ONLINE TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION OF HUMAN BEINGS

A NEW REALITY FOR AN OLD PROBLEM

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INTRODUCTION

The digitalisation of society and the democratisation of the use of technologies for relationships, information and communication (RICTs) is an unstoppable process that has brought about a new environment of cultural and digital practices[1]. According to estimates by the International Telecommunication Union, practically 5.4 billion people around the world had access to the Internet or used it regularly in 2023; meaning 67% of the world's population[2].

The globalisation of RICTs has led to the emergence of new challenges such as violations of user privacy, harmful content, cybercrime and the use of these technologies' potential by criminal networks for their own benefit.

Indeed, misuse linked to organised crime has been widely documented—and human trafficking is no exception. Traffickers have been able to adapt their business model using the tools provided by digitalisation to hide their criminal activities, including laundering illicitly-obtained profits and fostering victimisation of the most vulnerable people.

This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it has been observed increasingly over the last decade, but without a doubt the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point. The widespread use of the Internet and the limitations on mobility in those times meant that criminal networks needed to adapt their business models. Subsequently, the Russian aggression against Ukraine once again revealed the intensive use of social networks as a means of access to the displaced Ukrainian population. The online environment provides a new scenario that not only helps recruit victims of human trafficking, but also fosters the emer-

1 Gabelas, José Antonio; Marta Lazo, Carmen; Aranda, Dani. Why RICT and not ICT? (Por qué las TRIC y no las TIC?) COMeIN [online], March 2012, no. 9. ISSN: 1696-3296. https://doi.org/10.7238/c.n9.1221

2 Source: International Telecommunication Union. Statistics and conclusions about the year 2023. (Estadísticas y conclusiones sobre el año 2023). https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/statistics/

gence of new forms of exploitation that make the crime invisible and more difficult to detect.

RICTs are used by criminal networks in all phases of trafficking, with special emphasis on capturing and recruiting victims. There is also evidence of their use in helping to coerce victims by disseminating images, thus reducing the use of physical violence but increasing the psychological violence and the degree of dependency. As for the exploitation phase, ads are used on online dating sites and channels that disseminate pornographic content.

This situation has been acknowledged by international organisations and denounced by specialist civil society organisations and entities. Even so, the data we have is scarce and fragmented. It is limited to studies with very small samples or direct observation of specific cases by the agencies responsible for pursuing organised crime, as well as specialist NGOs. Nevertheless, they all agree on raising awareness about the potential risk posed by the use of the digital environment to foster human trafficking and sexual or labour exploitation, in addition to concealing such activities.

A multitude of tools have been put into practice or else are in the development phase. Taking advantage of this same technology, these tools help analyse data to investigate, improve detection and bolster prevention of this crime, and also to raise awareness about it. However, these tools are generally not well-known and require their users to have advanced, regularly refreshed knowledge.

The EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime (2021–2025) recognises that organised crime is planned, carried out and hidden on the Internet. Furthermore, it states that confronted with this reality, the police authorities and judicial powers must adapt to the fast pace of technological change. It also points out the general lack of knowledge about existing tools to boost their operational capabilities in tackling criminal networks.

The European Parliament, in its Resolution of 10th February 2021 on the implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, shows its concern about the misuse of digital technologies, social networks and internet services, urging Member States to train law enforcement authorities and civil society organisations in combatting trafficking in human beings by providing them with the technical knowledge and specific resources necessary to respond to the challenges posed by relationship, information and communication technologies (RICTs).

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In line with this resolution, one of the priorities laid out by the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021–2025) is to combat traffickers' digital business model given criminal activities' gradual shift towards this environment in the phases of recruitment and even exploitation of victims of human trafficking.

In addition, the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) of the Council of Europe in its report on human trafficking facilitated by technology recognises the challenges, but also the opportunities that such technology gives us. Among the challenges, there is the lack of specialised police units and staff with suitable training and updated knowledge, the volume of information to be processed, the protection of personal data, the complexity of submitting evidence, and the need for improvement in collaborating with the private sector.

In this context, and given the way the online environment mutates and adapts so quickly, it is considered crucial to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the real situation as regards this phenomenon, analysing both the problems and challenges, as well as to develop tools and initiatives that may be of interest to the community of experts involved in preventing and combating trafficking and in protecting and assisting its victims and their recovery.

For all of these reasons, and with the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings making use of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, it was decided to carry out a study on the online dimension of this phenomenon.

A questionnaire with nine questions was drawn up and sent to all Member States using the European Network of National Rapporteurs or Equivalent Mechanisms via the Office of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. In Spain, the questionnaire was sent to the state's law enforcement bodies, the Human Trafficking and Immigration Unit at the Attorney General of the State's Office, and to the Spanish Network against Trafficking in Persons, which covers more than thirty organisations and civil society entities specialising in assisting victims.

Let this introduction also serve to express gratitude for the effort made by the Member States to provide contributions, having received 22 contributions from different countries. Within Spain, thanks are also due to the Trafficking and Immigration Unit of the Attorney General of the State's Office, to the National Police, to the Civil Guard and, last but not least, to the Spanish Network against Trafficking In Persons.

The following pages are the result of an analysis of the documentation received, in an attempt to systematise the diverse information gathered. Our intention is not to present an exhaustive study, but rather to provide as simplified a view as possible of the state of the situation, the available data, the challenges and difficulties we are facing and, lastly and most especially, to share the good practices that have been sent to us and which we believe may be useful in tackling this dimension of human trafficking effectively.

Madrid, 4th March, 2024

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01 CRIMINAL NETWORKS' *MODUS OPERANDI*

The use of RICTs for organised crime is not new. Organised crime has continually made use of all kinds of cutting-edge technological devices to help commit crime, always staying a step ahead of police forces. Today it is using encryption technology, GPS localisation, radar systems, drones, submersible and semi-submersible vessels, devices for forging documents, and much more. Cyberspace has also become an environment in which criminal menaces have proliferated in recent years: scams, ransomware attacks[3], distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks[4], grooming[5], etc.

This intensive usage seems to have increased most especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought with it a significant rise in the use of the Internet, e-commerce and social networks. The pandemic posed a challenge for criminals due to the different measures restricting mobility, border closures and lockdowns. This challenge led to an increase in their abilities to operate fraudulently on the Internet.

This criminal rationale is fully applicable to the crime of human trafficking. Their use of social networks and the Internet goes back a long way. There

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3 Type of malware or malicious code that prevents the computers or systems it infects from being used.

4 Type of cyber attack that attempts to make a website or network resource unavailable by overloading it with malicious traffic so that it cannot work properly.

5 Sexual harassment of a child or adolescent by an adult via the Internet.

were already cases documented in the late 90s, specifically in Australia, when an investigation following a complaint made to hotels led the police to find different files on several computers containing images of Thai women and scanned forged passports that had been sent by email. The person arrested had been able to contact and order Thai women to be sent to Australia for sexual exploitation without leaving his place of origin[6].

Traditionally, the use of relationship, information and communication technologies has been limited to the capture or recruitment phase of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Social networks such as Facebook were mainly used to find people, and particularly women, in situations of vulnerability or extreme need who were given a fake job offer, or else who were directly offered prostitution in conditions far removed from the reality of the exploitation they were going to encounter.

However, there has been a progressively greater online dimension to the means for committing crime, too, and in the final phase of exploitation, especially in enabling it. Criminal networks seem to be seeking the utmost digitalisation of the entire trafficking process, thereby seeking a more discreet business that evades control by police and organisations specialising in assisting victims.

RICTs also make it possible for these organisations' structures to be less complex and numerous, yet just as effective, enabling a small number of people to entrap, transfer and exploit a growing number of potential victims.

The fact that young people, being digital natives, are the main users of the tools provided by relationship, information and communication technologies puts this sector of the population in a vulnerable situation.

Despite what one might initially think, the deep web does not seem to be having a decisive impact on human trafficking. Its use appears to be residual and more linked to other types of crime such as sexual abuse of minors or child pornography.

Below, the main modus operandi are described as used in the activities, means and intentions of human trafficking.

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6 Kathleen Maltzahn. Digital dangers. Information and Communication Technologies and Trafficking in Women. APC Issue papers, 2006 https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/lsidocs/386%20digital_dangers_EN_1.pdf

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1.1. Activities

In accordance with Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 5 April 2011, on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA[7], the activities described as concerning the crime of trafficking in human beings are: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons.

Although RICTs can be used in all of these, it is within the victim recruitment phase where it takes on its most notable dimension. In this area, there are basically two types of techniques that can be differentiated: the passive or "fishing" type, and the active or "hunting" type. Both kinds focus on taking advantage of the victims' vulnerability or situation of need by offering apparently easy and highly profitable solutions to their situation.

Passive or fishing techniques are carried out by posting ads on websites and social networks. The recruiter does not address potential victims directly, but rather posts well-paid job offers, be they in the areas of home help, hospitality, agriculture, the world of fashion, entertainment, prostitution or activities linked to pornography, or else newer ones such as sugar dating[8].

This system is a mutation of the traditional job offers that recruiters used to spread by word of mouth among more intimate people, family or friends within their countries of origin. Digitalisation has enabled such offers to be rapidly adapted to the demands and specific needs of each situation, each region or geographic area, and even to the potential victims themselves. An idyllic, sugar-coated and very lucrative image is given of the activity to be carried out in the destination country, concealing either the true activity to be carried out or the conditions under which it will be carried out.

The big advantage of this technique is that it does not require the criminal networks to make a large investment in resources or time, or even physical contact between the recruiters and victims, thus blurring and gaslighting the possible crime.

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7 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32011L0036

8 The concept of sugar dating involves two people of significantly different ages and purchasing power entering into a relationship where companionship or sexual relations are offered in exchange for an economic return, whether in monetary terms or via valuables, holidays, etc.

In active or "hunting" techniques, however, the recruiter identifies possible victims, especially through social networks and public data on view in them, and contacts them. This requires a greater investment in time, resources and knowledge than the passive technique, since a process of social engineering is generally necessary[9] to analyse the potential victims' profiles and adapt the recruiter's profile in order to exploit their vulnerabilities so that they end up falling into the trap of deception.

This type includes one of the best-known recruitment techniques: the "lover boy" method, widely used by criminal networks in Eastern Europe since 2000. The technique, which is well documented, consists of the recruiter pretending to be in love with the possible victim, promising a life together and a very tempting project in another country. Once the victim has been separated from their family environment and network of social support, they are easy prey for sexual exploitation. This method has gradually become digitalised, and today social networks or platforms are used in practically all cases to seek sentimental partners as a means of contact with potential victims. The use of social networks also makes it possible for the victim to get their first in-person contact with their recruiter/exploiter only when they are in the destination country, which then makes it difficult for them to access any family support network or friends in their country of origin. Furthermore, it leads to enormous emotional dependence, which makes it difficult for people to identify themselves as victims, assuming their exploitation to be logical, and normalising it.

The hunting technique can also be carried out by actively offering jobs such as those described in the passive or fishing kind. In this case, as in the "lover boy" kind, new technologies enable the same person to gain access to an exponentially greater number of possible victims, multiplying the latter's vulnerability and simultaneously reducing the risk for the perpetrators of the crime, who also see a significant increase in their business potential.

In addition to recruitment, RICTs are used to help transfer the victims. They allow criminal networks to monitor the journey and keep up constant com-

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9 Fraud based on social engineering covers all methods used by criminals to exploit a person's trust in order to directly obtain money or else confidential information enabling them to commit a subsequent crime. Social media is the preferred channel for this, though it is not unusual for contact to be made by phone or in person. https://www.interpol.int/es/Delitos/Delincuencia-financiera/Fraudes-basados-en-la-ingenieria-social

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munication, while reinforcing the traffickers' anonymity, making it difficult to identify such criminal networks and for police to act against them. Airline tickets are usually purchased and sent digitally to the victims. Fake or forged documents are also used, and there are different channels in the social networks through which such documents are trafficked.

One aspect that is no less important is that they also make it possible to recruit, threaten, intimidate, coerce and exploit victims without the need to even transport them. By using web cams to stream pornographic videos, it possible for the same victim to be recruited and exploited without even leaving their own city of residence.

Despite all of the above, traditional forms of recruitment and transport also continue to coexist with the use of RICTs in a kind of mixed or hybrid system.

1.2. Means

Directive 2011/36 lists the following means of trafficking in human beings: 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 [...]. We must remember that these means are not applicable when the victim is a minor.

In essence, the use of RICTs focuses on two aspects: on the one hand, threat and coercion towards the victims, and on the other, deception.

As regards threat or coercion towards victims, the Internet and social networks have brought about a change in the paradigm we have known until now. Traditionally, criminal networks used direct physical or psychological violence on their victims. There were threats against their life or physical integrity, or else against that of their closest family members, especially parents and children. This violence has been changing over the years, tipping the balance towards more psychological violence: fear. In this area, the digital world carries an undeniable specific weight.

Mobile devices are constantly used in human interactions; in fact, there is already talk of the use of "screen language". Techniques such as sexting[10] have

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10 Sending photographs or videos with sexual connotations produced by oneself via mobile phone or another device with a camera

been greatly boosted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among the younger population, who are also one of the groups most vulnerable to human trafficking. Criminal networks use a variant of sexting to threaten or coerce their victims, and especially to keep them bound to sexual exploitation. The threat involves sending images to the victim's family or close friends of a sexual content linking them to the world of prostitution. The victim, fearing social stigmatisation, does not report their situation to the police, continuing to be exploited.

This process also occurs in the opposite direction, since the victim electronically receives photos of their family in the country of origin as a veiled threat of possible harm towards them and in order to keep them bound to exploitation.

The use of RICTs for deception has been documented in the recruitment process through fake job offers on websites, contact via the social networks to offer advantageous working conditions, or else through the lover boy method.

As was also the case in the recruitment phase, the use of the Internet helps the traffickers remain anonymous, reduces the need for human resources to commit the crime, and provides them with a higher level of security against detection by police forces or even by specialised bodies from civil society.

1.3. Purposes

Article 2 of Directive 2011/36 rules that the purposes of trafficking in human beings shall include, at least, 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[11].

As we shall see below, the official statistics do not reveal much information about the use of RICTs in the exploitation phase of human trafficking.

Based on the information obtained, there seems to be evidence of use concentrating on enabling exploitation, as well as advertising it, especially in the area of sexual trafficking, although other areas cannot be ruled out, such as

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11 Although on the date this study has been completed it has not yet been published in the Official Journal of the European Union, the modification to Directive 2011/36/EU has now been approved, which will include forced marriage, illegal adoption and the exploitation of surrogacy as new purposes of trafficking

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those pointed out especially by civil society entities and organisations warning of possible exploitation on pornography websites or even via artificial intelligence or the metaverse.

In the exploitation phase, new technology is used to control and locate the victims. The use of spyware and GPS geolocation to control the victims' communications and monitor their movements and activities is particularly noteworthy among the contributions received. This surveillance requires little investment and is very dissuasive to victims.

The use of virtual wallets has also been seen: Bizum-type transfer apps and other similar tools to charge money for sexual services, avoiding the use of physical money; as well as tourist or holiday rental apps also often being used to get apartments, houses or chalets in which to exploit women. This system provides great mobility for criminal networks, allowing the supply of sexual services to be adapted to the demand, for example at big events such as international fairs or top-level sporting events at which it has been confirmed that the presence of sexual services on offer rises exponentially. This intensive use of homes or private locations has led to a definitive shift in prostitution and sexual exploitation from the traditional hostess clubs or brothels towards much more concealed locations that are difficult for police forces and healthcare bodies from civil society to monitor, track and access.

One of the most common uses in the exploitation phase is in advertising the services, especially in the area of sexual exploitation. Traditional advertisements in the press and on cards or flyers have gradually been disappearing, and in a world accustomed to digital language and online purchases, an advertising model has come about based on a network of contacts, ads, and escort and massage services, as well as through groups on messaging apps and even on the social networks.

This form of advertising multiplies the number of potential "clients", anonymises interpersonal relationships, conceals criminal activities, and even masks exploitation under the appearance of voluntary prostitution. Work is done involving the marketing or whitewashing of information advertised via sexist, discriminatory language that seeks to sugar-coat an activity that is often being carried out under obligation. The truth is that the ads that have been monitored share some common characteristics such as photos with the same background for a multiplicity of women and the same contact number or physical address, revealing the presence of exploitation networks or at least an organised network behind the prostitution.

In different police operations, the use of call centres has been verified, through which the organisation's members posted sexual advertisements, handled calls from clients, arranged sexual appointments, booked train tickets for the victims' journeys, the flats where the exploitation took place, and even the accountancy for the illegal activity. Call centres have also been identified as a possible activity linked to trafficking for the purpose of committing criminal activities, specifically large-scale scams.

The digital environment has also brought about an exponential rise in devices for taking and recording images. We are completely familiar with the use of video cameras on computers, tablets and mobile phones. This availability lends itself to new forms of exploitation such as re-broadcasting videos with sexual content via streaming, and recording and disseminating pornographic content. In fact, the supply of such content appears to be indistinguishable between pornography websites and those offering prostitution services[12]. In its 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)[13] recognised this, pointing out specific cases such as one by a criminal group that exploited 21 victims to engage in "cybersex." The performances were broadcast live and reached clients around the world. Other court cases describe forms of trafficking that include "on demand" sexual abuse of minors. Although similar cases have been detected, they are not usually prosecuted as human trafficking but rather as sexual assault or rape.

The Internet can also be used for other purposes of human trafficking, such as committing crimes. The aforementioned report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime describes a court case in which recruitment to commit identity theft and data fraud was demonstrated. The victims were held in an abandoned building and forced to live in unsanitary conditions. They were given false identities to purchase and hire products from companies by improperly using credit card information on websites, as well as fraudulently using digital signatures to file income tax returns.

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12 APIP-ACAM Foundation (2023): Pornography and prostitution on the Internet: New scenarios in the sexual exploitation of women and girls. Diagnosis to prevent their recruitment. (Pornografía y prostitución en l@ red: Nuevos escenarios en la explotación sexual de mujeres y niñas. Diagnóstico para la prevención de la captación.) https://fundacionapipacam.org/acceso-a-los-documentos.html

13 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022). Global report on Trafficking in Persons. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip-2020.html

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However, the use of relationship, information and communication technologies still seems to concentrate more on the sexual aspect of human trafficking, although their use for any of the other purposes cannot be ruled out.

02 USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS

As already mentioned at the beginning of this report, the use of the Internet by criminal networks is nothing new. The dark web plays a very prominent role in this regard. It offers different "criminal services", most notably the sale of stolen databases, cyber scams, drug trafficking, violations of property rights, arms trafficking, the sale of stolen goods, child pornography, sextortion, etc.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, despite the more-or-less widespread use of the dark web to commit crimes, the truth is that the scarce data available and the experience of professionals responsible for pursuing crimes, and even of civil society bodies specialising in assisting victims, all indicate that human trafficking occurs mostly on the surface web or clear web, which gives it a greater reach since it is used by most Internet users as opposed to the dark web, which requires greater technical knowledge and has fewer potential users. This is acknowledged by the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) of the Council of Europe in its 2022 report on human trafficking aided by technology[14]. In addition to this situation, there is the fact that cryptocurrencies are rarely used in human trafficking for payments or movements of criminal proceeds.

The exploitation of victims continues to provide profits in cash, and such pro-

14 Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings-GRETA (2022) Online and Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings.
https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-full-re-p/1680a73e49

fits are predominantly transferred through money service businesses (MSBs) or couriers, or else traditional informal economy systems such as hawala[15]. Some criminal networks use fintech services[16] like Leupay or Revolut to conceal their profits[17].

Throughout the previous section, we saw how computer tools are being used in all phases of trafficking. Traffickers use social networks or messaging systems to contact or communicate with victims, carry out coercion, threats, control over them, advertise services and even to help in the logistics of exploitation.

According to the information received to draw up this report, and as a result of the analysis by the Spanish Intelligence Centre against Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime, which acts as the focal point for the National Rapporteur against Trafficking in Human Beings, it has been confirmed that the following platforms are being used:

Social Networks

The social networks are structures formed in the Internet by people or organisations that interconnect through common interests or values. Relationships are quickly created through them between individuals or companies, with no hierarchy or physical limits. The figures on their use reveal a great deal[18]:

⊘ 4.76 billion people around the world use social networks, meaning 60% of the world's population.

⊘ 137 million new social media users in the last 12 months.

⊘ The average daily time spent on social networks is 2 hours and 29 minutes.

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15 An informal channel for transferring funds from one place to another through service providers known as hawaladars, regardless of the nature of the transaction and the participating countries.

16 Fintech is a portmanteau of the terms finance and technology and it refers to any business that uses technology to improve or automate financial services and processes.

17 Europol (2021): European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment.

18 https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-deep-dive-time-spent-on-social-media

Although new social networks have appeared in recent years that enable a more fluid, faster interaction between users, Facebook continues to be the social network that police forces and specialised bodies continue to report as having the greatest usage, especially when it comes to attracting victims of trafficking. It allows not only direct interaction between recruiters and victims, but also enables fake profiles to be created in order to offer jobs with misleading or manifestly false conditions.

The social networks also enable victims to be entrapped, and also to boost the numbers of potential clients by advertising their services under an appearance of legality and a voluntary nature which, as we saw above, makes it difficult for the victims to identify themselves as such, as well as hindering awareness among those who use their services.

In addition to Facebook, the information that has been received or which was already available indicates that practically all known social networks like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Snapchat, etc. are being used.

Messaging apps

Instant messaging apps have become the preferred communication channel for the worldwide population. The most widely used applications are Whatsapp, Instagram, Line, Telegram and Messenger.

As mentioned above, messaging apps serve multiple purposes when it comes to facilitating the recruitment of victims and exploiting them, relying on the privacy of communications and encryption.

It would be impossible to cover the great diversity of existing apps, so in this study we wish to specifically mention Telegram, which judging by the information received and the experts consulted has a special impact on human trafficking.

The app enables public and private channels to be created. These channels are a means of communication via the messaging app with which public messages can be spread to large audiences, or else private messages to more restricted audiences. Moreover, the groups within this app allow for communication between all of their members and the sharing of multimedia files, while only the administrator can limit and restrict communication between members.

As for the content in the public channels, there is some control to prevent con-

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tent related to pornography, terrorism or breaches of intellectual property. However, it is not difficult to find channels or groups with pornography. Furthermore, the fact that Telegram allows groups of up to 200,000 users multiplies the effect of dissemination for this type of content, within which one can find cases of exploitation.

It is in the private channels where the most pressing problem lies. These are typically confidential and encrypted; nobody can access them except via a link or invitation from an administrator. This tool can be used by groups in which pornographic content is shared and situations of sexual exploitation can also be concealed.

Another feature that lends Telegram greater anonymity is that an account does not need to be linked to a phone number. Hence, trafficking networks can search for people and put them in private groups where pornographic videos and photos are shared, using only their name.

Another of the peculiarities that makes Telegram a widely used app for trafficking networks is the secret chats. This option allows for a completely private conversation between two people, with end-to-end encryption, in which the conversation will be kept completely secret between the two participants, so that the messages exchanged in the chat can only be read on the mobile device where they have begun the conversation.

In addition, the messages exchanged in the secret chat are not stored in the cloud, so not even Telegram can access them. This characteristic makes it difficult to trace in the event of a crime of trafficking or exploitation of human beings.

Online gaming

The Internet has brought about a veritable revolution in the world of video games, allowing multi-player games on a global scale. This format of gaming not only allows participants to interact as the game unfolds, but also has messaging modules where players can exchange their experiences in real time. According to data from Google[19], searches for competitive multi-player games rose by 70,000% between 2019 and 2020, and online multiplayer games increased by 300%.

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19 Source: Google, searches between September 2019 and September https://games.withgoogle.com/reports/insightsreport/

Gaming communities are increasingly interconnected with each other outside of the games, and they create and consume related content. Globally, there were more than 100 billion hours of gaming content playing time and 40 million active gaming channels on YouTube between October 2019 and September 2020[20].

Although the average age of players in Europe is 32 years old, 18% of players are between 6 and 14 years old, and 21% between 15 and 24. In fact, two of the most in-demand games, Minecraft and Roblox, with 201,000 and 75,000 million visits respectively, are among those preferred by younger players. Moreover, almost 47% of players are women[21].

This market has not gone unnoticed, especially in the sphere of online sexual exploitation of minors. There is no evidence of specific cases of human trafficking via this medium, but there are reports of cases of grooming or sexting that have used these games' chat channels as a means of contact. The high demand for young victims for trafficking, and especially for sex trafficking, should keep us on the alert for proper monitoring of this environment to enable early detection.

Websites for Job Ads and Offers

Traffickers and exploiters do not restrict themselves to messaging apps or the social networks. In recent years, there has been greater use of advertising pages and classified ad web pages to offer services to victims; even the exploiters themselves create independent web pages outside of the large domains[22]. There has been a gradual shift from the traditional flyers tucked under vehicle windscreen wipers and newspaper ads towards the online environment. This has led to greater and better access for potential clients while making detec-

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20 Source: Google. Internal traffic data https://games.withgoogle.com/intl/es-419/reports/insightsreport/

21 Video Games Europe (2023) *All about videogames. Culture, creativity, technology. European Key facts 2022*. https://www.videogameseurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Video-Games-Europe_Key-Facts-2022_FINAL.pdf

22 Oficina de las Naciones Unidades para la Droga y el Delito (2020). Informe global sobre la trata de seres humanos.
https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html

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tion of possible cases of trafficking or exploitation more difficult, whether in the sexual or employment sphere.

Holiday Rental Websites

The new digital business models also help the logistics of trafficking and exploitation networks. In recent years, there has been a boom in holiday rentals fostered by the different platforms that enable individuals to put their properties up for rent for short periods.

The exploitation networks, as mentioned above, have moved their criminal businesses towards these types of locations that enable great mobility and concealment of criminal activities. This practice also facilitates one of the networks' common practices: offering potential clients a periodic rotation of women, which encourages greater demand for sexual services.

Furthermore, the use of private homes is favourable to one of the criminal activities most often linked to social exploitation, which is small-scale drug trafficking. The victims are forced to consume and sell narcotic substances to clients in order to increase the networks' revenue.

The use of this type of location makes the work of detection and preventive police intervention difficult, since access to these places requires prior judicial authorisation..

Pornography websites

Relationship, information and communication technologies have penetrated all economic sectors, and the world of pornography has not let the digital revolution pass it by, globalising access to it and presenting it as just another online leisure option masking the potential dangers that it poses.

In order to define the volume of the pornography business, it is sufficient to briefly analyse the figures from the most popular website in this sphere, Pornhub. Every day, according to the company's own data, an average of 130 million people from all over the globe and from very different socioeconomic levels enter the page. This means about 3.5 billion monthly visits and 36 billion a year.

Its supply free of charge generates more than 100 billion views per year, which is tantamount to saying that there are 12.5 views per year for every inhabitant on the planet. In addition to this, there are more than five million premium subscribers who have access to exclusive videos for a fixed amount per month.

To give an idea of the volume of content, it would take 169 years to be able to see everything uploaded in 2019. At its peak, 18,073 terabytes of space were occupied per day. However, after journalist Nicholas Kristof denounced that cases of sexual exploitation, abuse and rape could be found on the Pornhub platform in an article in *The New York Times*[23], it responded by deleting more than two-thirds of all its videos, especially those from unidentified servers. Thus, in just 24 hours, the website went from having nearly 13 million videos to 3 million.

Given this situation, and taking into account the presence of this type of content, the European Commission announced last December that the large online pornography portals Pornhub, Stripchat and XVideos must comply with the new Digital Services Act (DSA), which among other things regulates the content that large platforms show users on the Internet. The decision comes after establishing that these services have at least 45 million monthly users on average in the EU, which means they must comply with the strictest standards, for example, when verifying the user's age, and take steps to remove illegal content.

The dissemination of pornography, live videos (live streaming) and the practice of selling audiovisual material with erotic or pornographic content via platforms such as OnlyFans should also make us concentrate on this reality and its potential danger in terms of the recruitment and exploitation of people for sexual purposes, and on how the business surrounding sexual exploitation is mutating towards markets that are seemingly innocuous but which conceal patterns of pimping for the prostitution of others, fostering it and gaining wealth from it, and which encourage or allow digital violence, especially towards women.

The dark web and cryptocurrencies

When talking about organised crime, it is common to refer to both the dark web and cryptocurrencies. However, unlike with other crimes, and as has

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23 Nicholas Kristof (2020) The children of Pornhub. Why does Canada allow this company to profit off videos of exploitation and assault? https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html?searchResultPosition=1

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already been pointed out above, when we talk about human trafficking there does not seem to be an intensive use of either the dark web or virtual currencies.

Starting with the dark web, we must point out that this is only a fraction of what is known as the deep web or hidden Internet, which accounts for approximately 90% of the information available. Databases and pages on certain content are hosted within this hidden Internet, whose information is not indexed to make it accessible to conventional search engines (universities, government web pages, banks and online commerce).

As we have mentioned, the dark web is a small fraction of the hidden internet, and to enter it, it is necessary to have encrypted access through the Tor network, with a high level of anonymity achieved by generating communication through different computers acting as servers, making it practically impossible to know the origin and destination of any information transmitted.

Moreover, the open Internet or "clear web" contains only 10% of the information available on the Internet, but on the other hand, it has billions of users.

It is precisely this latter fact that leads us to understand the little importance held by the dark web in human trafficking at the moment, as has also been highlighted by the latest studies[24] and investigative experts, beyond cases of organ trafficking or sexual abuse. Criminal networks dedicated to human trafficking require a constant supply and demand. On the one hand, they must have access to large population groups in vulnerable situations in order to recruit the largest possible number of victims. On the other, they must offer the victims' "services" to the biggest possible number of "clients" in order to make the investment they have made profitable and generate profits as soon as possible.

This idiosyncrasy makes it unlikely that criminal networks or small groups dedicated to human trafficking will pay special attention to the use of the dark web, since it limits the scope for recruitment and the provision of ser-

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24 STOP THE TRAFFIK (2018): Human trafficking and the Darknet. https://www.stopthetraffik. org/human-trafficking-darknet/

vices. It therefore seems more logical to use the usual Internet channels, camouflaging possible activities linked to exploitation by using non-illegalised forms such as prostitution, pornography, job offers and outsourcing.

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03 STATISTICAL DATA

In view of the information gathered to carry out this study, the main characteristic of the official data about this reality is the scarcity of it, if not a total lack of it. At the European level, only six countries have provided any type of specific data on the number of victims who have been recruited or exploited in online environments.

Another three countries are developing or have just implemented a new tool to gather such information.

Most of the statistical data submitted to draw up this report comes from studies carried out by specialised organisations and bodies from Spanish civil society based on interviews and specific cases in which the presence of RICTs has been confirmed in some of the phases of the crime of trafficking in human beings.

The information provided by Member States is as follows:

⊘ **Croatia**: until 2021, no identified victim had been exploited through the internet. In 2022, there were 17 identified, and in 2023, there were 4 provisionally identified (up to July)

⊘ **Italy**

In Italy, there is statistical data on the number of people identified by the Italian anti-human-trafficking system. The national database (SIRIT) contains data concerning the assessment, assistance and methods for recruitment of persons identified in the 21 anti-human-trafficking projects in Italy. Over the past five years, there has been a gradual yet steady increase in people recruited online, as shown by the following statistics:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
New evaluations	3478	3798	2167	2417	2488
People recruited online	13	18	20	23	50
% of the total number of people evaluated	0,4%	0,5%	0,9%	0,9%	2%

⊘ **Luxembourg**: Although national statistics do not contain detailed data on the impact of the online dimension of each case, there is a section indicating whether the victims were recruited online. In the past 5 years, there have been 102 cases:

> 2019: 0 cases
> 2020: 1 case
> 2021: 8 cases
> 2022: 49 cases
> 2023: 44 cases

⊘ **Portugal**

For the period 2018–2025, the Human Trafficking Observatory has 25 records of (alleged) victims who have been recruited for human trafficking via the Internet. The contribution submitted by the Portuguese authorities indicated that this data may be an underrepresentation in terms of the "real" dimension of the online modus operandi, and therefore it does not represent the "real extent of such use".

The following information can be extracted from the data provided:

§ Most of the (alleged) victims are women, with a total of 14 cases; in another 10 cases, the victim was a man. In one record, the sex is unknown.

§ Most are adults (23).

§ A prevalence of (alleged) victims from third countries (South America, Europe (non-Schengen), and Africa). From the European Union, 4 (alleged) victims were from Portugal. From third countries, 13 (alleged) victims were from Moldova. The other nationalities are protected under statistical secrecy.

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§ As for the purpose of the human trafficking, most of it is recorded as employment exploitation (specifically in the agricultural sector), with 16 (alleged) victims recorded. In four records there is sexual exploitation, and in another four, unknown/other purposes. In one record there were multiple purposes: sexual and employment exploitation.

§ Several records mention Facebook as the platform used.

◇ **Romania**

For the period 2017–2022, Romania has submitted the following data:

§ In 2021, there were 105 victims recruited online out of a total of 505 identified victims (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian authorities). Among these figures, there are 49 cases of child pornography and four cases of online pornography.

§ In 2021, there were 105 victims recruited online out of a total of 505 identified victims (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian authorities). There were 335 victims sexually exploited, while 25 cases of child pornography have been identified, and another 22 cases of online pornography.

§ In 2019, there were 72 victims recruited online out of a total of 698 identified victims (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian authorities). A total of 518 victims were sexually exploited. Among these figures, there are 44 cases of child pornography and 18 cases of online pornography.

§ In 2020, out of a total of 596 victims identified (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian authorities), 98 were recruited online and 426 were sexually exploited, of whom 76 cases were identified as child pornography, and 21 as online pornography.

§ In 2021, there were 105 victims recruited online out of a total of 505 identified victims (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian

authorities). There were 382 victims sexually exploited, while 89 cases were identified as child pornography, and another 17 cases of online pornography.

§ In 2022, there were 67 victims recruited online out of a total of 500 victims identified (counting victims identified within Romanian national borders and Romanian victims identified abroad and notified to the Romanian authorities). There were 342 victims sexually exploited, while 77 cases were identified as child pornography, and another 10 cases of online pornography.

◌ **Eslovaquia** reports the following number of cases since 2019:

2019: 2 cases
2020: 6 cases
2021: 2 cases
2022: 4 cases
2023: 3 cases (provisional data up to July)

As regards Spain, the Intelligence Centre against Terrorism and Organised Crime (CITCO) acts as a focal point for the National Rapporteur against trafficking in human beings, and it compiles official statistical information on this matter. These statistics do not show any structured data regarding the online dimension. However, analyses have been carried out on the information contained in the database managed by CITCO in order to search for any information related to online recruitment. As a result of these analyses, it was seen that approximately 5% to 10% of police investigations mentioned online recruitment. However, this data cannot be considered conclusive, since the statistical system does not take into account this form of recruitment.

The Human Trafficking and Immigration Unit of the Attorney General of the State's Office gathers and analyses data in Spain on investigations and victims of human trafficking that have been prosecuted. Their information sources are police reports and criminal trials. Based on this data, an exponential increase has not been seen in the use of the Internet and websites, which is evidenced by the information provided by the police forces and specialist bodies.

The investigations referred to in their records are mostly reactive; that is, they originate from victims reporting the crime. Gathering data from judicial investigations on the use of social networks in the crime of trafficking is not easy, as such use is not criminally defined, since it is not a "typical" means of commit-

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ting a crime but rather a communication channel associated with "deception" to recruit the victims. Furthermore, in a high percentage of cases the recruitment is of a "mixed" type where social networks are used and at the same time someone known to the victim intervenes (relatives or friends who are part of the same social network), or else a relationship is established with the victim that is more typical of "direct" recruitment, such as the method known as "lover boy", common in the trafficking of women from Romania. This is why, in trafficking for sexual exploitation, "direct" recruitment still prevails by far in the records of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

As for the exploitation phase, the use of websites offering sexual services also bears no significance within the criminal classification, and in general it is not shown in the statistical data.

In the reports of the Attorney General of the State's Office and complementary studies on human trafficking from 2017, 2018 and 2019, by then there are references to the use of the Internet and online platforms, although specific figures cannot be gathered. For 2021, 2022 and 2023[25], the data provided is as follows:

⊘ 2021. Out of a total of 110 monitoring proceedings initiated:

§ Recruitment through the Internet: 10 cases

§ Mixed recruitment: 4 cases

§ In the rest of the proceedings, the recruitment is direct or the method is not stated

⊘ 2022. Out of a total of 110 monitoring proceedings initiated:

§ Internet use: in at least 6 cases

§ Direct recruitment: 33 cases.

§ The rest of the cases involve mixed recruitment or else the method is not stated.

⊘ 2023: Out of 69 monitoring proceedings initiated:

§ Recruitment via Internet: 8 cases

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25 The data for the year 2023 is provisional on the date when the contribution from the Human Trafficking and Immigration Unit was received (July 2023).

§ Mixed recruitment: 5 cases.

§ In the rest of the proceedings, the recruitment is direct or the method is not stated

Beyond the scarce official data, we find it interesting to point out the study presented by the NGO Diaconía España: "Implication and impact of technology in trafficking for sexual exploitation" (*Implicación e impacto de la tecnología en la trata con fines de explotación sexual*)[26] in the context of the #DESACTIVA-LATRATA project. The method for this study is based among other aspects on interviews carried out with various groups of people, including survivors of trafficking, professionals who provide direct support for survivors, those heading police investigations, and people who could be potential targets of trafficking. Among the people interviewed, 61% refer to the social networks as the most frequent means of contact with victims; 14% talk about instant messaging services; and 25% mention other means. Out of this 25%, there are 53% of them who refer to recruitment through family or their partner; 27% through friends or acquaintances; and 20% referred to job ads, as well as prostitution.

This same study reveals Facebook to be the most used online recruitment platform (54%) followed by Instagram (23%), OnlyFans (12%), TikTok (8%) and dating apps (3%).

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26 Diakonia Spain (2022), Implication and impact of technology in trafficking for sexual exploitation. Proposal for development of an AI-based algorithm to detect and combat trafficking (Implicación e impacto de la tecnología en la trata con fines de explotación sexual. Propuesta de desarrollo algorítmico basado en inteligencia artificial para la detección y lucha contra la trata.) https://diaconia.es/desactivalatrata/wp-content/uploads/Informe-V-Seminario-RLC-Trata-Web.pdf

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04 DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES

As we have now seen, the online world offers an almost infinite range of possibilities for criminal networks or people attempting to profit from the exploitation and trafficking of human beings. Without a doubt, the difficulties and challenges are far-reaching, and some of the most noteworthy ones that it has been possible to identify throughout this study are as follows:

⊘ The private or closed-off nature of the networks, protected by rights to the privacy, intimacy and secrecy of the users' communications, which are protected by large technology companies, and which only help the anonymity of those who abuse them and use them for criminal purposes.

⊘ The legal imprecision regarding the criminal use of online methods and the lack of proactive investigations into the matter are holding back the pursuit of trafficking committed through or facilitated by the Internet and the technologies associated with it.

⊘ The lack of digital evidence, coupled with the legal problems in accessing it, makes it difficult to prosecute cases of human trafficking that have been enabled by relationship, information and communication technologies. There must be more training and awareness in this area.

⊘ The need for greater use of technological means of investigation such as scanning open social networks to search for pornographic material, extending such methods that are currently widespread in other crimes to investigate human trafficking.

⊘ An increased awareness of the risks associated with the Internet, specifically as a means of recruitment and in some cases exploitation, especially among younger users.

⊗ Encryption of messaging systems makes it difficult to track criminal activity and slows the process down.

⊗ The location of certain websites in other countries, especially outside the European Union, makes it difficult to request data and slows down police investigations and judicial proceedings.

⊗ Relocation of the criminal activity. All phases of the crime, especially recruitment, can now be carried out from anywhere in the world, increasing the transnational nature of a crime in which this aspect is already significant. This situation heightens the already pressing need for international collaboration in order to adequately pursue the crime.

⊗ Recognising the signs of online trafficking. It can be difficult to identify victims of trafficking in the digital environment, since the signs of exploitation may be concealed or disguised. It is essential for professionals and online platforms to be trained to recognise the indicators of trafficking and exploitation in this context.

⊗ The difficulty in establishing age and identity. It is often difficult to determine the actual age of online victims, making it complicated to protect them and refer them appropriately to the relevant services. Criminals may use techniques of manipulation to appear to be minors themselves, making it difficult to identify them accurately.

⊗ The difficulty of self-identifying. Recruitment via the Internet or social networks increases the victims' sense of guilt in the process of recruitment and exploitation, since it is often the very same individuals who initiate or approach the social networks, exposing their weaknesses, who are finally recruited.

⊗ The lack of resources and technical training for front-line staff responsible for detecting and identifying situations of human trafficking and exploitation. Ongoing training and an adequate provision of resources are fundamental in preventing and pursuing the crime.

⊗ Defending the victims' right to their own image, which is continually violated by their exploiters when they use images to advertise sexual services on the Internet, usually without consent.

⊗ The constant mutation or appearance of new platforms and the criminal networks' great capacity for adaptation mean that detection and investigation strategies must be continually updated. In this vein, there must be suitable monitoring of the implications and applications resulting from the growing use of artificial intelligence.

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⊙ There is a huge, constantly growing volume of data available. This poses a disadvantage, since it makes it difficult to analyse the data without the necessary technological means. However, it also poses an opportunity, since with the appropriate tools it can give researchers and specialised bodies a prime source of information for early detection, improved identification and more effective protection for victims.

⊙ Collaboration with companies and online service providers is necessary, studying mechanisms to regulate them, as well as to ensure that users' privacy is protected without undermining the necessary protection for victims.

⊙ Improving information channels towards especially sensitive or vulnerable populations in order to identify misleading or fake job offers that act as a gateway to sexual or labour exploitation.

⊙ The victims are becoming even more concealed from the eyes of specialised bodies and police forces. At the same time, RICTs make them more accessible and exposed than ever to being exploited to provide services for the growing community of potential consumers through online advertising.

⊙ With borders being broken down through digitalisation, it is necessary to have international collaboration, which is already essential to pursue the crime and its perpetrators, and to protect the victims.

⊙ The European Court of Justice[27] has shortened the data retention period. This will make the work of investigators harder, since the evidence will disappear when an incident is reported beyond a certain deadline.

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27 Judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union dated 5 April 2022. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A62020CJ0140

05 GOOD PRACTICES, AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES

As we have seen, technologies for relationships, information and communication coupled with a massive use of the Internet provide a huge range of resources for criminal networks engaged in trafficking and exploiting human beings. Nevertheless, they also provide new tools and means to prevent, detect and pursue the crime better, as well as to identify, protect and assist the victims and to carry out awareness-raising activities.

We can see such good practices below, as well as awareness-raising campaigns, shared by the twenty-two Member States that have submitted contributions, and by the bodies and organisations in Spain that have collaborated in this report.

BELGIUM

1. The Belgian government participates in different related events such as the United Nations Blue Heart campaign. .

2. Messages aimed at prevention are posted in social and traditional media on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

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3. In 2022, the Blind Betting campaign was also disseminated, created within the framework of EMPACT regarding human trafficking

CROATIA

1. The #DontBeACatch / #NemojPostatiLovina campaign was launched on International Missing Children's Day in 2020 upon the initiative of EUROPOL and in cooperation with the European Police Professional Network for Missing Persons and AMBER alert Europe, with the Republic of Croatia's Interior Ministry actively taking part together with 23 countries of the European Union.

2. In cooperation with the Croatian Agency for Personal Data Protection and the Academy of Dramatic Arts of the University of Zagreb, the Interior Ministry also made an educational and preventive video entitled What happened to Tina? to raise awareness. The video is regularly played in police stations throughout the Republic of Croatia.

3. Approval of the Study Plan on the subject of Computer Science. Topics such as online safety, data protection, cyberbullying, digital reputation, electronic violence and the prevention of human trafficking are all addressed. One of the teaching methods proposed is for students to take part in the workshop on the prevention of human trafficking during the 3rd cycle of education, which includes upper primary school students, and the 4th and 5th cycles, which include secondary school students.

CYPRUS

1. The Cypriot police carried out several awareness-raising campaigns to help prevention and increase knowledge about human trafficking.

2. Recently, a television commercial on human trafficking for begging was broadcast, aiming to raise awareness about this purpose of trafficking.

3. The Office for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (CTHB) promoted the 24/7 hotline, via which anyone can report a crime or provide any information related to trafficking in human beings. Crimes can be reported anonymously. The campaign includes distributing awareness-raising material, as well as small gifts for the same purpose.

4. Since September 2022, an online platform has been running (https://traffickinghumanbeing.police.gov.cy/police/humantrafficking.nsf/subscribe_en/

subscribe_en?openform) to report human trafficking. It is linked to the Cyprus Police website and monitored daily by members of the CTHB Office. Crimes can be reported anonymously on the platform.

5. Between 6 and 11 November 2022, members of the CTHB Office took part in the Cyprus Police Week, when awareness-raising materials were handed out and information was given to citizens.

CZECH REPUBLIC

1. In the sphere of prevention of human trafficking, various awareness-raising campaigns and activities have been carried out. The number of them grew significantly in 2022 due to the arrival of people displaced following the Russian aggression in Ukraine. However, those activities did not focus on online platforms.

2. Social media platforms, Internet browsers and search engines are often used to spread preventive awareness information. This approach has proven to be very effective, reaching a relatively wide audience in several languages (it has also been used with people displaced from Ukraine).

DENMARK

1. In 2019, The Danish Centre against Human Trafficking (CMM) launched an initiative concentrating on combating technology-enabled trafficking. As part of the initiative, several meetings were held by a network of experts from financial institutions, cyber police, tax authorities, social media and the technology industry.

2. The CMM published a brief tool for red-flagging human trafficking specifically based on the technology in the human trafficking chain (https://cmm.dk/materialer/guidelines-og-procedurer). The tool is specifically aimed at the financial sector, technology companies, cyber police and other authorities that work with technology or digitalisation in various contexts, who detect misuse of their platforms to exploit people and who could prevent such recruitment or exploitation as part of their job.

The tool includes trafficking indicators separated into categories: behavioural indicators, financial indicators, and recruitment, coercion and surveillance indicators. For context, three cases have been introduced in which different types of exploitation and several of the indicators on the list appear.

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3. Denmark is in the early stages of developing a website-tracking tool in collaboration with NGOs and academic experts in the sphere of sexual exploitation.

FRANCE

1. The Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings (OCRTEH) has created a specific app to counteract the new kinds of modus operandi. It analyses websites with ads for prostitution in real time, monitoring the evolution of the phenomenon of prostitution while producing statistics and a map of prostitution. The information obtained from this app has made it possible to confirm and fill in certain trends revealed by traditional statistics based on surveys carried out by the National Police and the Gendarmerie. Significant work has also been done to train OCRTEH investigators with this new tool and on how to use various techniques adapted to RICTs (investigation using pseudonyms, cyber patrols, open source investigation, cryptocurrencies, special investigation techniques, etc.).

2. The OCRTEH has created a new group of researchers (eight people, including a data scientist) dedicated to detecting online pimping networks. Given that the Internet and social networks are particularly used by minors and young adults to prostitute themselves, this task force can launch investigations through cyber patrols, investigations using pseudonyms, and data analyses.

3. The OCRTEH has initiated an entire policy of identifying and protecting victims, thanks to the use of specialised investigative means and reinforcing collaboration with associations. The shift to digitalisation of the entire recruitment process away from physical means has made the work of tracking by civil society associations and bodies less relevant, and has increased the vulnerability of the victims, who are becoming more invisible. They are uncooperative and even unaware that they are victims with the rights associated with that status, yet they still need to be protected, which has prompted OCRTEH to continue to reorganise the police assistance given to victims.

To this end, the intervention of specialised associations is now systematically requested before carrying out police operations, via the one-stop shop offered by the Ac.Sé network (National System for the reception and protection of human trafficking victims). This system allows victims to get assistance from by NGOs before, during and after they appear at the police station. This in turn helps foster a climate of trust and puts the victims in the best possible stead to testify. Finally, the associations will take responsibility for those who so wish.

This arrangement of roles and purposes made it necessary to draw up a protocol between law enforcement and associations, signed in 2022. Without this coordination, the associations would not have access to prostitution victims in closed-off premises. The advantages of this system are evident: it provides well-founded witness testimony for the investigation and trial, which leads to better criminal convictions, and it gives victims better possibilities for social reintegration and to leave prostitution behind them.

4. Over the past two years, the Central Office to Combat Illegal Work (OCLTI) has worked closely with the European Labour Authority (ELA) and EUROPOL to improve operational cooperation in combating labour exploitation. The ELA takes part within the context of its mission to watch over compliance with EU rules on labour mobility and the coordination of social security rules. This inter-institutional alliance reinforces surveillance and awareness among watchdog agencies, law enforcement and the economic sphere to tackle this type of recruitment at its roots. The task of raising awareness and informing workers and employers is more specifically the responsibility of the ELA.

5. Within the French Ministry of the Interior, several services are working on the risk of abuse of the tools for authorising online foreign labour recruitment (PFMOE). The digitalisation of procedures requires reinforced surveillance to avoid vulnerabilities appearing that may allow for workers to enter in non-compliant conditions and for improper purposes. This stance of monitoring applies to all digitalised services provided by public administrations, in the spheres of both labour and social security, since violations of workers' rights usually affect these two areas at the same time.

6. In October 2022, the Interdepartmental Unit for the Protection of Women against Violence and for combating Trafficking in Human Beings (MIPROF) published an inter-ministerial guide, which can be accessed on several government websites. This educational guide concerning the identification and protection of human trafficking victims is aimed at all professionals who work in the matter, and contains numerous developments on the specificities of identifying and caring for minor victims, particularly online.

7. The "Amicale du Nid" association has created a "virtual patrolling service" to provide help and support for victims, starting with an analysis of pornographic sites, their target audience and the services they offer. In line with this initiative, an instant messaging system has been created to reach victims.

GERMANY

1. THB Liberi/THB Liberi II project. Within this project, numerous investigations were given financial backing or provided with analysis reports. Innovative solutions were launched, such as a tool for automated research on prostitution websites and on customer forums, as well as a pamphlet for fake customer activities. Periodic training was also provided, and knowledge shared with other countries.

2. Collaboration between the Moldovan Ministry of Labour and the German NGO Arbeit und Leben to protect seasonal workers from the Republic of Moldova working in Germany. The parties involved signed a cooperation agreement to provide workers with practical information on rights and working conditions in Germany before embarking on their journey. The project included online training on German labour and social legislation, and the creation of messaging groups for workers to stay in touch. The collaboration won an award for good practice by the European Labour Agency (ELA) in 2023.

3. NGOs and the Federal Criminal Investigation Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) carry out awareness-raising activities on the "lover boy" method.

4. In February 2023 the KOK-Trafficking 2.0 study[28] was presented to a wider audience of professionals in the government administration and civil society. It thus helped in the process of understanding and interconnecting problems, and in developing new approaches.

GREECE

1. There are special emergency or help phone lines, such as the 112 line, which a victim can call 24 hours a day to state that they are in danger and, via geolocation systems, information is then provided about the area where they are located.

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28 German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings-KOK (2023): Trafficking in human beings 2.0- digitalisation of trafficking in human beings in Germany. Development and courses of action.

https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/en/news/news/kok-news/digitalisation-of-trafficking-in-human-beings-kok-study-identifies-major-challenges-for-law-enforcement-and-specialised-counselling-centres

2. There are platforms and other means of communication via the Internet through which a victim can get legal aid or other types of specialists remotely when it is difficult to find one in their place of residence.

3. The Migration and Asylum Ministry's Reception and Identification Service has assigned specialist contact persons at central and local levels for survivors of gender violence, including victims of human trafficking. One of the main tasks for these people is to identify, support and refer survivors to the appropriate services.

4. The free2link project aims to connect organisations that work in asylum systems, integration programmes and in support of trafficking victims in Italy and Greece. It also aims to improve the skills of its frontline staff, as well as those in the public and private networks, in early identification of victims of electronic human trafficking. https://free2link.eu/

5. The "Child's Smile" project enables activities to be carried out aimed at pupils, teachers, parents and guardians, both with the physical presence of scientists and online. The activities are carried out by a specialised team of psychologists from the organisation, at all age levels, free of charge and throughout the country. The educational programmes, which are aimed at pupils, are approved by the Educational Policy Institute. Their purpose is to inform children about how to defend their rights, developing basic social skills against the dangers that a child may encounter (abuse, school violence and bullying, Internet safety, disappearances, human trafficking).

HUNGARY

1. In 2018, the National Crime Prevention Council launched a preventive and awareness-raising activity that drew attention to human trafficking in online environments within the context of the EUMelo campaign. It was aimed at uneducated people from third countries, who might be naïve but adventurous. A decoy website was created that lured people in with unrealistic promises of work. Although the website was designed with some mistakes that enabled its purpose to be detected, it gained 37,000 visitors and more than 1,700 people applied for jobs. These people were informed about what they should take into account the next time they applied for a job abroad.

1. "I stand up for you". This was a human trafficking prevention project that included talks for children living in residences and foster care networks. On

IRELAND

the one hand, the programme was intended to prevent victimisation and, on the other, to focus on raising awareness among the police.

IRELAND

1. The "We Don't Buy It" campaign told the truth about prostitution and sex trafficking in Ireland. The campaign mostly targeted men who pay for sex, those who are considering paying for sex and those who have done so in the past, in order to alert them that their actions are not harmless and have consequences for both the women they exploit and for themselves under the legislation. At the same time, the campaign was designed to raise awareness among people who practise prostitution about the services available to them. https://www.ruhama.ie/campaigns/we-dont-buy-it-2019-2020/

2. Campaign by the International Organization for Migration (IOM Ireland): 'Anyone Trafficked'. This initiative's general goal is to raise public awareness about the reality of human trafficking in Ireland and describe its signs and indicators, as well as the different types of exploitation that exist, from sexual exploitation to the trafficking of minors, forced begging and forced labour. The campaign focuses on the fact that human trafficking not only exists outside Ireland in other countries, but is a problem within this country, too. The main message emphasises that human trafficking can occur anywhere, in small towns and not just in cities, and that anyone can be a victim of human trafficking while, at the same time, anyone can be involved in trafficking and exploitation. https://www.anyonetrafficked.com/

3. An SMS campaign aimed at self-reporting (to the police), sending mass SMS messages in four languages (English, Romanian, Spanish and Portuguese) with the text "Message from the Irish Police/Gardaí: The Gardaí (Irish Police) are concerned for your welfare during these times. Should you have any concerns, please contact us on (087-xxxxxxx) for assistance, or in emergency dial 999. Stay safe. From the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit."

4. An SMS campaign to reach prostituted people, especially those linked to the escort sphere. The aim was to provide proactive support and reassure those who were still advertising and providing sexual services during the COVID-19 period. This initiative was very successful and has been maintained. It consists of sending a message in English, Portuguese and Romanian with the text: "In this time of crisis we, the Irish Police, are mindful of your welfare. If you are in any danger, please text or call 086-8282704 and we will respond and give you assistance."

In most cases, a response was received indicating that they were grateful for the message and the concern shown. Some of the escorts indicated that they were heeding the government's advice and that, although they continued to advertise, they had stopped working for fear of contracting the virus.

5. Members of the Irish Police (An Garda Síochána) attached to the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit (OPIU) of the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) have access to the "Traffic Jam" technological tool as part of their job in combating the sexual exploitation of victims. It has given very positive results in terms of prevention, detection and investigation of cases of sexual exploitation and possible cases of human trafficking.

Traffic Jam innovates towards victim- and trauma-centred policing, focusing on the most serious forms of sexual exploitation. It crawls through open-source websites where sexual services are advertised daily so as to analyse and aggregate information in real time. It then uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to help law enforcement bodies to:

§ Identify and pursue organised crime.

§ Identify victims of sexual exploitation.

In 2019, Traffic Jam was used to identify around 3,800 potential victims of sexual exploitation. Globally, Traffic Jam copies more than 300,000 new online ads every day. It can be accessed online via any generic web browser and can run on laptops and mobile phones.

The Traffic Jam toolset includes:

§ Telephone Lookup: Search for a phone number linked to advertised escort services.

§ Search Features: Searches based on keywords, date ranges, email addresses, and geographical areas.

§ Watchlists: Adds images, phone numbers, and keywords to watchlists that will give a notification when they appear in future ads.

§ SimSearch: Search for non-facial images and a search for similar images in other data sources; for example, similar backgrounds such as beds, curtains, etc.

§ FaceSearch: Same as SimSearch, but searches for similar facial images.

§ Simple/Advanced Trail: Shows results for all ads based on phone numbers or common images, and helps identify OCGs.

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§ First Appearance: Identifies new ads unique to a specified geographic area.

Traffic Jam has been an extremely useful tool since the OPIU began using it in October 2021. The time and effort now required to gather information and supporting materials has been dramatically reduced. This has enabled the OPIU to be more efficient and effective over time, since the required information that was sought is now provided in a more relevant and pertinent way, unlike with previous investigations. This new resource tool can help reduce the risk and trauma for potential victims by providing timely information.

6. The Blueblindfold campaign is a website dedicated to human trafficking that has been running since 2015. The website raises citizens' awareness so that they know the signs of trafficking and how to report any problems to the authorities. It has an email account and a free telephone number monitored twenty-four hours a day in a Garda data centre. Emails are received directly by the Human Trafficking Investigation and Coordination Unit (HTICU) and acted upon. https://www.blueblindfold.ie/

ITALY

1. The Progetto Tenda cooperative, a local partner to the anti-trafficking project L'Anello Forte, took part in the Free 2 Link project described above in the section on Greece. The project was designed to train several operators working in the Italian anti-human-trafficking system on how to deal with the phenomenon via social media campaigns, acquiring knowledge about online human trafficking, creating a set of awareness-raising tools, and drawing up a final report. The helpline against human trafficking ensured that the national network had access to the specific training sessions as well as to the information material used during the project. Furthermore, in June 2021, the Italian helpline against human trafficking organised a webinar specifically dedicated to the topic of electronic human trafficking, open to all parties working in the Italian system against human trafficking. https://free2link.eu/

2. The 21 projects against human trafficking that make up the system carry out outreach activities with at-risk populations, as well as identifying victims of human trafficking/exploitation, social assistance and integration.

3. The good practices that have been compiled include monitoring advertisements related to indoor prostitution, carried out by the Contact and Disse-

mination Units of the system to combat human trafficking. Upon analysing the research carried out in "Surf and Sound—the role of internet in people smuggling and human trafficking"[29] and the Free2Link Report (2022)[30], it can be seen that most victims of online human trafficking are recruited for sexual exploitation. Surveillance and subsequent contact with people engaged in indoor prostitution is vital when it comes to noting the emergence of indicators of human trafficking or serious exploitation. There are several projects against human trafficking that have collaborated with the police to detect ads in which especially vulnerable people (such as suspected minors) may be taking part. In recent years, awareness has risen among those running the anti-human-trafficking system of the risks arising from online recruitment, and also among the people who receive assistance. In order to prevent the risks for people who are being assisted of becoming victims again, they are provided with information about the risks involved in responding to online job ads on digital platforms (Facebook, Telegram, etc.)

LATVIA

1. "Dangerous Friendship on the Internet" campaign launched by the child protection service and Net-Safe Latvia. This is aimed at children, adolescents and their parents. As part of the campaign, a tool was launched for users to check for themselves to help recognise when minors are being recruited. The campaign included several videos, myth-busting posters and other information formats in different communication channels.

https://drossinternets.lv/lv/info/bistama-draudziba-interneta

2. The Latvian Ombudsman launched the "All that glitters is not gold" campaign. This was spread mainly through the social networks, giving five stories about the recruitment and exploitation of people. Although these recruitment stories did not directly focus on Internet-enabled trafficking, they included information about messaging with strangers on the Internet, finding work through an uncertified site, and other aspects of how the Internet is used.

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29 E-crime, ICT, Law and Criminology. University of Trento (2017): Surf and Sound - the role of internet in people smuggling and human trafficking https://csd.bg/publications/publication/the-role-of-the-internet-in-people-smuggling-and-human-trafficking/

30 Free2link Project (2,022): Free2link Final evaluation report. https://free2link.eu/library/

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https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/news/cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversanas-kampa-na-ne-viss-ir-zelts-kas-spid/

3. The Safer Internet Association of Latvia has created a user-operated tool for teenagers and parents that helps recognise possible grooming (https://sos.drossinternets.lv/). It is an interactive tool and offers a step-by-step guide on how to recognise when an unknown Internet friend is actually a groomer. If a child detects some of the warning signs, the tool gives advice on what to do. In 2022, a total of 7,927 children and adolescents between 8 and 17 years old used the tool and verified their friendship on the Internet.

LITHUANIA

In order to better inform the population about the threats of human trafficking, every year the Interior Ministry disseminates information campaigns on television, radio and national public transport. For example, on the EU Anti-Trafficking Day in 2020, the ministry organised an information campaign on the potential dangers of human trafficking and its forms on the most popular Lithuanian radio stations (which are also translated online).

LUXEMBOURG

1. As part of the victim protection programme, one of the first activities carried out is to give the victim a mobile phone. At the same time, they are made aware of the dangers of using the Internet and the social networks, especially in the case of younger victims, but also for the rest of the survivors who wish to stay in contact with their families in distant countries through the social networks. The victims' addresses are kept secret so as to minimise the risk of being attacked or threatened by the traffickers or exploiters

2. In cases of human trafficking related to sexual exploitation, sites specialising in escort services that are used to post ads about the victims' services are checked in order to identify other possible victims who may have been exploited by the same perpetrator (phone number, backgrounds of photos, etc.).

NETHERLANDS

1. There is a nationwide awareness campaign, "This is also human trafficking", launched by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security in collaboration with

various organisations. The goal is to raise awareness and encourage people to stay alert to the signs of human trafficking. By doing so, more attention can be paid to this problem and the victims can be better protected and helped. The campaign focuses on different forms of human trafficking such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging and forced criminal activity. The campaign's message is that human trafficking not only occurs in distant countries, but also in the Netherlands. It can happen to anyone, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity or origins. The campaign uses different media such as television, radio, social media and posters to spread the message and make people aware of the different signs of human trafficking.

2. "Not everything is what it seems" campaign. Launched by the Ministry of Justice and Security and aimed at informing clients of prostitution about the legal situation and responsible behaviour. In addition to the legal situation for clients of paid sex, it has been reported that from 1 January 2022, clients in the Netherlands will also be committing an offence under Article 273g of the Criminal Code if they purchase a sexual service from a sex worker who is known (or suspected) to be subject to coercion, exploitation or human trafficking.

3. The Human Trafficking Field Laboratory, provided by Harvard, created a team to develop a pilot project to combat the sexual exploitation of minors on the Internet. The Field Laboratory team consisted of six human trafficking experts from NGOs, public prosecutors and security forces, and was supported with training by teaching staff, including the Harvard Kennedy Business School. The team has organised activity days with law enforcement, victim support NGOs and public prosecutors' offices to detect online sexual exploitation of minors in order to bolster cooperation and increase the capacity for digital/online detection of the sexual exploitation of minors on different platforms through different organisations. The Harvard Field Lab method enabled different parties to work together and develop innovative solutions to complex problems such as human trafficking. Fake ads with minors were used to test websites' methods for preventing sex ads. Virtual agents and profiles were used to identify victims and disrupt human trafficking, offer support and better understand how online platforms enable sexual exploitation.

4. Within the context of the Europol EMPACT project on trafficking in human beings (EMPACT THB), the first European Hackathons were organised in 2022. These activities were led by the Dutch National Police with the support of Europol. The first hackathon was an immediate response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and it was an online hackathon. The aim of this hackathon was to

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identify potential platforms, potential victims of human trafficking, and criminals specifically related to the Ukraine conflict. This hackathon was held virtually, and the activities carried out were done on a national level. There were 93 officials from 14 countries who participated, and 125 online platforms were monitored during that one-day hackathon. Potential platforms for further investigation and surveillance were discovered.

An in-person hackathon was later organised, also within the context of EMPACT THB, which took place at the Dutch Police Academy, and was again organised and headed by the Dutch National Police with the support of Europol, the National Public Prosecutor's Office and Eurojust. The in-person hackathon, focusing on online sexual exploitation, took a strategic perspective with the goal of better understanding human trafficking in the online panorama. In addition, a specific time slot was dedicated to Ukrainian victims of human trafficking. Nearly 90 law enforcement officials, human trafficking (THB) experts, and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) experts from 20 countries took part. Law enforcement experts explored more than 200 Internet platforms in eight hours. Indicators of trafficking were detected on the surface web, deep web and dark web, and more than 50 platforms required operational surveillance for further investigation. During the hackathon, there were tools, tips and tricks shared to gain information and control over human trafficking platforms. This hackathon helped create a visual overview of platforms that required further exploration since they were suspected or identified as human trafficking-related platforms. With this knowledge, these platforms can be proactively scanned and explored for victims and perpetrators of human trafficking. The hackathon helps improve international cooperation, creating a network of OSINT/TSH experts to combat online human trafficking at a European level.

POLAND

1. Activities based on "trusted flaggers"; that is, trusted reporting entities that enable illegal content to be removed faster. Introducing "trusted flaggers" into service providers' systems enables complaints from trusted institutions to be prioritised, and consequently an immediate response can be given.

2. In addition, according to the WeProtect model, any service that allows users to share their own content should also provide an easy way to report it and a mechanism for responding to incidents, especially those related to child safety.

3. Fast, effective detection and tracking of the spread of content related to CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material). Examples of this type of solution include the ones developed for the "Arica" project and the "Fenrir" project, as well as computer programs that work on the principles of specialised web crawlers.

PORTUGAL

1. Implementing regulatory standards involving participation from the technology sector and the government could be a good practice to prevent and combat human trafficking. Such standards could be a blend of some voluntary standards and a core of obligatory standards, all through a perspective of transparency and obligations of due diligence as regards their work and systems.

2. It should be guaranteed that technology-enabled human trafficking is included in national legislation and procedural regulations, ensuring that investigators and public prosecutors have the necessary tools to investigate, gather evidence, share information, present charges and submit evidence to the courts. This could strengthen cooperation with the aim of improving data-gathering and sharing among law enforcement, anti-trafficking parties and other stakeholders. The harmonisation of transnational legal frameworks relating to online human trafficking is also a crucial matter.

ROMANIA

1. SIMEV - National Integrated System for Monitoring and Evaluation of Victims, run by ANITP (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons). This system gives the possibility of tracking the situation as regards the trafficking and recruitment of victims, including online recruitment and the support and assistance that victims receive when they have been identified.

2. The computer app for registering all children from Ukraine is called Primero, which has been launched by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, with technical and financial backing from UNICEF, as part of the coordination mechanism in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. It includes screening for child trafficking during the initial assessment and, if necessary, a child can be referred to the relevant channels as a possible victim of trafficking.

3. The work by the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP) aims

to cover a wide spectrum of forms of human trafficking (sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging) by providing the population with the necessary information to avoid dangerous situations, as well as useful tips for cases in which trafficking and exploitation have already taken place. The agency's work is also aimed at discouraging and reducing the demand that drives human trafficking, developing preventive measures aimed at potential clients of sexual services or employers seeking cheap labour. At the same time, ANITP's work is also intended to convey the message of eliminating prejudices about the situation and the options for victims of trafficking, while insisting on the need to respect their rights and treat them equally, regardless of their age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, educational level or other personal aspects.

To give an overview of the scope of information activities carried out, in 2022 the agency and its partners launched more than 190 educational projects and campaigns to prevent human trafficking, with more than 4,200 prevention activities carried out, reaching approximately 240,000 beneficiaries. Furthermore, anti-human-trafficking messages and helpful tips posted on ANITP's Facebook page, Instagram and TikTok accounts reached more than 7,000,000 people.

In order to make the activities in the fight against trafficking in human beings more effective, especially in terms of improving the capacity to detect and identify victims of trafficking early on, as well as the assistance given to them, in 2022 the work by the Regional ANITP Centres included organising 280 training sessions for socio-professional categories that might come into contact with victims or potential victims of human trafficking. They were aimed at approximately 6,150 beneficiaries (local police, neighbourhood police, law enforcement and judicial officers, border guards, gendarmes, teachers and school inspectors, psychologists, social workers, placement centre workers, educational counsellors, priests, town council representatives, soldiers, haulage workers, hotel staff, volunteers, etc.).

4. The national campaign "Spread your wings! Information means freedom". This was a national campaign carried out as part of the project "PDP2 - Strengthening national capacities in the field of international police cooperation and the fight against crime", funded through the 2014-2021 Norwegian Financial Mechanism. This campaign was carried out exclusively online through social networks, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram, targeting adults and minors at risk or vulnerable to human trafficking, as well as the general public. The central feature of the online campaign was the promotion of anti-human-trafficking

messages with the support of three well-known, influential personalities in Romania. The campaign on TikTok resulted in an impact of more than 2,700,000 individual users the social network Facebook using Reels. The campaign also included a phase on Facebook and Instagram, with three different audiences created to selectively spread anti-human-trafficking messages targeting labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and child safety online. The target audiences were created using filters provided by the aforementioned social networks (gender, age, origin, education, interests, behaviours, membership of different groups, etc.) By disseminating these materials on the two social networks, an impact was achieved of more than 1,700,000 individual users.

5. National campaign: "Prison is not just behind bars!" This was carried out by ANITP as part of the transnational project "Further strengthening the capacity to combat trafficking in human beings with a focus on prevention, cooperation and recovery of the proceeds of crime" - WESTEROS 2. The campaign was implemented from March to December 2022 in both online and outdoor environments. It aimed to discourage demand for the services provided by victims of trafficking. The process of designing the campaign included creating a profile of consumers of sexual services and cheap labour, which included the characteristics of this target group and the filters applicable in social networks in order to establish a specific audience. This preventive approach involved a strategy of paid promotion of anti-human-trafficking messages in the online world via the social networks Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, enabling this type of promotion to reach a great number of beneficiaries, as well as suitably targeting the messages to people who might represent the demand for services within the human trafficking mechanism. As a result of the process, more than 4,000,000 views were achieved for the posts and ads on Facebook and Instagram, with an impact of more than 2,500,000 individual users, of whom approximately 1,700,000 are potential consumers of the services provided by trafficking victims.

6. An online campaign to prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation: "The perfect job – a one-way illusion". This campaign aimed to prevent human trafficking by raising awareness among people seeking work through online platforms, as well as users of online information among the general public. The prevention campaign activities took place in the online arena, on the OLX job site, while anti-human-trafficking messages were also promoted through ANITP's Facebook page.

7. In order to implement the preventive approach, two articles were created

on the OLX platform in the "Your Safety on OLX" section (Help Centre), with tips and recommendations to prevent human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. The campaign activities included publishing two banners on the OLX website, in the "Employment" and "Overseas Employment" sections, which registered 2.9 million views and more than 1,500 clicks. One of the banners redirected to the ANITP website (https://anitp.mai.gov.ro/), where they could learn more about the agency's activities and how to contact it for additional advice and information. By clicking on the second banner, users were redirected to a fictitious ad published on the OLX website, which contained a series of recommendations on how to analyse job offers and avoid the risks that may be concealed behind "perfect" ads. In addition to the ad that it was possible to access directly through the aforementioned banner, another fictitious ad was published on the OLX platform in order to reinforce anti-human-trafficking messages and information to prevent human trafficking for labour exploitation. The latter ad was promoted and permanently displayed in the "Jobs" section. The two fictitious ads saw a total of 102,315 views, 809 favourites and more than 18,000 clicks on the ANITP helpline number 0800-800-678, which was listed under the ad's contact details.

8. NITP, the Romanian Police and the Spanish National Police carried out the international campaign "Without clients, there's no trafficking!", a pioneering initiative in the matter, since it is the first initiative at European level working in a coordinated way to tackle the two dimensions of trafficking: the demand and supply that feed the phenomenon. The campaign is being carried out simultaneously in Romania as the country of origin and in Spain as the destination country. In Romania, it targets girls and women vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation. In Spain, the campaign draws the attention of those who use these services to the fact that their behaviour may be helping to finance human trafficking, as well as to the fact that the people who provide these services might be victims of such trafficking. The central feature of the campaign's organisational phase was the production of a TV commercial to promote this preventive approach's anti-human-trafficking message. The campaign's ad contains messages aimed at lowering the vulnerability to human trafficking while reducing and discouraging the demand that fosters it, with messages delivered by representatives of the three partnering institutions. To maximise the impact on the target audience, the video was produced in three versions: Romanian, Spanish, and both Romanian and Spanish.

SLOVAKIA

1. Ministry of the Interior raises the awareness of the general public on the issue of human trafficking through independent communication with media representatives in an effort

to raise the visibility of the issue, by updating the news on the website of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic www.minv.sk, crime prevention website (https://prevenciakriminality.sk), Facebook Prevencia criminality/Crime prevention, Instagram Prevencia criminality/Crime prevention or YouTube channel Prevencia criminality/Crime prevention and by publishing press releases through the press department of the Office of the Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic.

2. In 2021, the Crime Prevention Department of the Slovak Republic's Office of the Interior Ministry updated the information booklet on human trafficking, It can't happen to me, supplementing it with information on trafficking in children in Slovakia and the online environment. The booklet is also posted on the crime prevention website (https://prevenciakriminality.sk/p/brozury-a-letaky). In collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), efforts are currently being made to translate the booklet into Ukrainian.

3. An information flyer or "infocard" was also produced on the subject Fraud and some new forms of fraudulent behaviour. The flyer also deals with the matter of "Fraudulent job offers", connecting dots to the matter of human trafficking. It informs the general public, for example, about the recruitment methods used by traffickers, what job sectors have been identified with the most fraudulent job offers, what warning signs enable a fraudulent job offer to be detected, etc. As part of the preventive tips, attention was paid to informing about the National Help Line for Victims of Human Trafficking (0800 800 818), and more. The flyer is currently available to the general public on the website of the Slovak Republic's Interior Ministry (https://www.minv.sk/?brozury-a-letaky).

4. In response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Slovak Republic's Interior Ministry drew up a preventive information booklet on human trafficking in A4 format and in two language versions (Slovak-Ukrainian booklet). Due to the high number of foreign students, the booklet was turned into an information manual and extended to include other languages (Slovak, Ukra-

inian, Hungarian, Roma, Russian and English). The goal of all the information material was, and remains, to protect people displaced after the Russian aggression in Ukraine from the threat of the crime of human trafficking. All of the informative material was distributed online via Slovak and Ukrainian media and other means. The total number of booklets distributed in print to date has been 85,000 (https://rb.gy/beyk9h).

5. On the EU's Anti-Trafficking Day (18/10/2022), the Slovak Republic's Interior Minister carried out a preventive information campaign in cooperation with the company Slovnaft (a network of service stations) aimed at combating human trafficking, which was launched at 255 Slovnaft petrol stations throughout Slovakia. The aim of this campaign was to minimise the number of human trafficking victims. The campaign's tools themselves were stickers on the mirrors in the men's and women's toilets at each service station, which included terms describing the crime of human trafficking and an A5-sized information flyer with male and female faces and information on how victims of human trafficking can identify themselves as such, plus contact information for help. The campaign materials also included information in Ukrainian for those leaving Ukraine, a QR code with a link to the website www.ua.gov.sk and the telephone number of the National Help Line for Victims of Human Trafficking https://rb.gy/xerk0j.

6. The Slovak Republic's Interior Ministry and representatives of the group of experts on combating human trafficking joined the campaign against trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, created by EUROPOL, the Bulgarian General Directorate for Combating Human Trafficking, and the National Commission to Combat Human Trafficking https://rb.gy/eqc8bh.

SLOVENIA

1. The Ministry of the Interior carries out systematic awareness-raising activities in primary and secondary schools, where children are informed about the dangers of human trafficking, and also about its related use of the Internet.

2. The Ministry also raises awareness about human trafficking through regular publications on its website and on the social networks. It is also possible to anonymously report the crime of human trafficking through the website.

SPAIN

1. Together with the National Police, the NGO A21 has developed a prevention campaign called "Can you see me?" about online child sexual exploitation, which is intended to raise awareness about this type of exploitation that is currently on the rise and whose victims are minors. This campaign consists of three free materials that can be downloaded by anyone[31].

2. The HEROES international project[32], by the Complutense University of Madrid, against paedophilia and trafficking on the Internet, which "will analyse how to use the latest technological advances to prevent and combat sexual abuse and exploitation of minors and trafficking in human beings, and provide support for research into these crimes and for protection for the victims. To do so, it will develop an ambitious, interdisciplinary and international victim-centred approach. HEROES aims to set up a coordinated contribution with the security forces to address victims' specific needs and provide protection."

3. The University of Comillas, in collaboration with UNICEF Spain, carried out the study "Data Culture"[33] which estimated the "hidden number" of trafficking victims in the regional Community of Madrid for 2015–2019, and has laid down the foundations for a technological app based on blockchain technology that enables people suffering from trafficking and exploitation to access their rights, as well as fostering institutional interoperability among the organisations and authorities assisting them. The study is currently continuing in order to estimate the hidden numbers across Spain.

4. As a result of the study by Diaconía España, presented in November 2022, "Implication and impact of technology in trafficking for sexual exploitation. Proposal for algorithmic development based on artificial intelligence to detect and combat trafficking in Telegram"[34], the RAIST good practices (algorithmic

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31 https://www.a21.org/content/spain/gr4yo0

32 https://heroes-fct.es/project-es.php

33 https://repositorio.comillas.edu/xmlui/handle/11531/66676

34 Diaconía España (2022), Implication and impact of technology in trafficking for sexual exploitation. Proposal for development of an AI-based algorithm to detect and combat trafficking (Implicación e impacto de la tecnología en la trata con fines de explotación sexual. Propuesta de desarrollo algorítmico basado en inteligencia artificial para la detección de la lucha contra la trata.) https://diaconia.es/desactivalatrata/wp-content/uploads/Informe-V-Seminario-RLC-Trata-Web.pdf

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development based on artificial intelligence for the detection and fight against trafficking on Telegram) were presented to the general public. RAIST is a highly specialised digital tool based on artificial intelligence that combats trafficking in the sphere of prevention. The app detects red flags in processes suspicious of recruitment for sex trafficking.

5. The Spanish Data Protection Agency has a priority channel[35] to notify of illicit dissemination of sensitive content, a system intended to provide a rapid response in exceptionally delicate situations such as those that involve the dissemination of sexual or violent content.

6. The European BIGOSINT project[36] was created with the mission of taking on the new challenges and the new forms that are emerging in the exploitation of human trafficking. Its goal is to develop and test advanced tools based on artificial intelligence to improve existing investigations into human trafficking through the Internet.

7. The NGO APIP-ACAM has carried out the study "Pornography and prostitution on the Internet: New scenarios in the sexual exploitation of women and girls. Diagnosis to prevent recruitment"[37] about how the digitalised sex business works, with special emphasis on its pornographic format, which strategically aims to present itself as the most "glamourous" and professional side of the new formulas for the recruitment, violence and sexual exploitation of women and girls.

8. The NGO APRAMP has developed an awareness campaign, #TIKTOKTRATA, aimed at young people who are likely to be recruited through such channels. This campaign, launched on the social network TikTok by influencers, focuses on the outreach processes used by recruiters and the consequences of exploitation, using real cases narrated by people with influence among the younger population. The campaign is accompanied by debate activities in schools in a way that fosters an exchange of impressions and experiences between human trafficking survivors and people vulnerable to recruitment. The campaign has three phases:

⊙ In the first phase, after the working group draws up the stories and adapts them to the language and medium of social networks such as TikTok, three peo-

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35 https://www.aepd.es/canalprioritario

36 https://www.bigosintproject.eu/

37 https://fundacionapipacam.org/acceso-a-los-documentos.html

ple outside the organisation and schools but with significant influence among the young population launched a series of testimonies and questions, which made the girls and boys consider the power and what may be behind social networks, doing so anonymously and without linking to any institutional message.

⊙ The second phase involved putting together the videos and their reactions and comments. The campaign was presented and launched to the general public, attempting to put the spotlight on the situation and question the populace through the entity's experience and the voices from the campaign's collaborators and image.

⊙ The third phase is currently being rolled out and consists of running the campaign, with a presentation and subsequent debate in schools. A team made up of a social worker and a survivor stimulates the session and dialogue with boys and girls, making an analysis and providing them with the tools to detect and avoid situations of risk in using RICTs.

9. The awareness campaign by the NGO Diaconía, "Do you want to be a Sugar baby?"[38] highlights and raises awareness among the general public about the dangers associated with sugar dating, which can become a gateway to sexual exploitation.

10. Campaign by the NGO Amar Dragoste, "The Easy Way". The goal of this campaign was to raise awareness about online sexual exploitation through platforms such as OnlyFans and to prevent the recruitment of the young population in Spain. To do so, there has been collaboration with Sindy Takanashi, a survivor and influencer specialising in raising awareness about new forms of online sexual exploitation.

In the first stage, a survey was carried out on the social networks challenging the audience to answer the question "What have you heard your friends say in defence of prostitution?" Based on the responses, several teasers and a short film were created that included the responses, with phrases like: "She earns more than cleaning floors", "She does it because she wants to", "No one forced her to do it" and "It's the easy way".

In the second stage, the short film was shown to different influencers, who recorded their reactions and shared them on their Instagram accounts, direc-

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38 https://diaconia.es/desactivalatrata/que-hacemos/nuestras-campanas/quieres-ser-una-sugarbaby/

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ting their audience's attention to the next premiere. The reactions were also published on Amar Dragoste's Instagram account, with a teaser.

Finally, the short *The Easy Way* premiered in December 2023. The video tells of the reality experienced by women in Spain and the dangers of digital platforms like OnlyFans through the life of Claudia, a girl with an apparently normal life who ends up in online sexual exploitation.

SWEDEN

1. The "Grooming" campaign aims to raise awareness among children at risk of being exploited online. It provides an overview of the crime, the people who are at particular risk, and where to find help (social services in Sweden and the ECPAT hotline[39] online).

2. The campaign "Travel Courage" is targeted at people traveling to countries where there is a high incidence of children selling sexual services, and the message is that travellers should dare to act when they see someone or suspect someone of exploiting a child. They should contact the Swedish police.

3. The "You decide" campaign (2017) focused on purchasers of sexual services in Sweden. The message was that they should be aware that they are supporting sex trafficking when they purchase sexual services.

4. In the autumn of 2022, a project called "Project advertisement" was carried out. It was intended to expand knowledge about young people selling sexual services in physical encounters, with the Internet being used as their first point of interaction. On Sugardaters.com and Rosasidan.ws, 160 profiles were contacted. Only eight people were willing to meet. Two plainclothes police officers met with the advertiser. They were offered support based on their needs.

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39 ECPAT International is a global network that is an umbrella for different entities and organisations around the world, working in different areas related to tackling the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

06 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this study, it has been revealed that relationship, information and communication technologies and online environments are being used in the sphere of trafficking and exploitation of human beings. This section gives a summary of the most relevant conclusions and recommendations.

6.1. CONCLUSIONS

⊙ The online environment and use of digital tools pose a constantly growing form of social interaction, communication and information. The future is being written in digital language.

⊙ Organised crime has been able to quickly adapt to this reality by modifying its business model and knowing how to make the most of the advantages offered by RICTs and online environments. The trafficking and exploitation of human beings is not untouched by this.

⊙ The use of relationship, information and communication technologies together with the online environment is not new in human trafficking and exploitation. Indeed, there is evidence indicating it has been used in recruitment phases for over 10 years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an even more widespread use.

⊙ The social networks, messaging apps and online content allow for a global reach, fostering anonymity and ensuring immediacy in accessing information, services and people—including the most vulnerable groups. Criminal networks have been able to take advantage of these factors to increase the number of vulnerable people they can access, reduce the risks of being detected, increase their economic profits, and control their victims with less use of physical violence or coercion, all while using ever fewer resources.

⊙ Despite existing studies and concern about the use of these tools in tra-

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fficking and exploiting human beings, there is hardly any official data on their true extent.

⊘ The use of RICTs is particularly evident in the recruitment phase, particularly in the use of social networks and job search pages. Nevertheless, personal, emotional and family contacts are still also used.

⊘ This type of technology enables greater control over the victims, but at the same time it allows the exploiters to have less contact with them, while the threat or use of violence is camouflaged and more difficult to detect. All of this makes it more difficult to pursue and prosecute them.

⊘ Within the online environment, this has been a key feature in the mutation found in environments of exploitation, especially in the sexual sphere, shifting their locations to more private sites such as flats and houses, with a constant reduction in street prostitution and hostess clubs in recent years.

⊘ The concentration of exploitation activities in private spaces is making the problem invisible and lowering social awareness.

⊘ The Internet enables advertising for services the given by victims, making them accessible to a greater number of clients and fostering the commercialisation of exploitation of others.

⊘ Activities linked to human trafficking such as deception, coercion, violence and abusing a situation of need or vulnerability are all blurred by the use of RICTs.

⊘ However, online environments are introducing new forms of violence, which we may call digital violence, such as grooming, sextortion and doxing[40].

⊘ The social networks, and especially Telegram, are being used to promote the exploitation of human beings, enabling exploiters and clients to interact in a secure, private space.

⊘ The Internet provides new spaces for exploitation, mainly linked to the sphere of pornography, and concealed under the mask of professionalisation and of a legal, freely accepted activity. The phenomenon of webcamming or

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40 Type of online harassment involving posting personal information without consent

streaming videos is an environment of special concern due to its lack of control and the difficulty of detecting cases of human trafficking and exploitation. Nevertheless, there are very few specific cases where the trafficking or exploitation of human beings via such means has been documented.

⊚ The dark internet or dark web does not seem to be playing a relevant role in human trafficking, and would seem to be limited to the circulation of child abuse material. Nor does the use of cryptocurrencies seem to be widespread when it comes to the flow of profits from criminal activity.

⊚ Despite the growing use of the Internet, exploitation continues to maintain its traditional patterns outside the technologies described in this study, whether in sexual trafficking, labour trafficking or other purposes.

⊚ Bodies and organisations on the front line generally lack the specialisation and technical resources necessary to adequately monitor the huge amount of information available on the Internet and proactively detect cases of trafficking and exploitation of human beings.

⊚ There are numerous initiatives, especially private ones, to improve the detection of cases through Internet tracking, but they are not well known and their use is often limited to specific organisations.

⊚ International cooperation is a key factor in pursuing the crime of trafficking in human beings, and even more so in the online environment, since the content and servers are usually located outside the physical place where the exploitation occurs.

⊚ Technology companies that manage websites, social networks, instant messaging and other applications are a key feature in the chain of detection and prevention of human trafficking.

⊚ The Internet is being used to enable crime, but it also offers a wide range of possibilities for prevention and raising awareness about trafficking in human beings.

6.2. Recommendations

⊚ In the medium-to-long term, prevention continues to be the key factor. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop educational policies to raise awareness about the trafficking and exploitation of human beings in general, and how relationship, information and communication technologies together

with online environments can be used to foster such crimes and attract new victims.

⊙ The Internet allows us to reach billions of people through awareness-raising campaigns. It is a medium that should be prioritised to raise awareness of the risks associated with RICTs, especially among the younger population, since they are digital natives.

⊙ Clear regulatory frameworks should be fostered that criminalise all forms of pimping, including those that could be carried out through the Internet.

⊙ Regulatory frameworks should be laid down that guarantee technology companies' liability. A good example of this are the European Union's regulations, specifically the Digital Services Act (DSA)[41] and the Digital Markets Act (DMA)[42], which aim to create a safer digital space where the fundamental rights of users are protected, and establish a level playing field for companies.

⊙ Strategies, plans and protocols that comprehensively deal with human trafficking must include lines of action and concrete measures to foster the prevention of online human trafficking, improve the pursuit of it, and provide adequate protection, assistance and recovery for the victims.

⊙ In order to gain better knowledge of this new reality, and to be able to develop coherent plans and strategies, it is necessary to create statistical indicators to help gather concrete, comparable data.

⊙ The channels for exchanging information and reporting cases to the authorities must be improved, fostering confidentiality as well as mutual collaboration and trust between specialised entities and organisations and the public bodies responsible for pursuing crimes.

⊙ The technical capabilities of the police units in charge of combating human trafficking should be bolstered, providing them with the necessary material resources and suitable training to carry out digital investigations, in line with

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41 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065&-qid=1666857835014

42 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.265.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A265%3ATOC

the provisions of the European Union Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021–2025)[43].

⊙ Joint investigation and proactive detection initiatives should be carried out within Europol, as well as with the victims' main countries of origin.

⊙ Cross-border coordination procedures to exchange operational and strategic information should be improved, as well as sharing good practices on the use of RICTs that help detect and pursue cases.

⊙ Despite the spectacular developments in the technological sphere, we must not lose sight of the fact that traditional forms of exploitation are still the dominant ones, which is why attention must still be paid to sexual exploitation linked to prostitution, forced labour, human trafficking for the purposes of begging, extraction of organs, forced marriages and the commission of crimes.

⊙ The Internet must become a key element in proactive inspection work by police forces and employment inspectors. Job offers and sub-contracting mechanisms must be adequately monitored in order to prevent situations of forced labour.

⊙ Inspections of online environments linked to pornography and prostitution should be fostered to ensure they are not covering up situations of human trafficking and exploitation.

⊙ Preventive work must be backed up by relationship, information and communication technologies (RICTs).

⊙ Training remains a key factor. It is necessary for the professionals responsible for detecting, pursuing and prosecuting human trafficking to get specific training on the new forms of crime associated with the Internet, gathering digital evidence and suitably assessing it, and using undercover agents in the Internet. This can be decisive in helping ensure that the burden of proof does not fall exclusively on the victim's testimony.

⊙ Public-private collaboration should be boosted, as well as setting up chan-

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43 European Commission (2021): Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on the EU Strategy on Combatting Human Trafficking (2021-2025).

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nels to exchange information, especially with companies in the technology sector and Internet content providers.

⊙ Proactive detection work by specialised bodies is essential in combating trafficking networks; this detection must also be extended to the online sphere, for which adequate training and resources must be made available.

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