



CHAPTER V
TRAFFICKERS USE OF THE INTERNET

CHAPTER 5

TRAFFICKERS USE OF THE INTERNET; DIGITAL HUNTING FIELDS³³⁹

As the world continues to transform digitally, internet technologies are increasingly being used for the facilitation of trafficking in persons. With the rise of new technologies, some traffickers have adapted their modus operandi for cyberspace by integrating technology and taking advantage of digital platforms to advertise, recruit and exploit victims.

Everyday digital platforms are used by traffickers to advertise deceptive job offers and to market exploitative services to potential paying customers. Victims are recruited through social media, with traffickers taking advantage of publicly available personal information and the anonymity of online spaces to contact victims. Patterns of exploitation have been transformed by digital platforms, as webcams and livestreams have created new forms of exploitation and reduced the need for transportation and transfer of victims.

With the help of the internet, traffickers have learnt to adapt their strategies to effectively target specific victims, by actively ‘hunting’ those who they deem as vulnerable to falling victim to trafficking, or passively ‘fishing’ for potential victims by posting advertisements and waiting for potential victims to respond.

To analyze these new emerging patterns, UNODC has gathered the narratives of 79 court cases of trafficking containing an element of internet technology. Some of these cases were directly collected by UNODC to produce the *Global Report*. Others were collected from the UNODC Case Law Database, *Sherloc*, to expand the information at the base of this analysis.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ The initial findings of the research were reviewed at an Expert Group Meeting hosted by UNODC in Vienna on 25-27 November 2019. The meeting gathered practitioners, experts and academics to review the overall approach, verify findings and discuss additional perspectives.

³⁴⁰ The research is based on court material gathered by UNODC since 2012, which has been compiled into a Court Case Database. Out of the 489 cases included in the database, 45 were selected based on the criterion of containing an element of internet usage in the narrative. In order to expand the evidence base, an additional 34 cases from the UNODC ‘SHERLOC’ Case Law database were included in the analysis of this Chapter. In total, the final dataset comprises information from 79 cases of trafficking in persons reporting the use of internet during the criminal offence. The cases involved a total of 491 victims and covers more than 30 national jurisdictions. The dataset provides sex and age-specific information on a subset of cases. In total, the dataset provides information on 26 boys, 65 girls, 287 women and 41 men. In selected cases, full transcripts have been identified and analyzed, which is referenced in the foot notes where relevant.

The following pages make use of a definition of *Internet Technologies or Internet Usage* to describe technology elements in the reviewed court cases. The term broadly refers to technologies in form of social media platforms and applications, webpages, communication apps or other applications designed to transfer money, pictures or text between individuals. The more precise term of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) is not used since it refers to all communication including telecommunications, which would be overly broad for this research.

The following chapter presents an analysis of the collected court cases, illustrating how internet technologies are applied by traffickers to perpetrate their crimes in the digital age.

Digital platforms and markets: The use of technology to advertise, recruit and exploit

Among the cases collected by UNODC for this thematic chapter, the first which reports the use of internet dates to 2004. This case described how traffickers used a free-standing webpage to promote sexual services and to connect with interested consumers in a tourist destination.³⁴¹

Nowadays, internet-based trafficking has become increasingly varied; spanning from simple setups of advertising victims online, to traffickers’ use of communications platforms to broadcast exploitation abroad, to interacting with potential victims or transferring money between trafficking group members.³⁴² There have been cases of traffickers who have coerced victims into establishing rapport with customers in chat rooms monitored by the traffickers,³⁴³ and there is ample evidence of the

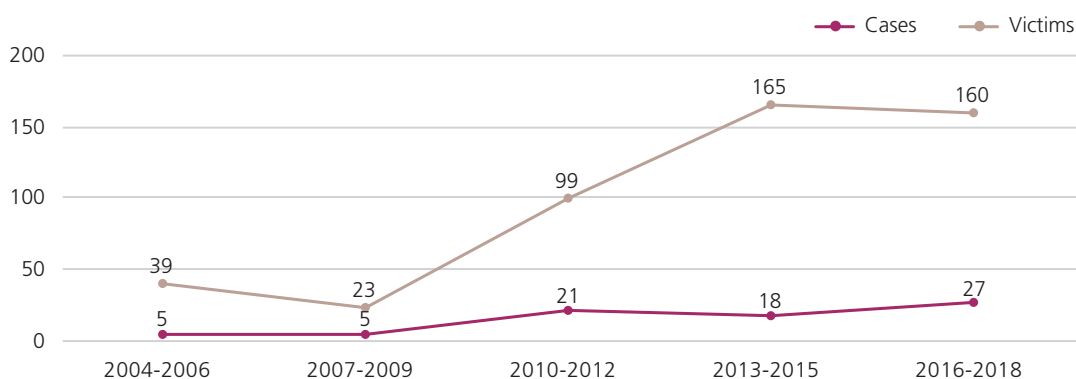
³⁴¹ United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2004, Case no. BRA004. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/criminalgroupcrimetype/bra/2007/processo_n_2004.81.00.18889-0.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

³⁴² Court case 230 – Belarus, 2017; United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (Vienna, Austria, 2018).

³⁴³ Regional Trial Court of Misamis Oriental, the Philippines, 10th Judicial Region, Branch 41, CRIM Case No. 2009-337



FIG. 86 Number of cases perpetrated with the help of internet technologies and identified number of victims, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases, 2004-2018



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

growth of child sexual abuse material online³⁴⁴ of which some is related to trafficking in persons.³⁴⁵ Traffickers have coerced their victims into forced crime, forced labour or have used internet technologies to advertise the selling of organs, such as kidneys harvested from impoverished individuals.

Advertisement

Through the internet, traffickers easily gain access to an increased pool of customers, particularly sex buyers. One court case is particularly illustrative: a single trafficker, working alone, managed to sexually exploit and connect one victim with over 100 sex buyers over a period of 60 days using online advertisement.³⁴⁶

344 European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, (2019).

345 Court case 329 – Thailand, 2016.

346 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2013, case no. CAN016. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law_doc/traffickingpersons/crimetype/can/2013/r_v_byron.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

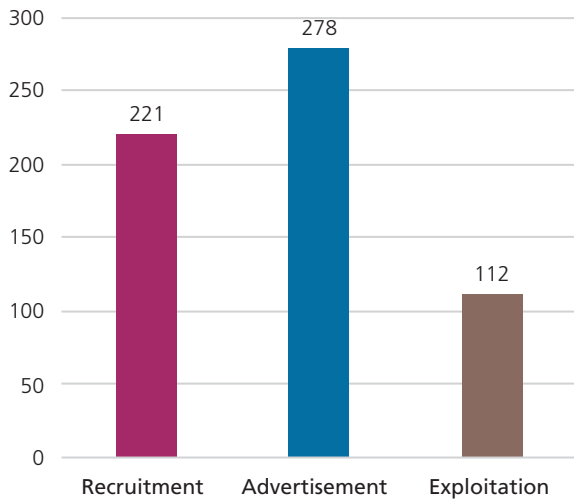
Traffickers increasingly use internet technologies to advertise the services resulting from their victims’ exploitation. Examples of advertisements used to exploit victims include those on classified listing sites, such as *Backpage*³⁴⁷ and similar, or on social media platforms and applications (apps).

From the 79 court cases selected for this chapter, 44 cases included some form of online advertisement with 278 victims affected (from a total of 491 victims in this dataset). The remaining 35 cases and 213 victims did not use any form of online advertisement.

In some cases, traffickers hide exploitative services behind legitimate activities to avoid detection by law enforcement while targeting their client base. Carefully crafted language with coded keywords and pictures are

347 The classified listing site, www.backpage.com, was seized by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation in April 2018. URL: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-leads-effort-seize-backpagecom-internet-s-leading-forum-prostitution-ads>

FIG. 87 Number of trafficking victims*, by types of activities carried out with the use of technology, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases, 2004-2018



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

*One victim could have experienced more than one type of activity.

used to attract potential clients.³⁴⁸ In some cases, advertisements are addressed to a close circle of clients, such as the case of child sexual exploitation advertised via social media platforms.³⁴⁹ In other cases, exploitation services are advertised in more organized ways via free-standing webpages which, on one occasion, publicized the exploitation of 89 victims through an escort service featuring approximately 2,800 advertisements.³⁵⁰

Through this type of activity, traffickers can be more direct. For example, one case described the use of a social media site as resembling the experience of ‘window shopping’, whereby customers could inspect which victims they intended to ‘buy’.³⁵¹

The platforms used for advertisements tend to be broadly accessible. The analysis of court cases report that regular online marketplace sites, on which anyone can post or browse advertisements to sell or buy any service (from

job vacancies to the sale of equipment, cars and clothes), are being used to advertise services obtained from victims of human trafficking.

Recruitment

The internet is also used by traffickers to connect with the targeted victims. Recruitment practices are widely reported upon, when it comes to both sexual exploitation and forced labour.³⁵² Several methods have been identified, from direct contact to more devious and deceptive ploys. 31 out of the 79 court cases considered for this chapter report an element of online recruitment, affecting almost half of the total victims included in the database.

Technology-based recruitment hinges on the anonymity of communications via the internet. It may prove difficult to identify the author of online advertisements or the genuine identity of people writing from social media accounts. An example of internet manipulation is described in one court case, where the trafficker used multiple online profiles to recruit the victims. The trafficker stayed in contact with each victim through two fake identities: one was used to write abusive text messages, while the other was used to express understanding and compassion. This technique was instrumental in building trust with the victims.³⁵³

The disclosure of personal information on social media platforms may easily be misused by traffickers. One group of traffickers, for instance, used *Facebook* to browse through user profiles and, on basis of the information that people shared, selected potential victims who could be more susceptible to being courted and tricked into exploitation.³⁵⁴

Other examples illustrate that job advertisements are also used as recruitment fronts. Examples of advertisements used to attract victims often include wording

348 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2011, case no. ARG040.

349 Court case 365 – Russian Federation 2015; Court Case 218 – Armenia 2014.

350 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2011, Court case no. USA126. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/usa/2011/united_states_v_robert_c_daniels_.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

351 Court case 316 – Panama, 2014; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2011, case no. ARG040. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/arg/2011/case_n_2338.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

352 University of Southern California, *Technology and Labor Trafficking in a Network Society*, 2015; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, and Tech Against Trafficking, *Leveraging Innovation to Fight Trafficking in Human Beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools*, (Vienna, 2020); European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, (2019).

353 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2016, case no. SGP003. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/sgp/2016/pp_v_muhammad_khairulanwar_bin_rohmat.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

354 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2014, case no. BEL034. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/bel/2014/case_n_210814.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

that describes the possibility of living a luxurious life or promising jobs in industries such as modelling or entertainment.³⁵⁵

Internet based exploitation

Internet technologies also play a role in the exploitation of victims. The internet can be used to broadcast or livestream acts of exploitation, reaching a large base of consumers in different locations throughout different regions of the world.

In one case, a group of traffickers organized and managed a “cybersex den” to exploit victims through coerced performances in front of webcams. The four male traffickers coerced 21 female victims into ‘cybersex’, harbouring them in an apartment where some rooms were used for dance performances. The performances were livestreamed, reaching paying costumers all over the world.³⁵⁶ Other court cases describe forms of trafficking that involve child sexual abuse ‘on demand’. One court case reported by Norwegian authorities, for example, reported one male trafficker who was found guilty of forcing children, both girls and boys, into sexual performances, which were livestreamed over Skype.³⁵⁷ Similar cases have been detected in other countries, but not necessarily prosecuted as trafficking, rather as sexual assault or rape.³⁵⁸

The internet can also be used to traffic victims to exploit them into the commission of crime. One court case describes how a group of traffickers successfully recruited people with the purpose of coercing them to commit identity theft and data fraud.³⁵⁹ The victims were kept in an abandoned building and forced to live under inhumane conditions. They were given fake identities to procure and lease products from companies by abusing credit card information on websites, fraudulently using digital signatures to file tax returns.³⁶⁰

355 Court case 317 – Singapore, 2016.

356 Regional Trial Court of Misamis Oriental, the Philippines, 10th Judicial Region, Branch 41, CRIM Case NO. 2009-337.

357 Court case 312 – Norway, 2016.

358 European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, (2019).

359 Court case 414 – Denmark, 2017; Eastern District Court of Denmark, Case numbers: AM2017.05.29H; AM2017.06.30Ø, AM2016.03.14B, AM2017.11.10B, AM2018.01.19Ø, AM2016.07.12B. Conviction, 2016 – 2018. URL: <https://vidensbasen.anklagemyndigheden.dk/h/6dfa19d8-18cc-47d6-b4c4-3bd07bc15ec0/VB/61db3c73-f3c2-49c5-a551-b755b9f-cfc31?showExact=true> ; Denmark, City Court, ref. 9-3441/2015, conviction 14 December 2015.

360 *Ibid.*

These cases reveal how technology has become integrated in exploitation and has introduced new ways for traffickers to expand their businesses. While these types of cases are not often detected, they make up a significant share of the total number of victims included in the database. In total, 12 out of 79 cases, corresponding to 112 victims, involved the use of digital technology in the exploitation of the victim. Out of the 112 victims, 11 were boys, 32 were girls, 40 were men and 23 were women. Six remained undefined in terms of sex and age.

Evolution of the internet platforms used

An analysis of the court cases suggests that different types of internet platforms are used by traffickers. For the purposes of this chapter, three broad typologies of platforms have been identified:

- **Social media**, including *Facebook, Myspace, Skype, WhatsApp* and *Vkontakte*;
- **Classified webpages for advertisement**, referring to generic websites where individuals post advertisements or browse for items or services to buy or sell;
- **Free-standing webpages**, referring to websites created by traffickers that do not form part of larger domains.

Trafficking methods and the profiles of victims and perpetrators seem to differ according to the platform used. As reported in the section on the structure of traffickers’ operations, organized crime groups are able to traffic more victims per case compared to criminals operating alone or in pairs (see section *Traffickers; how they operate*). This is also confirmed for cases of trafficking in persons where the use of the internet is reported.

Whether they are operating in groups or not, traffickers that make use of free-standing webpages are typically able to traffic more victims per case. The number of victims per case recorded for trafficking using social media, however, is still significant. As technology-based trafficking has become more commonplace, social media has been increasingly used by traffickers, making this method of trafficking an emerging threat, especially for youth.

Online classified sites or free-standing webpages are more frequently used to post fake job listings with the purpose of recruiting victims, or to publicize the services offered by exploited victims. These platforms were among the most used digital outlets in the mid-2000s. Over the

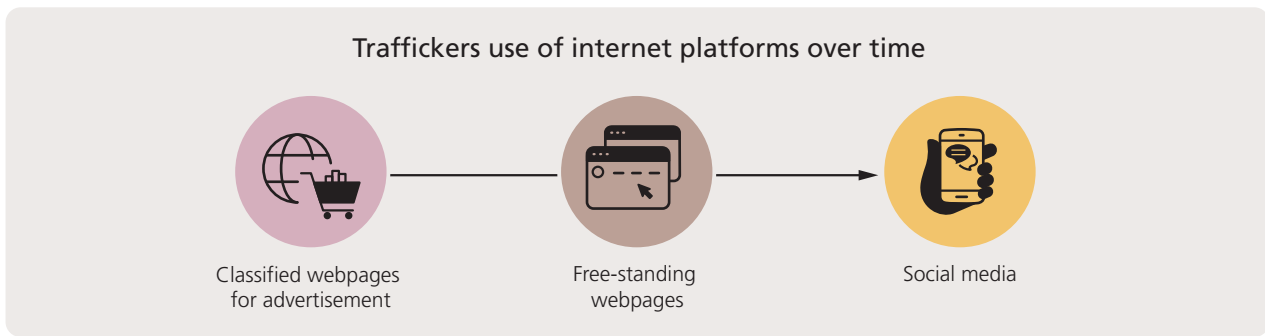
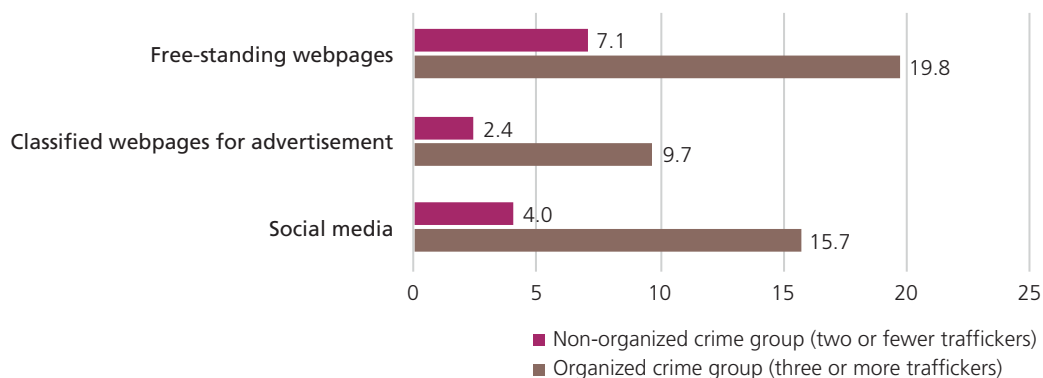


FIG. 88 Average number of victims per single case, by type of platform and size of trafficking group, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases*



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases)

*Out of the 79 cases of trafficking in persons reporting the use of internet during the criminal offence, 51 cases reported the type of platform used by traffickers and the number of traffickers involved.

years, they have been replaced in popularity with social media platforms, which have also become the main space for job advertisements.

This trend is also reflected in trafficking patterns. Since 2009, the share of victims trafficked using a form of social media has grown from zero to 51 per cent among the 79 cases. However, it is important to note that this figure is based on a limited dataset of court cases and does not necessarily represent all trafficking cases.

The dynamism of social media platforms makes them useful for criminal business activity that requires quick responses and the ability to connect with people without delay. The rapid pace of communication on social media is instrumental to the recruitment victims,³⁶¹ but also enables traffickers to easily link up with clients interested in purchasing an exploitative service. Since a significant amount of social activity has migrated to the digital sphere, traffickers use these platforms to easily blend in and move around, searching for victims.

³⁶¹ Court case 241 – Canada 2016.

The use of different platforms appears to relate with the age profile of the victims. Younger victims are reported in cases of trafficking through social media as compared to trafficking perpetrated across other platforms.

The average age of those using internet-based tools is decreasing; more children have started using the internet from an early age.³⁶² Children and teenagers are often 'courted' by traffickers on social media platforms³⁶³ and they appear to be susceptible to deceptive ploys in the search for acceptance, attention or friendship. These behaviours are easily abused by traffickers, who take advantage of younger victims not necessarily aware of the dangers of exploitation when approached by strangers online.

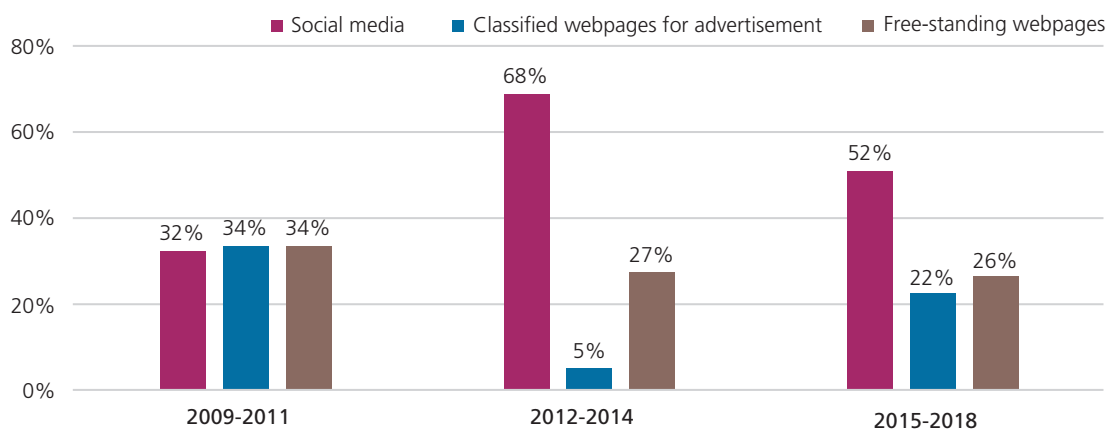
Adult victims are more exposed to trafficking through free-standing websites such as escort sites, where advertising of victims is not hidden. These public sites do

³⁶² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *The State of the World's Children: Children in a Digital World*, 2017.

³⁶³ Myria, *2017 Annual Report: Trafficking and smuggling of human beings: Online*, 2017.

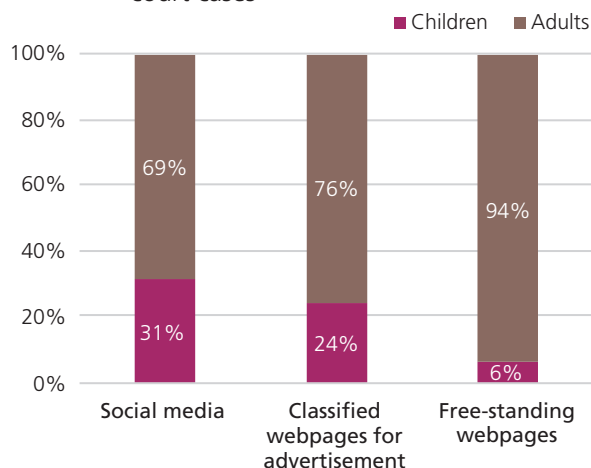
FIG. 89 Shares of identified victims in court cases including an element of internet usage by type of platforms used, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases

(N. 423 victims)



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

FIG. 90 Age of the victims and platform used by traffickers to recruit, exploit or advertise, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases*



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

*Out of the 79 cases of trafficking in persons reporting the use of internet during the criminal offence, 51 cases reported the type of platform used by traffickers and the age of the victims.

not typically involve child victims, possibly due to the heightened risk of drawing the attention of law enforcement or because traffickers who exploit children prefer more clandestine ways of operating.

Yet, although the use of public sites for child exploitation is limited, the availability of such materials is not limited. In addition to the platforms here considered, the so-called “dark-web” has gained the interest of criminals to facilitate their illegal trades. Among the information col-

lected for the purpose of this Report, there are no cases of trafficking in persons where traffickers operated over the dark-web. There are, however, reports of criminal organizations making use of this platform to distribute child sexual abuse material.³⁶⁴

According to Europol, the distribution of child sexual abuse material continues to grow and is available on various internet platforms, including the non-indexed part of the internet that is not accessible through mainstream search engines.³⁶⁵ Although distribution of this abusive material does not, in itself, constitute trafficking in persons, the production of images of child sexual abuse is very often the result of trafficking children for sexual exploitation.

New geographies of trafficking in persons

Internet technology has broadened the geographical scope of traffickers’ operations. The internet helps traffickers to operate across borders and in multiple locations at the same time, while physically exploiting the victims in a single location.

Cyber flows

By making use of internet technologies, traffickers are able to overcome geographical distances using the ‘cyber-space’ to connect themselves, victims and the final consumers of exploitative services. This form of trafficking may or may not require the transportation of the victim,

³⁶⁴ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2020.

³⁶⁵ European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Internet Organized Crime Threat Assessment, (2019).

CYBER FLOWS

Cyber flows connect perpetrators, victims and consumers at multiple locations



although some cases have shown that victims may be transferred between countries.

The cyber flows are often characterized by victims held and coerced into video performances, allowing the perpetrators to connect with potential clients living abroad. This type of trafficking has been identified in several countries and typically relies on the availability of video equipment and digital recording devices to broadcast victims' exploitation.

The examined court cases did not describe many cases of cyber flows, yet those reported appeared to be significant in terms of numbers of victims and customers. Internet technologies allow for exploitation in front of larger audiences than is generally possible with traditional trafficking.³⁶⁶

UNICEF reported how children may be at increased risk to exploitation in front of webcams—connecting with abusers based elsewhere, and in many cases, with their parents unaware.³⁶⁷ While this does not constitute trafficking in persons as such, it describes how abusive material is easily disseminated through digital tools, connecting victims and perpetrators in cyberspace.

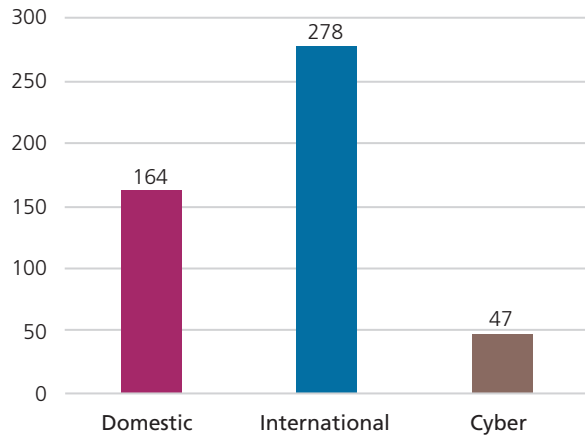
International flows

Traffickers may use internet technologies to facilitate the movement of people between countries. Of the 79

366 Bergen District Court, Norway, TBERG-2016-61974, Conviction 12 July 2016; Regional Trial Court of Misamis Oriental, the Philippines, 10th Judicial Region, Branch 41, CRIM Case NO. 2009-337.

367 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *The State of the World's Children: Children in a Digital World*, 2017.

FIG. 91 Victims*trafficked by means of Internet, by domestic or cross-border trafficking, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases**



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

*Out of the 164 victims that were trafficked domestically with the help of internet technologies, 35 were girls, 8 were boys and 102 were women. Of the 278 victims that were trafficked internationally, 184 were women, 41 were men and 34 were girls. The 47 victims trafficked via cyberflows included 14 boys, 17 girls and 16 women.

**Note: The figure also includes victims trafficked online through webcams and digital equipment, captured under the term 'cyber'.

examined court cases involving an aspect of internet usage, 34 involved victims who were transported across borders between two or more countries, amounting to 57 per cent of the total victims identified in the dataset. Internet-based technologies may prove particularly useful for assisting flows across borders, as they provide efficient and convenient ways also to facilitate international money transfers.

Cross-border trafficking facilitated by technology typically requires the involvement of several connected perpetrators. For example, as demonstrated by one case, trafficking can be facilitated by one organizer, with one recruiter in the country of origin and another person acting as the enforcer in the country of destination where the victims are exploited.³⁶⁸

Domestic flows

Trafficking operations facilitated by the internet may also be confined within national borders. Court cases include examples of traffickers that have coerced relatives into exploitation and advertised their services online. Other examples demonstrate people in vulnerable

368 Court case 283 – Israel 2017.

situations who have been abused by their friends, and similarly coerced into exploitation, which is then advertised on internet sites.

Victims may be recruited online with the exploitation taking place offline. One court case refers to a trafficker who gradually built an emotional relationship with the targeted victim, to the point of having complete control over the victim. Eventually, the victim was coerced into exploitation, which unfolded offline.³⁶⁹ Another example involved a trafficker that coerced a female victim into sexual exploitation, advertised her online and transported her to different cities in response to online demand.³⁷⁰ In these cases, the use of internet technologies during the recruitment of victims is a key element, mostly due to the ease of moving the victim out of his or her community.

Cyber traffickers

The way internet technologies are used to commit trafficking in persons changes according to the profile, group size and level of ‘cyber expertise’ of the traffickers themselves. Most trafficking cases facilitated by the internet are conducted on a small scale. As for trafficking that occurs offline, lone traffickers can assert control over their victims in several ways. An analysis of the court cases reveals

traffickers working alone through the internet generally recruit and exploit their victims in their countries of residence. Out of the 35 cases in the dataset involving a single trafficker using the internet, just six involved the international transfer of victims.

A significant number of court cases (24) involving use of internet technology were perpetrated by groups of traffickers working in groups of three or more. While comprising just around one third of the 79 identified cases involving technology, the cases involving groups of traffickers included over half of the identified victims. From the court cases, it is clear that larger trafficking groups are able to traffic larger numbers of victims. These results are broadly in line with the average number of victims trafficked by organized crime groups compared to non-organized crime traffickers reported for all forms of trafficking (see section *Traffickers; how they operate*).

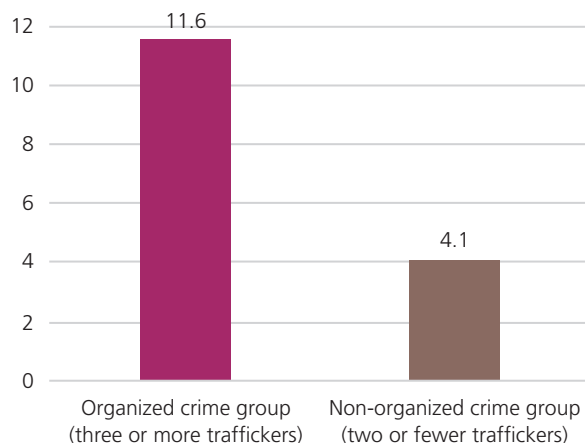
Cyber experts

Traffickers may possess different levels of computer literacy. Some use rather unsophisticated internet-based technologies. For example, many of the reviewed court cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were perpetrated with a smartphone equipped with a camera.

Other cases refer to more complex applications, such as the case of a trafficking group sexually exploiting large numbers of children and producing several hundred thousand images for online distribution through illicit sites.³⁷¹ Other examples indicate how social media can be used to facilitate money transfers between traffickers³⁷², or how traffickers use the internet to monitor their clients on the ‘digital streets’ of chat rooms.³⁷³

Sophisticated technologies allow traffickers to scale up their activities. It has been documented that organized criminal networks have attempted to recruit hackers or cyber experts to support their operations.³⁷⁴ One court case describes how a trafficking network had one ‘dedicated’ person responsible for online advertisement.³⁷⁵

FIG. 92 Average number of victims per case where the use of Internet was reported, by size of trafficking group, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases (79 cases)



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

369 Court Case 218 – Armenia 2014.

370 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2004, Case no. USA021. Also available at URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/usa/2004/united_states_v._gates.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

371 Court case 329 – Thailand 2016.

372 Court case 230 – Belarus 2017.

373 Republic of the Philippines Regional Trial Court of Misamis Oriental, Branch 41, CRIM.CASE No. 2009-337.

374 Lusthaus, J. & Varese, F. (2017). *Offline and Local: The Hidden Face of Cybercrime*. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice: <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax042>.

375 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2011, Case no. SWE014. Also available at URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/swe/2011/case_no_b_87-11.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

Another case involved the use of the application *Money Gram*³⁷⁶ to transfer money, along with other applications to recruit or communicate with victims. This shows how a reliance on internet technologies may remove the need for physical interactions between traffickers and victims. The use of multiple applications also indicates that traffickers are aware of the risk of monitoring and surveillance when using technology. Traffickers may initially contact potential victims on open groups in social media and move communication to encrypted or anonymized services, such as *WhatsApp* messaging on cellular phones.³⁷⁷

Traffickers seem to master the intricacies of linking means of coercive control with digital technologies. They can convince victims to share revealing pictures of themselves under the guise of assessing their suitability for some modelling job and then in turn, use the same pictures to maintain control over the victims by threatening their distribution. Some traffickers use social media to monitor the profiles of their victims and to track their whereabouts.³⁷⁸ In one case, a victim was lured to go home with a perpetrator whom she met online. She was later drugged and raped. The trafficker recorded the rape and threatened its distribution as leverage to coerce the victim into sexual exploitation.³⁷⁹

Modus operandi: The strategies used

Traffickers appear to adopt different approaches in the way they use internet technologies. The reviewed court cases highlight two distinct types of strategies: one in which traffickers proactively look for a specific type of victims (*'hunting'*), and the other in which traffickers attract potential victims (*'fishing'*).

Hunting strategies

Traffickers may proactively target specific victims or clients in a strategy that can be referred to as *'hunting'*. Hunting strategies are used both for getting access to victims and establishing connections with potential buyers of exploitative services.

In this approach, the targets of the traffickers are not random, but are chosen based on specific characteristics,

³⁷⁶ Court case 230 – Belarus, 2015.

³⁷⁷ Di Nicola, A., Baratto, G. & Martini, E., (2017) *Surf and Sound: The Role of the Internet in People Smuggling and Human Trafficking*, eCrime Research Reports 03, pp. 39-40. Middleborough, United Kingdom, 2017.

³⁷⁸ Republic of the Philippines Regional Trial Court of Misamis Oriental, Branch 41, CRIM.CASE No. 2009-337.

³⁷⁹ Court case 241 – Canada 2016.

Hunting and Fishing Strategies



Hunting strategies
Perpetrators actively approach victims in online spaces



Fishing strategies
Perpetrators wait for victims or consumers to respond to ads

such as economic, emotional or other vulnerabilities, which consequently make them more susceptible to exploitation or abuse.

Hunting strategies were identified in 21 cases collected by UNODC for the purpose of this chapter. Out of these, 18 cases referred to victims' recruitment, while four cases traffickers targeted potential clients interested in the services of exploited victims, with one case including the hunting of both victims and clients. A key characteristic of the hunting strategy is that the trafficker proactively pursues the victim or the potential customer online.

Social media provides traffickers with a large pool of potential targets and the ability to collect personal information on individuals whom they might otherwise never meet. In the cases where a hunting strategy was used by perpetrators, almost all involved the use of social media. This may be due to the accessibility of personal information shared on these platforms, which enables perpetrators to identify vulnerable individuals relatively easily, assess their situation and approach them to build relationship.

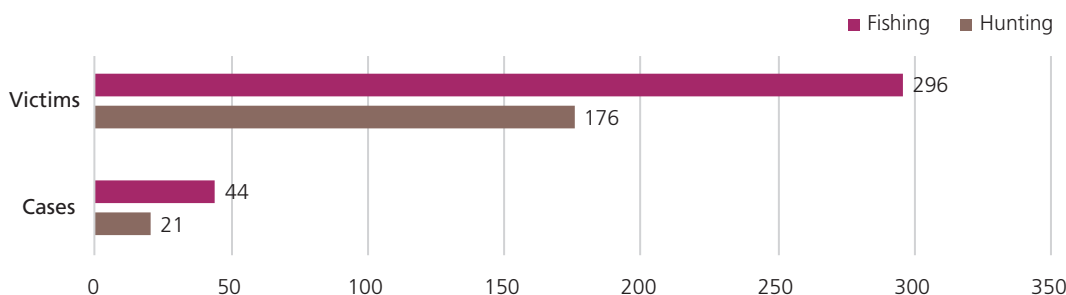
Fishing strategies

Conversely, the fishing strategies involve traffickers posting advertisements online and waiting for potential clients or victims to respond. According to the cases collected by UNODC, this strategy was more commonly used than hunting. Fishing strategies were identified in 45 cases, representing the majority of the cases in the dataset used in this Chapter.

Traffickers use fishing strategies to recruit victims by advertisements accessible to everyone, typically offering well paid jobs, prompting potential victims to make initial contact with traffickers.

In several of these cases, perpetrators used deception to attract victims by advertising jobs in a foreign country.

FIG. 93 Number of victims, by the type of strategy used by the traffickers, as reported in the GLOTIP court cases*



Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries (supplemented with UNODC SHERLOC cases).

In one case, traffickers used fake profiles on the social media platform *Vkontakte* to advertise modeling jobs in a foreign country. Traffickers eventually sexually exploited the women who were deceived by the advertisements. In this single case, approximately 100 women were recruited through fishing strategies.³⁸⁰

Fishing strategies are also used to attract potential clients. In these cases, traffickers typically post advertisements for escort services or prostitution, and invite interested customers to contact them. In one example, traffickers set up two websites advertising ‘escort services’, which were actually sexually exploitative services.³⁸¹ Clients would call or send messages over the internet to make appointments for prostitution services. In this case, more than 30 women were advertised online and forced to engage in sexual activities with customers. This case highlights the main advantage of fishing strategies for human traffickers: through the internet, perpetrators can reach many potential victims or clients with minimal risk, while simultaneously increasing the scale of their operations through minimal effort.

Fishing strategies are commonly used by traffickers to advertise victims to potential clients.³⁸² They typically use online classified advertisements,³⁸³ social media platforms³⁸⁴ or specialized websites dedicated to sexual services.³⁸⁵ In a smaller number of cases, perpetrators advertise victims on websites which they set up themselves,³⁸⁶ though this trend seems to be diminishing in favour of more mainstream platforms.³⁸⁷

380 Court case 230 – Belarus 2017.

381 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2004, case no: USA021. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/usa/2004/united_states_v._gates.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

382 38 out of 45 fishing cases involved use of advertisements.

383 11 out of 45 fishing cases made use of online classifieds.

384 Court case 283 – Israel 2016; court case 316 – Panama 2014.

385 15 out of 45 fishing cases made use of free-standing escort or prostitution websites.

386 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Case Law Database, SHERLOC, 2007, case no: BRA004. URL: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/criminalgroupcrimetype/bra/2007/processo_n_2004.81.00.18889-0.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc

387 See figure above cited “Share of identified victims in court cases including an element of internet usage by type of platforms used (423 victims from 2009 to 2018). In the dataset, the period from 2004 to 2008 had 11 cases with 95 percent of the victims being trafficked using free-standing webpages.