syrian documents that can be used in Turkey.

**Figure 8. Transcription of a Viber phone call between the researcher (R) and a smuggler (S)**

|   |  |
|---|--|
|  | <p><b>Translation</b></p> <p><i>Good morning, for the brothers who want to travel from Istanbul on 80-meter long boats, the departure is Monday for everybody [phone number], Viber: [phone number].</i></p> |
|---|--|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>R</b>  | I want to take my Moroccan brother from Turkey to Italy. He lost all the documents and he is in Turkey illegally. What can he do?  |
| <b>S</b>  | You have three different options. First: directly from Turkey to Italy with a 20-meter long touristic yacht, 60/70 people. Price: 7,000 euros. We will leave your brother on an unmonitored beach, 20 minutes away from a train station. The second option: from Turkey to Greece and then from Greece to Italy. Price: 6,200 euros. The third option, instead, is from Turkey to Greece and then from Greece to Austria by land: 800 euros.   |
| <b>R</b>  | Are the travels safe? Which assurances can you give me?  |
| <b>S</b>  | The travel is safe, <i>in šā' Allāh</i> [if God wills it]. I do my best, God does the rest. Many people arrived safe and well in Europe thanks to my work: this is my assurance. Call your brother and let me know.  |
| <i>[After a long conversation about the details of the travels and after kind regards from both of the speakers, the conversation is interrupted. After 5 minutes, the smuggler calls back]</i> |  |
| <b>S</b>  | Dear friend, I forgot to tell you that there is a problem. Your brother is Moroccan and if he gets caught by the Italian or Greek police he will be repatriated. But there is a way to solve this problem.   |
| <i>[The smuggler offers another service: to create a false Syrian Quaid (an official document with the personal information) and a false Syrian driving license]</i>                            |  |
| <b>S</b>  | <p>With these documents, he will be able to go to the Syrian embassy in Turkey, pretend to be Syrian and ask for a new passport. We are doing the same thing with people coming from Lebanon. Your brother has to talk in standard Arabic language. If they realize that the accent is strange, he has to say that he has Syrian parents but that he grew up in Morocco. [...] With the Syrian passport, he will be able to ask for political asylum when he arrives. [...] 800 euros for the documents, 200/300 for myself, as a tip. I am solving a big problem for you. [...]</p> <p>Think calmly, speak with your brother and when you have made a decision call me back and I will take care of satisfying your requests. If he doesn't want to travel but he only wants the documents, there are no problems: I will be of service anyway.</p> |

Source: Viber call. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound





modalities to reach Greece from Turkey. The transportation means that are published are a car and a yacht: for the former the price is 1,700 euros, for the latter 2,100 euros. Finally, the post displays a phone number to be used in order to communicate with the administrator of the page.

**Figure 12. Facebook post advertising travels from Turkey to Europe**



**Translation**

Travels with touristic yacht directed to Athens 2,200 euros, travels by land from Istanbul 1,700 euros, two hours of walking. Payment after arrival through any insurance office in Turkey or Greece. For those who are serious and ready for the travel, call [phone number], contact through WhatsApp.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 13 shows a web content found on a Facebook group dedicated to illegal migration. In the post, it is possible to see a picture, probably taken during a travel, posted by the smuggler himself. On the same post, the smuggler lists the possible modalities and the relative costs to reach various European countries, the means of transportation available and how to conduct the travel.

**Figure 13. Facebook group dedicated to illegal migration**



**Translation**

Non-stop travel from Turkey to Greece \$350. As soon as the island is reached, assurance to be able to use Kharitya in Athens after two days, everything is guaranteed on the island of Kyos, \$650. Afterwards by plane, from Athens to Germany for 2,500 euros, if we agree on 3,500 euros there is the assurance of having a place to sleep. There is a path by land from Turkey to Greece for 3,500 euros. There is a commercial boat from Turkey to Italy for 3,800 euros. There is a flight from Turkey to European countries for 6,500. Visa is guaranteed from Lebanon to Turkey for \$2,300. To contact me [phone number] WhatsApp.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Specifically, many of the identified web contents were related to routes toward Italy. The two following Figures (Figure 14 and 15) are examples of these contents that were easily found on Facebook. Specifically, Figure 14 displays a post advertising travels to reach the Italian peninsula from Egypt. The advertised travel is by sea, at least twice a week, and to participate it is necessary to contact the phone number written in the post.



**Figure 14. Post advertising travels towards Italy****Translation**

*Translation: Good morning to all who want to travel to Europe twice a week from Egypt to Italy by sea, safe and organized travel, [phone number].*

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 15, instead, shows a Facebook group on which a travel from Turkey to Italy on a boat carrying wheat is advertised. The travel lasts between 4 to 6 days and food and accommodation services are provided.

**Figure 15. Group advertising travels toward Italy****Translation**

*To all who want to travel to Europe we have a 60-meter long boat transporting wheat, it leaves from Turkey to reach Italy. The travel lasts between 4 to 6 days, food and water are guaranteed. On Viber Abu Adi [phone number].*

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

The online advertising of the means of transportation not only describes its characteristics, but it also announces the requested price. One aspect that emerged from the interviews with the smugglers is that the price increases or decreases in relation to different factors: the kilometric distance to be covered, the means of transportation, the urgency of the departure and the presence of kids – for which a price reduction is usually provided.

*“ If someone wants to leave with a boat in 30/40 people can go, pay little money and go. You can pay even a thousand euros. ”*

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

*“ For the prices: from Libya from 1,000 to 4,000 dollars per person. A mother with children will always have a discount, 1,700 – 2,000. A person bringing 5/7 persons can even go for free. ”*

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

*“ The first experience was with a Syrian customer for 4,000 euros. He left 2,000 euros to my friend and he (the friend) travelled with the customer. The travel was easy because it takes 15 minutes more or less; the whole roundtrip takes 30 minutes. Easy! ”*

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

Generally, the faster the transportation means are, the higher the probability of reaching the destination is, and the higher the price will be.

*“ Brother, my method is the nickel method (that is the most perfect method), my method is safe, and safety has its price, am I right? ”*

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

For this reason, some of the smugglers offer their travel services only to a specific target of customers: those who can effectively pay the high prices imposed for the transportation.

“ I have my method and my method is easy, for this reason also on the Internet, I use my methods to attract people, not too many people, but only those who can pay the price I ask. Because the travel I set up is 100% safe. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

However, in case the migrant needs to move and does not have the economic means to afford the costs, he will probably be able to find cheaper, less safe options.

“ Then it depends, those who come from the starting point have time to bargain. Those who come from far away are in a hurry to leave, for instance those who come from Iran, Pakistan, etc. do not have time to lose in order to leave. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

The in-depth interviews with smugglers allowed to verify the increasingly common tendency to use the web for criminal activities directed to the smuggling of migrants. Particularly, through the advertisement of routes, the Internet became ‘one of the easier ways to bring a lot of people. I always use Facebook and YouTube, I have a page that is all mine, when I have some free time I always go on Facebook, in internet points’ (Int. Italy – Smuggler 1). After this first contact online between the two users, the conversations take place on mobile applications (WhatsApp, Viber or Skype) to better define the details of the travel and to reach a level of acquaintance between the migrant and the smuggler:

“ Firstly, I have to establish that he is not from the police. As I told you, I talk to him, I leave him time to ask, do some research, and I have my own mechanisms to know whether he is one from the State or whether he is a serious one who wants to travel, because we are not joking. Then I meet him for a coffee far away from my place [of work]. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ First comes the greeting ‘good morning – good morning’, I have to know him, know where he comes from. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

As emerged by the interviews, there are various reasons justifying the choice of using these mobile applications. Among these reasons, there is the possibility of using encrypted messaging services, which enhance the privacy of the exchange of information on the travels. This aspect also emerged from the interviews with the national LEAs – which conducted investigations on migrant smuggling toward Italy:

“ They also use the most advanced technological tools such as social networks, Internet, WhatsApp, one of the means for communication also among themselves, with the aim of establishing encrypted and hardly trackable forms of communications. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

The interviews with the stakeholders, in fact, allowed to define the real reasons pushing these criminal organisations to use technological and digital tools. Firstly, these technologies allow to be able to communicate and use the same profile even when changing phone or SIM, and, in order to function, they simply need an Internet connection. Moreover, it is possible to rapidly change the name of the page/group/profile in order to avoid investigations and monitoring activities from the part of LEAs and Internet service providers:

“ Even if you change phone number or SIM, WhatsApp leaves you the option, if you want, to keep the same [old] profile, even those who change number because I always know who they are. I receive messages from the people that arrived even if they changed number. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ It’s a form of communication that is ‘free’: so the migrant, let’s say, that has a phone connecting to any Wi-Fi can be immediately reached – something that may not be possible with a ‘normal’ phone line. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

Therefore, social networks and technological tools such as smartphones facilitate these networks. Those who benefit from them, in fact, are not only the smugglers but the migrants as well. The NGOs interviewed report some experiences regarding their work with migrants who arrived in Italy that confirm what was said above:

“ I decide to leave, but do I board on whichever boat, or do I [try to] understand in which conditions to leave? Do I try to understand which moment is the most appropriate to leave based on the weather forecasts? Do I discover what is happening on the Greek coast rather than on the Italian one? Well, let's hear what my friends in Catania tell me? ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 4)

**Figure 16. Negative review of a smuggler published by some users on Facebook**



#### Translation

Warning! You have to be careful with this Tunisian thief, his nickname is [nickname]. He took 5,000 euros from 8 people to bring them to Budapest, and instead he left them on the Serbian-Hungarian border. Then he ran away.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Through the continuous exchange with other customers or family/friend's networks, those who intend to leave can – through social networks – collect information on routes and on most 'reliable' smugglers and get in

contact with the latter through mobile applications. The professionalism of a smuggler and of its network is demonstrated by the success of the travels he sets up, and these increase his reputation and fame among potential customers. During the period of using the fake profile, researchers found conversations and comments from the part of smugglers, related to routes and travels with some of the smugglers that were not considered reliable. In particular, it often mentioned the bad reputation of the travels organised by the captain of the boat called 'JetBoat', that has allegedly caused the death of many people – among which many children and a woman, close to the Turkish sea. Moreover, the case of a Tunisian smuggler was often cited who, after leaving eight people on the Serbian-Hungarian borders, ran away with all the money (Figure 16).

Through the social networks migrants' travels are monitored by friends and families, so that it is possible to verify the level of trust gained by the smuggler. Hence, the use of digital technologies creates chain effects that consolidate and reinforce the organised criminal organisations.

“ Those who left first give the number to another, saying that everything went alright and in this way they spread the word to new customers [... when the smuggler or an intermediary have a reputation, that they are fair, etc. Usually, those who have already travelled with them recommend them. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

“ He [talking of a friend] found his contact [of the smuggler] on Facebook, I saw that his experience was successful and I wanted to do the same. ”

(Int. Italy – Migrant 1)

After the online exchange of information and the establishment of trust between the two parties, there is, according to the interviewed smuggler, a meeting in person, far away from the locations usually frequented by the smuggler. This is aimed at finalising the agreements on the travel's practicalities.

“ At the end, there is the contact in person [physically] so that I make sure, I see how he talks, how he moves...and we talk about important things, price, assurances, modalities, everything. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

In conclusion, considering that they deal with an international criminal activity, the interviews with national LEAs confirmed the presence of a network of criminal groups aimed at the execution of different but interconnected activities. The investigations carried out by the LEAs interviewed, in fact, allowed for the discovery of the presence of links between various networks that are geographically fragmented: from central and northern Africa to northern European countries – especially affecting Scandinavian countries.

“ We found the presence of criminal organisations operating in a transnational dimension. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

Italy, given its strategic geographical position to the aim of migrant smuggling toward Europe, represents one of the major ‘transit’ countries:

“ There are organisations operating on the transit territories, such as Italy, where there are also subjects in charge of intercepting the migrants – when they are transferred in reception centers – and organising the continuation of their travel toward northern Italy and northern Europe and so on. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

However, as it also emerged from the literature (UNODC, 2009), the involvement of persons of Italian nationality in criminal activities related to the smuggling of migrants results to be very low.

“ So far, we have reported very few Italians, trifling numbers [...] a few units. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

## 4.3 Romania

Smuggling in human beings has seen important changes in the last decade, adapting to the new technological possibilities (Dark web, online advertising, social media platforms), but more importantly the current challenges in terms of migration have created a new fertile ground for this type of criminal activity. The dramatic events of the last years encouraged the development of illegal migration, especially in the Mediterranean, but also on the Western Balkans route, and dramatically raised the number of smuggling activities.

More than a quarter of a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2014 and more than one million in 2015. According to the latest Europol report on migrant smuggling, dated February 2016, migrant smuggling became the fastest growing criminal market in Europe, with criminal networks estimated to have had a turnover of 3-6 billion euros in 2015 from this activity. With a low risk of detection and punishment and law enforcement authorities facing huge challenges in countering this activity, new policies of preventing the exploitation of migrants by criminal networks and a reduction of incentives for irregular migration were needed.

In 2015, the European Union launched the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020), identifying migrant smuggling as a priority and setting specific goals in this regard: improved policing and legal procedure; collection and sharing of data and strengthening the role of Europol; providing better assistance for vulnerable migrants and deploying awareness campaigns; opening readmission agreements with the main countries of origin of irregular migrants; financing activities to strengthen the cooperation with third countries.

Currently, Romanians represent a significant source of people smuggling across Europe, involving people subjected to forced labour (agriculture, construction, domestic work, but also forced begging and theft) as well as sex trafficking. Eurostat 2015 Trafficking in human beings notes that Romania was one of the top five countries of origin for victims of human trafficking in the EU, alongside Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Poland, but also as the source country of traffickers, alongside Bulgaria, Romania, Belgium, Germany, and Spain. But, following the migrant crisis in Europe, there has also been an increase of smuggling and trafficking of migrants operated by Romanian smugglers, mainly passing them through from non-Schengen countries such as the Balkan Countries, Bulgaria or Romania to Schengen countries, mainly Hungary.

The ‘closed border’ policies, adopted by some of the Schengen countries, namely Hungary – the main



migrant route towards Western countries, led to an increasing number of asylum seekers/refugees remaining in the Balkans and the creation of temporary camps in the region. The pressure put on the Balkan countries, together with the final goal of the migrants – that of reaching wealthier EU countries, created new incentives for smuggling and new routes towards Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden.

In this context, Romania has seen a high rise in the smuggling of human beings and migrants, becoming mainly a transit country. In the case of people smuggling, Romanian criminals are not involved in the recruitment of migrants or refugees. Romanian smugglers, regardless of the fact that they may be part of a transnational smuggling network or may work on their own, act mostly as intermediaries in the smuggling process. Their role is to transport refugee or migrant groups on or from Romanian territory, taking them from their point of entry to the Western border. The data is also confirmed by Europol statistics – ‘Romanian suspects arrested in the last year typically acted as drivers’.

According to Europol, the most common nationalities of the suspects of criminal networks, coming from within the EU, engaged in smuggling human beings and migrants are Bulgarians, Hungarians, Poles and Romanians, with the suspects being active not only in their country of origin, but also in the final destination countries such as Germany and The Netherlands.

The research conducted within the project has revealed several patterns regarding the smuggling of human beings: it is a criminal network with clear assignments for each member; there are no clearly defined links between members; smugglers are often contacted by the migrants that wish to travel to Western countries; there is a low use of social media or traceable devices – with most of the smugglers using prepaid phone cards or personal communication.

### 4.3.1 Recruitment

Europol underlines the new technological options (Internet, social media) as some of the key features of smuggling, used for recruiting migrants, but also for recruiting drivers, sharing information on developments of migration routes, law enforcement activities or changes in the asylum procedures. But, as the analysis reveals, when it comes to the recruitment phase, the high number of refugees and LEA crackdown/surveillance on criminal networks created new patterns in recruiting: more and more migrants are personally seeking smugglers to pass into the Schengen area and, in order not to be traced by authorities, the latest

are using direct conversation or prepaid phone cards for communication. The Internet plays a minor role in migrant smuggling, as the analysis suggests in Romania’s case, where the activities are promoted and done in face-to-face interactions.

The latest dramatic events in Europe have created new smuggling possibilities: people who live in areas of conflict are directly interested in finding information about transportation and ways to enter other countries and, consequently, are actively looking to contact the smugglers themselves.

“ At the moment, all people from Syria want to migrate to Europe. We do not need advertising. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

According to the interviewees, Syria is the most common country for the recruitment of migrants travelling to countries of Western Europe or to Turkey, which is a waypoint for these immigrants.

“ I have connections in Syria, Turkey and Greece and we have developed a network of guides to reach the desired destination for each migrant, and each person within the network is responsible for his segment. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

As such, when it comes to the recruitment phase, the Internet or social media is rather used in the behaviours of traffickers/smugglers who posted job offers that did not correctly reflect the pay for the type of work, the benefits promised upon signing the contracts, such as hiring bonuses, free transportation abroad, free accommodation/very low rent or boarding.

But as for smugglers recruiting refugees or illegal immigrants, the Internet is rarely used and all actors involved in the various phases of the smuggling processes communicate personally and by telephone, using coded language. Only one trafficker has mentioned the Dark web, stating that the Dark web is rarely used as a way of communication, mainly due to lack of technological knowledge and use of it.

And the main reason lies with the relatively easy possibility of their devices being monitored by authorities. According to the interviewers, all communication within the criminal network and also with the potential victims



is done by phone or in person. In their interactions with each other or with migrants, smugglers are using communication codes, which are changed every month, together with their phone cards.

“ Never recruited on the Internet, only by phone. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

“ I am using the Internet, but not too often. I prefer the phone, it works faster and I can change the numbers I use monthly. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

“ [I did my business] by connecting people and guides who know their language, Syrians and Turks who speak English. [...] Now, in Syria I have a close/trustworthy man, who takes [migrants] to Turkey, and then I get them further. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

In addition, all LEA representatives that were interviewed believe that, in Romania, the Dark web is not used in trafficking in human beings or people smuggling, as there are few Internet users skilled enough to use this option.

“ This Dark net [...] It might be used when it comes to refugees, to migrant smuggling, for communication on the Dark net, but that involves advanced knowledge on the Internet, it's not enough to have access to a computer. [...] Not in Romania, I don't know anything about this system being used here. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ I haven't encountered it [the use of Dark web], because us, as a country, when it comes to technology, we aren't sufficiently prepared for something like this – not even accepting that there is a Dark area on the Internet. No... And even if there was [Dark web use], it did not surface in the cases I've had. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The migrants themselves are extensively using social media and the Internet, especially to communicate with friends or members of the Diaspora communities already living in their destination country. Seeking guidance on possible dangers on their route or receiving emotional support, most of the time refugees seek destination countries with existing communities with whom they share national or linguistic ties. In some of the cases, members of the Diaspora communities living in these countries are part of the criminal network, easing the access to accommodation, travel or employment.

According to the interviewees, smugglers almost never use the Internet to promote their services, as this crime is strictly monitored by law enforcement authorities and the risk of being discovered and caught is very high. They prefer direct contact with the migrants. In Romania, they say, there are no websites promoting migrant smuggling services to Western European countries. Recruitment is, most often, done through intermediaries (person to person), both when refugees are searching for smugglers to help them leave their home countries and when smugglers from across the borders contact Romanian criminals that are willing to guide migrant groups when transiting the country.

“ Usually, all this information [on recruitment] you get from people who want to leave the country, from immigrants [refugees] that are housed in various asylum centres in Romania: in Bucharest, Galați, Timișoara, and they talk among themselves: «We want to leave for Austria. Do you know anyone that can help us? » «Yes, there's X. [...] This is his phone number. » And then they discuss: what, how, how much, where, when, all the details. That is how they do it. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

In the case of illegal migrants, the main reason for this is the fact that recruitment does not take place in Romania, but abroad, especially in refugee camps, such as the ones in Greece. The smugglers in Romania are but intermediary links in much larger people smuggling transnational networks. Usually, they are contacted by smugglers in origin countries and are only involved in the transit of migrants in Romania, to its Western border.

“ Usually, the Romanians are never the initiators; they are only the middle link. That is trafficking... For example, Greeks recruit them [migrants] from camps readily available and have connections with people in Romania who transit them, so that it is not so obvious that a foreigner, otherwise monitored, enters Romania. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

### 4.3.2 Transportation

Romania has become, in the last years, a transit country for illegal migrants or refugees to their final country of destination. In the smuggling framework, criminal networks in Romania most often consist of drivers, being a rather small link to the entire network, data also confirmed by the latest Europol reports. Their role is to transport refugee or migrant groups on or from Romanian territory, taking them from their point of entry to the Western border. But Romanian drivers are not operating solely on Romanian territory and are often operating in the destination countries.

Especially following the impossibility of entering the Schengen area directly through Hungary from the Balkans, new routes have been created via Romania, creating the incentives for the development of a criminal network featuring easy access to transport infrastructures used for illegal activities.

An increasing number of refugees are trying to pass the border from Serbia to Hungary via Romania; the border passes from Sânnicolau Mare and Lunga (the border points between the Serbian, Romanian and Hungarian territory) being the ones used most often by the migrants. However, the figures are low compared to other EU countries, with 1,076 people who tried to illegally pass the border in 2015 and a similar number in 2016, according to the Border Police.

As per the transportation process itself, details on the route to follow, meeting places, as well as information on how to identify the transport vehicles to be used is most of the times given through phone conversation or face-to-face contact. Usually, the details regarding travel arrangements and prices are personally given to those who request such services, thus the smugglers do not advertise their business on the Internet. The smuggling victims are often transported in extremely dangerous conditions, hidden in ordinary trucks, passenger vehicles, or bigger trucks. In addition, refrigerated trucks are being used.

As per the communication process during the transportation, most of the interviewed stakeholders (including NGOs, migrants or LEA officers) revealed that the Internet and/or mobile apps were not used during the transport phase or had a rather minor role. In a strategy to minimise the risks of being caught, the smuggler crosses the border by car and directs the migrants to cross by foot, on certain known paths. If successful, the driver will collect those who managed to cross without being intercepted by the border police a few kilometres away from the border.

“ I haven't seen the Internet [communication between smugglers] so far. Just phones with prepaid cards, which are very difficult to monitor, especially since Romania doesn't have legislation to compel you to give your identification information when you buy a prepaid card. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The Internet is rarely used in this process, although one of the LEAs interviewed within the research stated that the Internet also plays a major role in this aspect:

“ Such a criminal group keeps in touch. Transporter, host, recruiter – to the final destination. So, they keep connected, obviously, through the Internet, through the same social media, until the group gets there [in the destination country]. [...] [The migrants] are trained, in a way, they are told what they have to do if they get caught, what they need to do, which route to follow, what transportation to use. All these things have something to do with the Internet and, of course, with social media. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The reasons why communication during the journey is made through other means as opposed to over the Internet are connected to both the migrant's characteristics and the authorities' vigilance. Many migrants do not have phones and, for those who do, connecting to the Internet is difficult, because it implies having access to wireless networks or to mobile phone services in the transit countries – which involves high costs and the risk of being identified by the authorities.

“ Some had phones, but most of them did not. In addition, it is not enough to have this kind of phone, a smart phone; you need an Internet connection, you need a SIM card that works in that country, or access to, I don't know, a store or something, that has wireless Internet, but the risk of being found out is high. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

Also, a new critical issue needs to be underlined when discussing the relationship between the smuggler and the smuggling victims. More and more often, migrants are also double-crossed by smugglers promising transportation towards Western countries but ultimately ending up in Romania. Respondents to this project recount various stories about how migrants sometimes end up in Romania by accident (abandoned or simply misled), and how their documents are forged.

## 4.4 The United Kingdom

### 4.4.1 Recruitment

The overwhelming majority of the findings relating to the function of the Internet and digital technologies that facilitate the processes of people smuggling to the UK were attained from social networking websites, in particular Facebook. The virtual ethnographic research demonstrates that social networking sites are a key instrument for migrants and smugglers to broadcast information about travelling routes, the occurrence of border closures, transportation services and involved costs of arranging trips.

The Figure 17 shows a very popular smuggling page on Facebook broadcasting information of brutal attacks on migrants by border guards and guard dogs on migrants travelling via a land route attempting to cross through the Bulgarian border.

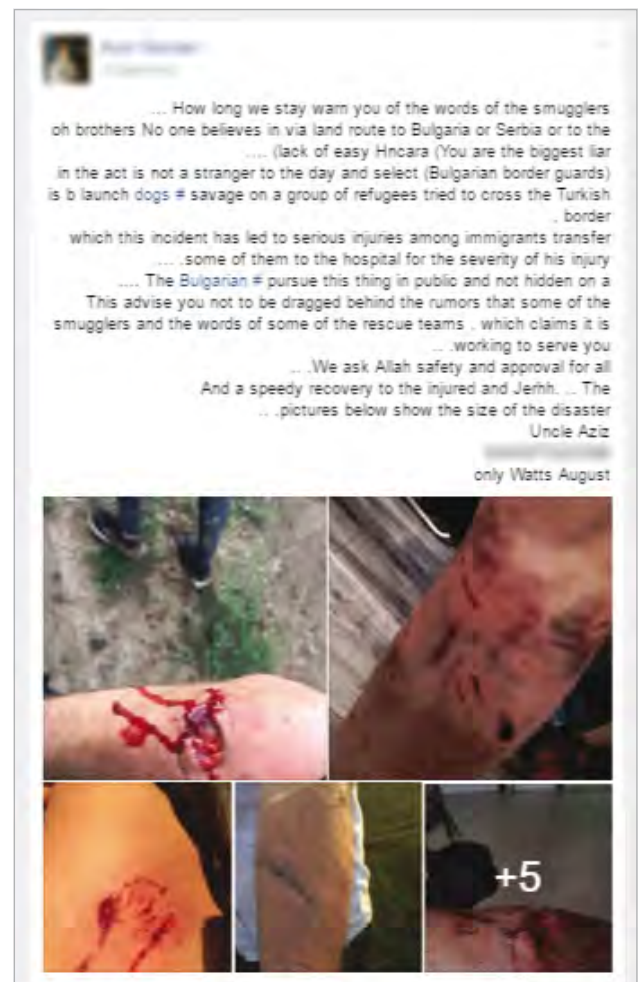
The research identified numerous active and highly popular smuggling-related pages and groups on Facebook that advertised transportation services, the sale of counterfeit travel documents such as passports, visas and identification papers including driving licenses, as well as general discussions of the navigation of paths into the UK, as well as in wider Europe. As one of interviewed experts mentioned, communication and the broadcasting of important information, such as which countries are easy to enter, where borders are open to travel through and where they have been closed, play powerful roles in the recruitment

of migrants to be smuggled and influence their decision-making processes:

“ It [the Internet] would be spreading news, if it's easy to get through the process of an asylum application, the news spreads very quickly, for example 'it's more relaxed in this country or the other country', then people will plan destinations accordingly. Again, it's communication, it's how you spread the news. ”

(Int. UK – Expert on Cybercrime)

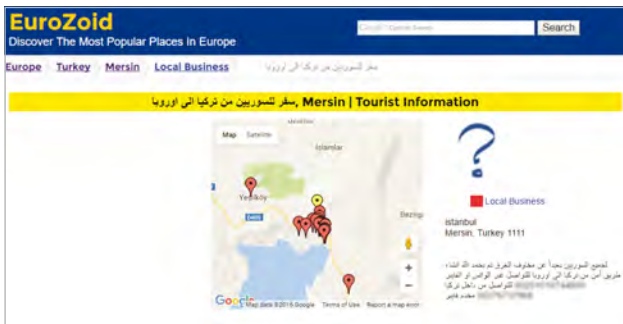
**Figure 17. Example of broadcast information about smuggling of migrants on Facebook**



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

In another typical site, it has been encountered smugglers advertised services by highlighting danger and urging potential clients to connect via Viber app (Figure 18).

**Figure 18. Example of advertisement of a transportation service based in Turkey to travel to Europe, on a popular Europe travel guide website**



#### Translation

*For all the Syrians who wish to escape from their drowning fears, we have successfully set up a safe transit from Turkey to Europe through the Alwats. Connect via Viber or [phone numbers]. To communicate inside Turkey use Pra server for Viber.*

Source: Website. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

Given that most of these pages and groups were private and unable to be freely accessed, it has been added these pages and groups as ‘friends’ in order to gain entry and also to receive notifications of new postings and updates relating to transportation journeys, the advertisement of new trips, usually dependent on suitable weather conditions, and the sale of passports or other such counterfeit documents. Owing to the illicit nature of these pages, researchers noticed that the names would be changed constantly, possibly as a means of avoiding detection, or accounts closed altogether. Indeed, one of interviewed smugglers remarked that on a frequent basis, human smugglers would continuously create and close pages on Facebook to evade possible law enforcement efforts:

*“ I closed them [Smuggling pages on Facebook] all. There are not there anymore. There is no point in having them. I had many because I used each page for a little bit and then I opened another one and so one. For protection, you know. You don’t want to be stable in this business, you need to ‘move’ again and again for protection. ”*

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

The interviews with human smugglers revealed that the Internet was an important tool in their smuggling activities, in particular the recruitment phase to advertise their services, albeit at different levels of use:

*“ Yes [using the Internet] but not as much as you may think. Most of my business in the beginning [recruitment] happens by people [offline]. People know you, they know what you do, they know you are a kacakci [smuggler], and they come to you and tell you what they want... I don’t trust the internet so much anyway because you never know who might be watching... My business partner in Kurdistan will send messages to friends, e-mails and ask ‘do you know anyone who wants to go to Europe? If you do, tell them to send me a message at so and so... ”*

(Int. UK – Smuggler 1)

*“ Yes, I have used the internet many, many times! Internet along with mobile phones, of course, is the best to have business from a distance! I have been helping people to come to the UK since 2002. I enjoy being a kacakci [human smuggler]. [...] I used Facebook before I come to England for a year, a year and a half. I had many pages in face book and advertised my services. Transportation, travel to Europe, good prices, best service. ”*

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

It is important to mention that Smuggler 1 emphasised that often, recruitment took place offline, as people who knew them either directly or indirectly, through friends or relatives, and their occupation as a smuggler would initiate contact in person and make enquiries on how to travel to the UK for themselves or for their relatives. According to Sanchez (2017), those seeking

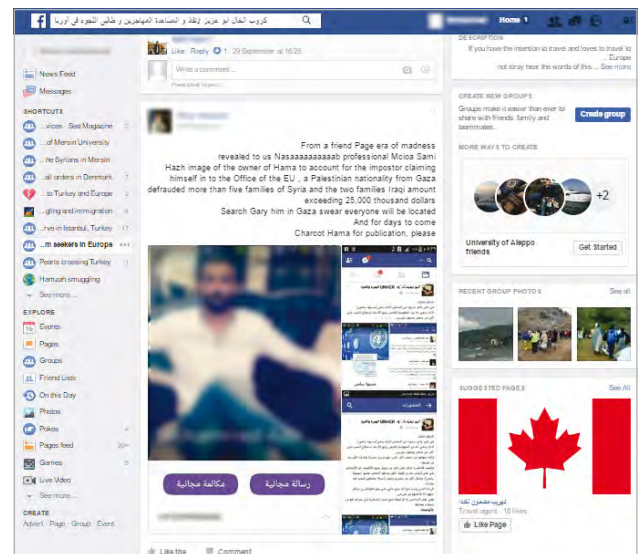
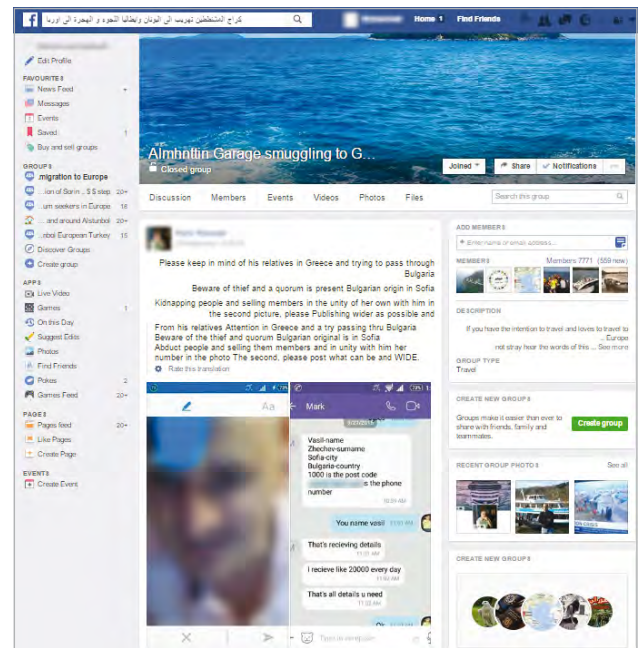


to migrate explore potential smuggling options usually by consulting their friends and relatives who have made and undertaken successful smuggling journeys, often meeting with smugglers in person or chatting via telephone and may meet several smugglers until a suitable option is chosen. Moreover, a small number of smugglers manage to form a client base and positive reputation attesting to the reliability, degree of communication throughout the journey and the quality of the transportation, all of which contribute to the duration of a smuggling enterprise, enabling smugglers to generate and conduct business with prospective customers.

A compelling finding pertaining to the recruitment phase of people smuggling was that some pages, particularly the ones that were more active and popular, would expose fraudulent smugglers who were advertising deceptive transportation services. These posts would often be very lengthy, detailing the unscrupulous smuggler's name, nationality, the country and city they were operating in, how they had defrauded their victim or victims, particularly in regards to payment, with a photograph of the person also attached to the post. Some people would comment on the post to confirm that they too had been deceived by the duplicitous smuggler, and would strongly urge others to be aware and use caution. Researchers speculate that these pages that would routinely uncover deceptive smugglers act as a very effective form of benevolent recruitment, by demonstrating that they were looking after and protecting potential migrants by raising awareness of dangerous swindlers masquerading as smugglers, and instilling confidence of their services, which would encourage migrants to making arrangement trips of transportation with these pages instead.

Figure 19 shows a popular and active smuggling page on Facebook entitled 'Uncle Aziz' exposing fraudulent smugglers deceptively claiming to offer transportation services to Europe and the UK, by exhibiting screenshots of Viber chats in which travel arrangements were discussed.

**Figure 19. Example of Facebook pages exposing fraudulent smugglers deceptively claiming to offer transportation services**



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound



## 4.4.2 Transportation

The research found a significant number of Facebook pages that were actively advertising transportation services, including boat, yacht or flight trips and to a lesser extent, land routes where the journey would be made on foot, to various countries in Europe, with one popular method of travel being from Turkey, in particular the cities of Izmir and Mersin, to various islands in Greece, and then utilising various routes to and within an assortment of European countries to the destination of the UK. One of interviewed smugglers mentioned that a relative of theirs would advertise the sale of European passports to facilitate transportation and entry to the UK:

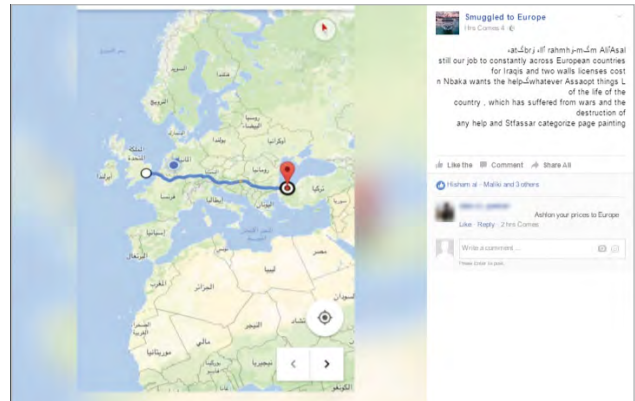
“ My cousin is in France and in his facebook account has a post about European passports. With one of those you get to England with no problem. You just need the money, 800-1,000 euros is OK. [On being showed the particular Facebook account, including the advert/post translated from Arabic to English] ‘Want to buy passport, ID, visa and driving license with no hassle? We make really high quality documents for travel to European countries. We sell only best documents. Guaranteed success. We make perfect passports for UK, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, USA, Canada. Very competitive prices. Discount available for families. The passport can be ready in 5 days. For more information, send an e-mail: [address]@gmail.com / tel. [phone number]’ ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

Figure 20 shows a smuggling page on Facebook named ‘Smuggled to Europe’, advertising transportation services, and including a screenshot captured from Google Maps that demonstrates a transit route from Turkey to the destination of the UK.

The research found that, typically, these pages would post photographs of the particular means of transport, usually of boats, cruise liners and yachts, providing information on its size and dimensions, and the duration of the journey. In addition, these posts would also outline the prices charged for the routes and journey, and include a contact number to make further enquiries. Moreover, by way of perhaps gaining the confidence and trust of potential customers and by extension migrants, the research discovered that many of these pages extensively posted photographs and videos of ‘successful’ trips made, both during the journey, and after the destination had been reached.

**Figure 20. Example of Facebook page advertising transportation services**



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

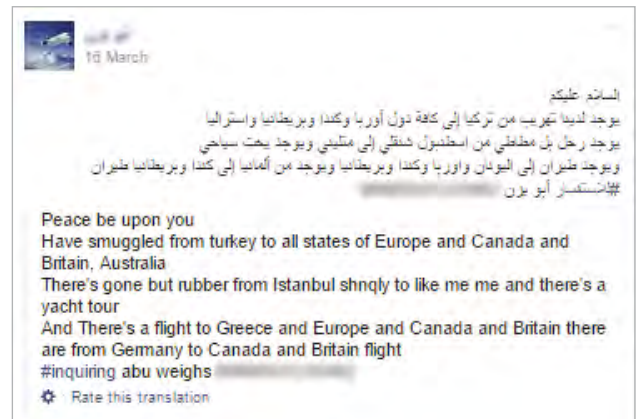
Figure 21 screenshots of transportation journeys being undertaken: the first image during the transportation process, and the second after arrival to the destination had been completed.

A box was featured on many of these pages that attested to how quickly the persons behind these pages would reply to messages, with some of the pages marked as ‘very responsive’, as replying within an hour, and others as ‘extremely responsive’, responding to messages in minutes. Some pages would also post status updates of successful journeys made, alert potential migrants of adverse weather conditions and of new routes into Europe using screenshots of Google Maps to demonstrate these routes in terms of distance and how to travel through the route without discovery by border guards or officials.

**Figure 21. Example of Facebook group advertising transportation services**



**Figure 22. Example of Facebook page advertising the sale of transportation services**



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

Figure 22 shows a smuggling page advertising the sale of transportation services. In this instance flight trips to the UK, with communication for further enquiries undertaken via WhatsApp.

Strikingly, the research came across numerous instance of the interplay between various forms of technology, in this instance between the Internet and mobile phone applications, the most widely used being WhatsApp and Viber. In this regard, researchers observed that when used in this way by smugglers, Facebook operates as a gateway, in that it introduces potential migrants to services through advertisements, with further communications, most likely to arrange transportation journeys and discuss payment taking place through WhatsApp and Viber, usually through the telephone numbers that were listed in the post. This was the usual method that took place for the interviewed smugglers, in which initial questions would be answered through private chats in Facebook but would then take place via mobile phone to make further arrangements between the smugglers and the clients, or between smugglers working alongside other smugglers:

“ This [private chats in Facebook] was very rare after they contacted me. Most of clients gave me a call; I offered a telephone number in the post, so they called me and made all arrangements. There are a few of, usually very young, people who will send messages in private chat in Facebook. Young boys who are on-line the whole time and are interested in going to Europe and they may want to ask something before the arrangements are made. You know to ask whether they can come with less money. Maybe because they don't have a phone, I don't know. Most of the people called me and I answer any questions they have. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

“ I just use mobile phones to communicate with my partners in places like Istanbul and Izmir. This is how we take care of business. Once the people get to Greece, there are others who take care of them. I also talk to people I know about the travel and advise them what to do when in Istanbul because Istanbul is very big and people from my town find it difficult. ”

(Int. UK - Smuggler 1)

Primarily when it comes to the smuggling of Asian and African migrants, all smuggling groups and/or individuals ‘cooperate’ (without even considering it) in an attempt to bring the bulk of migrants from Asia and Africa to the United Kingdom (as well as other countries of Western Europe). This takes place via a smuggler-to-smuggler approach that does not allow irregular migrants to be lost (see İçduygu & Toktas, 2002). Smugglers often unwittingly ‘collaborate’ with other smugglers, and are not known to one another, as they may live and operate in different villages, cities, regions, and countries (see, for example, Sanchez, 2017). In the event of arrest of one of the smugglers, or if the chain is sometimes broken during the journey (e.g., due to policing operations), other individuals, groups and networks, who have no connection with the smugglers of the initial stage, take over in the smuggling migrants. Information and communication technologies are instrumental at this part. Scholars have noted that smugglers and their clients rely on basic mobile phones for communication purposes, alongside social media and to recruit and guide clients, although as Sanchez (2017) points out, this usage is better understood as a reflection of the affordability and availability of mobile technology, rather than as a marker of the technological sophistication of smugglers. Significant sections of the communications that place between various smugglers working together take place through mobile technology, including phone calls, text messages (SMS), as well as WhatsApp and Viber and social media websites. These undertakings, when executed productively and in coordination, will guide clients to their final destination.

Figure 23 shows active and popular Facebook pages advertising smuggling services to the UK, as well as Europe, in particular transportation services via yacht and flight trips. Typically, cost breakdowns in Euros are included in the postings, with all further communication regarding these services taking place with phone chats using WhatsApp, through the phone numbers listed.

Figure 23. Example of Facebook pages advertising smuggling services to the UK

The figure displays two screenshots of Facebook posts advertising smuggling services. The top screenshot shows a post in Arabic from a user named 'عزير حسن' (Azir Hassan), posted in two groups. The text describes a yacht tour from Turkey to Italy, mentioning a 26-meter yacht, 35 passengers, and a cost of 4500 euros per person. It also mentions a 55-hour duration and a 35% discount for children. The post includes a WhatsApp contact number and a note to call the day before. The bottom screenshot shows a post in English from a user named 'Abu Vazan', advertising flights to various destinations: Greece (2500€), Europe (9000€), Britain (12000€), America, Australia, and Canada (16000€), and a yacht tour (1500€). It also mentions a 6-month Schengen visa for 7000 euros and a flight to the UK for 13000 euros.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound



As a means of a more active engagement with this aspect of the virtual ethnography, researchers tried to contact some of the more popular smuggling Facebook pages, in particular those who were likely to respond swiftly to messages. The rationale for this approach was to try and discover whether there were particular pages or smugglers and ‘brokers’ that would be able to provide information on ways of transportation and routes taken to travel, specifically to the United Kingdom. Researchers contacted these pages with a simple inquiry of how it would be possible to travel to the United Kingdom, from Syria as well as the costs involved as a lone traveller for the journey. As a means of initiating conversation, researchers used an online translation tool to translate text to Arabic, and then proceeded to send messages to the pages via Facebook’s web (and desktop)-based Messenger feature. Whilst some of these pages did indeed provide swift responses, the majority of the time the researchers were informed that further information could only be discussed through mobile phone applications such as WhatsApp and Viber, with contact numbers provided to do so. However, given that these conversations would be conducted entirely in Arabic, and with researchers possessing insufficient knowledge of the Arabic language, this, unfortunately, was an impossible, challenging task. Advantageously, however, creating and setting up a Facebook account yielded much data, in that researchers were able to gain more access and insight into previously inaccessible content, such as relevant smuggling groups and pages.

Figure 24 shows the initiating and engaging in conversation with a smuggling page on Facebook, enquiring as to the ways in which it would be possible to be transported to the UK, and what routes the journey would entail.

**Figure 24. Example of a Messenger chat with a smuggling page on Facebook**



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

The smugglers interviewed also remarked on the use of the Internet, in particular social media and mobile phones as being key mechanisms in the logistics of the transportation process, specifically keeping in contact with the clients during the transportation journey, as well as the arrival of their clients to the destination and, importantly, the arrangement of payment. Irregular migrants (or their families who very often see the facilitation of their migration as an investment) pay the full or at least 50% of the total smuggling fee in advance. This 50% is in most occasions used towards paying important actors of the journey before the actual journey starts. The rest of the fee is paid upon the migrants’ arrival in the destination country. In many occasions advance payments are made to a middleman, a trusted and prominent member of the local community, who then forwards the payment to the organiser upon the end of the migrants’ facilitated journey:

“ Once we have a customer, I have used Facebook and I have also been using e-mail in order to take care of details with regards to the details of the trip from Kurdistan to Istanbul and from Istanbul to Izmir, from Izmir into the Greek islands. Sometimes, especially when I know the person I helped to travel e-mails and Facebook are used to let me know that they have reached the destination and to sort out any outstanding money issues. We have to get paid too! You know, where to go and who to pay and so on. Sometimes there are problems any people are getting lost, they cannot find a place to stay, they cannot find someone to talk to, etc. etc. etc. the travel is full of problems and you cannot do this without e-mails, and phones. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

As well as advertising transportation services, one of interviewed smugglers would also provide information on available accommodation and where to charge phones during journeys for which the duration of the trip to the destination country was uncertain:

“ In most of the places people have to stay [transit points], they need a house, a bed to sleep on. The best way for them to know what is there, cheap places to stay, is Facebook. You can find a hotel anywhere in Europe but the problem is that they are very expensive. When they travel for months or even years they want to spend as little money as possible. You never know how long the trip will last, and in some place, they ask them for a lot of money, 5 euros for a bottle of water, 10 euros for a sandwich, and some people Greece, in Italy, in France, they ask you 20 euros to let you recharge your mobile battery. So, in the internet, in Facebook, you can advertise accommodation for as little as 10 euros a night. When people travel, they are always on their mobiles to find the cheapest solutions to their everyday problems... my cousin does the same for cheap rooms. [On being showed a relevant post on Facebook on available accommodation in France] ‘Cheap rooms in Calais. 15 euros per night, TV included. Common toilet with shower. Clean. Available for families. Discount negotiable. For more information, [phone number]. ’ ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

## 4.5 Web survey

A web survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums, was administered for each key member state (N=995). Specifically, this section presents the data about at-risk websites visited and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on actions related to the smuggling of migrants.

For this scope, the following questions were administered, among others (see Annex C), to the Internet users:

- Have you ever encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers?
- Do you know where these contents were published?
- Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?
- Have you or someone you know ever used these services?

The results of the web survey supported, in toto, what already emerged with the exploration of the web and thanks to the in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

According to the results of the web survey about half of the sample declared to have never seen or heard cases in which the Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertised cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers (Table 3).

**Table 3. Have you ever encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers? Percentages (N=966). Results from the web survey**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Yes, I did  | 7.6%   |
| No, but my relatives, friends or acquaintances did    | 4.0%   |
| No, but I know about similar contents from the media  | 20.0%  |
| No, but people say that similar contents exist        | 20.0%  |
| No, I have never seen or heard about similar contents | 48.4%  |
| Total   | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound



However, more than one out of ten stated that this is not an unknown phenomenon: in fact, 11.6 per cent declared to have seen or heard similar cases, directly (7.6%) or indirectly from their relatives, friends or acquaintances (4%). The rest of the respondents claimed to not know these cases personally or through their relatives, but from the media (20%) or other people (20%).

Although 38.5% of people claim to have never seen or heard instances of Internet or mobile content (such as websites, social networking messages, web/chat posts) that promote cross-border travel or transfer of immi-

grants or asylum seekers, and do not know or are not sure where these contents are published, it can be noted that the rest of the sample claimed that Facebook is the most frequent channel in which this published content was found (23.6%), followed by specific websites with announcement (10.6%) and other social networks such as Instagram (9.2%) (see Table A1, Annex D). Finally, they thought these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky mostly because the offered travel was unhindered and did not mention bureaucratic bounds (36.6 %) or because the prices were unusual (too high or too low) (31.3 %) (see Table A2, Annex D).



# 50

## The role of the Internet in the trafficking of human beings

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The term ‘trafficking in human beings’ refers to the ‘the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those 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’. It is also considered exploitation ‘the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs’. This definition, to be found in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, of 5 April 2011, represents an important achievement for the legislation on trafficking of human beings, at the European level. This document, in fact, represents a first comprehensive legislative response to this growing phenomenon, and it reflects the effort to implement preventive actions and to offer a clear and unique definition.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by traffickers to reach specific users. Facebook and dedicated websites play a significant role in this criminal activity.

This Chapter presents the results of research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project (i.e. Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom) concerning the role of the Internet in the trafficking of human beings. Specifically, for each country the results related to recruitment/transportation and exploitation (sexual and labour-related). phases are presented. Finally, the main results of the web survey designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums are briefly provided to support the research findings.

## 5.1 Bulgaria

### 5.1.1 Recruitment

Unlike the process of smuggling, where the Internet is used only in part of the 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 arranged a meeting with the girl and we preliminarily agreed on the payment. But another man goes for me to estimate whether she fits. When everything is done, I usually appear as well with a direct ‘job’ offer. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

“ Once they have transferred the first payment we call them for a direct meeting in the office or on the spot – that is, our man goes to their town for a meeting. If from a certain city 20 people are called, a general meeting is set up to advertise the job. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

### Sexual exploitation

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

“ It is the main mean for the recruitment of girls; it helps me a lot. It's not necessary to persuade the girl, she wants to herself... Years ago I 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

According to the interviewed person, he now exclusively recruits 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 pretend to be a man who needs a companion and try to be cautious, but they disclose to me on their own that they seek sex for payment. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

Although Facebook is largely used, it is perceived as being a bit harder to use to recruit in comparison with the dating sites:

“ But on Facebook the girls who offer themselves are more cautious. I judge whether they are a fit and whether I can count on income from them. I'm careful not to deal with minors, there are many. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 are registered there speak at least two Euro-

pean languages, and the profits they bring, respectively, are double in comparison with profits made in their home country.

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

“ It all started with my registrations on dating sites – Twoo, ELMAZ... The second month of my registrations 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 appearance. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

“ Almost all of the more intelligent girls looking for income in this way use the 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

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 was, that a lot of money could be made and I agreed because there was nothing to do, plus I also believed he was in love with me and we would do something together. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

“ They placed the ad like that – maids sought. However, not maids, but prostitutes. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)



The difference in recruitment could be connected with the victims' socio-demographic status. The first victim is about 23-25 years old, with a Bulgarian ethnic background, with secondary education completed and at least an average knowledge of foreign languages. The second one is a few years older, has not completed secondary school (dropped out of it to arrive with the 'boyfriend'), and of Roma ethnicity. 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 expressive skills. She has never used the Internet nor mobile apps. However, usage of the Internet as a recruitment method could not be ethnic-defined. The Roma victim evidenced the 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 was; they needed work or simply were of that sort. Just the first week they were chatting on Facebook and the next week they came to him to work. Knowing what it was all about... ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

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

**“ To 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. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

According to another LEA representative:

**“ Internet hardly has a role. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

**“ Through the Internet it's about 50-60 per cent of the cases... For labour exploitation, it is done without the Internet, because Gypsies are predominantly recruited, for low-qualified labour. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

**“ The Internet is used in less than 50 per cent of the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation and much less in cases of trafficking for labour exploitation. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Also, the interviewees from this group of respondents specify:

**“ In both types of traffic, the process of recruitment may not be performed solely through the Internet. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

**“ Also, there is a scheme in which victims are first spotted in places they frequent – at school, in malls, in bars and discos. Then the names of those spotted are asked to be identified by their acquaintances and they are then looked for on Facebook. ”**

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Regarding the question of which Internet options are used for recruitment, the LEA representatives do not fully agree about the predominant model. One of them puts the stress on the circumstance of 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. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Another one outlined Facebook as a main instrument:

*“ They create pages on Facebook that are closed groups, and the girls add them as their place of work. 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 for sure. Such opportunities exist on 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 also used, but very rarely. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

All of the three interviewed NGO representatives estimated the role of the 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 the Internet is already the major one, described a mechanism very similar to those described by the sex trafficker and the victim recruited through the Internet: that the primary target are girls who already try to use the Internet to make money through 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, decide if she is good enough and naturally I make an offer to her (to work for me)... ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

She emphasizes that the existing dating sites are the primary initial means of contact that is then transferred to Skype or phone and followed by a personal meeting. According to her statements Facebook is also used, including for checking whether someone has accounts on dating sites. Regarding the type of victims who had not been engaged in prostitution (and the respondent stated they are an increasingly 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’ method, and that the Internet just assists the traditional methods. They paid attention to victims who hadn’t personally thought about the possibility of prostitution.

*“ With regard to the recruitment of victims the most popular method is ‘Lover Boy’, in which he wins the trust of the victim, builds a romantic relationship that ends with an offer to go abroad and thus start the exploitation. There are also other options – acquaintances, acquaintances of the victim, relatives abroad. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

According to one of the respondents-NGO representatives, both job postings 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 forums and job advertisements are also used. All these things are used a lot; social media is also used by methods that include – someone requests your friendship 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

The same interviewee paid attention to the 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

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

“ Porn sites and regular networks – Twitter, Viber, email, Facebook – are facilitating the mechanism, especially for the sexualisation of girls. The fact that these people bring [a feeling of] security, and are the only ones who tell the girls, especially girls that they are beautiful, that they 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 have 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

According to the results from the exploration of the web that could not account for 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 publishers of the advertisements, but the more detailed of them point to at nightclubs and spas, 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 the 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 address, a Skype address or a WhatsApp account, for the candidate employees to be able to contact them. This leads researchers to another serious advantage of recruiting through the web – at a very early stage in 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 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. An additional option for private contacts between the advertisers and their target group are the chat rooms or personal messages on the online platforms where the job offers are 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 to 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 to 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 seemingly have a great variety of options to choose from. Different escort agencies, nightclubs, 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 will enjoy:

- Full access to social security and healthcare;
- 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 hours and the right to 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 made their own 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 old, 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 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 they usually do not mention if this process would involve any additional expenditure. In regard 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.

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 that led to a private conversation with a trafficker in Germany, who offers a job as a sex worker. The communication itself goes through the channels of one of the dozens of 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 to potentially 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 euros a day. In addition, he also promises to secure free transportation to the destination country, a job in an elite nightclub, 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 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 the 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 searching for people for work in construction or agriculture. From there, people connect through email, or the same ad is published on Facebook as well. My girls share it on their pages so it can be liked by others and in this manner, more people have access to the ad. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 on one of the job sites mentioned by the labour trafficker: jobs.bg, and after talking with an official of the company, he looked at their Facebook profile as well. Also, he sent his CV by email. After that, Internet and mobile apps were not used:

*“ Primary connection flowed over the phone. She told me that I could look at their page on Facebook to convince myself that everything is legal. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the interviewed LEA representatives were rather sceptical regarding the use of the Internet in the recruitment phase of trafficking for labour exploitation. They expressed opinions that either the 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 the Internet is not needed, even in sexual exploitation. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

One of the LEA representatives interviewed observed that the recruitment for labour abroad is most frequently done through ads, including ads on job websites. However, he expressed suspicion whether those cases represent trafficking or not; and stated that in the majority of cases he has knowledge 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. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Only one representative of NGO commented on the use of the Internet for recruitment for THB for labour exploitation. She expressed confidence that the 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 an American man through the Internet, through a dating site. The woman is Russian. She departed for the USA, got married and afterwards was subjected to exploitation: servitude and forced labour. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

According to the results from the 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 the 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 assistane;
- 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, with regards 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 that 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 1,200 euros; secured working contract, accommo-

dation and in some cases even nourishment and free transportation 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.

With regard 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. In many instances, they are deceived and forced to pay additional fees or subjected to unforeseen expenditure for housing and other urgent needs.

## 5.1.2 Transportation

For both types of trafficking, the Internet is hardly related to the transportation phase. According to the traffickers interviewed, they use mobile apps but only for advertisement and for matching demand and supply. In the 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.

### Sexual exploitation

According to the interviewed sex trafficker, the mobile applications, such 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 on the same websites they've been recruited from, or on other 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 facilitated by the Internet only in the case of the girl who used it to start her 'job'. Her evidence regarding this topic also generally coincides with the statements of the sex

trafficker. She uses both a Facebook profile and profiles on dating sites:

*“ We advertise our own services on the sites. What my pimp does is provides me with a boy who is a good computer specialist and who processes photos and some videos with good quality. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

Skype and mobile applications 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. You could use them to send erotic videos and to negotiate the price. But this is also a kind of direct advertising... Even through videochatting on Viber, and Skype also works perfectly. I will only say that it is impossible to work without these applications. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

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

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

*“ In the case of sexual exploitation yes, to some extent. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

*“ I do not know what the role of the Internet is in the case of highly paid elite prostitutes – it may play a role, but there are no complaints there. ”*

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

“ For example, by uploading ‘beautiful’ pictures on the Facebook profiles of girls; sites for free ads are used, with the headings ‘She and He.’ In isolated cases video chat and webcam are offered. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

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

“ There is an example of disguised prostitution from 2012 on a site for photo models and mannequins. Girls have their profiles there and the 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 Ros-sen Cholov. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Regarding the advertising of services of the victims of sex trafficking, one of the NGO representatives pleaded she is not aware of how it might be done, and that even the victims do not have a 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 to 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 they generate much more money. 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 it is quite difficult to detect and dismantle because the trafficker somehow remains much more out of the picture... Victims in the case of a site, they are not on the street; use of the site comes with payment, customers pay accordingly on the Internet and thus it is difficult to know whether the victims were minors. It is more difficult to understand if the victims agree with the whole thing because for example, there are cases where I said there were 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. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

## Labour exploitation

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

“ Basically, I use Viber, and WhatsApp to a lesser extent. In this manner, I negotiate with the employers abroad: directly. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – 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 employers for me there. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)



The interviewed LEA representatives are unanimous in stating that usage of the 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 in that. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

“ In the case of labour exploitation, they would rather use old business contacts abroad. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Only one respondent from the group of NGO representatives commented on the advertisement of services of labour traffic victims. In 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 to pick somewhere, but it's on other channels. Offline, there are communities where from person to person this happens and is very regionalised, in Bulgaria and abroad. For example, the village of the Vratsa region, from there they go to Germany and do this. And it's such a network of people, which is mostly offline. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

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

“ 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, for order brigades and for babysitters... ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

## 5.2 Italy

### 5.2.1 Recruitment and transportation

The in-depth interviews and the exploration of the web allowed for the understanding of how the recruitment of the victims of human trafficking is nowadays expanding and constantly changing, both in the ways in which it is carried out – through the use of digital technology and social networks – and in the categories of people affected, given the growing amount of children involved.

However, in some parts of the world, the recruitment for the scope of sexual exploitation is still predominantly done offline, through informal channels and friend/family networks. This is, for instance, the kind of recruitment through which many Nigerian women become victims of trafficking for the scope of sexual exploitation. These women/girls, after undertaking the travel through intermediaries and arriving in the destination country, are informed of the job they will carry out and of the ‘travel debt’<sup>4</sup> they got into to reach their destination. Hence, it is possible to assume that the contact process between the victims and the trafficker – therefore, the recruitment – takes place mostly in the origin countries, originating from informal and direct communication networks, without necessarily involving the research of job and travel offers on the Internet, as confirmed by some of the interviewed experts:

“ Recruitment forms vary for the different nationalities, because often it [the recruitment] occurs in the countries of origin. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

“ We had many economic problems because of my father's death, and one day a neighbour proposed to my mum to help me, because she had relatives in Europe who needed someone to work as a babysitter. I was taken to Italy to the madam's home. There, there were other women and they told me I was supposed to work as a prostitute and that there was no child to babysit. ”

(Int. Italy – THB victim 4)

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<sup>4</sup> This term refers to the amount of money that migrants must pay the traffickers as a remuneration for managing the travel toward the destination country or the removal from the country of origin. Among the various ways in which men or women can pay their debt, sexual and labour exploitation are options.

Even if the informal channels for recruitment are still solid, the emersion of online recruitment channels has amplified the range of potential victims, increasing the number of victims' nationalities and lowering their age – with a growing number of minors involved. The analysis of the collected data, in fact, confirms the hypothesis that social networks are highly used for the scope of recruitment. Among the analysed social networks, Facebook offered more relevant data for the research, followed by Instagram.

Figures 25 and Figure 26 show two advertising techniques for the scope of recruitment online. Both were found on social media websites, using the keyword 'job contract Europe' – in Arabic, and are aimed at advertising jobs, contracts, visas, and residences in Europe. The first image refers to a Facebook closed group, which could not be accessed in order to view the posts; however, the group's name, the cover image and the variety of offered services are indications of a possible link with human trafficking. The second image, instead, refers to a Instagram personal profile aimed at providing information about job opportunities in Europe and, specifically, in Italy. The profile's administrator published posts and advertisements on available jobs in the Schengen area. In both cases, the information about the jobs was vague and brief in relation to the required skills, to the working location and to the potential remunerations.

**Figure 25. Closed Facebook group (supposed to be) for the recruitment phase of human trafficking**



#### Translation

Visa, residence, work contracts and travel organisation for Gulf States, Europe and Turkey.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

The online recruitment of potential victims is carried out in different ways and is directed at various targets. From the exploration of the web, in fact, two main kinds of recruitment strategies emerged: the first consists of offering jobs, with related travels and the documents which are necessary to move to and within Europe; the second method usually involves minors and takes place on the Dark web.

**Figure 26. Instagram profile (supposed to be) for the recruitment phase of human trafficking**



Source: Instagram. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

In the first case, the travel offers often include transportation services which are organised to take the person to the location where the work will be performed; in other cases, the offers regard itinerant works, especially in the tourism sector, involving long periods of mobility within European countries. For these reasons, the transportation phase of the trafficking in human beings has been included within the recruitment phase. During the period of the web exploration, in fact, cases of travel offers – potentially related to human trafficking – not linked to job opportunities were not found.

From the interviews, it also emerged that traffickers use fake profiles on social network platforms in order to attract and interact with potential victims. This kind of online behaviour was also confirmed by some of the interviewed victims of trafficking:

“ I was contacted by a man who used false information and his brother's profile picture; with this Facebook profile, he used to contact a lot of girls and he randomly found me. He told me he worked as a taxi driver and he was the owner of a radio taxi. He told me he lived in Turin for many years. I started to date this guy and after a few days he asked me for money saying he would have taken care of me, finding me a job as a nurse. ”

(Int. Italy – THB victim 3)

The ways in which they get in touch are the same: the trafficker or the person linked with the criminal organisation attract the girls – potential victims – online, especially on social networks. Among these subjects a virtual relationship is established based on dreams, false expectations and promises of a better future life; they plan weddings and travels and send presents or money to convince the potential victim to leave for Europe or Italy.

As confirmed by some traffickers and representatives of NGOs, social networks facilitate the recruitment of potential victims due to the possibility, for the traffick-

ers, to easily and frequently view what these people publish online. It is common, in fact, to make it possible for other users to view personal pictures, videos and posts – unless specific privacy settings are chosen. This online content, accessible to all the users, can be seen by traffickers who select in this way the potential victims. The broad use of social networks, their accessibility and the possibility to post pictures and videos allow a preliminary evaluation of the potential victims’ physical characteristics, and the latter will eventually be contacted through Messenger or other messaging applications. An interviewed woman who has worked for years in the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria affirmed this by saying:

“ Thanks to social networks, traffickers see that these girls are still very young and juicy, and therefore they enter in contact with them through the social media. ”

(Int. Italy – NHO representative 1)

Hence, with the broad diffusion of social networks, new recruitment techniques – based on digital technology – have emerged beside the old ones. A man, who has worked for more than 30 years in the human trafficking business, affirmed that:

“ The old methods are those in which the sponsors arrive in Nigeria, see the girls themselves and make them take a vow (often magic rites) before taking them out. They look at their body to check whether they will be able or not, then they take them with them. These are some of the old methods used to send someone to Europe, but these days there are new inventions. ”

(Int. Italy – Trafficker 1)

The so-called e-recruitment – i.e. recruitment through computer and internet-related tools (Cortese and Cippolletti, 2015; Sykiotou, 2007) – becomes the primary form of recruitment, especially for the scope of sexual exploitation.

The second modality of recruitment, instead, mainly regards minors and it usually occurs on the Dark web. Specifically, the researchers identified posts and online conversations – published by users and alleged ‘experts’ – concerning information on how and where to find minor girls and boys. Figure 27 shows the content of a forum located on the Dark web; the screenshot dis-

plays a conversation between a buyer and a seller and it concerns the purchase of a ‘white female under 18’. In the conversation, the names or the websites of the users are, of course, not visible and further interactions between them were not found: they probably decided to continue the conversation on a private connection.

**Figure 27. Conversation between two users regarding the purchase of a minor girl**



Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

This second modality is less frequently found on the web than the first one, but the presence of specialised hidden websites or forums – especially on the Dark web – must not be excluded.

As mentioned, the trafficker's attraction for minors emerged. Due to their inexperience and high vulnerability, this category of subjects easily becomes the traffickers' prey, both in Italy and in origin countries:

**“ The Internet has for sure facilitated the recruitment of minors for what regards pornography, to commit crimes, for sure to attract young people. ”**

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

**“ Yes, to tell the truth, what emerged to us is that the majority of foreigner unaccompanied minors, that are for instance in Italy, use Facebook much more than WhatsApp or others. ”**

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

In this regard, it is important to notice that unaccompanied minor migrants are considered to be at high risk of human trafficking. However, a growing presence of exploited children of Italian nationality has been registered.

**“ Among girls, also Italians in this case end up in the business of child pornography or, anyway, there is the risk that something virtual also becomes real; it has this broad use. Also, this way sometimes, of these websites, to go into certain things...this has had its consequences. ”**

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

**“ We have witnesses to minor unaccompanied migrants [...] many are those who make an unaware use of the Internet, on one side because they are alone, on the other because they are not supported by parents or trusted adults, they do not know what is the best way to use [the Internet], they do not have computer-related knowledge so that they can choose in an informed, aware, proper manner. ”**

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

As confirmed by the IPSOS's research (2016) carried out for Save The Children, the use of the Internet, social networks and digital tools is more and more common among Italian minors. The minors' high vulnerability

– determined by the age and the inexperience – and heedless use of the Internet and social networks expose them to potential abuses and exploitations starting online. Besides the smuggling and human trafficking phenomena, this vulnerability has repercussions on minors' involvement in online pornography and child pornography. As emerged by the interviews, a widespread practice is to threaten vulnerable subjects for the possession of sexually explicit pictures or videos of the victim; the exploiter, in these cases, asks the victim for money or other benefits in order to avoid the dissemination of the material. According to Interpol (2017), these kinds of activities can be classified as sextortion, a term referring to the threat of showing sexually explicit images of a person, if this person doesn't provide compensation through money or other (sexual) benefits.

In cases of sexual exploitation linked to the trafficking of human beings, the threats are usually to show sexual images to the family or friends – in the countries of origin – of the exploited person. Given that these friends and family members may not know what kind of job is actually carried out by the trafficked person, the reaction is often to exclude her/him, victimise her/him and eventually recur to physical violence to punish her/him. Hence, these processes increase the victim's marginalisation, as well as social and financial exclusion.

## 5.2.2 Exploitation

Situations that are classifiable as bonded labour, servitude and slavery still take place in various working sectors, such as: textile production, manufacturing/ industrial, construction, domestic servitude and catering. Exploitation in these sectors is mainly diffused in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (UNODC, 2014). Sexual exploitation, instead, predominantly affects Africa, US, South America, Europe and Central Asia – manifesting itself as prostitution 'on the road', 'indoor' or online (UNODC, 2014).

In the following pages, the results of the research will be exposed with regard to both labour and sexual exploitation. For the former, the only results that will be evaluated are those emerged from the in-depth interviews. This choice is determined by the impossibility of univocally linking the analysed web contents to cases of (potential) labour exploitation – considering and confirming that labour exploitation often originates and manifests itself in 'offline' environments, such as those of agriculture or construction works. Instead, a high number of web contents somehow related to sexual exploitation were registered; this allowed to confirm that sex trafficking is increasingly becoming e-trafficking (Di Nicola et al., 2013; Hughes 2014; Latonero 2012; Maltzhan 2006).



## Labour exploitation

As mentioned above, it was not possible to identify web contents and related indicators clearly related to forms of labour exploitation. However, one exception is represented by the recruitment phase. In this regard, in fact, many online ads were collected advertising works abroad, not containing any information on wages, tasks, qualification requirements, place of work or employer. Moreover, the text often contained grammatical or syntax mistakes. The combination of these elements led to the conclusion that, while there may not be cases of labour exploitation in online environments, some websites and forums are used to recruit victims of labour exploitation.

The in-depth interviews with NGOs provided interesting information regarding this kind of exploitation. The nationalities that seem to be more linked with labour exploitation are Egyptian (especially children – Save the Children 2007) and Nigerian (especially women); however, a growing number of victims from East-Europe were registered.

The working sectors vary in relation to the gender: women – especially from East and central Africa – are generally exploited for personal care and in the tertiary sector (i.e. as housemaids, hairdressers, babysitters, etc.); men, instead, are more frequently located in the construction and agriculture sectors (especially for seasonal work) and in trading services.

““ It depends on nationalities, age, many factors. For the Egyptian nationality, there is more labour exploitation also because it is an economic migration. Instead, for Nigerian and East European it is sexual exploitation. It depends on nationality, on gender, on age and on the reason of migration. ””

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

““ Labour exploitation of Egyptians in markets takes place in the fruit and vegetable sector, in shops, stores, pizzerias, carwashes, fast foods. They work illegally for many hours and they sleep where they work – especially the Afghans. ””

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

One of the respondents mentioned the problem of work camps in Sicily. Here, Romanian girls, besides being exploited to work in greenhouses, are sexually abused by their employers. Hence, the two types of exploitation (labour and sexual) overlap.

““ This I experienced in Sicily, on the side that is transformed. Before, there were Moroccan migrants exploited in greenhouses; after the entrance of Romania to the European Union, many arrived, even Romanian women who work [in the greenhouses] and, in addition, they are sexually abused. ””

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

In this region of Italy, in fact, this ‘hybrid’ form of exploitation – a mixture of sexual and labour – seems to be consolidated:

““ The form of exploitation here is very peculiar: [women] from Romania are exploited for work, they live in shacks; they work in greenhouses for many hours a day and then they are sexually exploited. Their landowners are ‘medium’ or ‘small’, not ‘big’, and they ask for the extra work, that is sex. ””

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

One of the common elements that was underlined by the interviewed persons is the precariousness in which exploited persons conduct their lives and their jobs. This condition is common in all the sectors and all the regions: from North to South, from agriculture to personal care works. Marginalisation, isolation and victimisation seem to be common features among trafficking victims and their children:

““ They do not have access to anything, only fields, greenhouses and that’s it. Often there are minors, there are kids who do not go to school, they stay in the greenhouses with the mothers, there is no water, no beds. They live in conditions of poverty, decay, far from the world. The cultural situation is that these women are not welcomed by society. ””

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

From the research, it emerged that the Internet does not play a fundamental role in this type of exploitation. Among the minors who are victims of trafficking, the major communication channel is – according to the respondents – word-of-mouth, and not mobile applications or social networks.

“ The phenomenon we see of exploitation of minors we work with, it is often related to word-of-mouth communication between friends. So, I don't think that they read the ads there, but the mate, the friend hooks the other and makes him enter in the network. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

Instead, among the migrants who work in the agriculture sector and/or do seasonal work, it is common to use smartphones to facilitate the practicalities of the work, to share information and to manage the relocation of workers from the South to the North.

“ So indeed, even for the sake of work, there are significant numbers of people moving according to the seasons, the agriculture periods, and this for sure happens almost entirely through the mobile phone, through the Internet. The call cannot be by word-of-mouth if someone goes from Puglia to Trentino, so to speak. These instruments are used for sure, and the practice of changing the sim card works well. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

## Sexual exploitation

Since the 90's, the sex business has found on the Internet new settings where the demand can meet the supply for sex-related services (Selmi, 2009). The digital revolution stimulated the online share of sex and the emersion of new phenomena related, in particular, to the pornography industry. This determined a higher demand and a higher supply of sex-related contents and services. For these reasons, the form of human trafficking, which seems to be more affected by the advent of the Internet, is the one directed at sexual exploitation. Human trafficking for the scope of sexual exploitation, therefore, partially develops as a response to the growing demand of sex-related contents in online environments. Moreover, the Internet offers itself as a powerful channel for the advertisement of sexual services that are provided offline.

“ From the advent of the Internet, the phenomenon has totally changed. Also, the ads for in-house prostitution. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

As the existing literature points out, the Internet also allowed for the spread of sex-related material and services that do not require the physical interaction of the person. Tools such as chats, webcams, smart phones, etc. allow new kinds of sexual services – which could also be used in the context of exploitation and human trafficking.

One of the most complex aspects of the phenomenon is the difficulty in interacting with the victims in order to push them to exit the trafficking networks. Trafficking's victims providing sex services on the street, however, are sometimes approached by ONG or other entities, which manage to provide them support, as well as legal, psychological and medical assistance.

However, it is necessary to recognise that the offer of sex-related services is not always linked to exploitation and trafficking phenomena; in fact, there are also individuals and groups that voluntarily engage in sexual activities using online platforms, without having experienced any form of exploitation, physical abuse or victimisation processes.

This leads one to evaluate the will and intention of those who advertise and provide sexual services online, in order to distinguish those cases that are actually related to exploitation phenomena. To this aim, some indicators of the link with human trafficking have been identified. Hence, the research of contents related to sexual exploitation implied a case-by-case analysis aimed at distinguishing voluntary sex works from those ads advertising exploited persons.

Among the indicators that were elaborated to make this distinction, is the congruency between the information provided about the same individual when publicised on multiple websites. When a person advertises his/her sex-related services on many websites providing the same setting description, the same pictures and the same phone number, it is possible to assume (or at least, it is not possible to exclude) that this person himself/herself is advertising her job autonomously. When, instead, there are evident discrepancies between pictures, descriptions, locations and phone numbers referenced to the same person, or when the latter is advertised by a third party – and especially in the case of minors – a potential link with human trafficking and exploitation processes is assumed.

As confirmed by the interviews, the main channels used by traffickers to advertise trafficking's victims' services are social networks, especially Facebook:





**Figure 29. An advertising sex-related services provided by third parties**



Source: Twitter. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

On the visible web, many websites and posts (also in the Italian language) were found in which sex-related services – presumably provided by exploited persons – are offered and advertised by third parties. In some cases, these offers of sexual services are ‘hidden’ behind ads that refer to other activities, such as body-care (massages), escorting and dancing. It is practically impossible to quantify these elements and to certify in each case whom is administering the uploaded content; however, identifying their characteristic features can help in monitoring the development of the phenomenon and intervening when cases of abuse are identified.

“ The ads on the Internet are in the thousands, and in addition there are websites that change continuously, it is not even necessary that someone discovers them. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

**Figure 30. Incongruence between the title and the text of the advertisement**



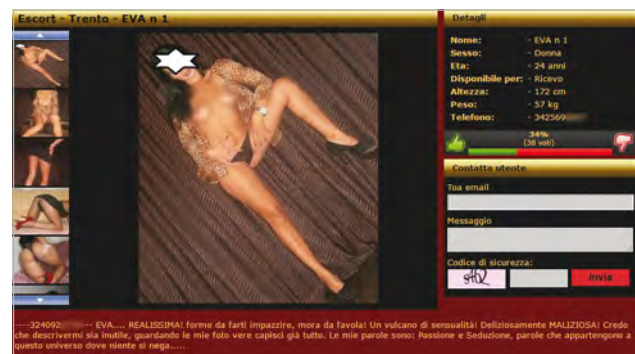
Source: Dedicated website. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

In the next paragraphs, some of the identified ads – characterised by the above described indicators and therefore potentially related to sexual exploitation of trafficking victims – will be displayed.

Figure 30 is an example of cases where there are incongruences within the post’s text. The title, in fact, refers to one Japanese girl, while the text of the ad talks about six girls of the same origins.

In Figure 31, instead, there are different phone numbers in the text of the ad and in the ‘details’ section of the page; this was considered to be a signal that the person providing the information is not the same one providing the services.

**Figure 31. Incongruence between the phone numbers provided in the advertisement**



Source: Dedicated website. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

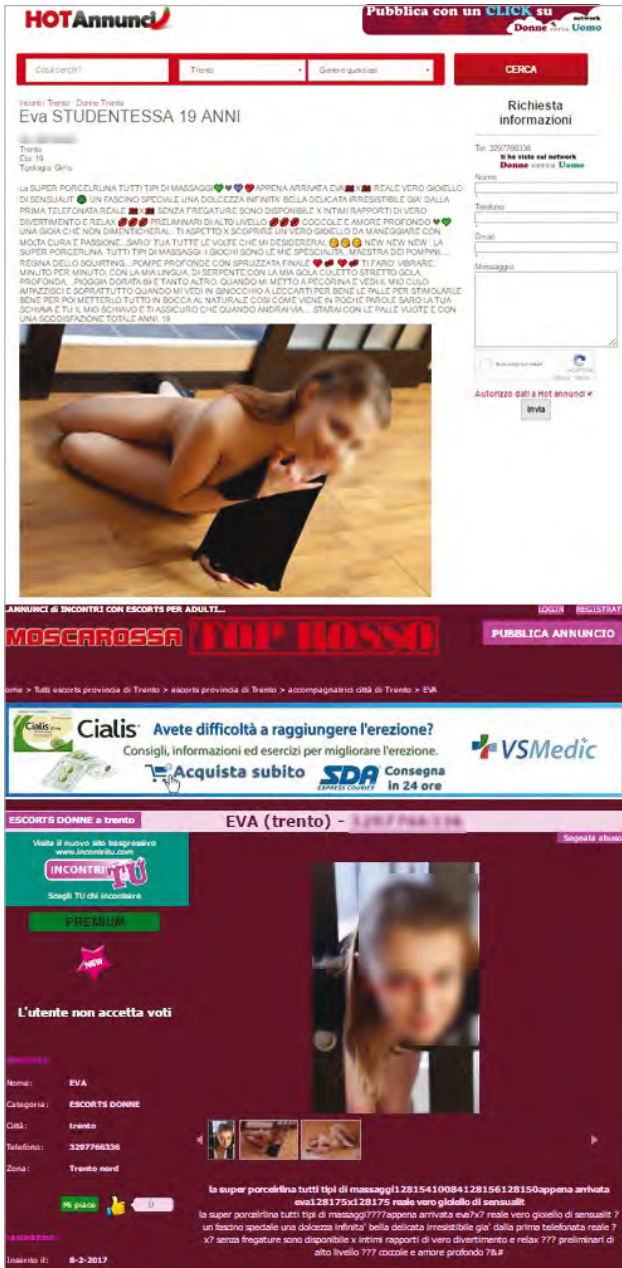
Figure 32 shows an example of advertisements, found on different websites, referring to the same person but providing different information (on prices, provided services, etc.). The girl in the picture is the same one, but in different poses and settings. The name, the location and the phone number are the same, but the description of the girl and of the provided services is different.

Finally, Figure 33 shows an example of ads, posted on different websites, where the same phone number is provided for different services and different women, located in the same Italian city. The first image refers



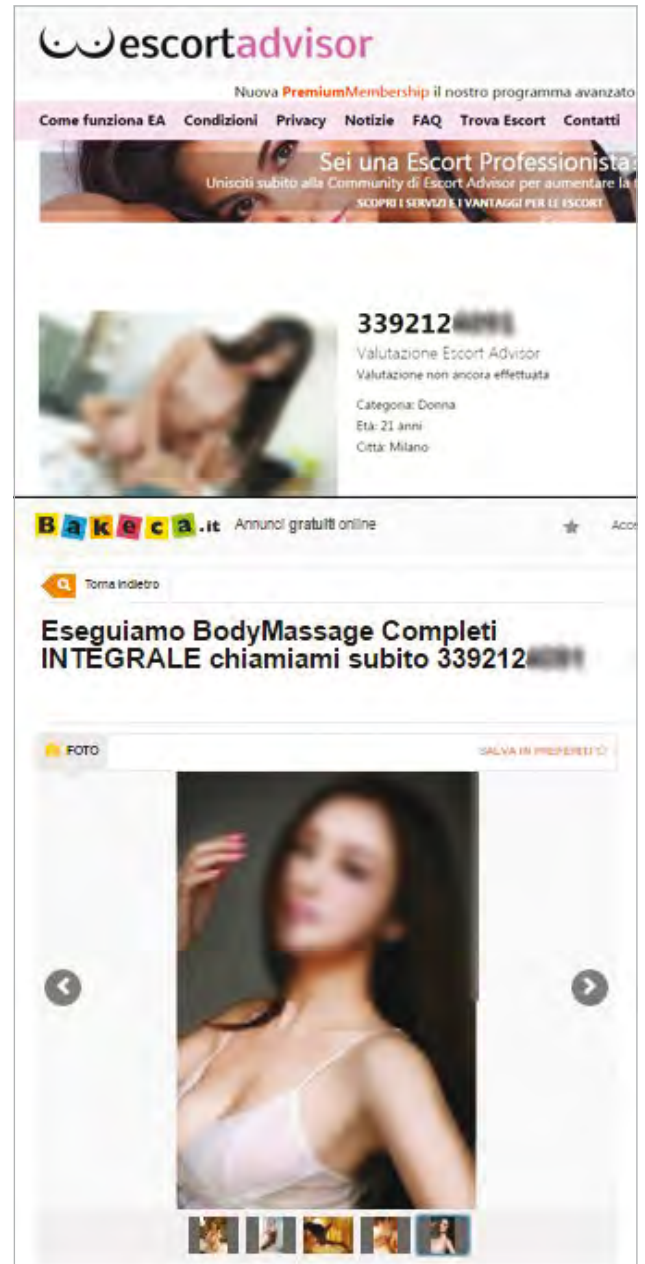
to escorting services provided by a 21-year-old woman; the second one, instead, advertises massage services in a wellness center. Both the ads contain images of Asian women in erotic poses, and the location is the same one. This suggests that both the offers are linked to a fictitious ‘wellness center’ which provides sexual services from several women.

**Figure 32. Multiple advertisements referring to the same person but providing different information (on prices, services, etc.)**



Source: Dedicated website. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Figure 33. Same phone number in ads located on different websites and showing pictures of different persons**



Source: Dedicated website. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Additional interesting information on sexual exploitation – integrating or confirming the findings of the web exploration – emerged from the in-depth interviews.

Firstly – as emerged from the exploration of the Dark web – the involvement of children in the trafficking business is acknowledged. Minors are usually described (by themselves or by third parties) as eighteen years old – excluding some cases of explicit pedophilia present on the Dark web. This is, of course, aimed at avoiding legal

enforcement agencies' monitoring actions and due to the severe penalties imposed for child pornography.

“ Let's say that now there are relevant numbers of girls, even younger, who tell you they are eighteen but they are clearly younger, maybe 17, 16 years old. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

“ The age is not declared because traffickers know their stuff, and minors are declared eighteen. They know it, even when they are not related to the Internet or to digital tools...the same goes for minors who are hooked on Facebook rather than on dating websites. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

Moreover, the presence emerged, within the human trafficking networks, of new nationalities not registered by the previous literature (i.e. Albanian and Nigerian). For the study of human trafficking phenomena, especially those related to sexual exploitation, nationality is, in fact, a fundamental element. Both for traffickers and for victims, nationality and ethnicity are the starting point to comprehend the exploitation processes and typologies that have been imposed or suffered.

“ We are afraid that there are people of other nationalities at risk, lonely women, of different nationalities than the Nigerians, who risk being exploited in the country. This is an alarm we perceive, because we start to see women of other nationalities who are forced into Libyan brothels [...] moreover, we are scared that there are people of other nationalities, different from that of Nigerian males, who start to traffic women and exploit them on the territory. Nationalities that are different from the Nigerian one tend to want to use force. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 4)

Many of the associations working on the street to provide support and protection to exploited girls underlined the high level of vulnerability of these persons. Often, these are lonely women who do not speak the Italian language, and they are obliged to live in the same centers where they suffer abuse or in the houses controlled by their mamans.

“ The exploitation mechanism is very grave, they spend hours on the Italian streets, they do double shifts, they suffer many health problems, they are paid very little for the services, they are forced to have unprotected sex because customers ask for it, notwithstanding the HIV problem. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

Moreover, these women suffer grave psychological damage, due to being taken away from family and friends and to the disappointment derived from the migration process or from the relationship with the trafficker, who misled them by pretending to be their lover.

“ Forced prostitution always involves a lot of struggling, so it always becomes the object of threats. Think about those who have children, many women, and the will, the awareness plays its role. These things make the person more vulnerable and fragile, and this is very important, because they feel everything has been taken away from them, and not only in the moment she becomes a prostitute, but also afterwards, through the web. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

To this problem, it is necessary to add physical damage caused by continuous abuse, violence, and total carelessness towards unprotected sex:

“ They need to have an abortion so they use gastrointestinal drugs. In addition to [psychological] trauma, violence, exploitation and other huge psychological wounds there are also the physical ones such as those during the pregnancy [...]. The girls do not have access to the external world. Their life is at home with the mamo with a girl who monitors them, one who once was also a victim. ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

Finally, it emerged from the interviews that smart phones are also very important in the trafficking processes. In particular, smart phones are used as communication and as a monitoring tool between the criminal network, the trafficker and the victim.

The NGOs found that victims, when they arrive in Italy, usually own a phone contact or a mobile phone to contact their maman or other subjects who are supposed to take care of them. Therefore, after their arrival, they are called to be picked up and transferred to the place of their exploitation:

*“ Since they are well ‘educated’, and they don’t tell that they have a phone number, or what they came here for; others don’t know it, others know but don’t say anything, because they did the voodoo rite, they gave the vow and it is hard that they will talk. ”*

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

*“ The girls enter [Italy] and are contacted by their exploiter through the phone, a simple phone. ”*

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

The smartphone allows the girls – as soon as they arrive in the destination countries – to stay in touch with their traffickers in order to meet them. The level of predictability and knowledge on what will happen to them can vary from case to case, also depending on the people they meet as soon as they arrive in the destination countries. For instance, an early meeting with NGOs, at this particular stage of the process, may in some cases prevent the entry of these girls into the exploitation phase:

*“ Thanks to the work of the NGOs, present at the time of landing, and so on, much more than in the past we have witnessed the cooperation of the future victims of trafficking, fortunately, because they decide to cooperate before they are physically involved in prostitution. ”*

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

*“ Within 24 hours of their arrival, we talk to them about their rights, the risk of exploitation, the risk of trafficking, of the termination of pregnancy. In short, a whole bunch of information. For the Nigerian woman, it is hard to intervene. The Congolese girl who has been raped in Libya, who has the trafficker out there, hears and comes to tell you something, you can intervene. ”*

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 2)

In cases where, unfortunately, the NGO’s support and actions fail to fulfill the foreseen goals, the girls are removed from the first reception centers by the exploiters, deceived or forced to enter the exploitation processes. Many of these girls are forced into prostitution, especially on the street – a method that, alongside the spread of online methods, remains widespread especially in some cities in northern Italy. In these cases, the smartphone is used to monitor girls remotely, as reported by one of the interviewed NGOs:

*“ The phone is used to monitor, because once when there was no cell phone, there were physical persons though more people present [...] the street unit stops next to a person and usually the phone rings: it means that there is someone somewhere asking: who are they? Make it fast because you have to work! ”*

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 3)

*“ The monitoring is done continuously and by telephone, they are always checked with the phone in sight. When the street unit arrives it is difficult to have a dialogue without the phone being switched on or they call each other to say that we have arrived. ”*

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 1)

## 5.3 Romania

### 5.3.1 Recruitment

Various Internet instruments play a paramount role in the recruitment phase of Trafficking in Human Beings, as further described by all professionals interviewed for this study:

According to the interviewed traffickers, recruitment over the Internet is usually done using the following channels: social media (Facebook, Twitter – private chat options), mobile applications (WhatsApp, Viber – used to communicate following the initial contact), job ads (posted online on job ad websites such as OLX, Publi24, Piața de la A la Z etc.).

What is more, according to the LEA representatives interviewed, the latter are a means of reaching and permitting contact with a great number of vulnerable persons, among which the most vulnerable are youth and children.

One of the police officers interviewed believes that children in orphanages are the most exposed to human trafficking, because, lacking adults to supervise them, the risk of accessing dangerous Internet content and getting in touch with traffickers is much higher. Other interviewees believe that, since the Internet has become increasingly accessible, the range of potential victims of sex or labour trafficking has expanded beyond children or youth coming from families that are financially struggling or poorly educated. Thus, even persons to whom traffickers had no access in the past have now become easily reachable, through the Internet, especially when using online resources in an imprudent manner. In this respect, authorities are especially concerned with minors.

*“ [At an event dedicated to preventing THB] we had young people from orphanages. Because, from our point of view, they are the most vulnerable towards becoming victims of trafficking in human beings. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

*“ All children these days have smartphones; it’s very easy for them to access information that they should never reach. [...] YouTube, for example: if you go on the channels of certain bloggers, automatically you reach a porn website. You have no control over where a certain connection might lead you [...]. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

*“ Presently, Internet access is very easy, victims are not aware of the dangers to which they are exposed when contacted by traffickers and many times, they fall... are deceived. In most cases of THB and trafficking in minors we had victims who were misled. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

*“ [Children] are absolutely obsessed with chatting on Viber, with posting all kinds of pictures, some rather indecent, on Instagram. [...] And, I say this again, don’t think that only people coming from certain environments are vulnerable, everybody is vulnerable. At that age, they may be children of professors, doctors, doesn’t matter, they do not have the ability to discern between what is right and what is wrong. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

They also used traditional, offline recruitment methods: recommendations of the girls who are already in the network or intermediaries – who recruit girls directly online or offline. The interviewed traffickers and smugglers do not mention other online communication means that are used in their business. Only one trafficker mentions the Dark web, stating that the Dark web is rarely used as a way of communication.

Also, all LEA representatives that were interviewed believe that, in Romania, the Dark web is not used in trafficking in human beings or people smuggling, as there are few Internet users skilled enough to use this option. In order to access Dark web sites, Internet access is not enough – one needs advanced technical knowledge and skill, which makes it highly improbable that those involved in trafficking or smuggling of human beings would use this Internet facility.



“ This Dark net, where there are gun sales, bankcard sales and all the others, but which is rarely used, at least not in THB. It might be used when it comes to refugees, to migrant smuggling, for communication on the Dark net, but that involves advanced knowledge on the Internet, it's not enough to have access to a computer. [...] Not in Romania, I don't know anything about this system being used here. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ I haven't encountered it [the use of Dark web], because us, as a country, when it comes to technology, we aren't sufficiently prepared for something like this – not even accepting that there is a Dark area on the Internet. No... And even if there was [Dark web use], it did not surface in the cases I've had. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The Internet and mobile apps are frequently used by traffickers in the recruitment stage because by using these communication vehicles, the traffickers and the victims can interact directly, without intermediaries, and rapidly, sometimes in real time.

The LEA representatives interviewed also believe that the Internet facilitates trafficking in human beings, especially since the spread of smartphone use, which permits surfing the web and using mobile apps any-time, anywhere.

The opportunity to access online resources through mobile phone services provides traffickers, on one hand, with access to potential victims more frequently, no matter their location (especially through social media) and, on the other hand, with the opportunity to communicate easily, both among themselves and with potential victims as well.

The most used sites are social networks (Facebook, as well as its private chat option, Messenger), especially for recruiting young women. Mobile applications – WhatsApp, Viber – are used to communicate following the initial contact.

Recruitment over the Internet is described as more efficient compared to traditional methods, because communication is easy, fast and at a low cost. Moreover, when using the Internet, total costs for business management are very low, about 20-30% of the total income.

“ 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. My costs are 20% related to the income. ”

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

“ [Facebook] is very useful, compared to what was happening 10-15 years ago. You stay at home, look at their [the girls'] pictures, [...] you socialise with them, you meet them and everything just happens of its own accord. ”

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

The NGO representatives interviewed stressed how well-versed traffickers are in influencing vulnerable people, having the necessary experience to fine-tune messages in the ads and in one-on-one conversations to raise their interest. They also highlight traffickers' dedication in following their agendas.

“ Here we need to work at the community and society level, where we need to explain to parents, grandparents and other relatives that if we, ourselves, do not offer the attention and affection our dear ones need, they will always search for these elsewhere [...] And those with an agenda, such as traffickers and recruiters, will always know what to do. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

“ If we were willing to learn from traffickers, how they know their jobs, how prepared they are according to their own working agenda and how focused on results they are, I'm telling you, we would be a few steps ahead of them. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

“ They know just by checking your profile picture. They get you, they know something about you from the first three sentences you exchange. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

Victims of both labour and sex THB have in common that they ended up being exploited as a result of being deceived in their search for a better life (better incomes or better incomes and a life partner).

Certain socio-professional characteristics (such as limited or lack of education), as well as stringent needs (such as shelter) make them more vulnerable to being recruited online and less vigilant to people they communicate with through online means. On the other hand, traffickers master the skills of adapting their recruitment techniques in response to the victims' needs, which they accurately identify just by checking their social networking site profiles.

*“ If I'm alone in my pictures and have no man or a friend, they see it and [conclude] ah, this one is single [...] They make a quick analysis: wow, this one is hot [...] they see some pictures, they see you are alone in those pictures, they get your weak point, just as they saw mine, he gets in [on the profile], sends you a message. ”*

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

## Sexual exploitation

The two victims exploited for sex interviewed for this study are Romanians and come from vulnerable groups (disorganised families, Roma). One of them had no formal education at all when she was exploited for the first time; they are currently receiving assistance from NGOs.

Most traffickers do not use the Internet or social networks to actively advertise and sell services to potential clients. According to the interviewed traffickers, using the Internet to promote the sexual services provided by THB victims is risky, especially because it would provide a way for the authorities to identify and monitor traffickers. Most of the time, the traffickers' clientele is formed over time, through offline recommendations, from person to person, so they do not need online advertising.

*“ I do not need publicity for middlemen who come looking for me and the girls are known in some circles for their services. Because of that, I do not need advertising, the network formed. [...] Other ways used to advertise the services to potential clients were middlemen who recommended the services to other potential customers as well as flyers. ”*

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

One of the interviewed traffickers said that he personally was recruiting girls using classified ad sites, especially through ads for jobs abroad. The ads contained elements that attracted the victims' attention, such as mentioning the opportunity to earn a lot of money in a short period<sup>5</sup>.

*England, looking for girls over 18, pretty, clean, discreet and sociable for escort services, willing to earn a lot of money. Private house, accommodations and utilities included. Minimum earnings 7000 Euro per month, we offer housing, transport, my commission is 50%... For further details contact me on WhatsApp at...*

Those ads would usually include the trafficker's phone number. Oftentimes the ads mention contacting the recruiter on WhatsApp, or other encrypted messaging apps, or there is a note that people can just call the number and hang up and they will be called back.

After posting the ad, the trafficker would wait for potential victims to get in touch with him. According to one of the interviewees, he received many calls from women interested in prostituting themselves abroad. He mentions that, in his experience, there were many girls who were willing to send them pictures or contact information. This suggests to him that girls understood what type of job it was (prostitution) and that they knowingly accepted it.

*“ There are ads on websites for employment abroad that get a good return; I post one phone number for a week and I get calls. [...] I do not use dating sites because the Internet is full of women who want to become prostitutes in order to have a better life. ”*

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

<sup>5</sup> Website [www.anuntul.ro](http://www.anuntul.ro).

The ads are very vague, not including an exact location or the name of the hiring company<sup>6</sup>:

*I am looking for a roommate for erotic massage: pretty, young girl, with common sense, reliable for a long-term collaboration. Pay on a daily basis, 50% commission, no other expenses on your part, I will handle everything else, Unirii area.*

Also, they usually transmit a sense of urgency: the offer stands only on a first come-first served basis; hence if the applicant takes time to research the terms, they would miss out on the opportunity<sup>7</sup>:

*Ladies, massage parlour with 4 years of experience, luxurious villa, already a compiled list of clients. 50% commission, no other expenses, daily pay, flexible schedule, free housing if needed. Big income. Urgent.*

Facebook is considered both by the traffickers and LEA representatives interviewed as the most frequently used recruitment tool for sexual exploitation.

In the LEA representatives' view, the main reason why traffickers prefer this social network is the abundance of photographs and information on the potential victims, which are usually young women (some of whom are underage). Its open access feature gives traffickers access to various contents that users post with imprudence (photographs, personal information, daily activities, places visited, etc.). Recruiters use these details when convincing victims that they share common interests, thus increasing the chances of the recruitment process' success. To this regard, according to the interviewees, children and young women are the most exposed to this approach.

Also, another important feature is the possibility of using Facebook's private chat option (Messenger) in order to have private discussions with the victims, which cannot be monitored by other persons (friends or parents of the victim) who may intervene in supporting the vulnerable persons, thus reducing the recruiters' chances to succeed.

“ Facebook is the most commonly used method on the Internet in the recruitment of young women. Usually under aged. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ Facebook is the most common [...], as far as I know, in most cases only Facebook was used. Facebook is the place where they post everything about their lives, their pictures [...], their hobbies, what they enjoy, you can find out just about anything there. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ [The network] that I have encountered most frequently is Facebook, because [...] it is very easy, by following a person's profile, to realise what their preoccupied with, what are their ideas, from what they post, what they share – it is all very open, everybody can see your profile. No matter how many privacy settings you put, it is public either way. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

All it takes is recruiters collecting a certain number of young women's profiles, identifying those who are willing to work in the sex industry and then contacting them. According to traffickers, part of the women they contacted on Facebook had either prostituted themselves in the past or manifested their desire to provide sexual services to foreign clients for an income that would help them to solve the financial problems they were facing.

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<sup>6</sup> Website [www.anuntul.ro](http://www.anuntul.ro), [http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-lo-curi-de-munca/videochat-masaj-adult/caut-colega-de-apartament-pentru-masaj-erotic-tanara-draguta-si-cu-bun-simt\\_43941101.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539](http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-lo-curi-de-munca/videochat-masaj-adult/caut-colega-de-apartament-pentru-masaj-erotic-tanara-draguta-si-cu-bun-simt_43941101.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539), accessed on 15 January 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Website [www.anuntul.ro](http://www.anuntul.ro), [http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-lo-curi-de-munca/videochat-masaj-adult/domnisoare-salon-masaj-cu-vechime-4-ani-vila-lux-clientela-formata-comision\\_41995101.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539](http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-lo-curi-de-munca/videochat-masaj-adult/domnisoare-salon-masaj-cu-vechime-4-ani-vila-lux-clientela-formata-comision_41995101.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539), accessed on 15 January 2017.

“ It’s easy, you look at the pictures, on the Facebook albums and you can immediately form an opinion on how they are... some of them were already prostitutes; they were doing it for themselves. [...] In 2014, I had a phone in jail. Somebody created a Facebook account for me and, using the phone all day long, I made many female friends. About 5. I sent them friend requests and then the conversation started by itself: «How are you? What is your job?» etc. ”

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

Another online recruitment source for sexual exploitation that the LEA representatives interviewed have identified is Instagram. This virtual medium is used less frequently by traffickers compared to Facebook, because, even though it provides traffickers with an opportunity to view photographs of its users, it does not integrate as many communication tools, such as the private chat option (Messenger).

Other social media, such as Twitter, are not used for recruitment, because they do not showcase photographs or personal information on the users.

There are three most common recruitment methods:

#### Method A

Some recruiters, after having contacted the women, make them offers for jobs abroad and, if they accept, force them to prostitute themselves once they are out of the country.

“ At the Iasi penitentiary, I met another trafficker. He would find the girls on Facebook, deceive them by telling them he would give them a job in Germany and, if they didn’t want to prostitute themselves, he would force them to do it. ”

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)

#### Method B

The other strategy that the traffickers use for recruitment is the ‘lover boy’ method.

Usually, after selecting a few Facebook profiles of young women (some of whom are underage) that correspond to their criteria – such as physical appearance, age and vulnerability – recruiters contact the women, requesting that they be accepted to her virtual friend group.

Then, through conversations on Facebook’s private chat (Messenger), under the pretext of establishing romantic relationships with them, traffickers manage to earn their trust and continue communicating with them, either by mobile apps, telephone calls or face-to-face. Thus, the social networking site is useful to recruiters especially in the initial phase of the recruitment process, which is contacting victims and convincing them to agree to a first meeting.

Following the private conversations on Facebook (and then, through mobile apps), recruiters meet the victims face-to-face, offer them gifts – some of the young women even move in with their ‘fake boyfriends’ – and thus, an erotic relationship forms between them. Once this happens, the recruiter discusses the financial needs of a family (needing to acquire a car, a home, to support future children, etc.).

After a relatively short period, of a few weeks, invoking pressing needs and using the deceitful romantic relationship he created, the recruiter asks the victim to prostitute herself in order to increase the couple’s income and then, gradually, they start proposing that they leave to a foreign country (most of the time the trafficker accompanies the victim) in order to make money and ensure the necessary income for their family.

“ You can’t recruit using only the Internet. I mean, it’s mandatory that there is face-to-face contact. I don’t think that the Internet is enough to make her fall in love. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ [...] In my entourage, for example, once I fooled the girl and promised to marry her – this works perfectly every time – when we would go meet our friends, a discussion would come up about how one of my friends’ girlfriends is abroad and makes very good money. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t propose it openly. [...] When she would hear that other girls make a lot of money, she wanted to do it as well. It happened by itself. Any woman that goes abroad can refuse to do something she doesn’t want to do. She can go to the police if she doesn’t want to do it. But they do it in order to make money. (Trafficker, sexual exploitation). ”

(Int. Romania – Trafficker)



According to the LEA representatives interviewed, a strategy for constraining victims to accept working with the traffickers, used by some Facebook recruiters, is blackmail. Under the pretext of establishing intimacy, they propose a photograph exchange between themselves and the victims. After an accommodation period, they ask the women to take indecent photographs of themselves and then use them as blackmail material: if victims refuse their proposal, recruiters threaten to publish the photographs on Facebook, consequently creating a situation that is difficult to manage by the victims, especially by underage girls.

“ A person, whose identity you do not know [...] throws some bait on certain addresses that they believe would match [recruitment criteria]. They earn the girls' trust and, from there [...] they [the girls] end up taking indecent pictures, which are then used to blackmail them. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ [The trafficker would approach] especially victims that were 11, 12, 13 years old, who had little life experience, requesting that they take off their clothes and get into pornographic poses. [...] Once the victims sent their first picture, they would start being blackmailed, they wouldn't tell their parents and that's where the child pornography really snowballs, through the minor's friends. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

There have been, nevertheless, some cases in which traffickers were more transparent when recruiting victims, letting them know that they would be working in the sex industry. If the victims consented, even though the traffickers were the ones that largely profited from the women's sex work, they could not be charged with any crime, as they were operating such businesses in countries where prostitution was not criminalised.

The interviewed LEA representatives believe that a factor that facilitates the use of the 'lover boy' method on Facebook is the way some young women choose to use this social networking site, allowing public access to photographs where they are scantily clad, as well as to personal information. Recruiters use these resources both in selecting victims, as well as in order to initiate conversations with the targeted women.

“ If you go on a few Facebook profiles you will find many young girls posting various pictures of themselves, I don't know... Naked, not necessarily nude, but on the beach... Then, they [the recruiters] search and throw the bait for multiple girls. Some bite... some [don't]... They start talking to them; whoever takes the bait is pursued further. They schedule a meeting and they go forward. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

Both victims of sexual exploitation interviewed recount being recruited using the 'lover boy' technique. Although one of them did not have a Facebook account when she was recruited the first time (as she was illiterate), she offers details about other women with which she was forced to practice prostitution, who were also recruited using this technique, but on Facebook. The traffickers usually accompanied the 'lover boy' technique with promises of facilitating finding a job in the destination country.

From the cases narrated by the victims, after exchanging a few lines using the Facebook private chat service, the trafficker ('lover boy') and victim meet and start having what seems to be a romantic relationship. Lured with promises of a better life for the couple (better living conditions, building a house, buying a car), the victim is convinced to leave the country and accept a job facilitated by the trafficker; job descriptions usually do not involve details related to prostitution or other sex-related activities. The victim travels voluntarily and only once she arrives in the destination country, she starts discovering that she was deceived; however, because of being coerced, forced or threatened, she does the work that is requested of her (practice prostitution). In other cases, the victim discovers that the trafficker is planning to exploit her sooner, but she is coerced to leave the country and practice prostitution (the trafficker takes the victim's documents, he threatens her, etc.).

“ It all happened on Facebook... a boy sent me a friend request... he started speaking very nicely to me... asked that we met, so we met. [...] I got into a relationship with the person and moved to his place. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

“ She said it’s a club where you just talk with men so that they drink more. If they drink more, you receive profit out of the additional money they spend. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

The ‘lover boys’ either work very closely on entrapping one victim at a time or simply setting the bait (such as promises of a romantic relationship, housing or details of a dream job abroad) for several potential victims and exploiting only those who fall into the trap. In the latter case, after the victim reached the destination, no further pretenses were used (in this situation, the traffickers were a couple).

“ I: Were they sent messages...? R: Love [messages], work [messages], come to me, you will find a job, all will be well... On Facebook. And he spoke to her on Facebook, she [...] searching for a job, she was desperate, as I was, she had no place to live. She found the person, but they were a man and a woman [...] They took the Polish girl, gave her some cash money to see how she was doing, how she danced, they said they liked how she moved [...] She didn’t want to, she was forced to also do chat and then to be with men, the same as I did. She did it for 4-5 years. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

One of the victims mentions being recruited online two times, after having already been sexually exploited. Both times, she was searching for a job and requested details over the phone. It is uncertain where the respondent was searching for a job (dedicated job ads, search engines or otherwise). Although the interviewee mentions she used ‘Google’ to find the telephone number for the person who advertised one of the jobs, it is not clear whether it was the search engine Google or the social network Google+; in context, researchers understand she is most likely talking about the search engine, even though she later mentions the trafficker did not have ‘a profile picture’.

### Method C

Another recruitment method via social media, less frequently used though, is practiced by female recruitment intermediaries who, after becoming THB victims, practiced prostitution of their own volition and became members of the criminal organisations. These women contact other women in their entourage or with similar

social profiles (low education, coming from disorganised, poor or single parent families) and either present the benefits of practicing prostitution abroad, or make job offers abroad promising large earnings, working in hotels or massage parlors.

“ What happens – and this is quite interesting – is victims of trafficking in human beings that have been exploited become procurers – many of them. [...]To some of them [potential victims] – which they know would be willing to do something like this – [the recruiter] gives herself as an example («Look how well I’ve done for myself and it’s no big deal!») and in the case of others, which she really wants to get and knows wouldn’t want to do it, she would tempt them with a very well paid job. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

NGO representatives interviewed confirmed this pattern and also added that female recruiters are usually partners in the trafficking network and, when the exploitation phase begins, they become guardians/managers of the exploited women.

“ Remember that a new recruitment method is using women as recruiters. Why? Because they are more trustworthy, when she comes and tells you she wants to have you as a nanny in England, where she raises her children, and she shows you photos of her children and so on, she gained your trust, hasn’t she? ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

Mobile apps (WhatsApp, Viber) are used by some traffickers in the recruitment for the purpose of sexual exploitation, most often following an initial contact on Facebook, as in order to communicate through these services they need the victims’ phone numbers. Usually, they get the phone numbers directly from the victims, by chatting on Facebook or indirectly, from friends or acquaintances of the victims.

“ Usually, contact on WhatsApp happens after the approach on Facebook. There have been situations when the contact between the trafficker and victim was through people in the victim's entourage; as we all know, WhatsApp has profile pictures.... Through the profile pictures, they look at them: «I like that girl, can you give me her phone number?» And the person gives the trafficker the phone number and that's how it all begins. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The LEA representative's respondents did not indicate cases of sex trafficking where recruitment was made through online dating services. Some of the interviewees believe that these sites are more likely used for the promotion of sexual services provided by persons that practice prostitution voluntarily.

According to them, most traffickers that use online services assume false identities and, usually, on social media, they use multiple accounts with different identities (under different names).

“ However... the Internet is used to deceive, meaning that they [the recruiters] always claim to be someone else. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ Usually, the traffickers' profiles are fake and not their real ones. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

After the recruitment phase, the Internet and mobile applications are used for running daily affairs. In order not to be tracked by law enforcement, the discussions are sometimes coded and email addresses are periodically changed by the users.

What is more, the ease in accessing the Internet makes the recruitment process independent of the place where traffickers are at one point or another. The NGO representatives interviewed stated that even imprisoned traffickers have access to mobile phones with Internet connections, which allows them to continue their activities related to THB even while serving sentences for the same crime.

“ We know very well that in maximum security prisons they have phones, they have Facebook accounts, they do online shopping; friends on their Facebook accounts, from the prison, post pictures with them and send [messages] to their previous victims, who are receiving specialised help. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

On the other hand, some of the past victims that use the Internet (and especially social media) with the purpose of satisfying some emotional needs, are addicted to it; sometimes their addiction manifests itself stronger than memories of exploitation, as they relapse to showing little or no vigilance when using the Internet, as they did before they experienced being trafficked.

“ And since some emotional and psychological vulnerability was still at high levels, they ended up talking, so in about five minutes after connecting to the Internet, they ended up talking with the same type of person. Why? Because they were lurking. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

“ Now... I think there is none [match between demand and supply on the Internet]. Some time ago, there were those classified ads, such as «Nice young lady offers company or massage services», but now, in the age of the Internet, such ads are obsolete. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The match between supply and demand over the Internet happens in the particular situation in which traffickers that exploit women that practice prostitution actively promote their services online; these offers are generally masked as advertising for massage parlours or escort services. These businesses sometimes advertise on social media, as well as on ad websites or in the classified ad sections of online newspapers. The interviewees, however, only have such information regarding cases where the exploitation took place in Romania.

“ Most times the exploiters or the traffickers publish ads themselves... or members of their family or members of the network... they publish ads to attract customers for sexual services... and post their own phone number. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ Prostitution may occur, for example, in massage parlours or escort services. [...] And [for] these erotic massage services there are ads, including on ad websites, but on social media as well. Almost all of them have these ads, including on Facebook and such, they have ads. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

## Labour exploitation

The victim (a man) of labour exploitation interviewed for this study was trafficked by a group of Romanians in Denmark and received support from the International Organization for Migration, who included him in a program of rehabilitation for THB victims. He was recruited face-to-face, as the traffickers were searching for a victim travelling through his village, which was close to the border. Consequently, the Internet was not used during this phase with the labour exploitation victim.

According to the LEA interviewees, the most frequent way of recruiting victims of labour trafficking online is posting ads for jobs abroad on specialised websites or in classified ad sections of online newspapers. When recruiting online, traffickers post very well thought-out ads, appealing to people who have never been abroad and do not know details about the procedure for obtaining a job in a foreign country.

In terms of forced labour, there were also common denominators in the links found<sup>8</sup>:

- Several posts/recruitment announcements mention the fact that overtime is both encouraged and paid;
- A common concern among job seekers is the commission they might have to pay to their employer, so it is common to mention there is no commission requested from them directly, but that the employer would cover that; the same applies for taxes.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.anunturiurgent.ro/locuri-munca/munca-in-strainatate/angajez-culegatori-vinete-spania\\_i52642](http://www.anunturiurgent.ro/locuri-munca/munca-in-strainatate/angajez-culegatori-vinete-spania_i52642), accessed on 2017, January, 20.

- A significant number of job ads mention the health insurance, children allowance and other tuition fees to be offered free.

*Certified company is hiring men and women that are willing to work, aged 18 to 58, to work in agriculture harvesting eggplants in Spain. Wages of 1500 EUR/month, overtime 8 EUR/h, accommodation provided by the employer, two meals per day, free transport to Spain, allowance for underage child, medical insurance. Weekly departures.*

- The request of foreign language knowledge is mentioned only at conversational level, at best<sup>9</sup>;

*Man looking for female colleague that is at least 18 years old to work in couples' video chat. No experience or foreign languages needed. I offer daily or bimonthly pay. I work from my house. I offer accommodation for girls who are from out of town.*

- The opportunity of the worker to be accompanied by his spouse for which there is a job, as well as a hiring bonus is also a common practice<sup>10</sup>;

*Workplaces in the EU, in factories: men, women, couples – unskilled workers, max. 55 years old. Wages of 1600 EUR, accommodation, food, work contracts for maximum 6 months with the option to prolong them, medical insurance, child allowance. The work is 8hrs/day, 5 days a week, overtime, Departures in September. All paperwork is signed at the company headquarters. For other details please contact us at...*

These ads usually appear to come from companies and not natural persons, and, besides large salaries, boast free transportation, accommodation and/or meals. Some ads are entirely false, while some of the advertised jobs do exist.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-locuri-de-munca/video-chat-masaj-adult/colega-baiat-caut-colega-minim-18-ani-pt-a-lucra-in-domeniul-videochat-la\\_42517221.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539](http://www.anuntul.ro/anunturi-locuri-de-munca/video-chat-masaj-adult/colega-baiat-caut-colega-minim-18-ani-pt-a-lucra-in-domeniul-videochat-la_42517221.html?l=2928466cfc3cf8c19034383a5fed5539), accessed on 2017 January, 20.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.olx.ro/oferta/contracte-la-fabrica-de-incaltaminte-italia-germania-plecari-urgente-ID4b6Z0.html#94b9d65024>, on 2017, January, 20.



“ There are companies with false ads, right? They promote services they, in fact, do not offer – a job somewhere, in some country, washing dishes, with 700 euros cash. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

“ Victims are being contacted through these ghost companies, that have false advertisements. We know what happens next, when they get there and they find themselves in different conditions. ”

(Int. Romania – NGO representative)

Behind these ads, however, are natural persons, organised groups of traffickers operating in Romania or paid intermediaries that connect victims and (Romanian) traffickers living abroad.

“ [Recruitment tools] are those ads on the Internet or in newspapers for workforce recruitment [...] They [recruiters] list enticing financial benefits for people with very low income. They create the appearance of companies that function legally, offering receipts or work contracts. So, people are under the impression that everything is legal. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ The salaries are, obviously, superior to all those in Romania, specifically 1,200-1,500 euros per month, they are promised free accommodation and free food from the employer. Influenced by these lies, they go there [...]. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

However, according to the LEA representatives, victims of THB recruited for labour exploitation, are most often approached through offline means – through their family members, friends or acquaintances – which usually involve one of the traffickers engaging victims face-to-face. This happens because most trafficked persons come from rural areas or have poor educations and, as a result, they use the Internet rarely or not at all. Consequently, in many cases, the online ads are subsequently distributed by members of the trafficking

network in social environments where the Internet is not commonly used.

In some cases, the Internet is also used by traffickers to look for job offers published by foreign employers in Western Europe, in order to use these opportunities for Romanian worker trafficking. The criminals contact the owners of the ads to procure cheap workforce from Romania, for a commission.

“ My opinion is that potential traffickers track the ads [online, for work abroad] [...] And then the connection is made between the employer abroad and the trafficker in Romania [...] they make a deal, like so: «look, I can get you 20 people [...] with whom you can do what you want». It's like trading things or animals. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

According to one of the LEA representatives, besides publishing online job ads, the labor traffickers usually used prepaid SIM cards when communicating among themselves or with their victims to the detriment of the Internet. They frequently change their phones and SIM cards in order not to be intercepted by the authorities and not to leave any traces that might be discovered in computer searches. When they used mobile applications or other online services, they use false accounts.

“ [Traffickers keep in touch] by phone, usually. Prepaid phones, which are very difficult to track. [...] You said what needed to be said; you throw away the phone, buy another card and let everyone know through SMS that you have a new phone number. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ [Communication is] not so much on the Internet, because there are traces. All the time, if you do a computer search, you can find information on who sent what and where, so it's a risky method of communication. [...] They [traffickers] realised that. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

### 5.3.2 Transportation

In THB, regardless of the type of exploitation, all interviewees believe that the Internet is not used during the transport phase. The findings of the interviews with the victims indicate that the Internet is being used mostly in the recruitment phase of THB for sex and then in the exploitation phase (for advertising services); however, it is not used during the transportation phase.

In most cases, victims of sexual exploitation travel to foreign countries along with their recruiters and communication is done face-to-face. Moreover, the victims of labour exploitation are expected by traffickers or intermediaries in the destination countries and communication prior to their arrival is not necessary.

The victim of THB for labour exploitation and one of the victims of THB for sexual exploitation mention travelling willingly with their traffickers (recruiter, in one case, 'lover boy', in the other) to the destination country. The other victim of sexual exploitation also travelled willingly the second time she was recruited, but coerced the first time (her documents and phone were taken and she was guarded).

In the case of labour exploitation, most of the victims (generally, men) come from environments where the Internet and mobile apps are used to a small extent (rural areas, low income population categories). The transport is usually organised by the recruiter or by the final beneficiary of the workforce. Part of the victims pay for their transportation, while in the case of others, the recruiter pays for their transport, most often as a loan.

*“ [...] they go there, they even pay for transportation, which is usually organised by the recruiter or the exploiter and when they get there, they realise that, actually, they were deceived. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

### Sexual exploitation

In terms of sexual exploitation, women and children are the most common victims, and the results of the current research is conforming the same trend for the victims coming from Romania: a majority of the ads target women.

The victims of sex trafficking that are recruited online are, according to the interviewees, mostly young women, with poor education and low income, who come

from disorganised families, with a consistent history of physical or mental abuse. These are also the most frequently used methods in the exploitation phase. In most cases, they are underage girls.

Also, there are a significant number of cases where persons that are voluntarily practicing prostitution become victims of sexual exploitation when their procurers begin forcing them to do sex work, sequestering them, abusing them mentally or physically, or confiscating their earnings. In the interviewees' experience, many of the sexual exploitation victims ended up being trafficked abroad after they had previously practiced prostitution.

*“ Usually, the victims of THB, in this case underage girls, are those who come from disorganised families, families that have problems, families with poor education [...] or families where both parents or at least one of them are abroad, who have left their children in the care of their grandparents and left for God knows where, with what issues, what jobs. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

*“ The people they target? People who don't have a job, people who have children, those who come from disadvantaged families, in which they have already been the victims of constant abuse, whether physical or verbal, with parents who drink and don't take care of them, mainly these. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

*“ So the transition is much easier when, I don't know, the girl accepts to prostitute herself, but she can [later on] become a victim of trafficking in human beings. There are quite many cases of [trafficked] girls who prostituted themselves beforehand. ”*

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

In all cases of exploitation reflected by the qualitative research conducted for the current report, victims were coerced to do the work the trafficker wanted them to do. Coercion was done by: use of physical violence (beatings), threats, dispossession of documents and money. Some of the interviewees lived together with their traffickers, which also reinforced the circle of dependence.

“ [...] I had no choice. [...] And since I kept on not making money, when I got home, after these three days at the club, he beat me badly and [...] he sent me on the street, with that woman. [...] I couldn't [refuse], I was too scared after the beating he gave me... and there [on the street] I was with that woman and I couldn't tell her I didn't want to. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

There are clear warning signs for potential recruitment into prostitution, as well as forced marriages. Transportation is often included, as well as accommodation, meals or daily allowances for meals. If there are costs, these seem unrealistically low.

The Internet tools are also used in the exploitation phase rather through the interdictions or restrictions that the traffickers impose when using online communication facilities, according to the details based on prosecution and/or case law.

They permanently monitor their activity and communication on social media, through mobile apps or even their phones. The main purpose of this is to cut off all contact with their family and friends, in order to minimise the risk of the victims getting away and to prolong their exploitation.

“ When the victim reaches the foreign country, he or she loses... contact with their parents, with... situations where they can contact anyone via phone or even the Internet are extremely rare. Most of the time, when there is such contact between the victim and family, the trafficker is right next to the victim, monitoring them the whole time. And this is what facilitates a longer exploitation period. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

Respondents who were victims of THB for sexual exploitation escaped their captors with the help of the authorities, who were open to listen to their stories and encouraged women to disclose the situations in which they were.

## Labour exploitation

According to the interviewees, the victims of labour trafficking generally come from rural areas, have low income and, usually, do not know the legal procedures that need to be followed in order to get a job abroad. Most of them, lacking the knowledge and abilities, do not use the Internet and are usually recruited through intermediaries or answer ads in newspapers. The interviewees do not provide information on the way the Internet is used in the exploitation phase of labour trafficking.

“ Most victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation are coming from rural areas who do not know that, when you are offered a job [abroad], you need to sign a contract at an institution of the respective state or even of your own state. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

According to the Romanian ANITP's 2015 report, 20% of the human trafficking victims are exploited through forced labor. Most of them are exploited in agriculture or construction.

Mainstream media reports currently covers stories about labour exploitation of Romanian workers, especially women, in the agricultural areas of southern Italy<sup>11</sup>.

*Hidden among fields of flapping white plastic tents across Ragusa province, 5,000 Romanian women like Bolos are working as seasonal agricultural workers. Their treatment is a growing human rights scandal, being perpetrated with almost complete impunity.*

Physical violence (beatings), threats, dispossession of documents and money are also used in the exploitation of the victims recruited for labor, as indicated by the interviews conducted with the victims of exploitation.

<sup>11</sup> Lorenzo Tondo and Annie Kelly, The Guardian, Modern-day slavery in focus. Raped, beaten, exploited: the 21st-century slavery propping up Sicilian farming, 12 of March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/mar/12/slavery-sicily-farming-raped-beaten-exploited-romanian-women>.

“ They both came and told me to found a company [...] And when I told them I don't want to [...] He pulled me from the hood and told me «Come on outside, if... Come on, outside!» [...] When he opened the door and I stepped over the threshold, he punched me very seriously. [...] A lot of requirements, they took me to stores, to steal [...] They even bought a car in my name [...] After we left Nădlac, he took our passports. I only had an identity card. I had my passport made afterwards, in Copenhagen. He took our ID cards. After he took them, I never saw them again. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

However, the victim of THB for labour exploitation needed more time to get his story through to the authorities, which he only managed to do once he met a co-national, who supported him in getting the International Organization for Migration involved in his case.

“ [Romanian officer:] «Tell me what happened to you, because the Danish police don't understand you. [...]». [Interviewee:] I told him: «How can they understand me [...] if I came so many times and they didn't give me a translator, how could they understand?» [...] [R.o.:] «They don't believe what you are saying. [They think that] It's either you have [too much] imagination, or you are hallucinating [...]» [...] If they would have given me a translator the first time I went to the police, things wouldn't have gone so far. They couldn't have. This is what was wrong. ”

(Int. Romania – THB victim)

Other than offering a few details about what the labour and/or sexual exploitation means (details on the specifics of deception, in the destination country), from cases they know, the NGO representatives who participated in the study did not elaborate on how or whether the Internet is being used in the exploitation phase of THB.

The same happens for migrant cases, as recounted by both interviewees: starting from situations where people enter Romania legally, once their visas/residence permits/work authorisations expire, they end up being labour or sex exploitation victims (sometimes both).

The transition from the status of legal immigrant to the one of illegal immigrant being exploited is done face-to-face; none of the interviewees mentioned anything about the use of the Internet in such cases.

## 5.4 The United Kingdom

### 5.4.1 Recruitment

The recruitment of victims is an integral aspect of the human trafficking process. A plethora of websites, including social networking and microblogging services such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as online classifieds, dating and international marriage agency sites (see Jones, 2011), have been documented as recruiting people into trafficking and advertising the sale of their services, for the purposes of sexual or labour exploitation (see Hughes, 2014; Latonero et al., 2011, 2012; Mendel and Sharapov, 2014; Sarkar, 2015; Sykiotou, 2007). In the words of one of the NGO representatives that has been interviewed, the Internet, as well as social media sites such as Facebook have been reported as facilitating the recruitment of victims of human trafficking to the UK:

“ If I constructed a poll of people [victims] that I've asked about how they learnt about jobs, yes, people would say they went on a website for instance, and found a job. So yes, the tricky thing is how to quantify the balance between the human factors and the technological factors, because most people we work with tell us about people that were involved, and yet for me the interesting bit is how did they meet those people? It's all very well saying 'I met a friend', which is pretty much what everybody tells you, 'I was exploited by a friend', 'a friend introduced me', etcetera, and I don't think there's a process or system yet where we ask the follow-on questions like 'where did you meet that friend?', 'were you connected on Facebook?', 'did you use-', I think the internet yes- social media- the internet yes in terms of recruiting job adverts and social media. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

To lure and recruit victims online, traffickers frequently place spurious, promising advertisements on employment, dating and marriage websites for jobs including: administration, cleaning, home help, child care, waitressing, hostessing, pole dancing, transportation, the collection and delivery of charity bags, agricultural farming and construction roles, educational courses or work in the tourism sector (see also Europol, 2014). The online research revealed some distinct examples of suspected deceptive recruitment, in that research found advertisements of women selling sexual services on online classifieds that were written in very poor



English, advertising women as working in several areas of the UK, such as in Birmingham, Oxford, Newcastle and London, under various aliases. In one instance, in performing a google search of the number listed in the advertisements, research discovered that the same number was present on general employment sites in Lithuania, advertising and recruiting for jobs available in the UK. Such jobs listed were for charity collection and waitress work in the cities of Manchester and London for a high salary of £150-200 a day, in which accommodation and transportation to work were included. However, there was no mention of the company, organisation or the name of the person recruiting for work or the requirement of any qualifications, with the only other information available in the advertisement being the mobile phone number.

In another occurrence, researchers found that the mobile phone number connected to a dubious advertisement on an online classified website for a woman selling sexual services in London, was also present in the employment section of an online Romanian newspaper for available work in the UK. This particular listing was for 'unskilled labour' and mentioned that 'conversational English' was preferable. Again, the name of the company or the person posting the advertisement was not disclosed, and nor, more importantly, was the specific job role. In her extensive examination of the role of the Internet in the facilitation of the trafficking of human beings for labour exploitation in several EU Member States, such as the Czech Republic, Ireland, Romania and the UK, Muskat-Gorska (2014) identified the presence of several 'red flags' that may indicate that a posted job offer was untrustworthy, and could lead to an unwitting candidate's exploitation. Such common red flags include: the promise of an unrealistically high salary for an unqualified job, the particular advert possessing only a general description of the job, no address of the company or organisation and the associated contact details of the advertisement containing only a mobile phone number or a general e-mail address for further enquiries. The research findings align with these red flags, and it has been suspected that these adverts are spurious and act as a means to lure and traffic women to the UK for purposes of sexual and/or labour exploitation. The mobile phone numbers may belong to a trafficking group or network based in the UK, who post bogus advertisements on online classified websites in their native countries and may also arrange the transportation and travel of their targeted victims to the UK.

The production of such sites that are used to recruit and lure victims for sexual exploitation overseas possess a distinctive consistency to them. Websites are frequently created and organised by traffickers in the

countries of origin and in the languages of potential victims, with these sites then fostering others, which build up to form national recruitment networks. As such, the content collected through the first website is then used on a second, the aim being to attract clients. Information on the victims that have been recruited is then translated into English, as well as the languages of other sex markets where the traffickers desire to trade. Research discovered the presence of a potential trafficking network operating between Bulgaria and Greece, recruiting for young women between the ages of 18-35 to work as escorts in the UK. To a lesser extent, advertisements were also posted in English, recruiting for women of any nationality and physical body shape to work in the Oxford area of the UK, predominantly on the adult jobs section of [www.backpage.com/uk](http://www.backpage.com/uk). The analysis and translation into English of the content of the Bulgarian and Greek advertisements revealed that each of the listings, despite the differences in language, contained an extremely similar layout and written information, with the full text of one of the advertisements outlined below:

**Ad:** *Escort for England  
£200 – 500 tii (sic) a day  
attractive and sexy girls profesionaliski [sic]  
and not, at the age of 18 to '35 to work in  
England. knowledge of English is an advantage  
but not essential. We are looking only serious  
girls who want to make a lot of money in a short  
time. for more information, please send current  
pictures and write to that email address  
[address]@gmail.com  
City: Sofia, Bulgaria  
Tel: [phone number]*

A google search of the e-mail address posted in the advertisement above revealed the presence of several more advertisements placed on both Bulgarian and Greek online classified and adult sex websites, which indicates that this e-mail address is accessed and used by criminal groups or individuals based and operating in Bulgaria and Greece, who respond to enquiries made by potential aspirants regarding the advertisements and may also organise travel and transportation from and between the two countries to the UK. Although all of the advertisements are recruiting women for sex work in the UK as escorts, there is no disclosure of the recruiter, thus it is impossible to determine whether it is an agency, a company or an individual who posted the advertisement. Moreover, there is no description of the terms of the job role, nor the location of the place of work, as well as there being no mention of the daily working hours involved. In one of the other advertise-

ments, researchers noted the advertisement offered 'free accommodation', yet there was no reference to the location of residence or the type of dwelling, nor whether the accommodation was tied to the workplace. As a report published by the National Crime Agency (NCA) affirms, victims exploited for labour originating from Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania stated that they were offered accommodation in the UK as well as transportation to the UK as part of an employment package (see National Crime Agency Strategic Assessment, 2015). Researches noted that the all advertisements of this nature emphasised that there was 'no experience necessary' for the job, and although knowledge of the English language would be advantageous, it was not an essential factor, which would suggest perhaps that women recruited may be advertised as being new to the UK sex market and to working in the sex industry, with emphasis placed on their lack of experience as an escort to attract potential customers or clients. Furthermore, a salient aspect of these advertisements was the aim to recruit 'serious women looking to make a lot of money in a short period of time', with the promise of unrealistically high amounts of money – for an unqualified job and a basic grasp of English – to be earned each day, ranging from £200-500, acting as an effective form of enticement.

What is also highly remarkable about this assortment of Bulgarian and Greek advertisements is that all of them exhibit all of the red flags mentioned earlier. Further casting doubt and arousing the suspicions over the authenticity of these Bulgarian and Greek advertisements is that a google search of the e-mail address, as well as the first half of the e-mail address, given its distinctive name and assortment of numbers, exposed the existence of several profiles of women on adult online classified websites in the UK, including [www.backpage.com/uk](http://www.backpage.com/uk), [www.vivastreet.co.co.uk](http://www.vivastreet.co.co.uk) and [www.punternet.com](http://www.punternet.com). Research found that the profile descriptions for each particular woman all featured the same written information and style of writing, which signifies that these profiles have not been written by the women themselves. These profiles may have been created, penned and posted on several online classified websites by the same criminal group or individuals that also manage the aforementioned advertisements and by extension the women, for recruitment. All of the women in the profiles were advertised as working in Oxford under various mobile phone numbers, although each profile did also feature the same e-mail address as listed in the recruitment advertisements as another means of contact.

A multitude of motivations may have influenced the decisions of these women to travel and perform sex

work, by applying for escort jobs abroad. Much of the literature pertaining to migration for the purposes of performing sex work has highlighted that such decisions to migrate are often motivated by a desire for personal advancement, following friends who are perceived as being 'successful' and wealthy abroad (see Agustín, 2005; Europol, 2006). Other reasons include supporting family members back in one's country of origin, wanting to attain a degree of independence, being afforded opportunities to travel and see the world (see Siegel, 2012, 2016), and that actively, many of the women were already working as prostitutes in their native countries. Women are recruited to socialise and mingle in clubs, pubs, night-time economy (NTE) establishments or in parties of the same ethnic groups (for example Romanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Russian), with traffickers browsing social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as digital mobile phone apps such as WhatsApp to locate other women who could work in the sex industry. Once potential victims are discovered, they are brought to the pimp or trafficker, who then introduces them to various sex industry venues throughout the country. At this stage, the women are usually aware of the type of work they are going to be introduced in. Petrunov (2014) notes that there has been an evolution in the trafficker-victim relationship concerning recruitment and relocation over the years, where 'soft' methods are now most frequently used, rather than the coercion that was typical in the 1990s. In the majority of cases, the consent of the trafficked person is acquired, and the division of earnings is pre-negotiated, with most individuals having been informed about the purpose of the trip, and the type of work they will be undertaking when they have arrived to the destination country. The main factor in the recruitment, is the promise of material gain, with coercion not usually taking place during the recruitment process. One of the interviewed experts recounted a discussion that had taken place with a sex worker who had travelled from her native country of Moldova to work in the sex industry abroad, wherein the woman was receptive of potential risks involved in regards to her personal safety and working environment, yet such dangers were seen as tolerable, as her performing sex work was an investment that would enhance her future trajectory:

“ I was speaking to a sex worker who was Moldavian... she had some rough times, but the impression you got from talking with her was that all of this were acceptable risks, she was desperate to go out of her country, she was also desperate to send money back to her country, she got into some trouble with a bar owner, yes she was being exploited, but within those margins, she had managed to accomplish a plan that she initially came up with about her life trajectory, ‘yes I’ll leave my city, go to a different country, do some sex work, work in a bar’ and there she was ten years after, and she was okay, or she sounded so, I have no reason to believe any different. ”

(Int. UK – Expert on Cyber Crime 1)

As some scholars such as Petrunov (2014) assert, one of the main reasons for working in the sex industry is the relatively large amount of earnings, compared with what these women would earn if they stayed in their home countries, accompanied with the ability to make a considerable amount of money in a shorter amount of time. However, in their research examining the recruitment and migration of women to Italy for sex work, Cauduro et al (2009) argue that although the women understand that they will be working as prostitutes, this does mean that they do not undergo sexual exploitation by their traffickers or pimps, or that they exert their will in a completely autonomous manner. Petrunov (2014), who in interviewing over 117 trafficking victims from the three largest ethnic groups in Bulgaria – Bulgarians, Roma and Turks, found that a sizeable number of respondents reported that they had experienced some coercion after they began working in the destination country, is also in qualified agreement. It is important to note, therefore, that whilst these recruited women may have applied to the advertisements listed on the Bulgarian and/or Greek websites with conscious awareness of what the work in the UK will entail, the possibility exists that these women may have underestimated the risks involved and they too, through coercion and threats, may be placed in exploitative situations by their pimps or traffickers.

As some of the NGOs that they have been interviewed informed the researchers, in their work, the ‘lover-boy’ method, in which a recruiter or trafficker, either operating alone or as part of a larger group, feigns romantic interest in a girl or young woman, and seduces her with promises of marriage and an auspicious future by travelling abroad from the country of origin, and as the relationship develops further, the recruiter or trafficker

manipulates or coerces the victim into sexual exploitation through prostitution, is a common tactic in the recruitment of victims to the UK:

“ Generally, you’ve got ‘loverboy’ situation, people falling in love, then ‘let’s go travelling, let’s go abroad’ and then the other way was just the promise of a job, so an agent or someone in a village would come and offer work, playing on vulnerabilities of poverty, lack of education, etcetera, to try and offer people things that actually don’t really ever exist. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

“ A trafficker will identify a child in a local community and actually befriend their family or befriend the child, or, in some cases of sexual exploitation, a boyfriend will be actually be used to then traffic a girl into sexual exploitation abroad. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 2)

In addition, direct contact is also initiated with victims in chat rooms or via social networking sites, where traffickers pose as friends or lovers to recruit victims, often exchanging e-mails, messages, photographs and videos with their victims to build a relationship and gain their trust and confidence. NGO 3 stated that in the grooming and recruitment of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation, instead of initial physical contact with the victim, the Internet has enabled similar manifestations to the ‘lover-boy’ tactic to take place online, on a range of social media websites and digital applications:

“ The more generalised ones, so obviously Twitter, Facebook. We look at sites where there’s more chatting going on, so Facebook, where Facebook groups are set up, you’re looking at Snapchat, you’re looking at WhatsApp, you’re looking at those types of apps that traffickers use to access children. If you’re looking at Facebook for recruitment purposes, you’re seeing traffickers targeting children online, inviting them to chat, and posing as children themselves. So a trafficker will pose as a child to gain a level of trust over a certain period of time, offer gifts, maybe arrange a meeting and in that context, then the child might have already been groomed, but then groomed further into sexual exploitation and commercial or organised sexual exploitation. Obviously, these websites and applications maybe have different purposes and they function in slightly differently, but historically, you’re looking at similar forms of grooming just using different technologies and different approaches. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

Another interesting point raised by NGO 3 concerns the usage of social media applications by traffickers to determine how close in proximity, a potential victim is to them, in terms of a nearby town or city, or even within the same locality, thus enabling them to easily track, meet and build up a relationship to gain their targeted victim’s trust:

“ I think probably ID’ing [identifying] locations, so if someone [victim] is using Facebook and had their location on, it’s very easy for someone [trafficker] to start assessing whether or not they are local to them, so do they invite them for a coffee or do they invite them to meet them and their friends, so I think social media is used like that, something we’ve observed is that lots of people we’ve worked with aren’t particularly internet savvy, which means they don’t have security settings on correctly. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

Many electronic devices such as mobile phones and tablets have, within their settings, built-in location services functions that enable any third-party applications and websites to use information based on the user’s current location, to provide numerous location-based services, such as finding nearby amenities that include

parks and restaurants. On this point, if a user has enabled location services, knowingly or unknowingly on their device, then such action would allow social media applications, such as Facebook, and/or Twitter to gain access to and publicly display the user’s location to their ‘friends’, through the user’s status updates, uploading of photographs and messages sent via Facebook’s Messenger feature, or depending on the user’s privacy settings, whoever is able to view their profile. Consequently, the visibility of one’s location to others can have negative implications for the user, and possess much benefit for a trafficker searching for women to recruit. NGO representatives interviewed mentioned that many of the victims they had worked with were not shrewd in their use of the Internet and were neglectful in checking their location services settings on their mobile phones. Thus, an imperative aspect of NGO 3’s work in supporting victims of trafficking was to spend time educating them on the importance of Internet safety, ensuring that the victims understood the data they were sharing and who could see it, in the hope that doing so would act as prevention of the occurrence of re-trafficking.

## 5.4.2 Transportation

Thus far, research undertaken into the scale and nature of human trafficking activity has indicated that the UK is primarily a dominant destination country for trafficking victims rather than a transit country in trafficking routes (see, for example, Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2006). In 2006, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which maintains a Trafficking Database of research reports by inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental sources on human trafficking trends, reported that within Europe, the UK ranked ‘high’ as a destination country for the trafficking of human beings. Moreover, the UNODC (2006) report noted that the UK is one of the main destinations for children and adults who are trafficked from: Central and South-Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Africa; Asia; Latin America; and the Caribbean. Such findings from the UNODC (2006) report are supported by the interviewed LEAs and NGOs. The Internet has been recognised in facilitating the transportation of trafficking victims, who are normally recruited in their own countries (see European Commission, 2014). NGO interviewees in particular outlined how social media sites have been used to aid the transportation process by among other facilitating the booking of tickets and obtaining travel documentation in several types of transportation:



“ The Internet and social media sites such as Facebook have enabled young people to contact individuals in neighbouring countries, arranging to meet people they think are friends who have been suggested to help facilitate the transportation of young people into countries when attempting to seek asylum. On arrival and/or through transportation to the destination country, young people have been exploited through labour means. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 1)

“ I would say yes, because- well I'm sure they facilitate it, in the sense of things like cheap airlines, megabus, all the cheap transport systems, it's really easy for a recruiter to then be booking people on to- it's a faceless booking process isn't it, I think that the Internet does then facilitate the movement of people, by the fact that you can book and then hand tickets out to people. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

Tickets are purchased online by traffickers often by using compromised credit card data, in order to conceal their identities and thereby add another layer of anonymity and distance to their criminal proceedings. Furthermore, the use of stolen credit card information beneficially ensures that the tickets nor the victims are able to be easily linked back to the traffickers. Various methods of conveyance are utilised in the trafficking of victims, such as travelling from the origin country by air direct to the UK via budget airlines, or transport by road through international bus, coach, minibus services (National Crime Agency Strategic Assessment, 2015), or by truck and private car, which has been noted as offering more flexibility than air or train (see Dimitrova, 2006). Furthermore, routes and entry procedures also differ, contingent on the country of origin, the modus operandi of the traffickers, and the personal circumstances of the victim (see, for example, Constantinou et al., 2015). An account of the logistics involved in the transportation of children to the UK for purposes of exploitation was provided by NGO 2:

“ Oftentimes, children will be brought in directly through ports, for example airports, Dover, you'll notice that the largest number of children identified in a London local authority will be in Kent, and the largest number of children going missing from a local authority have also been in Kent, so that's predominantly because the port there. So you'll see a disproportionate number of children actually in areas where there are ports, so children are brought through either on false passports, or on their own passports, unaccompanied or accompanied and not identified by border staff. So you do have a lot of issues surrounding identification and you also see children, particularly those recruited for criminal activities rather than illegally enter on lorries, the back of lorries. There was a case recently where there were four or five children were identified in Kent, and then subsequently went missing in 24 hours. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 2)

It is salient to acknowledge that transportation to the destination is frequently executed legally, as during the transportation phase, the victims move voluntarily and co-operate with the traffickers, as they believe that they are going to work at a legitimate job. In particular, for countries in Europe that are part of the EU, the principle of freedom of movement within them has granted a legal possibility for nationals of EU member states to enter and cross the border of transit and destination countries legally, with their own travel documents, which has resulted in difficulties in prevention within the transportation stage (see also Savona et al., 2013). After the accession of former Eastern Bloc countries in the EU, female nationals from Eastern Europe could freely and legally travel to the UK – among other countries – to study at the university or work in various sectors of the economy. These opportunities, which obliged traffickers to alter their approach since their potential victims were empowered to approach the authorities, since the possibility of deportation was not present. This has been the case with the rise of the Internet and mobile phones, which gave more freedom to sex workers to work independently, but at the same time, also gave criminals more opportunities for control by for instance, allowing pimps to communicate directly with clients as well as giving them the capacity to regularly control the women.

An ICT-related issue associated with the transportation process is forged documents. Research identified much evidence of forged documents as a possible means of

facilitating the transportation of trafficking victims to the UK, through conducting part of the virtual ethnography on the Dark web. Using the Tor web-browser and search engines such as 'Grams', 'TorSearch' and 'Torch', in the same manner as researchers would with the surface web, it has been found a deluge of darknet markets, such as 'Fake ID', 'Forgery Store', 'Onion Identity Services' and 'Valhalla', that were selling counterfeit travel documents, such as passports, as well as markets that were advertising the sale of identity papers, including drivers' licenses, identity (ID) cards and birth certificates that were available for all nationalities. Aside from being able to cross borders under legal pretences, such documentation is highly useful for acquiring bank accounts, applying for loans or being to rent property, particularly in the destination country once arrival has been made to the intended location. Although such contraband items are also obtainable to purchase on the surface web, the assurance of anonymity and the protection of the users' identities, resulting in a lower risk of detection from law enforcement within the infrastructure of the Dark web, is of high appeal to potential buyers and marketplace sellers who partake in illicit (or licit) web transactions and/or communication exchanges. As one of interviewed experts on cybercrime trenchantly asserted, in such online endeavours, there may be a broad range of criminal actors involved, spanning from those with rudimentary experience of the Internet, to those who possess much technological adeptness (see also Treadwell, 2012), such as accessing the Dark web to engage in illicit trade:

“ So then I suppose the other thing to look at is how much do you need to be technically-savvy or not in this trade to be able to use the technology... It's probably anywhere from a really tech-savvy person through to a person using Facebook and not really knowing that much else about technology. Most of the time you find it all runs on a continuum, from really highly skilled IT people through to your average everyday person. ”

(Int. UK – Expert on Cyber Crime 1)

Traffickers may be connected to criminal networks that are highly-organised that may also be linked to domestic networks, or, they may operate locally on a very small level (see also Sarkar, 2015). In this instance, 'buyers' may include members of a criminal organisation, such as a trafficking gang, or a lone trafficker purchasing documentation on behalf of their recruited victims. Or conversely, such members may be

buying documentation for themselves to accompany their recruited victims, as a way of obscuring their real identities when travelling abroad. Researchers noted that, depending on the particular vendor, the means of payment for the purchase of such documentation was through traditional forms of currency such as the Euro (€), or via Bitcoin (฿)<sup>12</sup>, a decentralised peer-to-peer payments network and a virtual currency that essentially functions as online cash (see Brito and Castillo, 2013). Many of the counterfeit documents for sale on various darknet markets were claimed by the sellers to possess very high levels of authenticity, with some stating that their documents had been 'tested and working fine all around the world', enabling one to travel freely and unproblematically without triggering suspicion, as well as passing standard cursory inspection procedures at post offices and for person-to-person payment transfer services in which money can be sent or received, such as MoneyGram and Western Union. Similarly, some sellers of passports available to purchase stated that there were no issues with travelling and entering another country, as the passports could also, for extra money, be affixed with visa stamps as well as being registered within official government databases of the destination country to avert suspicions and discovery. Technological capabilities have enabled further counterfeiting to take place, because not only can better fakes be developed at reduced prices, but advancements in ICT links dispersed locations in global trade relations, which makes the formation of networks of buyers and sellers and the exchange of money relatively straightforward. This has become especially discernible since the Internet and e-commerce by producers and consumers became widespread, with the Internet acting as a 'time/space compressor, on the one hand connecting sellers with large numbers of consumers in dispersed locations and on the other offering the formation of transient relationships between (cyber)criminal entrepreneurs' (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2016: 23).

A key feature of transnational trafficking is the complexity in its undertaking, in which to successfully transport a person to a country or across a continent, there is the requirement of valid, or purported to be valid and genuine passports, visas or other documentation that allows entry into the destination country.

<sup>12</sup> Since its inception in 2008, the usage of Bitcoin has grown to such an extent that it is now able to be used as a form of payment for the purchase of sexual services, as evidenced by one UK-based escort agency in the city of Birmingham, Passion VIP, accepting payments in bitcoin as an alternative and discreet payment method, in what has been termed as 'the world's first bitcoin brothel' (Blue, 2013), signifying possible future trends in the interplay between innovative technologies and the sex industry.

Alongside travel documentation, there is also the necessity of international transportation, local transportation in both the country of origin and the destination country, the supervision of the victim, or victims, during the travel, and a way to collect and control the victim upon arrival at the intended destination, before the exploitation begins, which are strategies that often involve a group of people to varying extents. In this respect, the organisation of such a transregional trafficking operation, where the transportation of victims internationally is a key feature that is frequently necessitated by more skills and capital rather than the establishment of a more geographically confined venture. The investments made by traffickers into the trafficking process – especially the transportation phase – are related to the anticipated profits as the traffickers aim to maximise their return, analogous to any other business.

### 5.4.3 Exploitation

In 2016, the most common type of human trafficking recorded for both adult and child (minor) victims in the UK was trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation (National Crime Agency, 2017). Labour traffickers operate across the UK and exploit workers in low-skilled areas of work such as car washes, cleaning services, nail bars, restaurants as well as seasonal agricultural work, such as the cultivation of cannabis plants. In addition, the wages of these victims, alongside any state benefits that have been fraudulently claimed in their names are frequently paid into bank accounts that are controlled and managed by traffickers (National Crime Agency, 2016). From the interview data, some of the LEAs and NGOs also attested to labour trafficking and exploitation commonly occurring in these sectors of work and establishments:

“ There have also been cases where members of the Eastern European community, and the Middle-East, some Kurdish men have been paid very low wages working in car washes or in fast food establishments. But, the wages paid to them on behalf of the gang they’re working for, who provide the tied accommodation they’re living in, the wages are never actually seen and are instead used to pay for the accommodation, and then the accommodation is so overcrowded and cold, and without running water, you’re basically living in a shit-hole, and then you work all day for nothing. ”

(Int. UK – LEA representative 2)

“ There’s a wide range of different manifestations... some of it are people who are being used for benefit fraud and some of it is helping organised criminals in terms of cannabis farms, and some of it can even extend into domestic servitude, where people are recruited in other countries, to come and work for professional people and be paid next to nothing and work seven days a week... there’s also things like car washes, tanning salons, sunbed places, nail bars, massage parlours, there’s a whole range of casual services that victims are recruited for... People are often used and brought over for benefit fraud, I know a friend who used to volunteer at the Citizen’s Advice Bureau, and he said that quite often, people would turn up with disreputable looking characters accompanying them, and they would be seeking to get advice and register for benefits. ”

(Int. UK – LEA representative 1)

In instances where children have been trafficked to the UK, one NGO asserted that there was a striking degree of convergence and overlap within the types of exploitation that child victims have experienced:

“ The most common forms of exploitation would sit within two broad categories. So child trafficking for sexual exploitation, and child trafficking for labour exploitation. Now you can break that down in many different ways, and you can also see intersectionality within forms of exploitation... where you see domestic servitude, you might also see sexual exploitation, where you see a male who has been trafficked to the UK under the guise of football, for football purposes, you might then be exploited sexually. Or a child who is exploited for criminal activity, who is maybe into street crime, pick pocketing things like that, [they] might also be exploited sexually, so intersectionality... we’ve even seen a case of organ harvesting. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 2)

From the virtual ethnography, the reserach identified a multitude of advertisements recruiting for work in the UK, placed on numerous online classified websites and Facebook pages in numerous languages that were consistent with the red flags as outlined earlier, in an array of fields, such as construction, agriculture, health and beauty. In some circumstances, researchers found

that the mobile phone number listed in the advertisements was, when searched for on Google, connected to profiles of women in the UK that were selling sexual services, either on online classified websites or adult entertainment sites, with the original advertisement making no mention of sex work and being in a completely different job sector.

It is important to state that, despite widespread use of the Internet and digital technologies, not all victims of trafficking would have been recruited and exploited through the use of these mediums, given that informal 'offline' forms of recruitment, such as word-of-mouth, or through friends and relatives is still a very pervasive and efficient method of trafficking individuals into situations of exploitation. This type of recruitment is still extensive in rural areas or among particular communities such as Roma or other minority ethnic communities or within peer groups, with traffickers often going to the families of victims directly. One interviewed NGOs stated that such tactics were deployed by traffickers recruiting and transporting targeted victims to the UK for labour exploitation:

*“ In our experience in Nigeria, you'll have someone who befriends a family, offers the opportunity of education and employment abroad... so it could be a male person or someone not directly related to the criminal organisation that is paid to befriend the family and offer these opportunities and then smuggle them into the UK for purposes of exploitation... ”*

(Int. UK – NGO representative 2)

One interviewed LEA mentioned that Vietnamese minors were frequently trafficked to the UK for purposes of labour exploitation to work on farms and coastlines to cultivate plants and cockles, with traffickers, as part of an organised crime syndicate, visiting impoverished families to recruit young victims, and exploiting sociocultural factors of family honour and providing for one's family through working as potent forms of debt-bondage:

*“ When you look at a lot of the other places in the country, where you've got cockle farms in Cumbria to your big fruit farms in Kent, there seems to be a predominance there. Cleveland is a small area. So that was across a number of reasons, some relating to sexual exploitation where some were trafficked, but the majority were Vietnamese minors who had been trafficked basically for labour exploitation, on cannabis farms. So there, the understanding is, Vietnam, poor family, organised criminals in Vietnam say 'right, we'll give you whatever [payment], this is your money, send so and so [the trafficked victim(s)] to the UK, they're now going to pay off the debt'. What that means for us is that we've now got a safeguarding issue because they're a child, a child who won't comply, because generally, a child from Vietnam, they're much more streetwise than our kids, you've got a child who feels it is an honour to pay back the family debt, you've got a child who feels that their family will be seriously harmed or murdered if they don't pay off the debt, and you've a child who probably still think that their life is still better here than it was in Vietnam. So, with those issues, you've got a non-compliant victim, and non-compliant adult. The ages we are talking about are 13-14 years old... because of- certainly in Vietnam and it isn't much different in Eastern Europe is that money ties you in coercion, because you have always be in fear of your family, so is the debt ever paid? It's quite depressing really. ”*

(Int. UK – LEA representative 2)

Discussing trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation, one NGO asserted that this type of trafficking possessed a distinctly offline dimension, where it was most likely to be shrouded in secrecy, most probably due to the illegal status of some trafficked victims:



“ But I cannot believe, because we are a reception centre, it would make sense if you were coming through Tees port to be integrated quite easily without anyone knowing, unless the UKBA find out. There have been police raids on some restaurants, where illegal immigrants have been working in those restaurants, not saying they were trafficked necessarily, but they were illegals, so there was that illegality going on. Because it tends to be in houses, it's either domestic slavery or farms... we don't have the farmlands that they have in the South-East where I know there's more trafficking into farm labour. Barnardo's have engaged in work where they have uncovered young boys being exploited to carry drugs to another part of the area, internal trafficking it might be for drugs. There's lots going on, some we're aware of and that's published, and some we're not aware of... If everybody keeps quietly, and it's quietly done in somebody's house and nothing's being said, you know if they're out on the criminality side of things, in terms of not being seen... you know brothels, whose going to look at that unless somebody's been in there that's purchasing? Who's going to look cannabis farms, kept quiet because it's about providing drugs, supply and demand. And labour for domestic servitude, where you know, nobody's going to say that their maid has been brought over illegally or trafficked are they? ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 4)

The Internet has also augmented the nature of sex work from a predominantly physical environment to an increasingly virtual landscape to such an extent that most prostitution is currently advertised and solicited online (see also Ibanez and Suthers, 2014; Finn and Stalans, 2016), in what has been referred to in the literature as ‘virtual red light districts’ (Cauduro et al., 2009: 59; Ibanez and Suthers, 2014; Perer, 2012). Correspondingly, there has been a significant shift in human trafficking activity for the purposes of sexual exploitation to the virtual sphere, with both the supply and demand side having benefitted from the use of the Internet and digital technologies, with trafficked victims often being advertised online. The majority of the research findings gleaned from the virtual ethnography pertain to human trafficking concerning sexual exploitation, in particular the exploitation of young women.

Researchers noted that typically, each advertisement of a woman posted on the online classified and adult sex websites researchers were researching included:

a title, the name or alias of the listed woman, a textual profile description which would often include information on the physical attributes of the woman, such as her height, weight and breast size, photographs of the featured woman, the location of the town or city she was based as working in, and a mobile phone number for contact purposes. More infrequently, it has been noted that some advertisements contained videos of the advertised woman dancing or posing in a provocative manner, stated nationality and/or ethnicity of the woman, the woman's age, and whether the woman was listed with another woman in the advertisement, for example as a ‘duo’, sometimes with corresponding photographs of the two to demonstrate this was the case, and the inclusion of an e-mail address as another means of contact, alongside the mobile phone number. On this specific issue, it has been emphasised by researchers such as Konrad et al (2016: 6) that great difficulty lies in ‘discerning whether the [suspected] victim is in any capacity a willing participant rather than a victim of fraud, threat, or coercion through posted advertisements and personal encounters’, and remains to be an assignment that is fraught with complications. As researchers could not be entirely sure of whether the women featured in such advertisements and websites were actual victims of human trafficking, it has been used cautionary descriptions, such as ‘potential’, ‘possible’ or ‘suspected’ victims. Moreover, research findings demonstrate a wide assortment of nationalities, including Hungarian, Czech, Spanish, Moldavian, Ukrainian, Brazilian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Romanian<sup>13</sup> women. However, it is important to note that whilst these women are listed under these nationalities, in reality, this may not be a true representation. The research will now discuss the most salient patterns and themes that emerged from this specific aspect of the virtual ethnography. Predictably, the first theme is the very visibility of online sexual exploitation as part of the trafficking process:

<sup>13</sup> Romania has consistently been reported as being the most prevalent country of origin for potential victims of trafficking in the UK, with more than half of victims being exploited for sexual purposes (National Crime Agency Strategic Assessment, 2015).

“ It [the Internet] has certainly facilitated the sexual exploitation of children, it's certainly facilitated the exploitation of women in the sex industry and men that actually... the necessity to be on a street corner anymore is less because they can be accessed in a different way, and that's the same for children. So, there will be sites or ways of communicating on the internet, and it may not be Twitter or Facebook, it may be other models [websites and applications] that we don't even know. We are having a situation now where young men and women are being groomed online for, maybe joining ISIS or involved in terrorist groups. So if that can be done, then don't say to me that the Internet can't facilitate also putting people together who are quite willing to exploit others, for all sorts of different reasons. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 4)

“ People are purchasing sexual services, and the Internet is a really easy place to use that, mobile phones- so you're in a new city for work, you log onto your phone, download an app and say 'oh yep, I can visit X, Y and Z', so I think there is definitely technology being used to facilitate the supply and demand. Yes, for labour, because of the recruitment sites, but I think the sexual exploitation is more apparent, because there are actual pictures of women online that someone purchasing a service can make a decision on, so that's using the technology. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 3)

“ Definitely in terms of online sexual exploitation, live-streaming of child sexual abuse has become a new phenomenon, and it has definitely fuelled more child trafficking and more sexual abuse, whether done by family members or organised crime networks, it's something we've seen contribute to a rise in sexual exploitation. But we have also seen a rise in identification and prosecution of offenders. ”

(Int. UK – NGO representative 2)

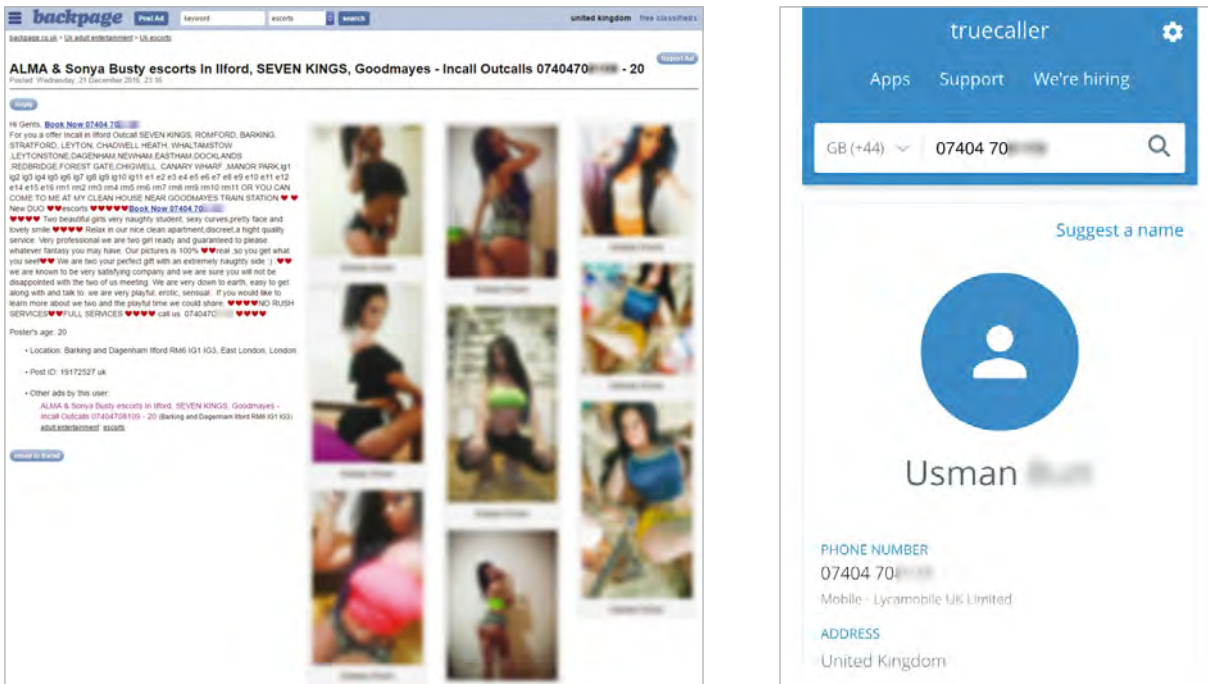
The virtual ethnographic research regarding human trafficking and exploitation in the UK sex markets revealed the importance of the mobile phone number

listed within advertisements on online classifieds, for several key reasons. Firstly, the mobile phone number serves as the nexus between the virtual and real-world physical environments, as it enables a prospective purchaser of sex browsing online to connect to a potential seller of sex and plan an offline (and almost certainly sexual) encounter. Secondly, researchers detected in several advertisements that the listed mobile phone number, when searched for on google and also by using the search function available on various online classifieds, revealed the existence of several more women also advertised as selling sexual services, frequently in various cities across the UK as well some women also working in the same locality. Thirdly, in many instances, a google search of the mobile phone number also demonstrated that the same woman had multiple other profiles on various online classifieds and sex sites, in which she was listed under numerous aliases, ages and, in her earlier profiles, as working and based in various cities in the UK. As such, the mobile phone number listed in such advertisements can serve as an important indicator of potential human trafficking activity. The advertisement of several women under one number, either within the same city or multiple cities, suggests a 'shared management' situation, in which the women do not work as independent escorts, and may be under the control of a trafficking gang or network or a pimp, who control their profiles, are in charge of the mobile phone as well as subsequent bookings made. Likewise, a google search of the phone number of a sole woman advertised is also useful to discern whether the woman has been previously advertised in different locations in the UK, indicative of frequent movement to various locations across the UK, which can signify that the woman may be a victim of trafficking.

Further highlighting the significance of mobile phone numbers in the virtual ethnography was the use of a digital app and corresponding website called 'Truecaller'<sup>14</sup> which allows mobile phone numbers to be searched for in a database of over two billion mobile phone numbers, to see name of the person that the phone is registered to, as well as the location of the phone and the mobile phone carrier that the phone is connected to. Whereas the google search of the number listed in advertisements revealed the presence of other advertisements of women who are listed under the same number, researchers were able use Truecaller to search for the mobile phone numbers highlighted in the research as being linked to suspicious advertisements, and discovered that frequently, the number was registered to a person that was not listed in the

<sup>14</sup> See [www.truecaller.com](http://www.truecaller.com).

**Figure 34. List of women advertised under a sole mobile phone number, registered in the name of another person**



Source: Website. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

advertisements, and in many instances the name of the person was male. This discrepancy between the name or names of the women in the advertisements where the number is listed as a point of contact, to the number being registered in the name of another, male person, strongly suggests that the person may be a trafficker or pimp who manages and controls the women, and may arrange bookings for them (Figure 34). Although research stress that using Truecaller did not result in all of the highlighted numbers being registered in another person’s name, or even registered at all, research did find that many of the numbers were listed under the Lycamobile phone operator, a large and popular ‘Pay-as-you-go’ network. The possession of ‘pay-as-you-go’ phones has been observed as being used by criminal networks such as traffickers and/or smugglers for operational and coordination purposes, as well as to maintain constant contact with their victims to facilitate their exploitation, where mobile phones are often prepaid, or ‘Pay-as-you-go’, so that they are unable to be connected to a specific individual through a service contract (see also Ibanez and Gazan, 2016a, 2016b).

### Movement to or within the UK

Due to the extremely large number and volume of posts featured on the various online classified websites and social networking sites that researchers were studying, it would have been impossible to try to conduct meaningful analyses on all of the advertisements. Therefore, it has been made the decision to primarily focus the investigations on advertisements that possessed transient language indicative of movement to the UK or within the UK, given that a key feature of trafficking is the rapid rotation and movement of women from city to city. Such search terms used for this purpose were: ‘new’, ‘new in town’, ‘new for you’, ‘new in/to your city’, ‘fresh’, ‘just arrived’, etc. Research discovered several women listed under these various terms, with google searches of the connected mobile phone numbers in some of their advertisements revealing that they were listed alongside other ‘new in town’ women. In one striking example, researchers found the presence of a potentially widespread trafficking ring operating in several areas of London, in which several Eastern European women were listed as being ‘hot new girls’, ‘sexy girls’, new VIP party girls’, or ‘new girls in London’ under the same set of mobile phone numbers, and with all profiles exhibiting the same writing style. All of these points would strongly suggest that the advertised women had recently been moved to the UK for purposes of sex work.



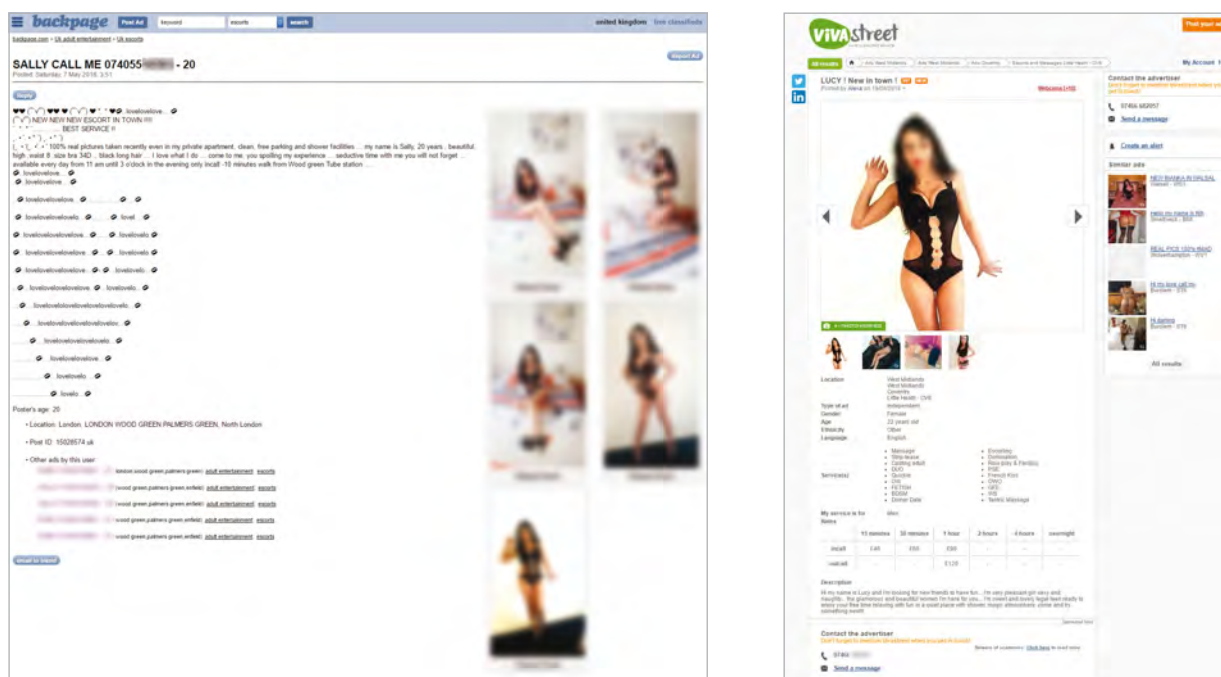
Furthermore, research were also able to identify how dynamic these types of profiles delineated as 'new' or 'new in town' were. A frequent pattern that emerged was the set-up of several profiles of women all listed as 'new girls' or 'new in town', who were typically advertised together, sometimes within the same advertisement, offering 'duo services', with photographs of some of these women demonstrating that they were working in the same residence. In these particular profiles, the written profile descriptions for many women being written in an extremely similar style in regards to grammar, syntax and spelling, as well as these women also being listed under the same mobile phone number. Sometimes the exact same profile information was copied and pasted to each profile, except for the aliases. After a few weeks, all of these profiles were removed and the women would 'disappear'. However, following a brief period of time, new profiles would be created, either in the same locality or a new area, in which the same woman or a group of women, were once again extensively advertised under new aliases and listed as being 'new in town'. This may be due to the women being moved onto another city in the UK by a trafficking gang or network or pimp to perform sex work, and to evade detection by removing the older profiles and creating new aliases to be advertised under.

Figure 35 shows a young Romanian woman, predominantly advertised in the Palmer's Green area of London

under several aliases of 'Sally', 'Yasmina', 'Jessika', with a group of Romanian women, who have all been advertised under various aliases. This particular woman has also been advertised under the alias of 'Lucy' in Coventry in the West Midlands, with her profiles on online classified websites possessing many inconsistencies in her purported age, and nationality, where she is listed as Italian, but her AdultWork profile attests her nationality as being Romanian.

A key feature of trafficking that has been consistently noted is that women are frequently moved from city to city and area to area, the purpose being to disorientate the victims in order to keep them isolated and prevent them from developing friendships that can function as social support systems, and gaining familiarity with their surroundings (see, for example, Dimitrova, 2006). Concurrently, this advantageously prevents detection by law enforcement and intelligence gathering activities. The transportation of women between cities and countries is an important part, not just of the trafficking process, but also for the sex market. Traffickers are aware that clients constantly desire new women to purchase sex from. Through frequent movement in and out of various cities, they make sure that victims are constantly circulated to entice sex purchasers, ensuring a continuous supply of a new stream of women who are often advertised as being 'new', 'new in town' or 'new in the UK' (Hagstedt et al., 2009) to meet demand. In the online context,

**Figure 35. Example of a woman advertising in an online classified websites**



Source: Website. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound



Konrad et al (2016: 3) have termed this method as ‘dynamic adaptation’, citing the modus operandi of some sex trafficking rings that advertise victims on particular websites, often altering some small details associated with the advertised name of the victim, or the featured phone number as a way to evade law enforcement. As Konrad et al (2016) argue, making such adjustments results in difficulties for rudimentary pattern-matching tools to track repeated advertisements. In the case of a potentially trafficked young woman researchers came across under the alias of ‘Shaila’, they found that she was subject to a review on www.ukpunting.com that raised interesting points:

*...Shaila’s profile says she’s Persian, which attracted me. When I got there, she said she was Pakistani. When I asked where in Pakistan she was from, she said it’s not important. I suspect she’s actually Eastern European from her looks, accent, how good her English is (pretty good) and how she confused Persia with Pakistan.*

The above excerpt is telling in that the poster remarks that ‘Shaila’ refers to herself as being of Pakistani ethnicity and not Iranian/Persian as she has been advertised under extensively on various online classified websites. This signifies a prominent discrepancy in her advertised and verbally self-reported ethnicity, in that it signifies that ‘Shaila’ may not be aware that her multiple profiles list her as being Iranian/Persian, which would indicate that her profiles may have been written and controlled by another party. The punter posting their review on the forum suspects that based on her physical appearance and accent, in actuality, ‘Shaila’ may be of Eastern European nationality. It may be that ‘Shaila’ has been told to describe her ethnicity as being Pakistani to enquiring clients, perhaps as a way of sounding more ‘exotic’, as it has been noted that ‘trying something new’, in regards to nationality and aesthetic physical features considered to be ‘exotic’, is a strong motivator for some clients to experience and purchase sex with a sex worker (see, for example, Cauduro et al., 2009).

## Analysis of the profile text

Analysing the written profile texts of women within advertisements revealed several compelling insights. Firstly, researchers found that many of the profiles, particularly those listed as ‘new’ or ‘new in town’ were written in very poor English, and were replete with several grammatical errors, deficient syntax and several spelling and punctuation mistakes. From the virtual ethnographic analysis of forums, researchers found that some punters were even able to state specific examples of browsed profiles that they thought were highly dubious, in numerous threads:

*I do not know if it applies nationwide but in our area Vivastreet advertisements almost all begin with NEW GIRL IN TOWN and have the most nonsensical profile descriptions; every girl possesses every possible virtue and will give you the best experience of your life! It reads like some moron has copied out a few thesaurus entries combined with erotica’s most overused cliches. Nothing useful regarding actual services is usually given and the site has no review system. Clearly written by a pimp and very unlikely the girls even know what is written about them.*

[Placebo88, 2016]

In a particularly illuminating post, one poster discussed his observances of a large group of Romanian women working in his home town, all of whom possessed identically written profiles and were working in the same residence, which was previously used by a group of Eastern European women who have since moved on:

*This is getting stupid. I’ve mentioned these before but the number of similar profiles grows. All of these profiles have almost identical wording. If they are all genuine then it may be a ‘super-brothel’... Basingstoke is not really awash with options so to have 6 such similar profiles really leaps out. Most likely both Romanian as 3 of the other 4 admit. The pictures are different enough that they are not obviously duplicate profiles. Has anyone seen any/several of them? I think they are all using in the same house as another batch of mainly EU girls who seemed to show up just before Christmas and stay for around 3 months, then get replaced by this lot.*

[mh, 2013]

Secondly, research discovered that several women, especially those who were listed under the same mobile phone number, all possessed extremely similar written profile information (see also Nagpal et al., 2015), in regards to the writing style and services offered, with only the aliases of the women being different. Some profiles, although they were not connected by a common mobile phone number, had the inclusion of special characters in the titles and text, such as hearts, stars, flowers and the inclusion of Emojis<sup>15</sup>, which were arranged in such an uncommon way that it would indicate that the profiles were written by the same individual or group.

Figure 36 shows a set of profiles that were listed on backpage, most likely posted consecutively, all featuring the same arrangement of peach-fruit emojis in the titles of each listing, the names of each women in the same distinctive style of capital letters, as well of the women being based as working in the same area of Edinburgh city. Each of these profiles all featured similar writing styles, where some of the women were listed as 'new to/in the UK' or 'fresh', indicating recent movement and arrival to the UK. Some of the photographs were of very high-quality, suggesting that they were taken professionally, the presence of which can indicate a group with access to a large amount of money and facilities (see Di Nicola et al., 2015). Researchers found that each profile also contained a link that stated 'other ads by this user', strongly suggesting that these profiles of the women have all been written and under control of the same user, who may be a pimp or trafficker. It is also interesting to note that all of these profiles have all been deleted, indicating that the women may have been moved to other cities in the UK to perform sex work.

**Figure 36. Example of a set of profiles that were listed on Backpage showing the same style or layout**



Source: elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

In their investigative work exploring the demand for trafficked prostitution in Sweden and factors that endorse or inhibit the business of trafficking, Hagstedt et al (2009) assert that in terms of advertisements, the same style or layout being used in numerous adverts can act as a sign of an 'organised' sex trade. Thirdly, on some profiles, several excerpts of the woman's profile description were found to have been copied and pasted from other escort profiles in the UK. Moreover, some of the women's profiles contained very little information and instead made references to specific sexual acts either in the title post or actual profile text, such as, 'OWO' (oral sex without condom) 'CIM' (ejaculation in mouth), 'ANAL' (anal sex), 'no unlimited times' (being able to orgasm as many times as wanted or as physically capable in one session), and 'full services' (all oral, vaginal and anal sexual services and acts available), all-inclusive for around £70-80 an hour. Disturbingly, many of the featured women were seen to be advertising unprotected sex for the same price.

As a useful comparator, researches spent some time examining the profiles of established escort women based and working in the UK as well as lurking on forums<sup>16</sup> connected to websites that provide support and advice to sex workers in the UK. In these particular profiles, the profile descriptions were composed in an idiosyncratic writing style in which it was quite evident that the content was written by the women themselves, as they featured unique phrases, wording (researchers also copied and pasted some excerpts on google to see if they were present elsewhere) as well as services offered. Research also found that 'standard' penetrative sex with condom was offered for £100, and 'extras', such as performing oral sex without a condom or for anal sex with condom were advertised as available for a further £10-20. On forums, it has been also discovered similar, impassioned sentiments towards unprotected sex without a condom in several threads, entitled 'bareback' and 'Bareback for 50 [£]':

*Bareback? Not even for all the gold of this world!!! My health is very important! Some clients are really stupid.*

[Pearl, 2012]

<sup>15</sup> Emojis are ideograms that are used in electronic messages and web pages. They encompass facial expressions, types of weather, common objects, places and animals.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.saafe.info](http://www.saafe.info), a dedicated website and forum offering support and advice for sex workers in the UK.

*iv been looking at aw [adultwork website] and other website and im shocked how many will do bareback i dont understand why would girls will do it some charge extra 20 or 30 [£] some dont charge any more sorry if any one reading this that does bb [bareback sex] im not beening [sic] nasty but once you get aids theres no going back no cure just a slow painful death saying all that most that do bb are fully booked the money rolling in and just about paying bills but hey i no whats right and whats not NO one should do bb an escort or not who agrees.*

[miss caroline, 2010]

*I can't imagine having unprotected sex with a client, I really really can't. Even if I stretch my imagination to it's furthest lengths I can't see myself saying 'go on, just do it'. I imagine some girls see sex work as an extension of their personal sexual experiences, which is sad really. I guess if you are willing to fuck strangers unprotected, it's not a huge leap to do it for money as well. Personally I think I'd be devastated to discover that chlamydia had been twisting up my insides, or warts were turning my vagina into a mass of road bumps while I was happily putting my faith in unfaithful men. But then that's me expressing my opinion while squicking out.*

[EvaBeeva, 2012]

*I despise clients who seek BB [bareback sex] as this behaviour kills people and puts pressure on some escorts to offer riskier services... When some slimeball [client] asks me for BB he is inviting me to sign up to a shortened life with a debilitating illness, a collage of very unpleasant drugs and an early grave.*

[JodieTs, 2010]

Researchers use such forthright and poignant narratives as outlined above to heavily emphasise and underscore how the practice of unprotected sex is treated with resolute anger by established sex workers in the UK. Similar sentiments are echoed in the comments by sex workers interviewed by Siegel (2016), who disparagingly asserted that Eastern European women, particularly those from Bulgaria and Romania, had ruined the business because they charged less than the prices

agreed by Western European sex workers, resulting in the undercutting of prices of the more established, local women, having sex with clients without a condom, and generally lacking 'civilized' manners, resulting in the whole sector acquiring a bad reputation.

*The new girls are from Bulgaria, and many from Romania, and no, we don't have any contact with them. Actually, we don't even want to, because they have ruined the business with their low prices... A Dutch or a German woman, or any classy foreign woman, would never work for less than 50 euros. Some ladies, especially these foreigners, will work without a condom, and they have simply ruined everything, because we would never do that.*

(Quoted in Siegel, 2016: 75)

A possible indicator of human trafficking is the disparity in prices between non-native and native women, in that foreign women advertise sexual services for cheaper prices than native women (see Hagstedt et al., 2009). Alongside lower prices, research can argue that another possible indicator could be the advertisement of unprotected sex without a condom, due to its hazardous nature to both the seller of sex and the purchaser. Indeed, some punters also attested that the sale of bareback sex by an advertised woman was alarming and a possible indicator that the woman's profile had been written by a trafficker and pimp, who control the profile and what sexual services for sale are offered:

*Most Romanian profiles display BB and unprotected sex, as normal. Quite often, it is the pimp who has written the profile and the WG is unaware of the services offered. If the pimp is also answering the mobile/replying the texts, he can quite often lie about these services, in order to entice the punter in.*

[Cooltiger, 2016]

*You will find that most of the profiles that list bareback are written by pimps. Most of the girls do not possess the minimal English grammar to construct profiles like the ones we see for the many Romanian girls.*

[sesalovesdarlo, 2015]

Fourthly, some of the advertised women also had multiple other active profiles on various sex sites in the UK, as well on social network sites, in particular Twitter pages for online classifieds, possibly as a means of gaining more exposure. An interesting aspect however, was some of the women's various profiles demonstrated notable profile discrepancies, such as the name or alias, age listed, working location and nationality. Indeed, on the latter point, researchers found that many women, especially those from Romania, would describe themselves as being 'Latina' or Italian, or Argentinian or Spanish, concealing their nationality as a reverse ethnic reputation manipulation (see Bovenkirk, Siegel and Zaitch, 2003 for an account on ethnic reputation manipulation). Researchers were able in some instances to cross-reference this particular discrepancy through inspecting the women's profiles on the 'AdultWork'<sup>17</sup> site, in which verification of one's profile and being able to join the site is through submitting identification proof of nationality, such as a passport<sup>18</sup> or driver's license. In one of the many cases researchers came across, a sex worker was stated as Italian in a website (www.sexolondon.com), yet her AdultWork profile, where proof of nationality must be submitted for the profile to gain verified status, states that she is Romanian, representing a prominent discrepancy and concealment of original nationality.

Just as Di Nicola et al. (2015) identified in their study, the poor use of the language of the country in the profile text – in the case English – in regards to spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors can point to two robust indications of trafficking. Firstly, the presence of spelling mistakes, poor usage of grammar as well as punctuation errors in the profile text signifies a very limited knowledge of English by the featured woman, and/or secondly, it may indicate that the profile itself has been written by a trafficker, who may be from the same country of origin as the featured woman, and is a non-native English speaker who also possesses a limited grasp of the language. As such, it can speculate that these profiles, as well as the profiles that list multiple women and are written extremely similarly, may

<sup>17</sup> A very interesting observation that researchers made came from reading the list of the Terms of Use outlined on the AdultWork sex website, in which it stipulates that a to a large amount of nationals from certain countries of Albania, Latvia, Romania and Russia are deliberately trying to defraud the website and its membership. As a consequence, nationals from these countries are subject to higher levels of additional verification and proof of identity, before being allowed to offer services on the website. This may be a compelling reason why criminal groups may use the Dark web to purchase counterfeit documentation, as means to join and acquire membership by passing the relevant security procedures on the website.

<sup>18</sup> Although it cannot be ruled out that such documentation may be in the possession of a trafficking gang, network or a pimp.

be composed and posted by another party, who create, write and control these suspicious profiles.

As mentioned earlier, researchers found many instances where women, particularly those from Romania, would conceal their identity and instead be advertised under various nationalities including Italian, 'Latina' or Argentinian or Spanish. It has been found several threads that were able to shed light on some of the reasons for this, with most pointing to the negative reputation of Romanians in the UK, including: 'Working girls misrepresenting their nationality' 'Why do so many Romanian girls to bareback sex', 'Beware Romanian girls on AdultWork', 'Are all Romanians best avoided', 'Vivastreet ' New Girl In Town' Wolverhampton THE WORST SIDE OF THIS BUSINESS', 'Romanians (Yep) Another Romanian Post' and 'Trafficking of women'. One poster outlined phases of the trafficking processes, specifically recruitment and exploitation as an explanation of how Romanian women were transported to the UK, and discussed their refusal to visit Romanian women for health reasons, given the propensity of Romanian sex workers to engage in unprotected sex, where the woman may be forced to offer the sale of unprotected sex by a pimp or trafficker, who possess a lack of concern for health or well-being of the victim:

*A significant number of these Romanian girls are brought over here under false pretence's (PA [personal assistant], modelling... job). When they get here they have their passport taken and are told they owe the pimp £x,000 and need to start paying back and the only job is prostitution, they are then subjected to violence to ensure their compliance. Now Sergie [name assigned to any archetypal pimp of Eastern-European origin] doesn't give a shit about the girl as he will move her on in a few weeks anyway so just like a hire car he wants to thrash the crap out of her in the time he has her. For him BB [bareback] is a way to get more clients and thus more money from the girl so he tells the girl that she is now offering BB. The girl is probably ignorant to the risks but quite frankly the risks of saying no to Sergie are significantly more life threatening and immediate that the risks of having 1000 high viral load HIV+ guys... This is why I don't see Romanian girls, I don't want to fuck a girl who is not doing the job on their own free will.*

[rolf32313, 2014]



*The influx of UK based Romanians have destroyed the previous good reputation of EE WGs (Polish/Czech/Hungarian) due to their bad attitude and rubbish service, coupled with their pimps' encouragement to rip off the punter. Yet guys still pay to see them because they are cheap. Avoid romanians, they all lie and cheat you out of your money. Trust me, they asked me for more money after 10 minutes, for you to cum again.. Also they lie about their nationality, they would say brazillian, to italian, to spanish... etc... they all are decitful. They dont look like their profile pictures either.*

[Taggart, 2016]

Such elucidatory passages from the virtual ethnography support the concept of 'ethnic reputation manipulation', as posited by Bovenkerk et al (2003), which researchers find is most pertinent and useful to refer to here. Bovenkerk et al. state that individuals and groups, as they engage in criminal activity, manipulate their ethnicity and ethnic reputation, either through emphasis or concealment. In doing so, these individuals and groups can acquire a foothold, status and power in a new country, and address an assortment of audiences that include insiders, outsiders and the law. As Bovenkerk et al. (2003) further expound about the salient nature of reputations:

*Reputations are judgements about vices, virtues, strengths and weaknesses that communities accumulate, process and reprocess about their members. The circulation of reputational information seems essential to all social interaction, whether conducting a business, achieving information or identifying reliable others... Reputations go beyond more personal impressions made on others: they are built up over time, involve a great deal of indirect evidence and often include social representations of entire groups (collective reputations).*

(Bovenkerk et al., 2003: 27)

Moreover, reputations can frequently have indirect and distant consequences. Given that reputations often circulate in conversations within groups, as researchers have observed with punters on web forums, it can be most challenging to create, cultivate or elude a particular reputation. Furthermore, Bovenkerk et al (2003) assert that whilst ethnic reputations can be difficult for individ-

uals to alter depending on the social context – in this case Romanian sex workers in the UK – they can play a positive or a negative role for them. Thus, the management of ethnic reputations often consists of playing with already extant reputations, either by masking one's ethnic ascription or embellishing stereotyped images. The research findings concerning the misrepresentation of nationality on their advertised profiles by predominantly Romanian sex workers in the UK online, most likely due to a perceived very poor reputation by punters, align with Bovenkerk et al.'s (2003) treatise, and to which researchers can argue is most likely a strategic mechanism to attract prospective customers, protect against the loss of visits by sex purchasers and by extension, business earnings made during these encounters.

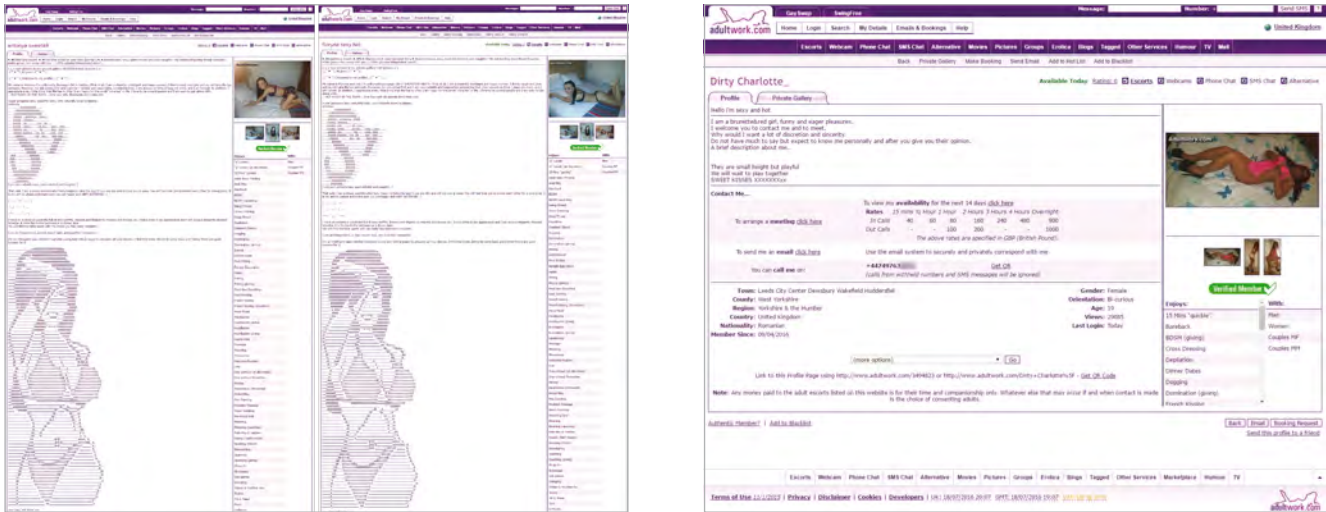
### Reverse image searches of profile photographs

A further significant aspect of the research was from a method used to inspect the photographs of some of the woman featured in adverts marked to be dubious. Researchers employed reverse image searching, a technique in which photographs can be searched for using a search engine such as google, to ascertain whether the same photograph is present on other websites and to locate, if possible, the source of a photograph. To do so, researchers would simply right click the photograph of the woman in question, select the 'search Google for image' option, and then see if the woman's photograph was present elsewhere. It has been also used a dedicated search engine specifically designed for this use, called 'TinEye'. Researchers found this method to very effective in identifying that the photographs of some of the women were featured on other profiles, under various aliases, and in different locations in the UK, indicating constant, continuous movement within the UK. Moreover, this method also revealed that some of the women advertised were also featured on European sex sites, such as those based in Poland and Romania, which suggests that the photographs of the women in the listings have been stolen from other sites, or that these women have been moved to the UK for sex work.

### AdultWork trafficked 'identity laundering'

A further interesting finding emerged from the analysis of women who were been identified as possible trafficked victims. Assessing their profiles on AdultWork, researchers noted a phenomenon of where one young woman in the profile had been replaced by another, and then subsequently replaced by another woman after a few weeks. Consistent within these changes was the profile itself, as well as the descriptive text of the profile. In many of these instances, researchers

**Figure 37. Group of potentially trafficked young Romanian women, who have all been advertised on the AdultWork website under the same profile**



Source: Website. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

noted that the women advertised possessed a very long, comprehensive list of sexual services, for the low, inclusive price of £80, in which unprotected ‘bareback’ sex was also listed. Researchers suspect this ‘profile swapping’, taking place on the AdultWork website as the main platform, may be a method used by traffickers to bypass ID checks to gain profile verification, and to engage in identity laundering of victims. This would advantageously enable traffickers to capitalise on an already verified AdultWork profile, with little effort in replacing photographs, or creating new profiles and written profile descriptions for the listed woman. This tactic has not gone unnoticed by punters:

*Profile selling is rife, genuine people get them verified and sell them on! if Sergei gets a new girl he can simply use an existing profile for her.*

[Jimmyredcab, 2015]

*There is some profile swapping going on which is not, sadly, that unusual with some EE [Eastern-European] girls where Pimps control the profiles. Any good FB [feedback] can then be transferred to a completely different girl.*

[Jacob, 2011]

Figure 37 shows a group of potentially trafficked young Romanian women, who have all been advertised on the AdultWork website under the same profile under

the aliases of ‘Antonya sweet’, ‘Floryna sweet’, ‘Dirty Charlotte\_’, with each woman being advertised for a few weeks, and then replaced by another, in the cities of London and Leeds. This rotation of women under the same profile indicates that profile swapping may be occurring, or that the profile has been sold to other traffickers and/or pimps to advertise the particular, featured woman.

## 5.5 Web survey

A web survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums, was administered for each key member state (N=995). Specifically, this Section presents the data about at-risk websites visited and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on actions related to the trafficking in human beings.

For this scope, the following questions were administered, among others (see Annex C), to the Internet users:

- Do you know cases when somebody responded to an ad or announcement for work (abroad or in your country) that was published online or in a mobile application and after that was coerced to work through threats, deprivation of documents, etc.?
- If yes, why do you know similar cases?
- Do you remember where these ads were published?
- In which sector or sectors was the work that the victims were coerced to do?

- Have you or someone you know ever seen/found Internet contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on dating websites/chats) that you would associate to an offering and/or advertisement of services provided by exploited people?
- Do you remember where these contents were published?
- In which sector or sectors was the service in which the victims were exploited?
- Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?
- Have you or someone you know ever used these services?

The results of the web survey supported, in toto, what already emerged with the exploration of the web and thanks to the in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

According to the results of the web survey more than a quarter of the sample declared to know cases when someone responded to an ad or announcement for work (abroad or in their country) that was published online or in a mobile application and after that was coerced to work through threats, deprivation of documents, etc. (Table 4). Most of them knew similar cases from the media, even if about one fifth claimed to know people who suffered personally, and 2.3% personally suffered (see Table A4, Annex D).

**Table 4. Do you know cases when somebody responded to an ad or announcement for work (abroad or in your country) that was published online or in a mobile application and after that was coerced to work through threats, deprivation of documents, etc. Percentages (N=995). Results from the web survey**

|                                      |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| No, I don't know about similar cases | 72.2%  |
| Yes, I know similar cases            | 27.8%  |
| Total                                | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Respondents declared to have seen these ads principally on social networks, Facebook (37.9%), Twitter (4.1 %) or others, as for instance Instagram (6.2%) (see Table A5, Annex D). According to their opinion, the most frequent sector or sectors of the work that the victims were coerced to do were agriculture (29.1%) and personal care (care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.) (24.5%) (see Table A6, Annex D).

The survey also examined if the respondents or someone they know had ever seen/found Internet contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on

dating websites/chats) that they would associate to an offering and/or advertisement of services provided by exploited people. About one third claimed to know similar cases (Table 5), mostly advertised on Facebook (22.6%), job sites (15.2%) or other social networks (10.1%) (see Table A7, Annex D). According to their opinion, intimate services (such as massage, escort, companions, etc.) (31.3%), entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.) (17.1%) and personal care (care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.) (14.7%) were the most frequent sectors of the services for which the victims were exploited (see Table A8, Annex D).

**Table 5. Have you or someone you know ever seen/found Internet contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on dating websites/chats) that you would associate to an offering and/or advertisement of services provided by exploited people? Percentages (N=967). Results from the web survey**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| No, never   | 68.4%  |
| No, but as I rethink this now, I can recall some ads that seemed suspicious, dangerous or risky | 21.1%  |
| Yes, I have definitely encountered such ads   | 10.5%  |
| Total   | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Finally, respondents thought these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky mainly because the working conditions/offered services were not clear (52.2%) and because the ads were anonymous (37.1%) (see Table A9, Annex D).



# 06

Key findings  
and guidelines  
for LEAs and NGOs



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By cross analysing project results retrieved from the web survey and from research activities carried out in the four member states involved it is possible to identify some key findings about the role of the Internet in both smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. At the same time, the project results allow for the outlining of some knowledge-based guidelines and tips aimed at improving the capability of LEAs and NGOs to develop more effective preventative and contrast strategies.

## 6.1 Smuggling of migrants

### 6.1.1 Key findings

**1. The Internet plays a relevant role in the smuggling of migrants.** Project results highlighted that the Internet plays a relevant role in people smuggling activities, particularly in the recruitment phase as a facilitator for the advertisement of services provided by smugglers. This result was confirmed by both the exploration of the web and interviews with smugglers, migrants and LEAs. However, while in Italy and in the United Kingdom the Internet and digital technologies do not merely complement existing offline practices, but rather significantly expand the potential for illicit enterprise, in Bulgaria and in Romania recruitment for smuggling seems to be done prevalently offline. Potential migrants are informed offline (e.g. private channels, recommendations, person to person) and all actors involved in the various phases of the smuggling processes communicate personally and by telephone (usually by using coded language). The main reasons are that smugglers are afraid to be monitored over the web by LEAs, and that recruitment of migrants arriving in Bulgaria and Romania takes place offline in the countries of origin.

**2. Social media websites play a key role in the decision-making process of potential migrants.** Many stakeholders interviewed during the project highlighted that social media websites play a crucial role in the decision-making process of potential migrants. Indeed, communication and the broadcasting of important

information, such as which countries are easy to enter, where borders are open to travel through and where they have been closed, play powerful roles in the recruitment of migrants to be smuggled and influence their decisions on the 'if and how' to leave the country. For example, an asylum seeker interviewed during research activities in Bulgaria stated that, before leaving his country (Syria), he searched the Internet for information about different EU countries, to choose where to go, and connected through Facebook with acquaintances who had already lived in Bulgaria for years. Also, in Romania migrants use social media and the Internet extensively, especially to communicate with friends or members of the Diaspora communities already living in their destination country. Seeking guidance on possible dangers on their route or receiving emotional support, most of the time refugees seek destination countries with existing communities to whom they share national, language or linguistic ties.

**3. Social media websites facilitate the advertisement of smuggling services.** Social media websites (such as Facebook, Instagram and (to a lesser extent) Twitter) are largely used by smugglers to advertise transportation services, the sale of counterfeit travel documents (such as passports, visas and identification papers including driving licenses), and to provide potential migrants with general information on existing possibilities to reach Europe. Indeed, the majority of web contents identified during the project linked to smuggling were attained from social networking websites. Results from virtual ethnographic research demonstrate that social media sites are a key instrument for migrants and smugglers to broadcast information about travelling routes, the occurrence of border closures, transportation services and the costs involved with arranging trips.

**4. Social media pages and profiles run by smugglers provide information on travels.** The exploration of the web carried out during the project showed a significant amount of Facebook posts (published by profiles or pages) advertising illegal transportation services. Usually these posts contained information on:

- Country or geographical area of departure;
- Mode of transport (boat, yacht or flight trips and land routes by foot or by car). Typically, posts also display ideal pictures of the particular means of transport (usually luxury boats, cruise liners, yachts, and planes), and provide information on the size and dimensions of the vector and on the duration of the journey;
- Destination of the journey (even if sometimes this information is generic, such as 'Europe' or 'European Union');
- Price for the journey;
- Telephone numbers to call (usually via Viber and WhatsApp) for further information.

Sometimes these pages and profiles post photographs and videos of 'successful' trips made, both during the journey, and after the destination had been reached.

**5. Contents linked to migrant smuggling services on social media websites are easily accessible.** Web contents advertising smuggling services on social media websites are out in the open and easily accessible. This is especially true when using some basic keywords in Arabic in the search bar of social media websites (such as 'trip for Europe', 'visa' or 'Schengen'), making it possible to find a long list of posts, pages and groups dedicated to people smuggling. Even if some of these groups are private (i.e. their contents are not freely visible), research activities demonstrated that it is very easy to gain entry and to receive notifications of new postings and updates by using a personal profile (real or fake) and asking the administrator to enter the group.

**6. Smugglers provide potential migrants with detailed information via mobile applications.** In numerous instances there is interplay between various forms of technology, namely between the Internet and mobile phone applications, such as WhatsApp and Viber. Smugglers use social media websites (especially Facebook) as a gateway for advertising their services to potential migrants. Further communications to arrange transportation for journeys and to discuss payment then take place through those other platforms, including text messages and mobile telephony. During the project, an Arabic speaking researcher used WhatsApp and Viber to contact the numbers displayed in social media posts pretending to be a potential migrant and asking information for himself or for his relatives. Respondent smugglers provided detailed information on various 'travel packages' (routes, means of transport, timing, prices, etc.) and on additional services, such as the supply of counterfeit documents. Overall,

the smugglers contacted demonstrated a high level of knowledge of International and European Law (e.g. they provided detailed information on the asylum laws and how to circumvent them using fake documents).

**7. Social media websites are used by migrants to post feedback about smuggling services.** The exploration of the web conducted during the project highlighted that migrants use social media websites to expose fraudulent smugglers who advertise deceptive transportation services. These posts are often very detailed with information on fraudulent smugglers such as their name, nationality, pictures, the country and city they were operating in, how they had defrauded their victim or victims, particularly in regards to payment. These posts can also be used by smugglers on their pages as an effective recruitment tactic, i.e. by instilling confidence in their services demonstrating that they are looking after and protecting potential migrants.

**8. Social media profiles and pages run by smugglers are very effective and responsive.** Project results showed that smugglers active on social media websites are very responsive and use facilitators and marketing strategies in order to enhance the effectiveness of their advertisements. For instance, a service provided by Facebook certifies how quickly someone replies to messages sent to him/her in the private chat of the website. Pages run by smugglers analysed during the project were very often marked as 'very responsive' (replying within an hour) or even as 'extremely responsive' (responding to messages in minutes). Furthermore, Facebook profiles and pages run by smugglers frequently display the 'call now' button, an optional feature provided by the website thanks to which it is possible to contact the person running the profile/page in a very quick and effective way. Results from virtual ethnography highlighted that sometimes smugglers use 'live videos', a Facebook streaming service that allows them to provide potential migrants with detailed information on their services and to interact in real time with users watching the video.

**9. The Internet is also used during and after the journey.** Smugglers interviewed during the project in Italy and in the United Kingdom highlighted that social media and smartphone applications are key mechanisms in the logistics of the transportation process, specifically to keep them in contact with the clients during the journey, as well as the arrival of their clients to the destination and the arrangement of payment. On the contrary, research results in Bulgaria and Romania revealed that communications during the journey are made mainly through other means than the Internet, such as traditional phone calls.

**10. The Deep/Dark web seems to play a marginal role.** According to project results, the Deep/Dark web seems to play a marginal role in migrant smuggling activities. Indeed, the recruitment of migrants would be much less effective if carried out over the Deep/Dark web because of the very limited number of users: advertisement of services by smugglers could be easily and safely done through traditional Internet means (or offline). The only exception is the sale of forged documents: it emerged from the exploration of the web that on the Deep/Dark web there are several websites that promote the online trade of fake passports and ID cards that may facilitate people smuggling activities.

## 6.1.2 Knowledge-based guidelines for LEAs

Project results allowed for the outlining of some knowledge-based guidelines aimed at improving the capability of LEAs to develop more effective preventative and contrast strategies against migrant smuggling. More specifically, LEAs should:

- **Use the Internet as a pivot** (i.e. a source of information and an instrument) **in their operations against people smuggling.** The Deep/Dark web seems to rarely be used by smugglers: investigative attention should be focused on the surface web and especially social media websites. Web contents advertising smuggling services to potential migrants are easily accessible using the list of keywords elaborated during the project (see Annex A) and provide LEAs with useful information on routes, means of transports, prices, as well as contact details (especially telephone numbers) used by smugglers.
- **Develop their capacity to work with the Arabic language and other languages of the Middle East and North Africa** by creating a network of trusted native-speaking collaborators. Indeed, most of the web contents linked to smuggling activities (especially advertisements of travels on social media) are written in those languages.
- When allowed by the national legislation, **conduct undercover phone calls** contacting telephone numbers displayed on social media posts advertising smuggling services. This is a very important source of detailed information to take advantage of by utilising the phone numbers retrieved from the text of the posts.
- **Seek the collaboration of academia** in order to develop an **automatic tool for tactical/strategic analytical support** against Internet-based activities of migrant smugglers. This tool should have

enhanced capabilities such as the ability to crawl the Internet and social media websites, to integrate structured and unstructured data, to analyse big data and transform the restless streams of data in value, knowledge and decision capability, and to predict future threats. Such an instrument would be crucial since the amount of information on the Internet does not allow for an effective human analysis.

- **Develop dedicated training programmes** for law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges in order to raise their awareness on the use of the Internet (especially social media websites) in migrant smuggling, and to enhance the cooperation with Europol, Eurojust and LEAs from the origin countries of migrants.

## 6.1.3 Knowledge-based guidelines for NGOs

Project results allow for the outlining of some knowledge-based guidelines aimed at improving the capability of NGOs to develop more effective preventative and contrast strategies against migrant smuggling. More specifically, NGOs should:

- **Use the Internet as a source of information** to develop effective awareness-raising strategies against migrant smuggling. Web contents advertising smuggling services to potential migrants (easily accessible using the list of keywords elaborated during the project, see Annex X) provide NGOs with useful information on routes, means of transports, and prices, that can be used to tailor their campaigns.
- **Target social media websites:** an effective awareness-raising campaign for migrants should target the same web channels used by smugglers to advertise their services. NGOs should seek the collaboration of the companies running the social media websites in order to better target their campaigns and to effectively reach potential migrants.
- Develop **awareness-raising campaigns aimed at influencing the decision-making process of potential migrants.** In doing so, an effective awareness strategy should not discourage potential migrants from leaving their country of origin but provide them with information on the real conditions of the journey and on the real situations they will find in the European Union. This way the decision on whether to contact the smuggler will be a more rational choice and will be less influenced by misleading and idyllic information provided to potential migrants by smugglers advertising their services.

- **Seek the collaboration with academia** in order to develop a **support tool** that automatically monitors and analyses social media posts and comments linked to migrant smuggling in order to obtain updated and detailed information on how to develop tactical/strategic planning against migrant smuggling.

## 6.2 Trafficking in human beings

### 6.2.1 Key findings

**1. The Internet plays a relevant role in the recruitment of potential victims.** Project results in all member states involved in research activities highlighted that the Internet plays a key role in human trafficking since it did not only replace the traditional methods, but it also facilitates to a great extent the processes of recruitment of potential victims and their exploitation. Experts interviewed during the project described recruitment over the Internet (eRecruitment) as more efficient compared to traditional methods, because communication is easy, fast and cheap: when using the Internet, total costs for business management are very low (about 20-30% of the total income). Because of the Internet, in the last year the distinction between destination and origin countries has been more blurred. For instance, even if Italy is primarily a destination country (i.e. a state in which foreign victims of human trafficking are exploited), NGO representatives interviewed during the project highlighted that Italian victims are increasing, especially young girls lured via the 'sextortion' and the 'lover boy' method.

**2. Deceptive online job advertisements are used frequently to recruit women for sexual exploitation.** One of the methods most used by traffickers to recruit women online is through deceptive and fraudulent job advertisements. Research results allowed for the identification of a number of red flags (indicators) that are useful to identify at-risk job offers, namely:

- There is no precise indication of the person or entity offering the job (name, address, etc.);
  - The presence of contact details containing only a mobile phone number or a general e-mail address for further enquiries;
  - The text is written in poor language with grammar mistakes;
  - There are a lack of clear details regarding the job (only a general description);
  - The advertisement promises unrealistic conditions (such as very high salary for an unqualified job);
- The same advertisement is published on different platforms;
  - Moreover, in some circumstances researchers found that the mobile phone number listed in the job advertisements was connected to profiles of women that were selling sexual services, either on online classified websites or adult entertainment sites, with the original advertisement making no mention of sex work and being in a completely different job sector.

**3. Social media websites highly facilitate the 'lover boy' recruitment method.** The 'lover-boy' method is one of the techniques most used by traffickers to recruit their victims. Using this method, a trafficker, either operating alone or as part of a larger group, feigns romantic interest in a girl or young woman, and seduces her with promises of marriage and an auspicious future by travelling abroad from the country of origin, and as the relationship develops further, the recruiter or trafficker manipulates or coerces the victim into sexual exploitation through prostitution. Even if this technique is not new, today it is enormously facilitated by social media websites (especially Facebook).

Usually, after selecting a few Facebook profiles of young women that correspond to their criteria – such as physical appearance, age and vulnerability – recruiters contact the women, requesting that they be accepted to her virtual friend group. Then, through conversations on Facebook's private chat (Messenger), under the pretext of establishing romantic relationships with them, traffickers manage to earn their trust and continue communicating with them, either by mobile apps, telephone calls or face-to-face. The open access feature of social media gives traffickers access to various contents that users post with imprudence (photographs, personal information, daily activities, places visited, etc.) that recruiters can use to better identify their potential victims. Then, recruiters use these details when convincing victims that they share common interests, thus increasing the chances of the recruitment process' success. Moreover, traffickers use location services provided by social media websites to determine how close in proximity a potential victim is to them, in terms of a nearby town or city, or even within the same locality, thus enabling them to easily track, meet and build up a relationship to gain their targeted victim's trust.

Another online recruitment source for sexual exploitation that the LEA representatives interviewed in Romania identified is Instagram. This virtual medium is used less frequently by traffickers compared to Facebook, because, even though it provides traffickers with an opportunity to view photographs of its users, it does not integrate as many effective communication tools, such as the private chat option (Messenger).



#### 4. Traffickers use ‘sextortion’ to recruit their victims.

According to project results, a strategy used by some recruiters for constraining victims to accept working with them is blackmail. Under the pretext of establishing intimacy, traffickers propose with potential victims a photograph exchange: 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’).

**5. Dating websites and applications facilitate the recruitment of girls.** Dating websites and applications are very much used by traffickers (especially in Bulgaria) to create a first connection with potential victims. According to project results, in Bulgaria Tinder (a dating mobile application) is widely used to recruit girls to exploit abroad, because those who are registered speak at least two EU languages. In the cases of victims who tried on their own to earn money from prostitution and used profiles on dating sites, the initial contact with traffickers is made there in private chats and then transferred to Skype, mobile applications like WhatsApp and Viber, or conventional phone conversations, where personal meetings and prices are arranged. The traffickers use personal meetings as a ‘test’ of the ‘qualities’ of the victims, thereby representing the third phase of the recruitment.

**6. The Internet seems to play a more marginal role in the recruitment of victims for labour exploitation.** According to research results, the recruitment through Internet for labour exploitation seems to be far less probable than recruitment for sexual exploitation, due to the characteristics of the majority of potential victims (low-educated, from small settlements), the 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 the Internet in the process of recruitment for labour exploitation is practically proven with the victim and trafficker interviews in Bulgaria and are admitted in principle by LEAs and by one of the NGO representatives. Like the recruitment for sexual exploitation, the Internet is estimated as just one of the phases of the recruitment, followed by phone conversations, personal meetings, etc.

**7. Sexual exploitation is shifting more and more to the Internet.** The Internet augmented the nature of sex work from a predominantly physical environment to an increasingly virtual landscape to such an extent

that most prostitution is currently advertised and solicited online. Correspondingly, there has been a significant shift in human trafficking activity for the purposes of sexual exploitation to the virtual sphere, with both the supply and demand sides having benefited from the use of the Internet and digital technologies, with trafficked victims often being advertised online. According to Bulgarian results, victims receive updated profiles on the same websites they’ve been recruited from, or on other similar websites active in the exploitation country, with professional photos and videos of presentation. More in general, traffickers advertise the sexual services of their victims via different channels, such as dedicated sites, dating websites or applications, social media websites, classified pages, or escorting websites. However, many of these sex advertisements are concealed as other types of services (such as massaging).

According to Bulgarian research results, the Internet could be used for advertising, prevalently for specific types of prostitution connected with specific skills and personalities of the victims:

- In the case of victims with a 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 such as Viber and WhatsApp;
- In the case of victims with specific physical appearance requisites, for exploitation through porn websites.

**8. There are several red flags to identify ‘at-risk’ sexual advertisements.** It is not possible to be entirely sure of whether women featured in online sexual advertisements and websites are actual victims of human trafficking. However, project findings highlighted a set of indications (red flags) that are useful in identifying the occurrence of trafficking, which are:

- Text of the advertisement with very poor language, and were replete with several grammatical errors, deficient syntax and several spelling and punctuation mistakes;
- Young age of girls advertised;
- Disparity in prices between non-native and native women, in that foreign women advertise sexual services for cheaper prices than native women;
- The presence of mobile phone numbers associated with more women selling sexual services;
- The use of multiple profiles on various online classifieds and sex sites by the same woman (picture) under numerous aliases, ages and locations;

- Discrepancies, especially in social media posts, between the women advertised and the person publishing the advertisement;
- Advertisement for unprotected sex (i.e. sex without the use of a condom);
- The presence of ‘transportation indicators’, i.e. the transportation of women between cities and countries (such as, ‘new girl’, ‘new in town’).

**9. The Internet seems to play a more marginal role in the labour exploitation of victims.** According to project results, the Internet seems to play a more marginal role in the case of labour exploitation. Indeed, only a few NGO representatives in Italy and Bulgaria supposed (without evidence) this possibility, while the Romanian ones did not elaborate on how or whether the Internet is being used for labour exploitation. Consistently, research findings in the United Kingdom highlighted that digital technologies only complement informal offline forms of recruitment (such as word-of-mouth, or through friends and relatives).

**10. The Deep/Dark web is used to advertise sexual services by minors and the sale of forged documents.** Interviews conducted during the project highlighted that the Deep/Dark web is used by traffickers neither in recruitment nor in the exploitation phases. However, virtual ethnography results suggested that the Deep/Dark web is used by traffickers:

- As a source of forged documents aimed to facilitate the transportation of trafficked victims (especially coming from extra-EU countries). This documentation is highly useful not only for transporting victims to the destination country, but also for acquiring bank accounts, applying for loans or being able to rent property, particularly in the destination country once arrival has been made to the intended location;
- To explicitly advertise the sexual services of minor victims. The assurance of anonymity and the protection of the users’ identities (of both traffickers and clients) ensures a low risk of detection from law enforcement.

## 6.2.2 Knowledge-based guidelines for LEAs

Project results allow for the outlining of some knowledge-based guidelines aimed at improving the capability of LEAs to develop more effective preventative and contrast strategies against human trafficking. More specifically, LEAs should:

- **Use the ‘red flags’ developed during the project to identify at-risk online job advertisements**, i.e. that can be used by traffickers to recruit potential victims (in particular young women for sexual exploitation). Specifically, LEAs should focus their attention on advertisements published on different platforms with no precise indication of the person or entity offering the job, with only a general description of job tasks, written in poor language with grammar mistakes, promising unrealistic conditions (such as a very high salary for an unqualified job), and with inadequate contact information (such as a general e-mail or a phone number).
- **Pay attention to telephone numbers indicated in at-risk online job advertisements:** these numbers are usually also present on adult entertainment websites or online classified websites. By searching those numbers on online search engines (such as Google) it is possible to receive relevant information about the online recruitment and exploitation networks used by traffickers.
- **Use the indicators developed during the project to identify online advertisements of sexual services of potential victims**, i.e.:
  - a. Text of the advertisement with very poor language, and were replete with several grammatical errors, deficient syntax and several spelling and punctuation mistakes;
  - b. Young age of girls advertised;
  - c. Disparity in prices between non-native and native women, in that foreign women advertise sexual services for cheaper prices than native women;
  - d. The presence of mobile phone numbers associated with more women selling sexual services;
  - e. The use of multiple profiles on various online classifieds and sex sites by the same woman (picture) under numerous aliases, ages and locations;
  - f. Discrepancies, especially in social media posts, between the women advertised and the person publishing the advertisement;
  - g. Advertisement of unprotected sex (i.e. without a condom);
  - h. The presence of ‘transportation indicators’, i.e. the transportation of women between cities and countries (such as, ‘new girl’, ‘new in town’).
- LEAs should also **develop their capacity to investigate the Deep/Dark web** in order to fight the sexual exploitation of minors.

- **Be aware that open source online tools can be very useful** to conduct investigations on online human trafficking. For instance, applications and websites such as ‘Trucaller’ allow mobile phone numbers to be searched for in a database, to see the name of the person that the phone is registered to, as well as the location of the phone and the mobile phone carrier that the phone is connected to. Websites such as AdultWork can be used to cross-reference discrepancies in nationality, list of services offered, specifically ‘bareback’ sex and/or a very long list of services being offered for sale for an extremely small amount of money. The reverse image search tools provided by Google can be used to see where the photographs of a potential victim advertised online are present on other profiles, under various aliases and locations giving LEAs a more complete picture of the online exploitation network.
- **Develop dedicated training programmes** for law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges in order to raise their awareness on the use of the Internet in human trafficking, and to enhance the cooperation with Europol and Eurojust.
- **Inform youngsters** (especially young girls) about the **potential risk behind chatting with strangers on social media and dating websites and applications** (i.e. how to avoid the ‘lover boy’ technique).
- Develop **awareness-raising campaigns** targeting escort websites, dating websites and applications, and other virtual environments advertising sexual services providing users with the **information necessary to recognise the red flags that may indicate the presence of a girl exploited by traffickers**.

### 6.2.3 Knowledge-based guidelines for NGOs

Project results allow for the outlining of some knowledge-based guidelines aimed at improving the capability of NGOs to develop more effective preventative and contrast strategies against human trafficking. More specifically, NGOs should:

- **Run awareness campaigns** aimed at providing the public (especially the youth and other vulnerable groups) with **information on how to identify deceptive online job advertisements** (i.e. the red flags developed during the project). NGOs should also seek the collaboration with academia in order to obtain continuously updated information on new strategies used by traffickers to recruit potential victims online as to create effective campaigns.
- Develop an **awareness campaign devised for the youth to inform them about the risks and consequences linked to the injudicious use of the Internet** with a focus on the importance of Internet safety in regards to location services and privacy settings on social media websites and applications.
- **Familiarise the public about the dangers of ‘sexting’**, i.e. the sharing of personal explicit pictures, which then have the risk of being circulated online and/or used to blackmail a potential victim (‘sextortion’).





# Annex A

## Research protocol for the exploration of the web

This Annex provides some practical guidelines used by the researchers to conduct an exploration of the web (and also of Dark web) in each key member state (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK) in order to acquiring more knowledge on the use of Internet in the processes of THB and smuggling of migrants and Asylum Seekers.

To this aim, these guidelines will contain the following parts:

1. Common definitions of THB and Smuggling of Migrants and Asylum Seekers to be used;
2. List of websites (per typology) and keywords to facilitate the search of relevant data on the web;
3. Suggested method to search data on Dark web, using Tor Network.

### 1. How to define THB and Smuggling of Migrants and Asylum Seekers

In order to embrace a common definitional framework within the research team, please follow the international/European legal definitions of THB and smuggling of migrants/asylum seekers below when doing your research. During each phase of project Surf and Sound, the research team will adopt these common concepts.

#### Definition of THB

*Article 2 of the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims*

#### Offences concerning trafficking in human beings

1. Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the following intentional acts are punishable: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those 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.
2. A position of vulnerability means a situation in which the person concerned has no real or acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse involved.

3. Exploitation shall include, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs.
4. The consent of a victim of trafficking in human beings to the exploitation, whether intended or actual, shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in paragraph 1 has been used.
5. When the conduct referred to in paragraph 1 involves a child, it shall be a punishable offence of trafficking in human beings even if none of the means set forth in paragraph 1 has been used.
6. For the purpose of this Directive, 'child' shall mean any person below 18 years of age.

#### Definition of Smuggling of Migrants and Asylum Seekers

*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*

Smuggling of migrants is commonly understood as the intentional organization or facilitation of the irregular movement of persons across state borders, which is provided in return for financial gain (or other gain) by the migrants to the smugglers. Smuggling of migrants generally takes place with the consent of the person willing to move. However, the act of smuggling itself is

often dangerous and violent, forcing people to unsafe and inhumane travelling conditions.

According to 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: “(a) ‘Smuggling of migrants’ shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident; (b) ‘Illegal entry’ shall mean crossing borders without complying with the necessary requirements for legal entry into the receiving State; (...)”.

This is nevertheless distinct from trafficking in human beings, which does not require crossing of international borders, involves physical or psychological violence, coercion, exploitation of position of vulnerability, and is aimed at the exploitation of the victim. The distinction between these two types of crimes can however become blurred in practice because smuggled people can also become victims of violence or some form of exploitation.

All the EU Member States make a distinction between illegal migrants and asylum seekers/refugees. An asylum seeker is a person submitting a request for refugee status. The asylum seeker is not granted refugee status unless the Member State decides they qualify, following a defined legal procedure.

## 2. How to search relevant data on the web

Researchers of UNITN, Teesside, and CSD (Center for the Study of Democracy) are requested to search information on the links and contents of websites, web-forums, social networks, use of online chats, VOIP, etc. employed in the THB and people smuggling process on the web. As regards THB, the exploration will regard both sex and labour markets. Please pay attention to the relevant pop-ups that can appear while browsing websites.

The data collection will concern both the recruitment/transportation and the exploitation of victims of THB in each country involved in the study, namely: Bulgaria and Romania for the recruitment/transportation phases; Italy and the United Kingdom for the exploitation phase. As regards people smuggling, the phases of recruitment, transportation, and entry into another country shall be taken into consideration. More in details, the working plan will be the following:

### 1. UNITN – Exploration of the web as regards:

- a. The exploitation phase of THB (in the sex and labour markets) in Italy;
- b. The transportation/entry phases of people smuggling towards/into Italy.

*The research will focus on web contents in Italian (and possibly English or other languages case by case).*

### 2. Teesside – Exploration of the web as regards:

- a. The exploitation phase of THB (in the sex and labour markets) in the UK;
- b. The transportation/entry phases of people smuggling towards/into the UK.

*The research will focus on web contents in English (and possibly other languages case by case).*

### 3. CSD – Exploration of the web as regards:

- a. The recruitment and transportation phases of THB (in the sex and labour markets) in Bulgaria and Romania;
- b. The recruitment and transportation phases of people smuggling in Bulgaria and Romania.

*The research will focus on web contents in Bulgarian and Romanian (and possibly English or other languages case by case).*

For a search on the web (i.e. snowball-like search) of the above-mentioned contents, please follow the guidelines below that regards suggestions on: a. typology of sites to be searched; b. keywords to be used for the exploration.

## Suggested typologies of sites used by traffickers/smugglers for the recruitment and exploitation of victims

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:
  - a. Home assistance;
  - b. Waitress/bartender;
  - c. Au Pair/Care;
  - d. Modelling/Entertainment (e.g. dancer, hostess);
  - e. Construction/factories/agriculture;
  - f. Educational courses;
  - g. Matrimonial offers;
6. Advertising websites (e.g. Kijiji);
7. Travel agency websites;
8. Porn websites and forums;
9. Streaming websites.
- h. Tourism;
- i. Work in the sex market (the fact that a woman is already a prostitute does not exempt her from being trafficked).

*The above-list shall not be considered as exhaustive and can be integrated (Council of Europe, 2007; Latonero, 2011).*

## Suggested list of keywords (to be translated in each language) for a snow-ball like search on the web using also Boolean operators

| THB                         |                                       |                    | Smuggling of Migrants |                     |  |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--|
| General process             | Recruitment and transportation phases | Exploitation phase | General process       | Recruitment phase   | Transportation and entry into another country phases |
| Human trafficking           | Job offer                             | Sex                | People smuggling      | Movement of persons | Smuggler   |
| Trafficking in human beings | Job agency                            | Sex tourism        | Smuggling of migrants | Transfer            | Passenger  |
| Trafficking in persons      | Travel agency                         | Prostitute         | Migrant smuggling     | Transport           | Migrant  |
| Sex trafficking             | Temp agency                           | Sex worker         | People smuggling      | Move                | Seasonal   |
| Labour trafficking          | Foreign job                           | Brothel            | Illegal migration     | Borders             | Boat driver  |
| Sex market                  | Advertising agency                    | Massage parlour    | Recruitment           | Financial gain      | Pontoon  |
| Labour market               | Dating service                        | Escort             | Transport             | Money               | Lorry  |
| Trafficking process         | Matchmaking service                   | Dancer             | Migrant               | Asylum seekers      | Truck  |
| Recruitment                 | Dancer                                | Dancing-girl       | Migrant worker        | Refugees            | Cargo van  |
| Transport                   | Dancing-girl                          | Au-pair girl       | Asylum seekers        | ID                  | Airplane   |
| Exploitation                | Au-pair girl                          | Model              |                       | VISA                | Vehicle  |
| Coercion                    | Student                               | Wedding            |                       | Residence permit    | Driver   |
| Fraud                       | Model                                 | Wife               |                       | Fee                 | Pilot  |
| Trafficker                  | Waiter                                | Worker             |                       | Payment             | Sea  |
| Victim                      | Bartender                             | Waiter/bartender   |                       | Debt                | Land   |
|                             | Home assistant                        | Home assistant     |                       |                     | Air  |
|                             | In-home nurse                         | In-home nurse      |                       |                     | Borders  |
|                             | Caregiver                             | Caregiver          |                       |                     | Transit  |
|                             | Wedding                               |                    |                       |                     | ID   |
|                             | Wife                                  |                    |                       |                     | VISA   |
|                             | Farmer                                |                    |                       |                     | Residence permit                                     |
|                             | Bricklayer                            |                    |                       |                     | Fee  |
|                             |                                       |                    |                       |                     | Payment  |
|                             |                                       |                    |                       |                     | Debt   |

*The above-list shall not be considered as exhaustive and can be integrated (Council of Europe, 2007; Latonero, 2011; U.S. Department of State, 2014).*

### 3. How to search relevant data in the Deep web

Researchers of UNITN, Teesside, and CSD (Center for the Study of Democracy) are requested to search information on the links and contents of websites, web-forums, social networks, use of online chats, VOIP, etc. employed in the THB (both for sex and labour trafficking) and people smuggling process also on the Deep web. Search engines – such as Google – index well over a trillion pages on the web, but there is information that common search engines do not find. Most of this is in the Deep web, i.e. databases of information that need to be searched directly from specific websites.

Please follow the suggested methodology below and take into account the working plan and guidelines for the exploration in the common web explained in the previous paragraph.

#### Suggested methodology: Tor Network

1. **Understand the Tor Network.** This area of the Deep web, sometimes called the Dark Net, is used for trades, conversations, and information that users want to keep private. Users must use software called 'Tor' to access this region of the web, visiting websites with the so-called 'onion' domain. Accessing this area of the Deep web is legal.
2. **Download the Tor Browser.** Tor is a free browser that lets you connect to web pages anonymously: <https://www.torproject.org/projects/torbrowser.html.en>. Many Deep web communities can only be accessed through the Tor Network.
3. **Protect your anonymity.** Accessing the Deep web through Tor network is legal, but taking advantage of the Tor anonymity precautions is highly recommended to avoid malicious attacks:
  - a. Click the 'S' logo to the left of the Tor Browser address bar, and click 'Forbid scripts globally';
  - b. Turn on your Windows or Mac firewall;
  - c. Never download any file from a Tor webpage, not even a .pdf or .doc file. Torrent-sharing is especially insecure.
4. **Start with a Deep web introduction.** One of the most popular sites in the Deep web community is 'The Hidden Wiki' ([http://zqktlwi4fecvo6ri.onion/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://zqktlwi4fecvo6ri.onion/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)), which collects Deep web links for you to explore. Most of the links in this section are only accessible through Tor, but not through ordinary browsers.
5. **Use a Deep web search engine.** In order to find a variety of results, try using several of Deep web search engines for each search, such as Torch (<http://xmh57jrznw6insl.onion/>) and TorSearch (<http://kbhpodhnfxl3clb4.onion/>).
6. **Talk to Deep web users.** Talk to people using Onion-Chat (<http://www.chatrapi7fkbzcyr.onion/>).



# Annex B

## In-depth interviews protocol

This Annex provides the protocol used by the researchers to administrate the in-depth interviews to key actors in human trafficking and in smuggling of migrants (e.g. traffickers/smugglers, victims, LEAs, NGOs) for each key member state (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK), in order to obtain primary data on the use of Internet in the two processes and to fine tune qualitative techniques/virtual ethnography, with the final aim of increasing knowledge, awareness, and expertise on the use of Internet in the processes of THB and smuggling of migrants.

Suggested key actors to be interviewed for each country involved (IT/UK/BG/RO) are at least 12, namely:

- 3 traffickers and/or smugglers (at least 2 traffickers and 1 smuggler);
- 3 victims (at least 1 for each sector of exploitation considered by the project: sex trafficking and labour trafficking; 1 illegal migrant or asylum seeker);
- 4 LEAs representatives (at least 2 police officers and 2 public prosecutors/judges expert in the field of THB and/or smuggling of migrants);
- 2 NGOs representatives (expert in the field of THB and/or smuggling of migrants).

During the interview, each interviewer should follow the definitions of THB and smuggling of migrants/asylum seekers (see ANNEX A), and remember the different phases of the trafficking/smuggling processes:

1. THB: a) recruitment; b) transportation; c) exploitation;
2. Smuggling of migrants/asylum seekers: a) recruitment; b) transportation; c) entry into another country.

The following paragraphs, after some guidelines for a general introduction of all interviews, illustrate specific in-depth interview protocols for each category of key actors. These protocols are designed for each country involved in the study and may be translated in each native language if necessary.

### General introduction of all interviews

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am (affiliation, role) \_\_\_\_\_. I would like to talk to about our project Surf and Sound (please specify relevant project details). The interview should take less than an hour. I will be

recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down.

(For traffickers/smugglers and victims) All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with research team members, and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

### In-depth interview protocol for traffickers/smugglers

#### 1. Have you ever used the Internet and/or social networks to recruit persons/your clients?

- If yes, what are the modalities you used to these persons/your clients through the web? Can you please give us some practical examples?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information also on:*

- i. Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - ii. Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - iii. Use of mobile phone. If yes, use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.
- If no, what were the modalities you used to recruit these persons/your clients?
  - If no, have you ever met other someone who recruited clients through the web? If yes, how they did it?

*For the interviewer, please focus on social media, Deep web, VOIP and/or mobile phones.*

## 2. Have you ever used the Internet and/or social networks to facilitate the transport/entry into another country of persons/your clients?

- If yes, what are the modalities with which you used the web to facilitate the transport/entry into another country of persons/your clients? Can you please give us some practical examples?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information also on:*

- Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of mobile phone. If yes, use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.
- If no, what the modalities with which you transported these persons/your clients without using the web?
  - If no, have you ever known other colleagues that transported their clients also using the web as facilitator? If yes, how they did it?

*For the interviewer, please focus on social media, Deep web, VOIP and/or mobile phones.*

## 3. Have you ever used the Internet and/or social networks to advertise services of persons/your clients?

- If yes, what are the modalities with which you advertised services of these persons/your clients through the web? Can you please give us some practical examples?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information also on:*

- Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of mobile phone. If yes, use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.
- If no, what the modalities with which you advertised services of these persons/your clients? Have you ever known other colleagues that advertised services of their clients through the web? If yes, how they did it?

*For the interviewer, please focus on social media, Deep web, VOIP and/or mobile phones.*

(Please adjust question n. 3 to the different exploitation sectors of sex and labour trafficking).

## In-depth interview protocol for victims of THB and illegal migrants/asylum seekers

### 1. How did you get into this country/this place? (Please specify if it is internal or transnational THB or smuggling of migrants).

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information on the use of the Internet in the recruitment process, e.g.:*

- Did you answer to an advertisement on a website/social networks because you wanted to leave your country?
  - Did someone contact you through the Internet/social networks and offer you a job abroad or other transfer opportunities?
- If yes, what are the modalities they used to get in touch with you?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information also on:*

- Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
  - Use of mobile phone. If yes, use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.
- Other possible questions:*
- In your opinion, did the contact you from your country or from abroad?
  - Who promised you this job and in which way?
  - What kind of job/experience abroad did they promise you?
  - Did they force you into doing different work than what was promised?

- If no, what were the modalities with which you were contacted?

### 2. Have you ever known other persons that have been recruited through the web? If yes, how did it happen?

*For the interviewer, please focus on social media, Deep web, VOIP and/or mobile phones.*

**3. Do you know in which way your services as a sex worker/worker were advertised in this country/in this place?**

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information also on:*

- i. Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- ii. Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network). If yes: use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- iii. Use of mobile phone. If yes, use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.

(Please adjust question n. 4 to the different exploitation sectors of sex and labour trafficking).

## In-depth interview protocol for LEAs representatives

**1. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media facilitate the recruitment of victims of THB?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which victims are recruited through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**2. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media favour the match between demand/supply for the services provided by victims of trafficking in the sexual and/or labour markets?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which these products and services provided by victims are advertised through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**3. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media facilitate the recruitment of illegal migrants and asylum seekers?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which they are recruited through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**4. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media favour the transport/entry into another country of illegal migrants and asylum seekers?**

- If yes, what are these mechanisms of facilitation? Can you please give us an example/case study?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information on:*

- i. Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter): use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- ii. Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network): use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- iii. Use of mobile phone: use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.

## In-depth interview protocol for NGOs representatives

**1. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media facilitate the recruitment of victims of THB?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which victims are recruited through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**2. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media favour the match between demand/supply for the services provided by victims of trafficking in the sexual and/or labour markets?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which these products and services provided by victims are advertised through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**3. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media facilitate the recruitment of illegal migrants and asylum seekers?**

- If yes, what are the modalities with which they are recruited through the web? Can you please give us an example/case study?

**4. According to your professional experience, do the Internet and social media favour the transport/entry into another country of illegal migrants and asylum seekers?**

- If yes, what are these mechanisms of facilitation? Can you please give us an example/case study?

*For the interviewer, in particular collect information on:*

- i. Use of social media (e.g. Facebook/Google+/Twitter): use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- ii. Use of the Deep web (e.g. Tor Network): use of private chats and/or public posts, other means used;
- iii. Use of mobile phone: use of Whatsapp, Viber, or other similar tools.





# Annex C

## Web survey (online questionnaire)

This Annex provides the English version of the questionnaire administrated via web in each member state (i.e. BG, IT, RO, UK), designed for Internet users in order to acquire information about their experiences related to the role of the web in the smuggling of migrants and the trafficking in human beings.

### Section 1. Introduction

Hello, this is a web survey which aims at gathering people's experiences with Internet and mobile app content related to job and dating-related ads and announcements. It is part of the European project Surf&Sound, coordinated by eCrime, University of Trento (Italy) and carried out in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and Teesside University (UK).

The questionnaire will take only 10-15 minutes to complete. We would be very grateful if you share with us your experiences and opinions. Information will be collected anonymously and processed in aggregate form.

Thank you very much in advance for your help. For further information about the project, please visit [www.surfandsound.eu](http://www.surfandsound.eu) or email [ecrime@unitn.it](mailto:ecrime@unitn.it).

### Section 2. Information about you

In order to learn more about the experiences of different groups of people we need to ask some questions about you. These questions could not identify you personally, but could help us to understand the different groups of people you belong to.

#### 2.1. At first, we need to know how old are you? (Obligatory)

- Less than 15 years
- 15 – 17
- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 or more

(If less than 15 years):

*We are very sorry, but you cannot continue without permission from your parents or other responsible adults. Thank you very much for your intention to help us with our survey! The questionnaire should be interrupted and the IP address not allowed repeating the attempt.*

#### 2.2. Your gender:

- Male
- Female

#### 2.3. In which country you live in the greater part of the year?

List of EU countries plus 'Other (please, specify)'

#### 2.4. In the last 12 months, have you travelled for work in other countries?

- No, I have not travelled, or travelled but not for work
- Yes, for less than a month in total
- Yes, for one to six months in total
- Yes, for more than six months in total

#### 2.5. In what type of area do you live in the greater part of the year?

- Urban area
- Rural area

#### 2.6. And how many people approximately live in the settlement you live in the greater part of the year?

- Less than 10,000
- 10,000 – 49,999
- 50,000 – 299,999
- 300,000 or more

## 2.7. What is the highest educational level you have completed?

- Tertiary education – MSc or Ph.D.
- Tertiary education – Bachelor
- Post-secondary non-tertiary education (e.g. vocational college)
- Upper-secondary education
- Lower-secondary education
- Primary education
- Without completed education

## 2.8. What of the following groups you would say you belong to?

- (Country's) national, from the ethnic majority of the (country)
- (Country's) national, from one of the ethnic minorities of the (country)
- National of other EU countries
- National of countries outside EU

## 2.9. How frequently do you use each of the following (Obligatory)

At each row, please, check the answer most proper for you:

|                                     | Several times a week or more | Several times a month | Several times a year  | Less frequently       | Never                 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook                            | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Twitter                             | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other social networks               | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Job sites                           | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dating sites                        | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dating apps, as Tinder, Badoo, etc. | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dark/hidden networks                | <input type="radio"/>        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## Section 3

Now, we would like to ask you some questions about your experience with some types of Internet sites and mobile applications.

### 3.1. Have you ever encountered web or mobile app content (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on dating websites/chats) advertising work (abroad or in your country), that seemed suspicious, dangerous or risky? (Obligatory)

- No, never (go to 3.5.)
- No, but when I'm rethinking this now, I can recall some ads that seemed suspicious, dangerous or risky
- Yes, I have definitely encountered such ads

### 3.2. (If 2-3 to the previous question) Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?

Please, check all applicable:

- The promised working conditions looked too good
- The working conditions were unclear
- The travelling and/or accommodation details were not clear or seemed unreal
- There were no qualifications required or the required qualifications did not respond to the presumed tasks
- There were several ads with different conditions, but for one and the same job and with one and the same contact details
- Other reasons (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### 3.3. Where these ads were published?

Please, check all applicable:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other social networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Job sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating apps (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dark/hidden networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.4. In which sector or sectors were the jobs specified in these ads?**

*Please, check all applicable:*

- Agriculture
- Construction
- Personal care (care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.)
- Tourism, hotels and restaurants
- Entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.)
- Intimate services (as massage, escort, companions, etc.)
- Other (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.5. Have you ever responded to an ad or announcement for work abroad that was published online or in mobile application? (Obligatory)**

- No, I haven't (go to 3.7.)
- Yes, I just got in contact to receive additional information, without further steps
- Yes, I even did some preparation of documents, reservation of tickets, etc., but have not departed
- Yes, I went abroad, but came back without starting the job
- Yes, I went abroad and started the job

**3.6.a. (If 2 in 3.5.) Why haven't you undertaken further steps?**

- I changed my mind with regards to working abroad
- I didn't like the conditions
- The conditions and/or organisers seemed suspicious
- Other reason (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.6.b. (If 3 in 3.5.) Why haven't you departed?**

- I changed my mind with regards to working abroad
- The organisers put new conditions that I didn't like
- The organisers deceived me (with money or something else)
- Other reason (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.6.c. (If 4 in 3.5.) Why haven't you started the job?**

- The organisers put new conditions that I didn't like
- The conditions appeared different than those preliminary announced
- The organisers deceived me (with money or something else)
- Other reason (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.6.d. (If 5 in 3.5.) Were you satisfied with the job?**

- Yes, the conditions generally corresponded to those preliminary announced
- No, the conditions were different than those preliminary announced, but I decided to work anyway
- No, the conditions were different than those preliminary announced and I was forced to work through threats, deprivation of documents, physical force, or other means
- Other (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.7. (Ask all) Do you know cases when somebody responded to an ad or announcement for work (abroad or in your country) that was published online or in mobile application and after that has been coerced to work through threats, deprivation of documents, physical force, or other means? (Obligatory)**

*Please, check all applicable:*

- No, I don't know about similar cases (go to 3.10.)
- Yes, I know similar cases from the media
- Yes, I personally know people who suffered
- Yes, I personally suffered

**3.8. (If 2-4 in 3.7.) Do you remember where these ads were published?**

*Please, check all applicable:*

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other social networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Job sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating apps (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dark/hidden networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- DK/Not sure

**3.9. (If 2-4 in 3.7.) In which sector or sectors was the work that the victims were coerced to do?**

Please, check all applicable:

- Agriculture
- Construction
- Personal care (care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.)
- Tourism, hotels and restaurants
- Entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.)
- Intimate services (as massage, escort, companions, etc.)
- Other (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- DK/Not sure

**3.10. (Ask all) Have you ever sent or received proposals for romantic or intimate relationships through Internet or mobile apps? (Obligatory)**

- No, neither (go to 3.14.)
- Yes, only have received
- Yes, only have sent
- Yes, both

**3.11. (If 2-4 in 3.10.) And have you responded/ got response after similar proposals through Internet or mobile apps? (Obligatory)**

- No (go to 3.14.)
- Yes, but romantic or intimate relationship was not started (go to 3.14.)
- Yes, and romantic or intimate relationship was started

**3.12. (If 3 in 3.11.) Where you received/sent the proposal after which you started a romantic/intimate relationship?**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other social networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating apps (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dark/hidden networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other site or mobile app (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions are personal, but we would very much appreciate your sincere answers. Let us kindly remind that your confidentiality is guaranteed.

**3.13. You mentioned that you started a relationship (or relationships) after proposal sent or received through Internet or mobile apps. During any of these relationships, have you ever experienced the following?**

|  | Yes                   | No                    |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Together with that partner/those partners, you moved to another place or country                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your partner offered you money or expensive gifts at exchange of intimate relations with him/her             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| You had voluntarily intimate relations for money with other people, in order to sustain you and your partner | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your partner forcibly got the money you had earned through intimate relations with other people              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your partner forced you to have intimate relations with other people for money                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**3.14. Have you or someone you know ever seen/found Internet contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on dating websites/chats) that you would associate to an offering and/or advertisement of services provided by exploited people? (Obligatory)**

- No, never (go to 4.1.)
- No, but when I'm rethinking this now, I can recall some ads that seemed suspicious, dangerous or risky
- Yes, I have definitely encountered such ads

**3.15. (If Yes in 3.14.) In which sector or sectors was the service that the victims have been exploited?**

Please, check all applicable:

- Agriculture
- Construction
- Personal care (care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.)
- Tourism, hotels and restaurants
- Entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.)
- Intimate services (as massage, escort, companions, etc.)
- Other (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- DK/Not sure



**3.16. (If Yes in 3.14.) Do you remember where these contents were published?**

Please, check all applicable:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other social networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Job sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating sites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dating apps (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dark/hidden networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- DK/Not sure

**3.17. (If 2-3 to 3.14) Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?**

Please, check all applicable:

- The language was not grammatically correct
- The ads were anonymous
- The working conditions/offered services were not clear
- The same ad appeared in different websites
- Other reasons (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**3.18. Have you or someone you know ever used these services?**

- No
- Yes, only people I know
- Yes, only me personally
- Yes, both people I know and me personally

## Section 4

**4.1. Have you ever encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers? (Obligatory)**

- Yes, I did
- No, but my relatives, friends or acquaintances did
- No, but I know about similar contents from the media
- No, but people say that similar contents exist
- No, I never seen or heard about similar contents (go to the end)

**4.2. (If 1-4 in 4.1.) Do you know where these contents were published?**

Please, check all applicable:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other social networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Websites with announcements (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other websites (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Mobile apps (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Dark/hidden networks (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- DK/Not sure

**4.4. (If 1-4 in 4.1.) Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?**

- The same images appeared in different websites
- The offered travel was unhindered and did not mention bureaucratic bounds
- The provider's contact/telephone number was published on the page
- The prices were unusual (too high or too low)
- Other reasons (please, specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4.3. (If 1-4 in 4.1.) Have you or someone you know ever used these services?**

- Yes
- No

## End

This is the end of our survey. Thank you very much for dedicating part of your time to help us!

Please be aware that Internet and mobile applications could bring potential risks to users and do not hesitate to inform the Police or other authorities, if you have reasons to believe that you or someone else can become victim of a crime!



# Annex D

## Web survey (key results)

**Table A1. Do you know where these contents were published? Percentages (N=585). Results of the web survey**

|                             |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Facebook                    | 23.6%  |
| Twitter                     | 3.6%   |
| Other social networks       | 9.2%   |
| Websites with announcements | 10.6%  |
| Other websites              | 3.2%   |
| Mobile apps                 | 1.7%   |
| Dark/hidden networks        | 4.8%   |
| DK/Not sure                 | 38.5%  |
| Total                       | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A2. Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky? Percentages (N=585). Results of the web survey**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| The same images appeared in different websites                            | 24.4%  |
| The offered travel was unhindered and did not mention bureaucratic bounds | 36.6%  |
| The provider's contact/telephone number was published on the page         | 11.3%  |
| The prices were unusual (too high or too low)                             | 31.3%  |
| Total   | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A3. Have you or someone you know ever used these services? Percentages (N=494). Results of the web survey.**

|       |        |
|-------|--------|
| Yes   | 6.7%   |
| No    | 93.3%  |
| Total | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A4. If you have encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers. Percentages (N=257). Results of the web survey**

|                                       |        |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| I know similar cases from the media   | 75.5%  |
| I personally know people who suffered | 22.2%  |
| I personally suffered                 | 2.3%   |
| Total                                 | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A5. Do you remember where these ads were published? Percentages (N=369). Results of the web survey**

|                       |        |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Facebook              | 37.9%  |
| Twitter               | 4.1%   |
| Other social networks | 6.2%   |
| Dating sites          | 2.2%   |
| Dating apps           | 1.4%   |
| Dark/hidden networks  | 2.2%   |
| DK/Not sure           | 7.0%   |
| Total                 | 100.0% |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A6. In which sector or sectors was the work that the victims were coerced to do? Percentages (N=368). Results of the web survey**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Agriculture  | 29.1%         |
| Construction   | 16.8%         |
| Personal care<br>(care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.) | 24.5%         |
| Tourism, hotels and restaurants                                      | 18.2%         |
| Entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.)                               | 12.2%         |
| Intimate services<br>(as massage, escort, companions, etc.)          | 16.0%         |
| DK/Not sure  | 2.2%          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100.0%</b> |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A7. Do you remember where these contents were published? Percentages (N=217). Results of the web survey**

|                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Facebook              | 22.6%         |
| Twitter               | 2.8%          |
| Other social networks | 10.1%         |
| Job sites             | 15.2%         |
| Dating sites          | 5.1%          |
| Dating apps           | 1.8%          |
| Dark/hidden networks  | 2.3%          |
| DK/Not sure           | 5.5%          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100.0%</b> |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A8. In which sector or sectors was the service that the victims have been exploited? Percentages (N=217). Results of the web survey**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Agriculture  | 10.1%         |
| Construction   | 6.5%          |
| Personal care<br>(care for children, elderly, disabled people, etc.) | 14.7%         |
| Tourism, hotels and restaurants                                      | 13.8%         |
| Entertainment (dancers, singers, etc.)                               | 17.1%         |
| Intimate services<br>(as massage, escort, companions, etc.)          | 31.3%         |
| DK/Not sure  | 2.8%          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100.0%</b> |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A9. Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky? Percentages (N=402). Results of the web survey**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| The language was not grammatically correct             | 28.9%         |
| The ads were anonymous                                 | 37.1%         |
| The working conditions/offered services were not clear | 52.0%         |
| The same ad appeared in different websites             | 23.6%         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100.0%</b> |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

**Table A10. Have you or someone you know ever used these services? Percentages (N=304). Results of the web survey**

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| No  | 85.5%         |
| Yes, only people I know                   | 12.2%         |
| Yes, only me personally                   | 1.0%          |
| Yes, both people I know and me personally | 1.3%          |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>100.0%</b> |

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound







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