



Co-funded by
the European Union

Study on Responsible Use of Internet and Social Media to Prevent Victimization

An Online guide created with primary research, through questionnaires filled by survivors of human trafficking and professionals working on the field in the five countries and secondary sources through desk review and data analysis

By Epeksa



ΕΠ.Ε.Κ.Σ.Α.
Επιστημονική Εταιρεία για την
Κοινωνική Συνοχή & Ανάπτυξη

In collaboration with Centro Studi Medi



PARTNERS

Agorà Società Cooperativa Sociale



CS Medi



UMWS



URZĄD MARSZAŁKOWSKI
WOJEWÓDZTWA ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIEGO

RiseUp



Epeksa



ΕΠ.Ε.Κ.Σ.Α.
Επιστημονική Εταιρεία για την
Κοινωνική Συνοχή & Ανάπτυξη

Red Incola



MTU Eluliin



Index

Tactics to attract trafficking victims through the Internet	2
Other ways to attract potential victims.....	6
Ways to recognize trafficking victims.....	7
Profile and Statistics of trafficking victims and recruiters	7
Victim's Profile:	7
Greece.....	7
2014-2018: In total 229 recognized victims.....	7
Italy	9
Spain	9
Poland	9
Estonia	11
Recruiter's profile:.....	11
Questionnaires' results.....	12
Poland:.....	12
Estonia:	12
Spain:	13
Greece:.....	14
Italy:.....	15
Prevention Measures	16
Conclusions	17
BIBLIOGRAPHY:	18

Tactics to attract trafficking victims through the Internet

According to Plan International's latest research about harassment via social networks, girls are in a danger position as users, since they coexist in the same digital place with traffickers. The Internet offers them easier access to approach their victims, without even contacting them face to face. In that way they gain control, and it is easy for them to manipulate potential victims. They go after individuals that seem to be vulnerable and have a social media profile that exposes their insecurities and their mental and life state. Once they have the information they need, they go forward trying to come closer to the victim and create a bond between them. They often have fake social media profiles to seem more reliable or to upload fake employment advertisements. It is also common for them to be present in online dating apps. Traffickers use social networks as a controlling method in two ways: they isolate the victim from their social cycle by restricting their account or they impersonate them while sharing shameful rumors as well as personal pictures.

It is a fact that human trafficking is being portrayed on social networks in the wrong way with important aspects of it being missed. Police officers while knowing the deeper truth about trafficking, they are still not able to recognize a victim in all cases. However, many laws have been established to prevent and punish this atrocious crime. Nowadays, the recruitment of sexual exploitation begins on the Internet. The internet site, named Backage, was a digital space for traffickers to sell and buy victims by uploading their pictures. The Internet has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, we can use it to educate and protect ourselves, on the other hand it offers the perfect means for traffickers to recruit victims. Another platform used by traffickers is OnlyFans, where many people, mostly influencers, share their content. Some of them do it by choice, whereas others are forced to. It is important for police officers to make good use of the Internet, to identify victims and inform properly the world about this topic.

According to National Human Trafficking all social media apps, such as Facebook, Instagram, Kik, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Tinder, Meetme.com, Plenty of Fish and Grindr, can turn into dark places. Traffickers use these media to connect with the potential victims and to upload misleading job, money and visa contract advertisements.

Although many Internet platforms that were found to engage in sex trafficking closed off, there are still many others left to be used as methods of manipulation and control by the recruiters.

It is true that prostitution exists both in the real world and on the Internet. Those who support prostitution claim that Internet helps the women working as sex workers to access their clients way easier than before. However, these same women are easy targets for recruiters. Till 2010, there was an internet site, called Craigslist, providing links to sexual services. It is needed to clarify that Internet helps both traffickers and police officers to find victims. One of the most common advertisements

in Craigslist was about free accommodation. Finally, the majority of women who sell their body via Internet are targets for physical violence.

The United Nations has established the 30th of July as the International Day against human trafficking. The definition of trafficking refers to forced labor, sexual exploitation as well as organ removal, tactics that offer a huge amount to recruiters. It is true that because of Covid-19 the use of the Internet was more frequent. According to the general secretary of United Nations, the traffickers use advanced technology to approach the victims with fake promises to exploit them. The dark web is the perfect place for both recruiters and clients to share and consume shameful footage of the victims anonymously. According to the Organization of USA for International Development, the economic consequences of Covid-19 had as a result the rise of human trafficking as a profitable illegal activity. As the distance between people gets bigger and bigger, the Internet gets a higher resonance as a mean of exploitation for recruiters. It is also mentioned that most victims are women and girls. Dr. Jane Ongolo claims that there are two categories of traffickers, the organized criminal teams and opportunistic recruiters, including businessmen, close collaborators as well as relatives. The Internet makes it easier for recruiters to sell human organs and arrange the transfer and residence of victims. There are two types of methods used by traffickers to find their victims. The first method is called 'chasing', since the traffickers target proactively specific victims to connect with them or with possible buyers. The second method is called 'fishing' and is about advertisements uploaded on the Internet by traffickers who wait for potential victims or clients to get trapped. The United Nations recognizes the benefit of technology in order for trafficking to be eliminated.

According to the chief of Europol, mr. Nenand Naka, some of the victims are recruited by traffickers of the same nationality who offer them supposed job opportunities in Europe. However, nowadays, the most common means of recruitment is the Internet, and traffickers upload in there advertising links which lead the potential victims to group chats. Once they start engaging in the conversation, traffickers present to them job offers that demand visa. When they arrive in the country of destination, everything seems ideal until they face harsh reality, namely exploitation and the debts. It is crucial to mention that traffickers have eliminated acts of violence towards victims, because in that way there will be no indications of harm and thus, they will not be exposed.

It is true that a high percentage of trafficking victims are minors. It is quite concerning that in 2018 many trafficked victims had been approached via Internet. That is why the Survive and Thrive Advocacy Center made a Toolkit to prevent young people from being trafficked through Internet platforms. The pandemic of Covid-19 had a crucial impact on the increase of human trafficking through social networks. Both children and teenagers are at high risk of being targeted by recruiters due to the lack of supervision from parents regarding access to social media and gaming sites. Also, teenagers are in a very vulnerable state emotionally and thus, they may trust

people, namely traffickers, that can take advantage of them and trap them. There is a method used online by recruiters named 'Sextortion', a type of sexual exploitation taking place both on social media and gaming platforms, where traffickers collect information for the potential victims, ask for sensitive footage, such as intimate pictures and then threaten them to use this inappropriate content against them, to gain power over them. Fortunately, there are some ways for children to be kept safe by traffickers online. More specifically, personal information such as full name, phone, home address or email should be hidden. Also, it is important to never share personal pictures or location. Last but not least, it is mentioned to avoid accepting friend requests from unknown individuals and keep privacy on every account.

The human trafficking is the recruitment of people using violence and coercion. There is a category of human trafficking, called e-trafficking, referring to the recruitment of victims through Internet aiming mostly to sexual exploitation. Also, there is the Deep Web and the Dark Web. The Deep Web is not accessible from common browsers. The Dark Web, as part of the Deep Web, offers anonymity to its users and is the digital place for illegal and criminal activities. E-traffickers benefit from the Internet, since it provides them the opportunity to collect the necessary information to recruit and control the victim. In many cases, e-traffickers access their victims using the surface web, which is accessible by all, and connect to them through social media and dating apps as well as job advertisements. The most common target is children, and the Dark Web is very popular among recruiters, since their traces are not easily detectable and because the sales and exploitation of children are much cheaper. They advertise and sell young girls as <<sex slaves>> and thus, e-trafficking is related to pornography. However, there is evidence that can be quite warning and make the potential victim avoid the trap. For example, job advertisements that are written with grammar mistakes, offer ideal salaries or ask for personal information are suspicious. Also, many e- traffickers try to seduce the victim by showing intense interest towards her, in order to manipulate her physically and emotionally. It is positive that many countries of the European Union have established legislation for fighting e-trafficking, but unfortunately, many victims hide their truth due to their fear and their horrific situation and traffickers argue that there is always consent.

It is true that social media is used by millions of people daily, so traffickers have many options for potential victims and more effective and easier ways to recruit them. Traffickers are able to recognize the Achille's heel of each victim by just watching their social media post and approach them in the proper way to deceive them. Once the trafficker gains the trust of the victim, the last one ends up in a digital prison, since that is when the coercion begins. Coercion in social media can take many types, since traffickers restrict the victims from using their account, harass them, hack their profile, exploit them sexually on Internet or even impersonate them. In many cases, it is possible for the victim to 'Stockholm Syndrome'. It is concerning that many children end up being sexually exploited online. Traffickers advertise minors online by using hashtags, in order for potential clients to have easier access. Also, traffickers use social media in order to communicate and cooperate with other recruiters. It is important to

mention that traffickers use livestream platforms exposing sexually the minor victims in front of the streamers. They often target children who seem vulnerable online, since these children are more prone to share personal data and trust the wrong people. It is hopeful that social media implements policies that can protect children from traffickers by identifying their illegal online activity.

One of the most common tactics that traffickers use to recruit their victims is the 'loverboy' method. This method is referring to the men who show fake romantic interest towards young girls, in order to gain emotional control over them and force them into commercial sex. Social media benefit loverboys, since they have a wide access to potential victims, approach them romantically and exploit them sexually in the end.



Other ways to attract potential victims

Nowadays, traffickers use mostly psychological manipulation to recruit and control their victims. The first step of psychological abuse is dehumanization. This happens when the trafficker destroys the self-esteem of the victims, makes them believe that they are deserving of this terrible situation, makes them question their self-worth and sense of control over themselves and their lives. Secondary, recruiters make their victims believe in the most catastrophic scenario that can happen to them with threats, such as ending up in jail, a fact that will shame them in their whole life. Also, traffickers make their victims doubt those who can help them, such as care providers, with the justification that the latter will report them to police. Moreover, traffickers tend to stalk their victims without letting them have personal space and freedom. It is crucial to mention that traffickers avoid physical violence towards victims, since any hints of abuse can get them suspected and probably arrested. Furthermore, the trafficker often threatens the victims that if they disobey, he will call the police and accuse them of being criminals or illegal immigrants. Last but not least, the recruiter usually gives false hope to the victims that he will set them free in a specific time later and thus, they endure their torture hoping to break free one day.

There are six steps that most traffickers follow in order to recruit their victims. The first step for recruitment is the search for victims. Traffickers focus on targeting individuals who seem vulnerable and look for them both at physical places, such as shelter, as well as on Internet. Then, once they target their victim, they try to create a close relationship between them through communication and fake interest, in order to build trust. Traffickers are not always strangers to the victim, since in many cases, they are part of the victim's social cycle. The third step takes place when the trafficker has gained the trust of his victims and he is able to meet their practical or emotional needs, such as their need for work or love. In that way, it is easier to manipulate them and to start to exploit them with the justification that they can earn money, or they return the favor to him as their 'savior'. The last step is to maintain control over the victim with both physical and psychological abuse.

It is true that vulnerable individuals tend to be the most common targets for any trafficker. These individuals are vulnerable for many reasons. For example, they may come from unstable families, suffer from substance use or mental disorders or face difficulties with the native language if they are immigrants. Traffickers are masters of false promises to trap the victim into sexual exploitation and forced labor. The most fake promises are about marriage and employment. Traffickers aim to control their victims and to achieve their goal they try to build a trusting bond between them and the victim. Trust is gained through financial, and job offers or through romantic relationships. However, false promises are not the only way for victims to be recruited by traffickers, since the last ones use coercion with physical, sexual as well as psychological abuse, threats and isolation. The main reason why trafficking is such a successful crime is because it brings a lot of money to the ones involved.

Traffickers transport people from one place to another, in order to exploit them sexually or force them into labor. Human trafficking is probably the most profitable and less detectable crime. People of all ages and genders are potential trafficking victims. There are plenty of ways for a trafficker to deceive his victims and recruit them. One of them is to be related romantically to the victims, in order to exploit them sexually and use emotional and physical abuse as method of control. It is very usual for traffickers to target populations from poor countries and approach them by offering them job opportunities and promising them a brighter future abroad. It is important to mention that in countries where families live in constant poverty, their only way of survival is to sell their children to traffickers. Also, traffickers use their victims to find new ones and promise them that if they do their job, then they will gain more freedom. Another method is religious abuse. This happens, when the trafficker controls his victims by making them vow, to not escape or misbehave, since this would be perceived by as an insult towards God. Probably the rarest tactic of recruitment is kidnapping, due to the high chances of the victim to run away more easily. Lastly, there is a method called 'baby farming' and is referring to the forced pregnancy of trapped women, in order for the trafficker to sell their babies.

Ways to recognize trafficking victims

Human trafficking can take place in various locations. Regarding sex trafficking, it can be spotted at hotels, strip clubs, massage businesses, restaurants, on the street as well as online. The signs that indicate that someone may be sex exploited are many. For instance, the potential victims are absent from school or work, constantly leaving their house, are drug users, hide possible hints of violence or travel very often. On the other hand, labor trafficking is taking place mostly in agriculture, restaurants or health and beauty services. The concerning signs that someone may be victim of forced labor are when he does not earn enough money, he is in debt without the means to pay it, he does not have control over his finances, lives with his boss and suffers from negative emotions.

Profile and Statistics of trafficking victims and recruiters

Victim's Profile:

Greece

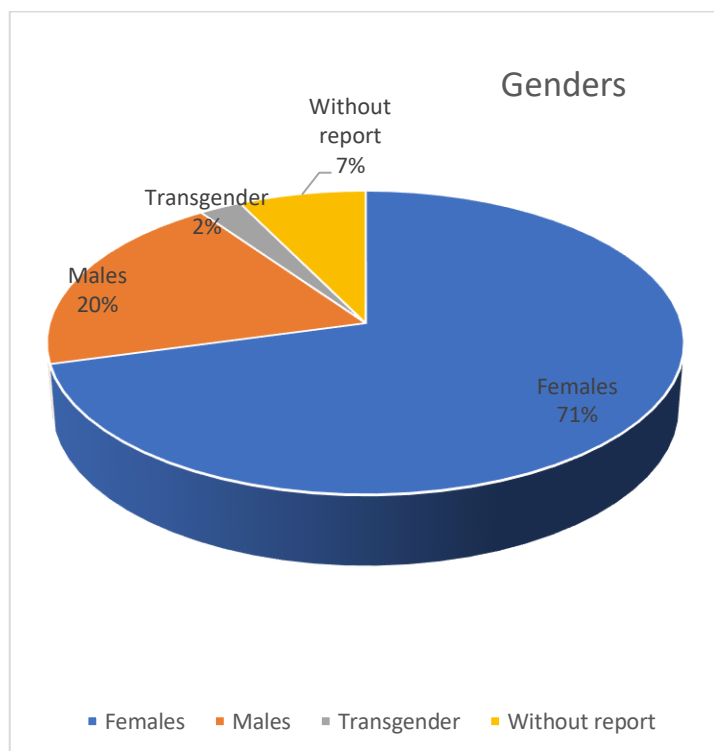
2014-2018: In total **229** recognized victims

Gender and age: **77,7%** women, **26,2%** minors

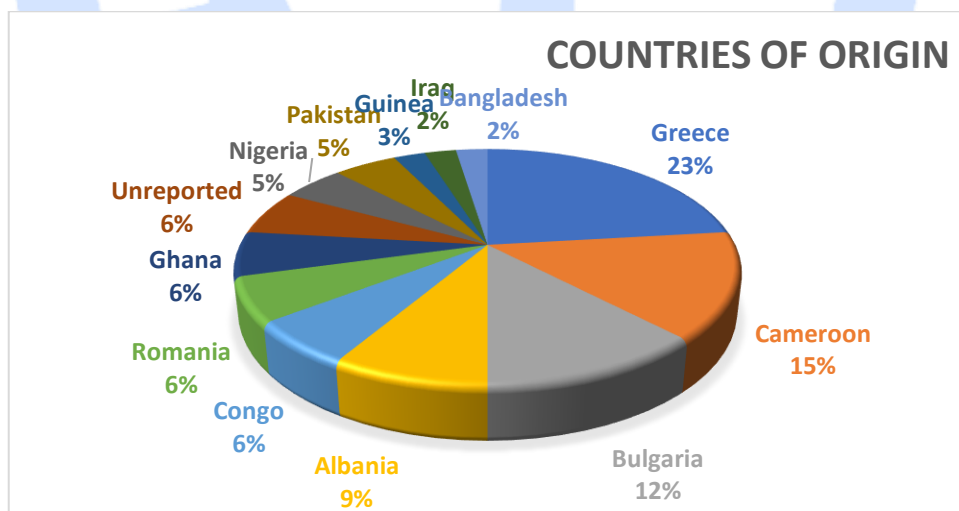
Nationality: **32** from Greece

January to June 2019: In total **82** victims

Gender: **58** females, **16** males, **2** transgenders and **6** without report regarding their gender



Nationality: **19** from Greece (**16** of them were minors involved mostly in forced begging), **12** from Cameroon, **10** from Bulgaria, **7** from Albania, **5** from Congo, **5** from Romania, **5** from Ghana, **5** from unreported countries, **4** from Nigeria, **4** from Pakistan, **2** from Guinea, **2** from Iraq, **2** from Bangladesh

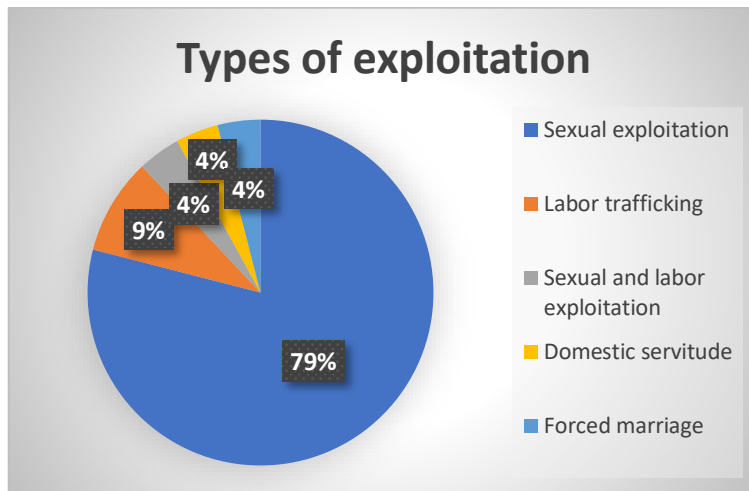


2020:

Gender: **70%** females, **18.5%** unknown, **14.3%** males

Age: **77.2%** adults, **14.8%** unknown, **8%** minors

Exploitation type: **79%** sexual exploitation, **9%** labor trafficking, **4%** sexual and labor exploitation, **4%** domestic servitude, **4%** forced marriage



Methods of Control: **31%** physical abuse, **24%** unknown, **20,7%** threats, **6.9%** induced substance abuse and isolation, **3.4%** withholding personal documentation, sexual and economic abuse

Italy

2016:

Gender: 80% females involved in sexual exploitation

Nationality: Nigeria

Spain

2019: In total **294** victims involved in sexual exploitation

2023: In total **294** victims

Nationality: **47%** Colombians

Exploitation type: **5** victims of forced marriage

Poland

2014: In total **207** victims

2015: In total **115** victims

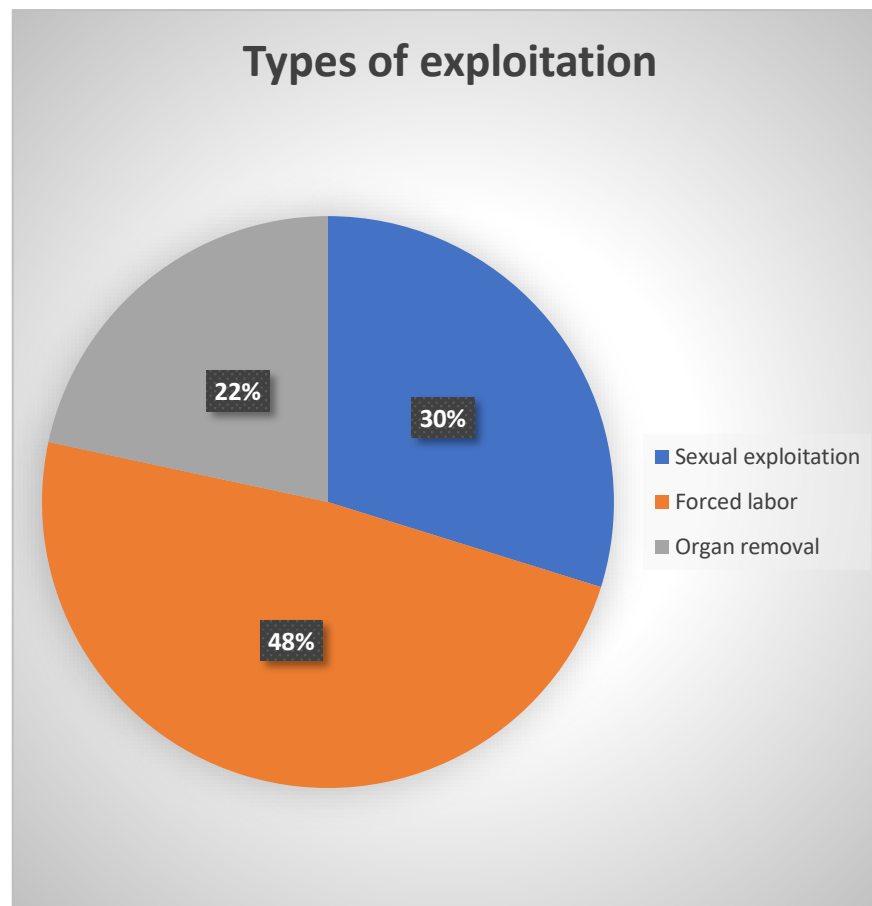
2016: In total **78** victims

2017: In total **453** victims

2018: In total **222** victims

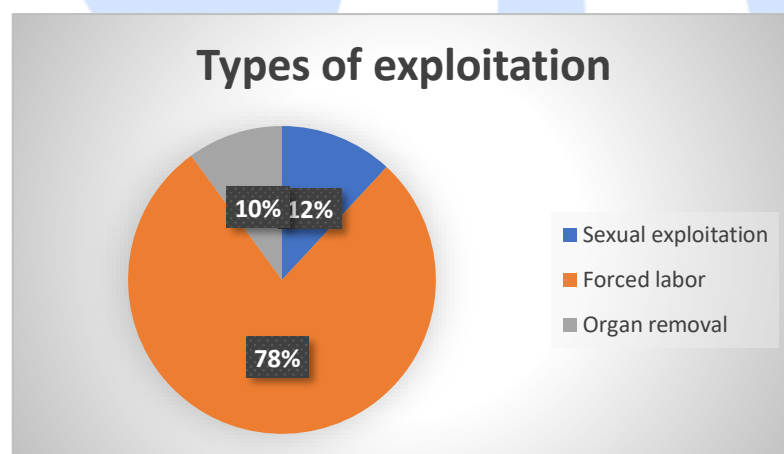
2019: In total **208** victims

Exploitation type: **62** victims of sexual exploitation, **101** victims of forced labor, **45** victims of organ removal



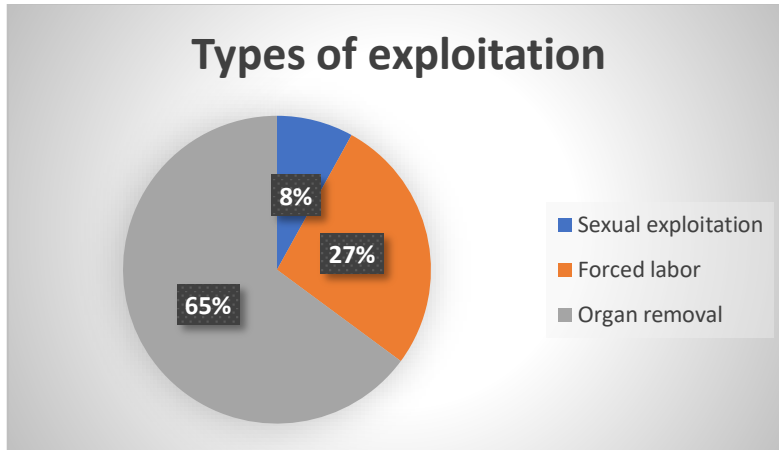
2020: In total **269** victims

Exploitation type: **32** victims of sexual exploitation, **210** victims of forced labor, **27** victims of organ removal



2021: In total **447** victims

Exploitation type: **36** victims of sexual exploitation, **121** victims of forced labor, **290** victims of organ removal



Estonia

2017: In total **12** victims

2018: In total **14** victims

2019: In total **67** victims

Nationality: **54** victims from Eastern Europe

2020: In total **34** victims

Nationality: **29** victims from Eastern Europe

Types of Exploitation: **12** victims of labor trafficking, **17** victims of sex trafficking

2022:

Nationality: Eastern Europe (especially Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Poland), Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Central Asia, Africa

Types of Exploitation: Sex trafficking, labor trafficking

2023: In total **35** victims

Gender: **27** females, **4** men, **4** LGBTQI+ individuals

Nationality: Africa, Asia (especially from Middle East, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), North and South America, Eastern Europe (especially Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus), Estonia

Types of Exploitation: Sex trafficking, labor trafficking

Recruiter's profile:

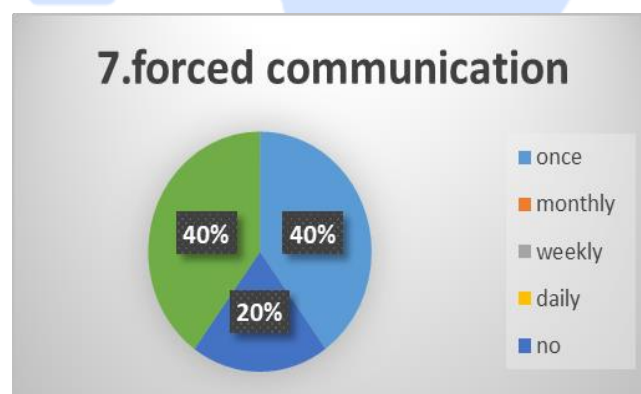
Age: average **28.5**

Gender: **24.4%** women, **45.1%** men

Questionnaires' results

Poland:

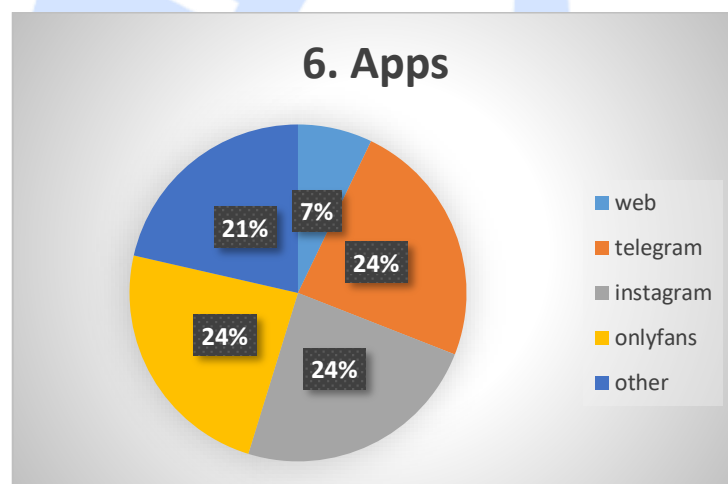
Analyzing the situation in Poland many important data were extracted by professionals working with ex trafficking victims. Most of them are women living in Poland having work experience in this specific field 1 to 2 years. From the total survivors, only 30% of them have been deceived into trafficking via Internet and specifically, 2 cases occurred through Telegram and 1 through OnlyFans. The professionals pointed that 40% of the ex-victims were forced to upload content on the apps mentioned above, whereas the rest 40% were not forced and 20% is unknown if there was any kind of force to upload content against their will. It was also found that in half cases the victims were forced only once to talk with strangers using these apps, meanwhile 25% was forced daily and the rest 25% is unknown to the professionals if any victim was engaging in conversations against his will. It also should be mentioned that in 75% of the cases it was unknown to the professionals if the victims had met those strangers in real life against their will, since only for the 25% of them they were sure that there was no forced meeting. Regarding the information about the people engaging with the victims via the Internet, the professionals mentioned that in half cases, the formers were not aware that they were viewing non-consensual content and were talking to trafficking victims and in the other half cases it was unknown to the professionals if these people had any clue. Regarding the cases of victims meeting strangers, 75% it is unknown to the professionals if these strangers knew that they were meeting them against their will or not and only for 25% the professionals could answer surely 'No'. Moreover, in 75% of the cases it is unknown to them when the forced use of the Internet started. It is true that due to the pandemic of Covid-19 traffickers used the Internet as the easiest mean of exploitation and there was a case of a victim that the professionals confirmed that was exploited via Internet during the pandemic. However, the two years following the Covid-19 they observed less and less cases of exploitation through the Internet.



Estonia:

In the case of Estonia, all the professionals who reside there and work with trafficking survivors are women with over 10 years of experience. All the victims that they have helped, had been exploited via the Internet. More analytically, 24% of them had been deceived using Telegram, 24% from Instagram, 24% from Onlyfans, 21%

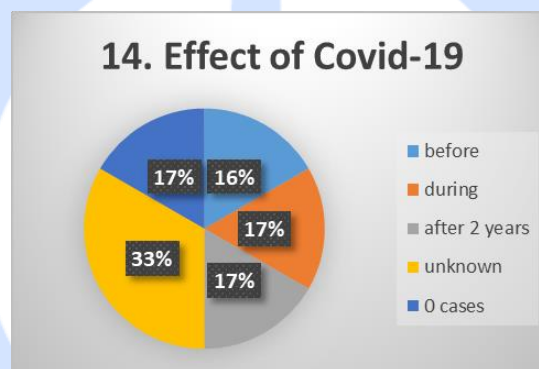
from websites and 7% from various other platforms, such as Voodie. The professionals pointed out that half of these victims had been forced to upload non-consensual footage on these specific applications, engage in conversations with other users and meeting them against their will weekly and the other half daily. They also confirmed that 57% of the strangers engaging with the victims did not know that they had been uploading content against their will, whereas the rest 43% were fully aware of that. On the other hand, only 13% of them knew that the victims were talking against their will. Regarding the situations where these strangers had arranged to meet with the victims, 63% of them were not aware that this was happening non-consensually, whereas 38% of them were fully aware of it. Professionals stated that 53% of the ex-victims started using these Internet platforms from the very first day of their exploitation and 47% of them just from the first weeks. The effect of the pandemic on the rates of exploitation via the Internet was obvious in Estonia as well. More specifically, 38% of the victims had already been using these apps before Covid-19. This percentage was raised to 42% during the pandemic and lowered to 21% after two years. These two years the professionals witnessed that the victims had been trafficked via the Internet 33% more, the rest 30% less often and the percentage of 37% has remained the same.



Spain:

Regarding Spain, all the professionals helping ex trafficking victims are women living in Spain. Half of them have 6 to 10 years work experience in this specific area, whereas some others have 3 to 5 years of work experience and the rest only 1 to 2 years. They confirmed that half of the cases of the survivors had been exploited via the Internet. Most of them had been deceived using Telegram (45%), Instagram (22%), websites (11%) and other applications (22%). In 75% of the cases, it was unknown to the professionals if the victims were forced to upload content against their will, whereas only 25% of them were forced to do so once. Moreover, in half cases the ex-victims had been forced once to engage in conversations non-consensually with strangers meeting online, meanwhile the rest 50% is unknown to the professionals if such an event happened. The professionals also pointed that in 50% of the cases it

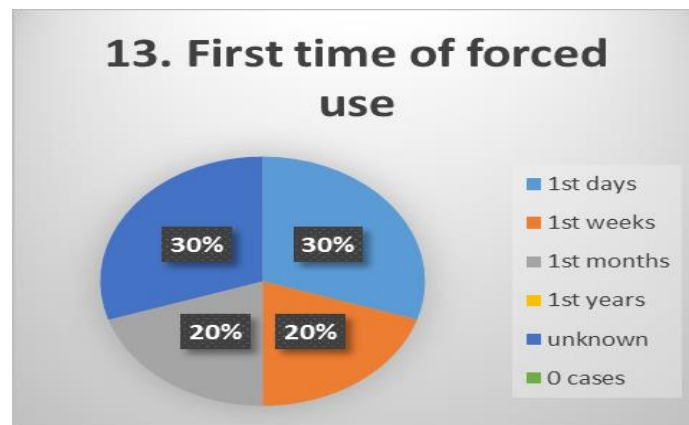
was unknown to them if the strangers engaging with the victims were aware of the forced uploaded content and conversations, whereas the other half of the strangers had no idea about the true situation. Also, 67% of the professionals did not know if the strangers meeting the victims knew this was happening non-consensually. However, it was confirmed by the professionals that 33% of the strangers were not aware that they were meeting the victims against their will. It is mostly unknown (75%) to the professionals when the ex-victims start using the Internet as a mean to be exploited by their traffickers. The professionals mentioned, regarding the effect of Covid-19 on the use of the Internet as the main mean of exploitation, that during and after the 2 years following the pandemic, the use remained the same as before. Nevertheless, in 33% of the cases it was unknown to the professionals how Covid-19 affected the use of the Internet from the exploiters to recruit their potential victims. Last but not least, they stated that in most cases (67%) the forced use of the Internet by the exploited victims remained the same the 2 years after the pandemic and only 33% of them were forced to use it more often.



Greece:

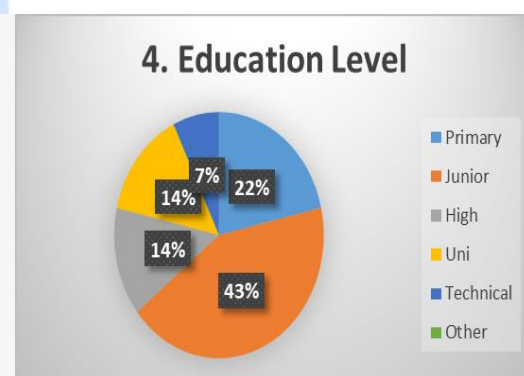
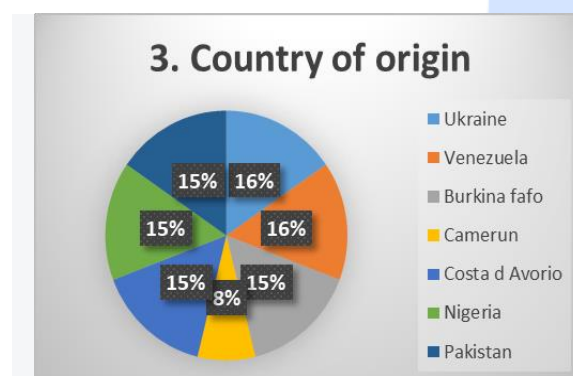
In Greece the professionals completing the questionnaires are also all women and most of them have 3 to 5 years of work experience. All of the victims they helped throughout the years have been exploited through the Internet and mostly via various webpages (40%) as well as through OnlyFans (36%) and Telegram (24%). The professionals stated that half of the survivors had been forced to engage in conversations with strangers online monthly, whereas some others (30%) on weekly basis and a less percentage of 20% only once. It was also pointed out that most of them (70%) had been forced to upload sensitive content once and the rest (30%) monthly. Also, most of them (60%) had met strangers against their will monthly, meanwhile the rest 40% only once. However, it is unknown to the professionals if these strangers were aware of the situation of the victims. Regarding the timeframe when ex trafficking victims started using the Internet as a mean of exploitation, 30% of them started from the very first day, another 30% it is unknown, 20% the first week and the rest 20% the first months. The majority of them (70%) had been exploited during Covid-19 and the rest 30% it is unknown to the professionals how the pandemic affected their situation. Lastly, they observed that the exploitation via the Internet had

remained the same (80%) the same the 2 years after Covid-19 and in some little cases (20%) had increased.



Italy:

In Italy the questionnaires were completed by ex-trafficking victims. Most of them are women (69%) and their age varies from under 30 years old (54%) to 50 years old (46%). They are coming mostly from third world countries of Asia and Africa with low educational level as well as from Ukraine due to the ongoing war. It is noticeable that none of them had been forced to work using the Internet, even though they have been exploited through it and especially through webpages (29%), Telegram (29%) and Instagram (43%). Only a minority of them (9%) had been forced to upload content against their will and none of them had been forced to talk to strangers online consensually. There was only one case of a victim who was forced to meet a stranger who got to know using the Internet. In most cases (73%) the victims confirmed that these strangers were not aware of the harsh truth behind the uploaded content and conversations, whereas the rest 27% of the survivors were not sure if the strangers knew they were engaging with trafficking victims. Especially, regarding the meetings with them in 82% of the cases, the strangers did not know that they met the victim non consensually, whereas 18% of the victims could not confirm or deny the awareness of these people. In the case of Italy, since the survivors did not work as victims via the Internet, they remained unaffected from Covid-19 and the following years.



Prevention Measures

The Internet and especially social media platforms provide means for users to stay away from traffickers. First, users are able to keep their profile private instead of public, and thus, keeping things hidden from strangers, keeps them safe. With that being said, they have the choice regarding who they accept as a friend and should avoid adding unknown people as well as chatting with them. Moreover, oversharing is never a good move, since traffickers can use this information to approach the victim and later, use it against him. Also, it is advised not to trust job advertisements, since in many cases, they are traps used by recruiters to attract potential victims. Furthermore, there is the option to block unwanted individuals that harass or act suspiciously. Finally, it is significant for everyone to acknowledge the signs of trafficking to protect themselves as well as others and know the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

The data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline used by Polaris report in 2021 showed that 2019 and 2020 were the years when trafficking was increased through social media platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram. The most common victims found through the Internet are minors, since it is more difficult to be supervised by their parents and teachers in the digital world. Recruiters approach children online with fake social media presence, in order to groom them. Based on a CBS News' article, Facebook is the most used platform by traffickers to find potential victims. According to Polaris Project, traffickers use many deceiving methods to recruit victims, such as fake employment advertisements or scholarships or fake accounts. Once they attract the victims, then they groom them with various compliments or fake interviews for job opportunities as well as with fake promises such as paying for their travel and accommodation expenses. Then, there comes control by the trafficker towards the victims by threatening them, using both physical and psychological abuse as well as withholding their belongings. That is the moment when victims realize that they are exploited. There are three main types of human trafficking: forced labor, sexual exploitation and transcontinental child abuse. The detection of trafficking is quite difficult, especially if it begins online, since it is a crime not often observable. However, there are many established legislations that punish it and protect the victims. The first step for preventing trafficking from taking place on social media is communication between parents and their children about this horrific situation. Parents should raise awareness on their children about the dangers of using social media platforms and teach them how to protect themselves by not sharing personal information and accepting friend requests or messages from strangers.

Conclusions

The conclusions that were conducted from the questionnaires of the five countries were very significant providing a better understanding of the situation of trafficking victims in general and how the digital world plays an integral role to this happening. In Greece, Spain, Poland and Estonia the majority of victims have been exploited at some point through the Internet as the professionals confirmed, whereas Italy is the only country where the questionnaires of the victims showed that they were not forced to work using the Internet. The most used platform in all countries was Telegram and the fact that the majority of the people engaging online as well as meeting with the victims in real life were not aware of the exploitation going on, indicates that the recruiters had total control over their victims showing their experience in this field in order to not leave traces and continue the exploitation without getting caught. It is also true that the pandemic of Covid-19 created the perfect conditions for online exploitation to be increased. However, the years following did not change significantly the percentage of people falling victims of trafficking. Hence, it is important for everyone to learn to recognize suspicious signs online such as advertisements or messages looking too good to be true in order to navigate the digital world safely and especially children should be protected, since they are the most vulnerable target for traffickers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Andriana Sas, <<Number of victims of trafficking human beings in Poland from 2011 to 2021>>, Statista, 12 December 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1351720/poland-victims-of-human-trafficking/>

Andriana Sas, << Number of victims of trafficking human beings in Poland from 2019 to 2021, by type of exploitation>>, Statista, 12 December 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1351710/poland-victims-of-human-trafficking-by-exploitation-type/>

A21, <<Impact report 2020 Greece>>, A21, last access 7 July 2024, https://neutrinodata.s3.ap-southeast-1.amazonaws.com/a21/userimages/A21_Impact_Report-Greece.pdf

Catarina Parache, "Human Trafficking and the Media: The Dual Challenges of Misinformation and Social Media," *Police Chief Online*, July 26, 2023, <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/interplay-human-trafficking-media/?ref=3ffbdef18674aa21222701eea7975264>

Collier Ellie, <<Methods of Human Trafficking and Recruitment>>, High Speed Training, 6 January 2023, <https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/methods-of-human-trafficking/>

Florida State University, <<Sex Trafficking>>, The National Preventing Toolkit on Officer-involved domestic violence and human trafficking, last access 9 August 2024, <https://nationaltoolkit.csw.fsu.edu/leo/part-2/sex-trafficking/>

Huffpost, <<The statistics for human trafficking in Greece are far from reality>>, 30 July 2019, https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/ta-statistika-stoicheia-yia-ten-emporia-anthropon-sten-ellada-apectoen-apo-ten-praymatikoteta_gr_5d402301e4b0db8affae30cd

Human Trafficking Front, Social-Media and Child Sex Trafficking, Human Trafficking Front, 13 July 2023, <https://humantraffickingfront.org/social-media-and-child-sex-trafficking/> Government of the Netherlands, <<Loveboys>>, Government of the Netherlands, last access 8 August 2024, <https://www.government.nl/topics/human-trafficking/romeo-pimps-loverboys>

Kalaitzi Alexia, <<Young Greek women victims of prostitution- Trafficking in Greece>>, Voria.gr, 19 October 2019, <https://www.voria.gr/article/istories-apo-emporia-anthropon-stin-ellada---thimata-pleon-ke-ellinides>

Kalliou Eleni, <<E-Trafficking: Human Trafficking in Internet>>, Crime Times, last access 7 August 2024, <https://www.crimetimes.gr/e-trafficking-%CE%B5%CE%BC%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%AF%CE%B1->

[%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B8%CF%81%CF%8E%CF%80%CF%89%CE%BD-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BA%CF%84%CF%85%CE%BF/](#)

Katsaros Giannis, <<International Day against Human Trafficking: The social media makes it easier for traffickers to trap victims>>, HUFFPOST, 30 July 2022, https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/paykosmia-emera-kata-tes-emporias-anthron-pos-ta-mesa-koinonikes-dikteoses-dieekolenoen-toes-emporo-es-anthron-na-payideeen-themata_gr_62e5495ee4b0d0ea9b777998

Lifo, <<Black magic and 1.100 prostitutes: the dark side of Italy>>, 12 February 2019, <https://www.lifo.gr/now/world/mayri-mageia-kai-11000-pornes-i-skoteini-pleyra-tis-italias>

Polaris, <<Social Media Recruitment>>, Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking-and-social-media/>

Polaris, <<Social-media in Trafficking Operations and Abuse>>, Polaris, <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking-and-social-media/>

Polaris, <<Love and Trafficking: How Traffickers Groom and Control Their Victims>>, Polaris, 11 February 2021, <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2021/02/love-and-trafficking-how-traffickers-groom-control-their-victims/>

SBWD LAW, <<5 Ways Human Traffickers Recruit Victims>>, SBWD LAW, 23 March 2023, <https://www.sbwlaw.com/blog/5-ways-human-traffickers-recruit-victims/>

Social Media Victims Law Center, <<Social-Media and Human Trafficking>>, Social Media Victims Law Center, 26 February 2024, <https://socialmediavictims.org/sexual-violence/human-trafficking/>

Souza Jessica, <<3 ways to spot a trafficker on social media>>, Plan International, 5 January 2022, <https://www.planusa.org/blog/3-ways-to-spot-a-trafficker-on-social-media/>

Statista Research Department, <<Number of victims of sex trafficking in Spain from 2016 to 2023>>, Statista, 5 July 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1300849/number-victims-sex-trafficking-spain/>

Survive & Thrive Advocacy Center, <<Human Trafficking and Social Media Safety for Kids>>, Survive & Thrive Advocacy Center, last access 6 August 2024, <https://surviveandthriveadvocacy.org/human-trafficking-and-social-media-safety-for-kids/>

Tompea Eleni, <<How the Internet has changed prostitution>>, Social Policy, 5 October 2015, <https://socialpolicy.gr/2015/10/%CF%80%CF%8E%CF%82-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BA%CF%84%CF%85%CE%BF->

[%CE%AD%CF%87%CE%B5%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%BE%CE%B5%CE%B9-%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BD-%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%BD.html](https://umdsafecenter.org/take-action/recognize-human-trafficking/)

University of Maryland Safe Center for human trafficking survivors, <<Recognize Human Trafficking>>, University of Maryland Safe Center for human trafficking survivors, last access 9 August 2024, <https://umdsafecenter.org/take-action/recognize-human-trafficking/>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <<Technology and Human Trafficking: Avoid the Trap!>>, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, last access 6 August 2024, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/endht/2022/internet-safety-tips.html>

U.S Embassy Tallinn, <<2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia>>, U.S Embassy in Estonia, 26 June 2024, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2024-06-26/>

U.S Embassy Tallinn, <<2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia>>, U.S Embassy in Estonia, 2 July 2021, <https://ee.usembassy.gov/2021-07-02/>

U.S Department of State, <<2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia>>, U.S Department of State, last access 19 July 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/estonia>

U.S Department of State, <<2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Estonia>>, U.S Department of State, last access 19 July 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/estonia/>

Withers Mellissa, <<Psychological Tactics Used by Human Traffickers>>, Psychology Today, 19 October 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/modern-day-slavery/201610/psychological-tactics-used-human-traffickers>