



# COMBATING **ONLINE** SEX TRAFFICKING

Confronting Challenges  
Forging Cooperation

## WHITE PAPER

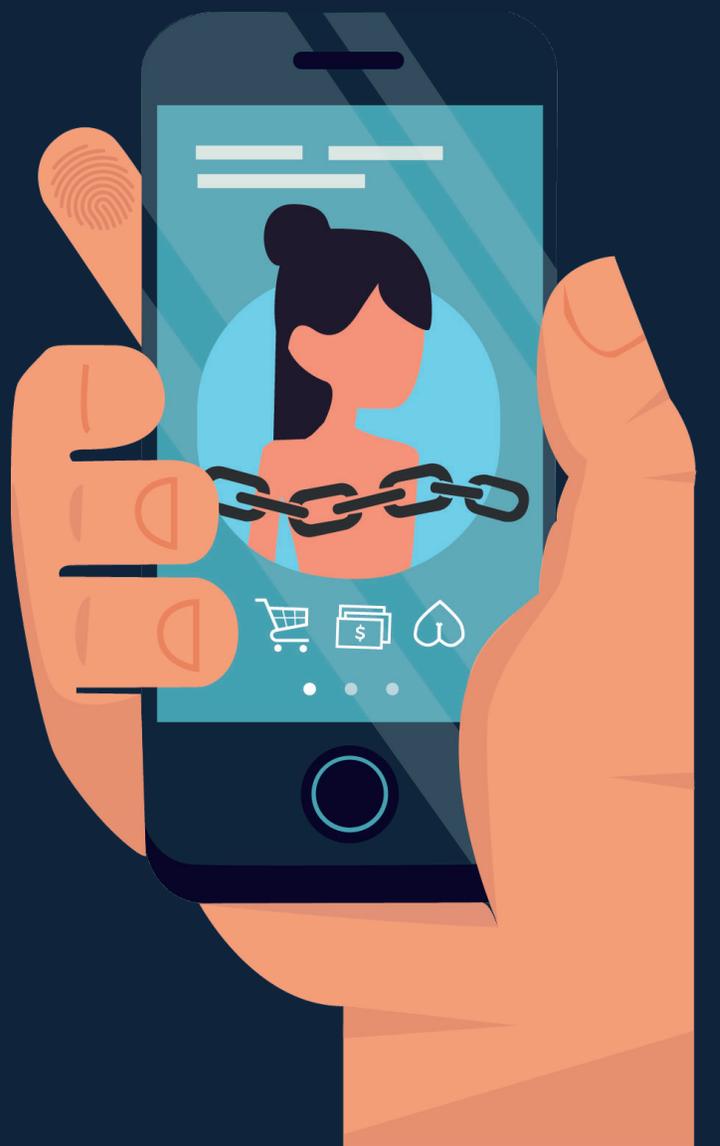
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# Executive Summary

Sex trafficking & related exploitation in prostitution are interconnected and intertwined with other challenges that our modern societies face: the ways in which women are viewed and treated, inequality predicated on race, gender, gender identity, and economic status, organized criminal activity, globalization, and of course, digitalization.

Today, information and communication technology (ICT) plays a significant role in our society. From cell phones to social media to Skype and the advancement of the internet, ICT is so ingrained in our lives that an existence without these technologies is unimaginable. In only the past few decades, technological advancements have greatly changed the face of sex trafficking and related exploitation in prostitution as we have known it.

The issue is that these advancements in ICT have given these technologies the power to be used for both good and evil alike. Research shows that criminal groups, especially sex traffickers, have come to utilize ICT in very unique and alarming ways in order to facilitate their business.

Thanks to ICT, it is now easier for traffickers to recruit, track, threaten, control, and transport their victims. They can also more easily connect with sex buyers.

ICT also makes it easier for traffickers to communicate and connect with each other and with other networks from different geographical areas and to proceed with invisible payments. Lastly, it has been observed that new forms of commercial sexual exploitation have emerged through the web.

But ICT, like all technology, is only a tool whose final utility depends entirely on the intention of those who use it. While ICT increases the incidence of sex trafficking and facilitates the growth of local and global sex industries, it also aids those who are working to fight sexual exploitation, hold traffickers and sex buyers accountable, and provide protection and support to their victims. ICT provides new opportunities including the development of awareness-raising campaigns, the identification and support of victims, and the ability to uncover evidence that will aid in the detection and prosecution of exploiters on both the supply and demand sides. Finally, the large amount of data made available through digitization can be readily utilized to better understand both the face of sex exploitation today and how to combat it more effectively.

This document, conceived as a preliminary and non-exhaustive working tool, aims to draw up an initial picture of the impact of ICT on sex trafficking and related exploitation in prostitution, initiate discussion and provide direction for work on these issues.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

over **20**  
**MILLION**  
people  
trafficked

- Source ILO

**\$ 300**  
**billion**  
world's  
prostitution  
revenue

- source: Havocscope

## This paper will explore the following questions:

- What is the current state of the law on sex trafficking & exploitation of prostitution worldwide? What about cyber-sexual exploitation ?
- How have sex traffickers adopted and used ICT to sexually exploit vulnerable human beings, primarily women and children?
- What are the responsibilities of tech providers in regard to this issue and what are the laws that govern their responsibilities?
- Why is the engagement of technology companies so important in addressing and combating trafficking and related sexual exploitation?
- What are the best practices and tools to fight online sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution?
- How can stakeholders better collaborate to combat sex trafficking?

# Glossary

This section defines some frequently used terms in the document.

**ICT** : Information and Communication Technology

**Prostitution**: the practice of purchasing another human being for the sexual gratification of the buyer.

**Trafficking in persons**: according to the Palermo Protocol, ratified by 173 parties, « trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs... The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth [above] shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth [above] have been used. »

**Sex trafficking**: according to the **U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act**, « the term 'sex trafficking' means the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act. »

**Online sex trafficking or online sexual exploitation**: sex trafficking facilitated by the use of ICT.



**Sex trafficking and related exploitation in prostitution is predicated on multiple and interconnected forms of inequality: men's domination over women, adults over children, rich over poor, North over South, whites over peoples of color.**

**WORLDWIDE**  
no Country is  
immune

# 1. Denouncing an Alarming Situation

## 1.1 Describing an organized criminal activity with international scope

All countries suffer from systemic sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is criminal activity that affects every continent and economic structure and impacts governments and citizens alike.

A large percentage of sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution is under the control of an extensive system of transnational organized crime, driven by evergrowing profits at the expense of the dignity and security of exploited people.

This organized criminal industry undermines the rule of law and threatens transparent economies, peace and democracy through dangerous links between exploitation and profits, and between corruption and the sex trade.

## 1.2 Recognizing the violence of sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution

Traffickers and sex buyers exploit the vulnerability of the people whose bodies they sell and buy.

The repetition of sexual acts performed out of financial need, including homelessness, inequality based on age, gender, gender identity, and racial or ethnic inequality, or other vulnerabilities, such as physical or mental disability, constitutes sexual violence in and of itself. Put succinctly, people in situations of trafficking and other commercial sexual exploitation experience the sex they are induced to engage in as serial rape.

The sex trade is one of the most violent forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. The vast majority of prostituted persons are victims of many forms of violence - physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, and economic.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

# 97%

**of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS**

### 1.3 Denouncing the exploitation of inequality

Sex trafficking and related exploitation in prostitution are predicated on multiple and interconnected forms of inequality: men's domination over women, adults over children, rich over poor, North over South, whites over people of color.

Women and girls, people of color, immigrants and members of other marginalized and discriminated against groups are vastly overrepresented in the sex trade all over the world.

Sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution are part of a long patriarchal tradition of subordinating women and girls.

Sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution are societal obstacles to establishing mutual and respectful sexuality. They strengthen the unequal power dynamic present in all forms of violence against women.

### 1.4 Condemning a market for human beings

The commercial sexual exploitation of human beings is a booming industry that grosses billions of dollars annually.

The sex trade thrives on the commodification of the most vulnerable populations.

Today millions of people around the world are being treated as common goods to be bought, sold, exploited, and discarded when no longer profitable.

This multi-billion dollar illegal industry is naturally subject to the basic rules of supply and demand. Those who sell victims and those who purchase them play an equal role in creating a marketplace that thrives on the exploitation of vulnerable people.



**Do we want a society where  
it is as easy to buy sexual  
services online as ordering  
pizza?**

## 2. Setting out the Current State of Law

### 2.1 Describing the international legal framework

Several international conventions address human trafficking:

○ The United Nations **Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949)** asserts that: « Prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person ».

○ The United Nations **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)** states that « States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women. »

○ The United Nations **Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its related Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo, 2000)** is a wide-ranging international agreement to address the crime of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, on a transnational level.

It establishes (1) that trafficked persons, including people in prostitution, are no longer considered criminals but as victims of a crime; (2) that there is now an accepted international definition of trafficking and an agreed-upon set of prosecution, protection and prevention mechanisms on which to base national legislation against trafficking, (3) that there is a comprehensive coverage of criminal means by which trafficking takes place, including not only force, coercion,

abduction, or deception, but also less overt means, such as the abuse of power or of a victim's vulnerability, (4) that the exploitation of prostitution and trafficking cannot be separated, (5) that victims who are domestically trafficked for prostitution are protected by the Protocol, and (6) that States Parties must take or strengthen legislative or other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of women and children.

○ The Council of Europe **Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005)** mainly focuses on the protection of victims of trafficking and the safeguard of their rights. It also aims at preventing sexual exploitation and all forms of trafficking as well as prosecuting traffickers and adopting measures to discourage the demand.

○ The **Convention on Cybercrime** of the Council of Europe (**Budapest, 2001**) is the unique international treaty on crimes committed via the Internet and other computer networks which binds France and the USA. It also contains a series of powers and procedures such as the search of computer networks and interception.

○ The **Directive 2011/36/EU** of the European Parliament and of the Council **on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011)** binds European State's legislation to prevent trafficking, to effectively prosecute criminals, and to better protect the victims

○ The Council of Europe **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul, 2011)** creates a legal framework at pan-European level which can apply to sex trafficking and related exploitation in prostitution. It aims to protect women against all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women.

## 2.2 Comparing domestic legal frameworks

### 2.2.1 Looking at legal systems against human trafficking

On April 13th 2016, French parliament adopted a new law against the system of prostitution which made the country enter completely into the Nordic model. The main change is that the act of purchasing sexual acts is now punishable by a 1,500 euros fine whereas selling sex acts is no longer a criminal offense.

Advertising human trafficking on a website can also be prosecuted as it can be considered indirect procuring. This crime is punishable by ten years imprisonment and a 1,500,000 euros fine. In other countries, like Canada the act of advertising sexual acts in exchange for money is in itself a criminal offense.

In France, in compliance with the victim's consent, the prosecutor can proceed with the trial, and some civil society organizations such as

Fondation Scelles can aid in criminal identification during the proceedings.

As for the cyber investigation, French criminal procedure code has set up several special techniques for tracking down human traffickers. For example, law enforcement will utilize computer data collection, decryption and other undercover operations. Often law enforcement will chat online under alias with human traffickers, pretending to be potential customers.

In the USA, the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 ("TVPA") added new criminal provisions which prohibit sex trafficking of children, criminalize attempts to engage in acts of labor and sexual exploitation; mandate that traffickers pay restitution to their victims, and strengthen the penalties for existing trafficking crimes.

## 2.2.2 Understanding Internet providers' liability

French 2004 law states that in principle, internet service providers are not liable for user-generated content posted on their websites.

To comply with their legal obligations, they must:

- 1 Set up a signaling system for harmful content, which must be easily visible and available for every web user;
- 2 Record data that can be useful in a criminal investigation, such as information enabling the identification of content editors; they also have to communicate these information to judiciary when asked;
- 3 Make public the measures they devote to combating cyber human trafficking.

**If they have knowledge of illegal content on their website and don't promptly remove it and inform the public authorities, they can be sentenced up to 1 year imprisonment and a 75,000 euros fine.**

In the USA, the Communications Decency Act of 1996 ("CDA"), 47 U.S.C. § 230, has been interpreted by the courts as providing an **immunity for internet service providers from user-generated content posted on their websites**. There is an exception to this immunity allowing the prosecution of service providers for alleged violations of the federal legislation about obscenity, stalking, and harassment by means of a computer in order to protect children on the internet.

**Pending bills proposing to amend Section 230 of the CDA**

**SESTA "Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act" of 2017 Senate 1693 sponsored by Rob Portman (R-OH) & Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)**

The SESTA proposes to hold internet service providers responsible for "knowingly advertising", "advertising with reckless disregard," or "knowingly profiting" from victims of sex trafficking through ads posted by third parties on their websites.



**FOSTA “Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act” of 2017 House of Representatives 1865 sponsored by Ann Wagner (R-MO)**

Mirroring the SESTA legislation, the last version amended of FOSTA passed the House of Representatives on February 27, 2018.

The Walters Amendment, endorsed by Congresswoman Ann Wagner, reinstates pro-victim sections of the original bill, including provisions from S. 1693, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act.

In its amended version, House’s FOSTA would:

- Clarify that Section 230 of the CDA does not impair or limit victims of sex trafficking from using their private right of action against the websites that sell them;
- Amend the federal sex trafficking statute to define ‘participation in a venture’ in response to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit’s 2016 decision in Jane Doe vs. Backpage.com, LLC;
- Allow State Attorneys General to bring civil actions on behalf of sex trafficking victims.



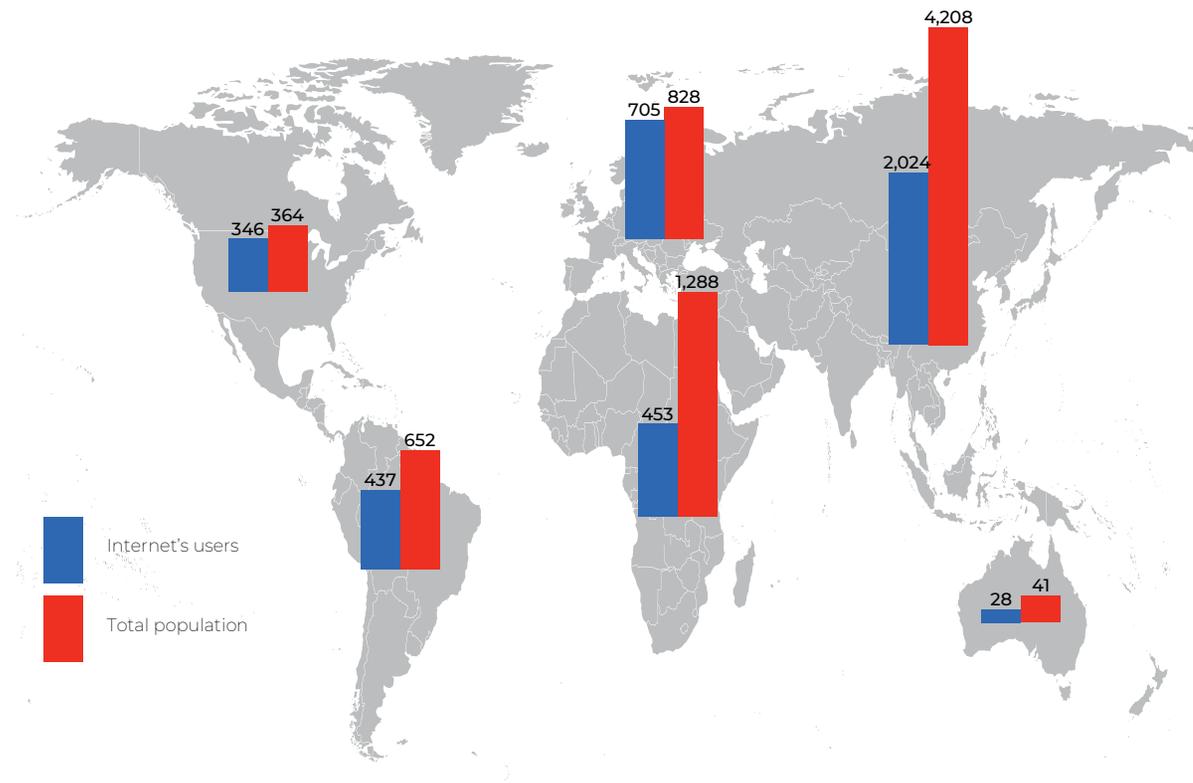
**On some sites, sex buyers can vote, post comments and evaluate the appearance, attitude, and compliance of prostituted persons, subjecting them to an unprecedented degree of public humiliation and exposure and giving their exploiters a new vehicle for abuse and control.**

### 3. Increasing Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Prostitution

It is difficult to obtain reliable figures on the profits generated by commercial sexual exploitation. However, by crosschecking information and sources, it is possible to establish ranges for quantifying the phenomenon. According to ILO, global profits from human trafficking are **estimated between \$75 and \$150 billion, from which 60% (\$90 billion) are from sexual exploitation.**

On the other hand, data from Havocscope, an organization that provides information and threat intelligence on the global black market, global prostitution revenue could be reasonably estimated at **around \$300 billion.**

Over the past two decades, Internet use has grown at a rapid rate. According to Internet Usage and World Population Statistics, since the year 2000, **global internet users have grown by 1,052%.**



Comparative analysis of Internet's penetration (figures in millions)

Source : internetworldstats.com, December 2017



Just 30 years ago there was no documentation of sex trafficking having occurred over an online platform. **Today, it can be estimated that over half of sex trafficking occurrences take place on the internet**

According to Thorn, an international anti-human trafficking organization that works to address the sexual exploitation of children, around two thirds of child trafficking survivors in the USA had been sexually exploited online. **The National Center on Missing and Exploited Children reports that online child sex trafficking increased by more than 800% from 2010 to 2015.**

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## STAT HIGHLIGHTS

# 78%

of the commercial sexual exploitation of children cases involved used some form of ICT.

The advancement of cyberspace has completely transformed the face of sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution. Not only is online sexual exploitation commonplace but traffickers are now able to easily recruit sex buyers for street prostituted persons through use of online platforms.

Traffickers and sex buyers enjoy the anonymity that the Internet provides as well as the lack of strict legal parameters. For example, advertising through online platforms is extremely inexpensive and involves very little risk for traffickers because it is hard for law enforcement to trace the origin of the posting. For sex traffickers, the risk is limited while the potential profit is huge.

ICT is increasingly prevalent in trafficking cases which involve the sexual exploitation of children. In one study done by Mary G. Leary, Professor of Law at The Catholic University of America, researchers examined all cases of human trafficking since the passing of the **Trafficking Victims Protection Act** in order to analyze how ICT has been utilized by criminals.

The study yielded **3,000 cases of human trafficking of which 715 cases of the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) were identified.**

Researchers found that **78 percent of the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) cases involved used some form of ICT.** The study found that ICT was used in all phases of CSEC including recruitment, the daily control of the victims, the search for buyers, the money exchange between traffickers and buyers, the facilitation of building the capacity of the underground trafficking network and protection from the police.

In this section, several uses of ICT by traffickers will be covered.

### 3.1 Recruiting the victims

The Internet is an effective platform for entering into contact with strangers and has been widely appropriated by traffickers to reach potential victims. The Internet's assurance of relative anonymity, its brief exchanges and its global character have encouraged procurers and criminal networks to use online platforms to advance their illegal activities.

Research reveals that traffickers use websites such as Craigslist and Backpage.com in order to advertise the victims available for sexual exploitation. This method is preferred by traffickers as the fastest way to sell women and children to the broadest market possible. In second place is the use of social media such as Facebook in order to connect with potential buyers.

While social media networks allow for free interaction between users, ensuring the ability to cultivate new and positive connections, they can also be harnessed by traffickers as a tool for abuse. Today, individuals, especially young people and children,

often experience a false sense of security while using social media and may allow complete strangers into their private lives online. In this free space, one meets not only friends, but also individuals in organized networks searching for vulnerable targets – the most desired being girls and young women.

Traffickers and other exploiters use of social media to “groom” vulnerable girls into sexual exploitation is extremely commonplace. Grooming is defined as the « process of gradually befriending, sharing, encouraging and/or tricking the child into a sexual type of exchange or relationship ». Research shows that grooming occurs much faster in the online context than in real life. Children today live fairly exposed lives through social media and blogs. As a result, children are very comfortable in online space and tend to give up information more freely than they would if they were to meet a stranger face to face. Since ICT is now cheaper than ever, children from all socio-economic backgrounds own mobile phones or smart devices with connection to the Internet. Consequently, through these online



### #1 Recruiting the victims

Social media networks facilitate interactions especially with young people and give them a false sense of security

### #2 Tracking the victims

Use of camera phones, computers, geolocation app in order to facilitate control, to blackmail victims and to exert pressure



### #3 Transporting the victims

ICT facilitates easy and cheap interconnections among criminal networks



### #4 Recruiting sex buyers

Trafficking networks locate their servers in a “cyber paradise” where there are no laws prohibiting their criminal activities



### #5 Facilitating communication

Traffickers use communication technologies to communicate freely wherever they are located. ICT facilitates their ability to connect with other networks to become international



### #6 Facilitating invisible payments

Development of digital currencies has facilitated the setting up of anonymous and near-zero cost transactions



platforms, traffickers and other exploiters have constant 24/7 access to children from all over the world. Any child, no matter her or his race, nationality or socio-economic background can become a victim of online exploitation.

It is also quite common to encounter fake job advertisements on the internet, with high remuneration offered. These ads help traffickers to easily identify vulnerable youth with no jobs and high need for money.

Social media networks have increased the frequency of this phenomenon. They are the perfect platforms to seek out future victims by making them feel at ease and by fostering their trust over time.

## 3.2 Threatening & tracking the victims

ICT is also used as a means of maintaining control over victims. Traffickers work to humiliate and break the will of victims so that there is no possibility for escape and victims must comply with all instructions.

Research has found that traffickers often use camera phones to create digital

images of victims engaging in sexual activities. Researchers believe that these images serve a double purpose. Traffickers can share these images as advertisements, further commodifying the victims. Traffickers can also use the images as collateral over the exploited individuals, blackmailing them with threats of showing the humiliating images to family and friends in order to maintain control.

Another form of control exerted through exploiters is using cyber technology to monitor their victims' whereabouts. Many cell phones now have the power of geolocalization, which traffickers use to ensure that they know the exact location of their victims at all times.

In addition, individuals tend to share, often unconsciously, a lot of personal information on the Internet, posting a tweet or a Facebook post, uploading a picture to Instagram, hotel reservations or comments on TripAdvisor, plane/bus tickets, and so forth.

This information can be used by traffickers to connect with new victims or track down former ones. It is therefore essential to educate young people so that they avoid the dissemination of such data in the public sphere.

### 3.3 Transporting the victims

Using advanced criminal networks, traffickers transport victims swiftly through international and local terrain. The use of ICT (i.e., cell phones, online platforms and social media) by criminal groups provides logistical support to one another, enabling them to coordinate and building relationships with other criminals in the region. In particular, traffickers use encrypted messages on WhatsApp or Telegram as they know they are difficult for law enforcement to access. The advancement of ICT has resulted in international human trafficking networks that are more interconnected and pervasive than ever before.



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## HIGHLIGHTS

# 75%

of those who entered the life in 2004 or later were advertised online.

### 3.4 Recruiting sex buyers

It appears that the growth of Internet trafficking has resulted in an increase in new sex buyers or “johns,” especially those reluctant to engage in street or brothel prostitution. The use of pseudonyms, mobile phones and SMS messages, ensure the anonymity of customers, giving them a sense of security and enabling them to set up sex buying appointments from the safety of their own homes.

Moreover, potential sex buyers may have the illusion that they are approaching an independent and fully consenting professional, when the reality is quite different.

The rise of the Internet has also led to lower costs for trafficking networks. Criminals now can advertise supply through the use of online platforms without having to incur significant expenses. Many trafficking networks take advantage of the benefits that come from operating in a “cyber paradise” without laws that prohibit trafficking, promoting and patronizing prostitution.

**According to Thorn, research on child sexual exploitation demonstrates that 38% of children who entered prostitution prior to 2004 were advertised online while 75% of those who entered prostitution in 2004 or later were advertised online. Online advertising is increasing while street solicitation is decreasing.**

The existence of sites solely geared toward the buying and selling of victims is increasingly commonplace on the dark web. On some, sex buyers can vote, post comments and evaluate the appearance, attitude, and compliance of prostituted persons, subjecting them to an unprecedented degree of public humiliation and exposure and giving their exploiters a new vehicle for abuse and control.

### **3.5 Facilitating communication among traffickers**

Like everyone else, traffickers use communication technologies to exchange information easily from wherever they are located. ICT also facilitates their ability to connect with networks in other regions and, therefore, to expand into international networks.

### **3.6 Facilitating invisible payments between stakeholders**

Bitcoin's digital currency is the world's first decentralized payment system. It allows for individuals to engage in financial transactions without going through any institutional financial intermediary. Digital currencies, such as Bitcoin, can easily facilitate discreet payments between clients and traffickers. This currency can also be used among traffickers and as a bribe for third parties who facilitate operations such as transport. Payments are outside of any governmental scope, which makes it harder for law enforcement to obtain evidence in prosecution cases.

### **3.7 Paving the way for the emergence of new forms of sexual exploitation**

The Internet also facilitates the emergence of new forms of trafficking and exploitation of prostitution like those described below.

#### **3.7.1 Sex Tours**

Sex tourism involving men from the global North and West traveling to countries in the global South and East to sexually exploit vulnerable women and children has been prevalent on the internet for decades. Since the early 2000s, a new variation of Internet-facilitated sex tourism has become increasingly prevalent: the sex tour or «city tour.» These tours, which last anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks, involve prostituted persons being transported to sex buyers, who choose their victims from a catalogue and then arrange to meet them in a predetermined place at a predetermined time, often during business trips.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

# 200,000

« camgirls »  
worldwide

Internet sites advertise these young women's measurements and services, along with their photographs. Customers only need to look at the list of prostituted persons who are staying in their region and then can easily "place an order" by SMS. These ads are managed entirely by procurers who organize trips, book tickets, and take care of the appointments. Since many of these traffickers resemble hospitality professionals, this form of sexual exploitation is often difficult for law enforcement to detect.

### 3.7.2 Sexual exploitation via webcam

Trafficking and prostitution entrepreneurs may induce girls and young women in desperate financial circumstances to offer pornographic performances in front of webcams for money. Buyers watch an initial marketing video on the victim's profile, where they get a glimpse of her performance and then pay per minute rates to access a «private session» with her. During the private session, they communicate with the girls through online chat and to make specific requests. While some so-called "camgirls" are independent many are

supported by specialized studios that market the girls and provide them with English classes and training to increase their potential to generate income.

**In 2016, it was estimated that there were 200,000 "camgirls" worldwide. Romania is the first country in the world to engage in this activity, with approximately 40,000 girls and an estimated annual profit of between 2 and 3 billion Euros.** The activity, contactless, is legal, and camgirls fall into the category of online artists. However, the line between camgirls and prostitution is very thin. It is often the case that sex buyers traveling to the city of the "models" propose to meet them in person, in order to have paid sex.

Defenders of webcam exploitation claim that sexual performances in front of a camera is not prostitution because it doesn't involve physical contact. Victims advocates report, however, that webcam prostitution can cause protracted trauma, including anxiety, depression, and dissociation, and that the psychological impact of cybersex can be as damaging to victims as that of physical abuse.

### 3.7.3 Dating sites “innovations”

The marketing of «sugar daddies» «sugar babies» and «sugar dating» originated in the United States but quickly became a global phenomenon. Like “Seeking Arrangement”, created by a Singapore-based entrepreneur in 2012, dating sites connect affluent older men with young women, frequently college students, often in debt and in need of income. While seemingly benign, «sugar dating» moves young women into prostitution, encouraging them to exchange sexual favors for gifts and cash. A number of young women have experienced sexual assault when they resisted sexual demands by their «sugar daddy.»

A related phenomenon is dating sites aimed at young women who wish to travel but do not have the means to do so. They can then rely on seemingly generous «donors» who, in exchange, will offer the ability to travel with them. The site never states that it is about transactional sex but the incomes of the men, who are interested in finding others to travel with, are prominently displayed on the site. The «attractive travelers» who register on the site will be chosen by the desires of the «generous travelers». Thus, like «sugar dating» sponsored traveling moves economically vulnerable young people, usually

women, into situations of commercial sexual exploitation and too often, when they have been lured away from support systems, overt sexual abuse.

### 3.7.4 Escorting

Escorting is conducted principally by affluent, older men, often at social gatherings. The escort, usually a younger woman, groomed and made up to appear to belong to a high social status.

Generally, escorts contact their customers via the Internet and have to pay a registration fee to be featured on a website. A significant share of their earnings is taken and those who want to unsubscribe often face threats and physical violence.

Even though ICT can't be directly blamed for the explosion of sex trafficking and the exploitation of prostitution, ICT has clearly increased the numbers and profits of human traffickers and their confederates, making it easier for them to communicate, to find, trap, transport and sell their victims, to conceal their financial transactions, and even to develop new forms of commercial sexual exploitation. But ICT is only what we, as a society, decide to do with it, and it has also widely been used to help combat human trafficking.

“

If people don't trust the technology that you're asking them to interact with, then you won't get reliable information. Likewise if you collect information from them and they don't see change, then you lose their trust.

- Deloitte Consultant

## 4. Supporting the Fight Against Sex Trafficking

Today, trafficking humans for sexual exploitation is one of the best investments in terms of risk/benefits. Although it is difficult to imagine totally eradicating this phenomenon, it is possible to drastically increase the risks associated with this activity in order to make it a less lucrative industry and thereby to decrease its incidence.

Several technologies are already being used to effectively disrupt the traffickers' business. For example, ICT helps to develop preventative actions, locate and rescue victims, monitor illicit activity, collect and analyze data to prosecute traffickers and their confederates, and facilitate communication among all anti-trafficking actors internationally and from various sectors.

More high-tech companies have come to believe that they have an important role to play in driving deeper research and innovation to employ ICT in effectively combating the human trafficking trade.

### 4.1 Improving prevention to clients and public opinion

The Internet has a role in facilitating communication. We have seen ICT used to help traffickers do their business, but these same tools can be used to facilitate detection and prevention and to influence public opinion.

Volunteers from **Microsoft**, for example, created an online sex chat box which initiates fake discussions with potential sex buyers and sends alert messages such as “Buying sex from anyone is illegal and can cause serious long term harm to the victim, as well as further the cycle of human trafficking”. The warning can vary depending on the conversation, if, for example, a potential buyer expresses an interest in someone underage.



### #1 Improving prevention

Fake chat box to identify sex buyers, flagging tools to slow down diffusion of sexual images, report abuse buttons, online petitions, videos prevention tools

### #2 Identifying victims and connecting them to resources

Free hotlines to support victims, apps to warn relatives when they feel threatened, features in «Search»



### #3 Expanding tools to locate evidence

Tools tracking specific types of payment, tools developed by High Tech companies for that specific purpose

### #4 Leveraging Big Data

These tools can be of great help to store, organize and analyze information left by traffickers to help the work of those combating sex trafficking



### #5 Allowing citizen to participate in the fight against criminality

Platforms to report abusive content to authorities

### #6 Utilizing Geo Mapping

Geo mapping systems are used to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial geographic data. these types of systems could be used to represent and share informations



**Google** and other high-tech companies have also developed a zero-tolerance policy to advertising for any adult sexual services (escort services, prostitution, and child trafficking). They have developed tools designed to target users who communicate about illegal content. These tools include community flagging functions and “Report Abuse” buttons integrated into different online platforms.

ICT gives communities social empowerment. Through online petitions, online training courses, crowdfunding campaigns, education videos and games, everybody has the opportunity to become involved in preventing the development of sex trafficking.

## 4.2 Identifying victims and connecting them with resources

Different tools have been developed to enable law enforcement and service providers to reach victims or potential victims of sex trafficking, providing them with easy access to resources that could protect and support them.

- **The National Human Trafficking Resource Center by Polaris** is a free hotline which assists victims and community members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. It is available in over 200 languages and accessible by sms & via email. Its mission is “to connect human trafficking victims and survivors to critical support and services to get help and stay safe, and to equip the anti-trafficking community with the tools to effectively combat all forms of human trafficking”

- **Microsoft Guardian App** is a smart phone mobile application which enables users to alert friends and families when they feel threatened. It uses a real-time tracking system and allows two ways communication between potential victims, their family and law enforcement.

- **Thorn** also worked with **Twilio** to create a shortcode that victims of sexual exploitation, as well as witnesses, can text to seek help discreetly.

- **Google** has also developed a feature in “Search” which connects victims of human trafficking with organizations that can help them.

- Another service called **Victim Reachout** is part of the **Intercept Project** and was developed by Volunteers from **Microsoft** and **Seattle Against Slavery**. It automatically grabs victims’ phone numbers from online sex ads, and sends messages to them, offering them assistance and support. The replies are redirected to trained persons.

It should be noted that several of these tools have been duplicated by companies and nonprofit organizations. Better coordination of these types of projects is needed.

Moreover, to ensure effectiveness, it is essential that victims are aware of the existence of these innovations which can potentially support them.

Finally, the confidence of victims in these support tools is essential. In the words of a passionate consultant from Deloitte, who is involved in these issues, « If [people] don’t trust the technology that you’re asking them to interact with, then you won’t get reliable information. Likewise, if you collect information from them and they don’t see change, then you lose their trust.»



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## HIGHLIGHTS

Volumes of data are growing at a rate of

**40%**

per year and will increase 50 times by 2020.

### 4.3 Expanding tools to identify and locate evidence to prosecute traffickers

Finding corroborating evidence is a common challenge in prosecuting sex traffickers. The volatility of exchanges due to ICT tends to make it very hard to prove that trafficking has occurred. However, some companies have invested in the development of tools to support finding evidence with the goal of being able to facilitate justice.

- Banks like **Western Union** joined the Blue Campaign and attested that they can identify specific types of transactions and specific times of transactions to identify patterns that lead them to sex traffickers and sex buyers.
- **Microsoft Computer Online Forensic Evidence Extractor (COFEE)** aids investigations by finding digital evidence from any computer running a Windows operating system. This tool can be installed on a simple USB flash drive and is easy to use by investigators who take a quick training session.

### 4.4 Leveraging big data

Like everyone else, traffickers leave digital footprints of their online activities. **Volumes of data are growing at a rate of 40% per year and will increase 50 times by 2020.** In the last decade, many searchers and workers from high tech industries focused on creating and refining powerful data analysis tools. These tools can be of great help to store, organize and analyze information left by traffickers to help the work of those combating sex trafficking.

In compliance with national legislation and, in particular, legislation on the protection of personal data it should be possible to look at data regarding immigration, finance, location and social media; such data collection and analysis could then aid in disrupting criminal networks involved in sex trafficking and prostitution. It could also be used in helping to identify and support victims, as well as in prevention messages to clients.

According to **Trace report**, data collection and analysis could aid in the following ways:

- “- Collecting evidence of online child exploitation gathered by multiple law enforcement agencies
- Organizing and storing the information safely and securely
- Searching the data base for information
- Securely sharing the information with other agencies, across jurisdictions
- Analyzing the information and providing pertinent matches
- Adhering to global software industry standards”

High Tech companies have already started to develop tools aligned with above objectives.

- **Spotlight** is a web application which aims to support trafficking investigations by going through thousands of classifieds and forum posts, sorting information and generating profiles.

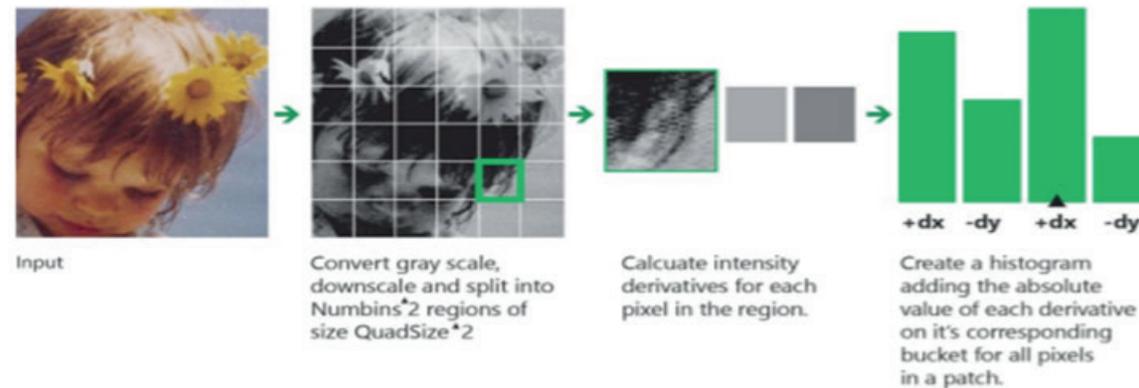
Spotlight was founded after Thorn discovered that over 60% of trafficked children had been sold online. **Thorn, Google** and the **Hover Foundation** have been jointly involved on this project. According to the Spotlight website, which is used by law enforcement in all 50 states, there have been over 7,000 victims and 2,000 traffickers identified in the past 12 months. The data also reveals that officers using Spotlight in daily basis save up to 60% of their time in their process.

- **Microsoft Photo DNA** automatically detects and reports the distribution of child exploitation images. It creates unique fingerprint-like signatures of images which help to quickly identify and rescue the victims of sexual abuse.

Thanks to this technology, millions of illegal images have been reported to the **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)**. The tool has been donated to Interpol for its database.

## PhotoDNA: How it works

### The technology



### The NCMEC Program



Efficient collaboration between law enforcement and High-Tech companies on data analysis could definitely aid in the fight against sex trafficking. However, it should be noted that it is necessary that the tools also consider the “dark web”. In addition, the protection of confidentiality and privacy should be intimately related with any development in this area.

#### 4.5 Allowing citizens to participate in the fight against criminality

Tools have also been developed to allow the participation of citizens when they encounter abusive or illicit contents.

In France, the governmental platform **PHAROS** allows citizens to report illegal acts on the Internet to the authorities. The objective is to prevent their dissemination and then improve access to information for police officers and agencies involved in the fight against ICT-related crime.

The platform **Point de Contact** serves the same purpose of allowing Internet users to report potential

abusive content. It was set up through cooperation between Internet Service Providers, hosting providers, search engines and web 2.0 platforms.

#### 4.6 Utilizing Geo Mapping

Geo mapping systems are used to capture, store, manipulate, analyze and manage present spatial geographic data. In the context of sex trafficking, these types of systems could be used to represent and share stories and information easily. In the longer term, this technology could be combined with other types of data on issues of sexual exploitation to better understand the situation.

We have seen that several types of technologies have already been developed to improve law enforcement efficiency, identify and support victims, collect and analyze information on this opaque business, discourage criminals by increasing their risk and raise awareness on sex trafficking issues. It is key to remember that constant advancement and improvement of these solutions is necessary.

“

The Internet has made it easier for children to be bought and sold online – using some of the same technology and websites that people use to sell their bike, find a roommate or look for a local garage sale.”

- Thorn

# 5. Elaborating Recommendations around Several Axes

In order to increase the risks and decrease the benefits of online sexual exploitation for traffickers and sex buyers, the following recommendations are presented around several different axes.

For each of these axes, three main areas of action could be leveraged, known as “the 3P’s”: protection, prosecution and prevention. Three main goals appear from these objectives: to protect and support victims, to prosecute and punish exploiters and to educate and raise public awareness.

## #1 Developing Cooperation

Effective action in this fight is possible only through strong collaborations:

- Bilateral & International
- Private & public
- Including NGOs
- Inter sectors & inter industries
- Between justice and legislation

The shared concern to protect cyberspace from the unacceptable use of online platforms by traffickers must strengthen

all stakeholders’ willingness to work together on the prevention of these threats. The goal of such collaboration would be to set up channels of communication between people who know and trust each other, and to exchange competences, information and best practices at all levels. In particular, strong collaborations between law enforcement and legislators from various countries would definitely boost the efficiency of the fight.

## #2 Investing in Capacity Building

Criminals in sex trafficking are very efficient in constantly changing their modes of operations and finding new methods to get around their opponent’s strategies. Their agility means that those trying to reduce this criminal act must develop new solutions fairly quickly. It is therefore essential that the actors involved in the reduction of this phenomenon are supported by a solid foundation rooted in capacity building.

### #3 Developing Sensitization Actions to Various Actors

The explosion of online sex trafficking partly reflects the lack of public awareness on certain topics. This issue won't evolve without intentional sensitization actions directed at:

- Potential victims
- Potential sex buyers
- Public opinion
- Use of private data online

### #4 Fostering Corporate Engagement

“In 2016, 64% of CEOs are increasing investment in Corporate Social Responsibility because they care about building trust with consumers, partners, governments, and their employees.”

There are various actions that a company wishing to improve its response to reduce online sex trafficking can take.



## **#5 Strengthening Support and Protection of Victims**

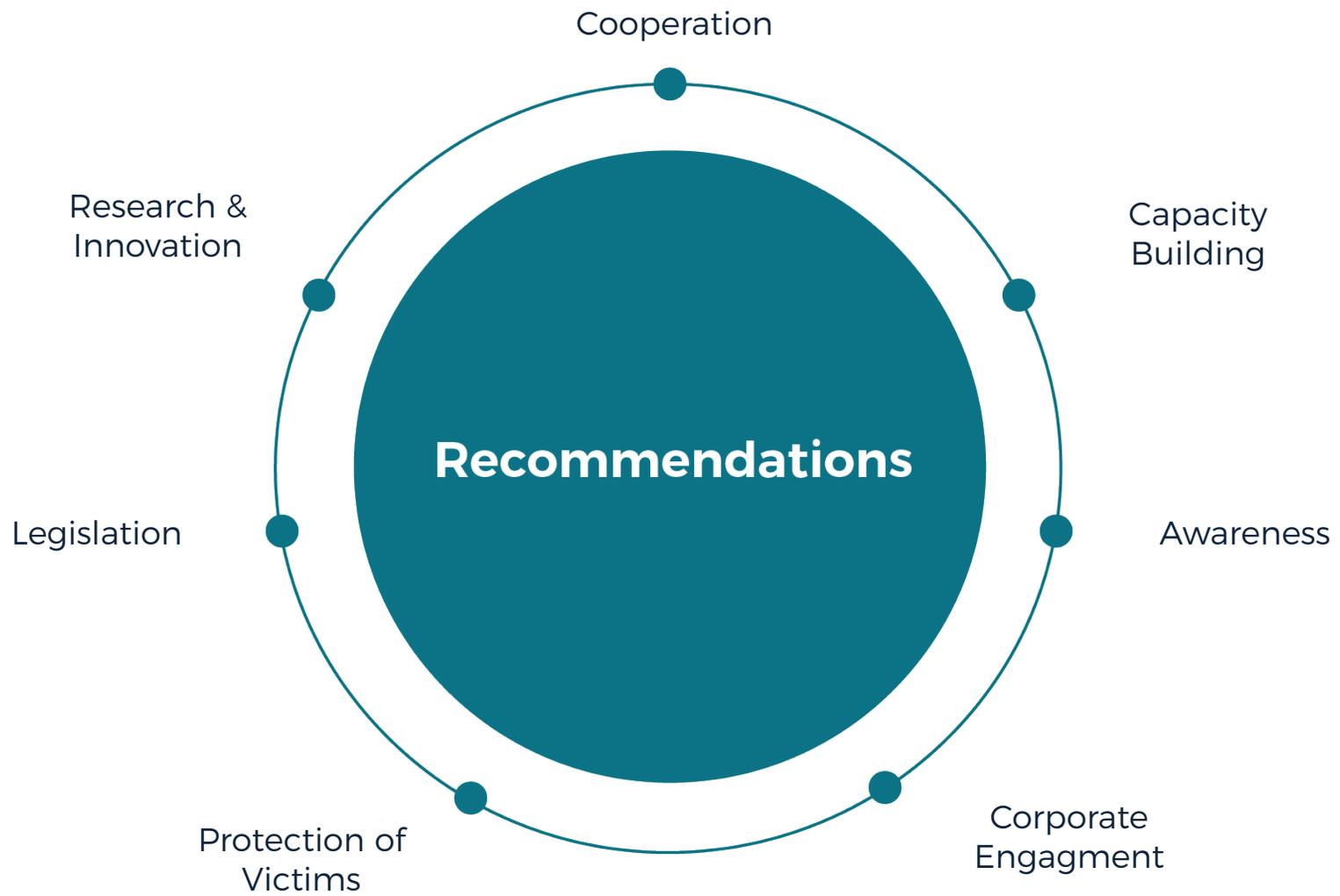
It is crucial to perpetuate the work of supporting and protecting these people before, during and after their exploitation.

## **#6 Legislating**

Today, the lack of effective legislation is largely responsible for the alarming explosion of the phenomenon of cyber-sex exploitation. The timing is unfortunately off, with legislation constantly lagging behind network advances and technological innovations. In a significantly challenging legal and judicial context, it is necessary to promote full implementation of the existing international framework and take normative initiatives to try to better address new realities of exploitation.

## **#7 Creating a Favorable Climate for Research & Innovation**

Future studies on the reality of the causes and effects of these phenomena must be conducted so that we can constantly refine our perception of challenge.



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