The Seventh EU Anti-Trafficking Day
Links between the Internet and Trafficking in Human Beings

18 October 2013
Parliament building
Vilnius, Lithuania

Lithuanian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union 2013

"Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings Online"
Keynote Address
Donna M. Hughes, University of Rhode Island

Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings Online

Donna M. Hughes, Professor, University of Rhode Island

Seventh EU Anti-Trafficking Day, Vilnius, Lithuania, October 18, 2013
"Exploring the Links between the Internet and Trafficking in Human Beings:
Cyberspace for Prevention, not Recruitment"

Introduction

We are meeting today to discuss how to prevent traffickers from using the Internet and other digital technologies to engage in the trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation and forced labor.

We should not be surprised to find ourselves here. Criminals have always adopted new technologies, particularly new forms of communication, to assist them in carrying out their crimes. It has been left to the law-biding citizens and seekers of justice to devise new ways to detect and stop criminals from harming people and society as a whole.

Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union

Although the Internet and other digital technologies are used to carry out human trafficking, the underlying crime of trafficking remains the same—a perpetrator tricks, coerces, exploits the vulnerability or the age of a victim—to compel them to work, provide services or engage in commercial sex acts. The crime is a serious violation of the law that the European Union has committed itself to eradicating.

A collection of data on trafficking victims in member states of the European Union from 2008 to 2010 reported 23,632 identified or presumed victims of human trafficking in the reporting member states. Of this group, 80 percent were female and 20 percent were male. Children were 15 percent of the total. Over 60 percent of victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 25 percent were trafficked for forced labor. The remaining 15 percent were trafficked for begging, organ removal or criminal activity. Of serious concern, is the discovery that over that three year period, the number of victims increased by 18 percent. Of the victims of sexual exploitation, 96 percent of them are women and girls, which means that this is a very serious issue of gender inequality. [1]

---

[1] Eurostat, European Commission, "Trafficking in Human Beings," Eurostat Methodologies and Working Papers, 2013.

According to the EU Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment, the levels of intra-EU trafficking (internal trafficking) are increasing due to freedom of movement throughout the EU. Organized crime groups involved in human trafficking are flexible and quickly change their tactics following changes in laws and law enforcement investigations.

The number of cross-border investigations against organized crime groups remains low, so trafficking in human beings remains a low risk and high profit criminal activity.[2] The number of convictions compared to the number of victims is low, which means that traffickers are seldom brought to justice. Traffickers do not see a deterrent to their crimes and assume they can continue violating the rights of people with comparatively little risk.

Use of Communications Technologies for Human Trafficking

Since the commercial use of the Internet began, it has been used to promote sexual exploitation. It has been used to transmit images of child sexual abuse (previously called child pornography). From the beginning the Internet was used for exchanging pornographic images and quickly became the main venue for viewing and purchasing pornography, which has a varied legal history and status over the past 20 to 30 years. The Internet was used to advertise sex tours, and in the early years, many of them openly advertised the availability of children for sexual exploitation. And since the beginning, the Internet has been used to advertise numerous locations and services for commercial sex acts. [3]

As a venue for promoting sexual exploitation, the Internet had a good five years head start before laws started to catch up, and an even longer time to operate before law enforcement got the training they needed to investigate crimes connected to the Internet.

Since those early 1990s, many laws have been passed or updated to criminalize crimes of sexual exploitation related to the digital technologies. Laws against child sexual abuse images are the strongest. And now, almost every country has a law against human trafficking for forced labor and sexual exploitation, and researchers are documenting how digital technologies are used by traffickers.

For many years, the Internet was a site for advertising commercial venues to sex buyers. As the type of forums grew, the Internet became a place for exploiters to contact and recruit women. Traffickers could place false advertisements on employment sites. Traffickers could offer young

---

[2] Europol, "EU Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment," 2013.
[3] Council of Europe document EG-S-NT (2002) 9, "Group of Specialists on the Impact of the Use of New Information Technologies on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation," Strasbourg, France, 17 February 2003

women careers as models. Women who signed-up at marriage agencies could be deceived. And traffickers posing as boyfriends could contact and groom women in discussion forums. [4]

Although anti-human trafficking laws are a decade old, as the EU statistics show, trafficking is a continuing, even growing, crime. And the Internet is still playing a major role. New information and communication technologies have grown and human traffickers continue to quickly adopt them. There are now 2 billion Internet users worldwide.[5] According to the World Bank, 75% of the world's population now has a mobile phone, and access is expanding into rural areas.[6]

What we call "online" no longer means just the Internet. As new communication technologies continue to become available, they go beyond the Internet to include wireless devices, such as smart phones, which are small computers, with access to the Internet. There is an ongoing "mobile revolution." These sophisticated, hand-held digital devices increase the capacity of criminals to engage in all aspects of human trafficking.

Use of Digital Technologies for Trafficking for Forced Labor

Traffickers appear to use digital technologies more for sexual exploitation than for forced labor. We have many documented cases of this. Traffickers appear to be less likely to use digital technologies for trafficking people for forced labor. Research on the use of digital technology for forced labor in the U.S. found that traffickers did not rely on technology other than pay-as-you-go cell phones. Victims of forced labor were recruited by word of mouth from impoverished villages. Once the victims were trafficked, they had little to no access to technology.

These findings are from a limited number of cases. It may be that traffickers do not use the Internet or other digital technologies to recruit or maintain control of victims of work in agriculture, construction, or manufacturing. It is more likely that traffickers contact each other and employers with digital technology. The researchers concluded that how forced labor traffickers operate makes it harder to track them through digital technology. [7]

In cases of trafficking of domestic workers, victims may be recruited through employment agencies or exploiters make private arrangements with contacts they know. The situation probably depends widely on the level of available technology in the sending region. It seems

---

[4] Trafficking in human beings: Internet recruitment. Misuse of the Internet for the Recruitment of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, Sykiotou, AP (Council of Europe), 2007

[5] International Telecommunications Union, *The World in 2010, ICT Facts and Figures*, 2010.

[6] The World Bank. "Mobile Phone Access Reaches Three Quarters of the Planet's Population," July 17, 2012. Accessed at: http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2012/07/17/mobile-phone-access-reaches-three-quarters-planets-population.

[7] Latonero, Mark. "Human Trafficking Online: The Role of Social Networking Sites and Online Classifieds," Center on Communication Leadership and Policy, University of Southern California, September, 2011, p. 17.

likely that some victims of domestic servitude have responded to advertisements online. One of the ways that exploiters of domestic servants maintain control is to prevent the victims from having contact with others and monitoring the victim's communications. This situation offers fewer opportunities for the use of technologies.

Because all existing data indicate that traffickers use digital technologies more for sexual exploitation that for forced labor, I will focus mainly on sexual exploitation.

Use of Digital Technologies for Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation

Another aspect of the increased availability and use of mobile, digital devices is that all of the concerned parties can be in motion, with real-time communication among all of them. Traffickers can engage in real-time communication, such as voice messages and texting, with the victim. Traffickers can pose as the woman in the advertisement and set up an appointment with a sex buyer. For online "adult entertainment" advertising sites, the ads can be changed and updated throughout the time that sex buyers are most likely to be actively looking for appointments. Sex buyers can search for and make arrangements for sex acts from almost anywhere.

The following activities can be carried out online:

- Recruitment of victims with false employment advertisements
- Contacting and grooming victims in online forums or dating sites
- Capturing images and videos of victims that will be used in advertisements or threaten the victims with exposure to their families
- Uploading text advertisements, images and videos to brothels, entertainment businesses or to prostitution businesses that operate only from the Internet, such escort services and online advertisement sites for prostitution
- Arranging meetings between sex buyers and victims
- Communicating with victims to monitor their activities, give them orders, threaten them, and control them
- Business arrangements can be made with criminal colleagues or legitimate businesses
- Money can be transferred

Previously, these activities could be done over the Internet with a laptop or a desktop computer, but now, they can be carried out with a mobile, wireless device.

There are many documented cases of human traffickers using social networking sites, such as Facebook, and online advertisement sites, such as Craigslist, and micro-blogging services, such

as Twitter. Many of them are mainstream sites commonly used by adults and children. Online, traffickers commit serious crimes like human trafficking right in front of the general public.

Investigation and Prosecution: Digital Forensics

Law enforcement investigations of human trafficking are able to investigate and collect evidence located on computers, the Internet and on digital devices. There is a long history of digital forensics in the investigation of child sexual abuse images (child pornography).

The widespread use of mobile, digital devices offers new challenges, but also new important sources of evidence of the crime of human trafficking. Data from mobile phones and mobile networks can reveal information and evidence to identify victims and perpetrators, and to track and prosecute perpetrators.[8] Mobile devices held by both the perpetrators and the victims hold important evidence. The data on digital devices leaves a digital trail for law enforcement to follow and use for evidence in a case against the trafficker. For example, data unique to mobile devices may include GPS (global positioning system) information, which can provide location data for both victims and perpetrators.[9]

Records of evidence of a human trafficking crime that can be found on digital devices, stored on memory cards or external devices, and in cloud storage include:

- Logs of calls made and received
- GPS data on movements of perpetrator and victim
- Voicemail and text messages
- Business arrangements
- Evidence of threats against a victim, abuse, intimidation, or drug use
- Instructions on where to go and acts to perform
- Instructions on what to do with money received
- Images and videos of the victim that are child sexual abuse images or document advertising the victim for prostitution
- Records of advertisements uploaded to escort or "adult entertainment" sites, data on where the trafficker is advertising the services of the victim
- Links between multiple perpetrators and multiple victims
- Evidence of conspiracy and organized crime

---

[8] Latonero, Mark, Jennifer Musto, Zhalch Body, Eve Boyle, Amber Bissell, Joanne Kim, and Kari Gibson, "The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking," USC Annenberg Center on Communication Leadership and Policy, University of Southern California, November 2012, https://technologyandtrafficking.usc.edu/2012-report/
[9] Miller, Christa M., "Mobile Forensics & Human Trafficking," 6 September 2013, http://www.officer.com/article/11145118/mobile-forensics-human-trafficking

Software has been or is being developed to enable law enforcement to easily access and trace digital communications on mobile devices.[10] If an offender can run the whole trafficking operation from mobile, digital devices, then law enforcement should have evidence of the whole operation. Organizations, such as United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), are providing training in forensic techniques, such as tracing criminals online and finding information on a locked computer[11]

Combating Child Sexual Exploitation Online

I want to briefly mention the development of new technologies that are being used to combat child sexual abuse images. In 2009, Microsoft announced the development of PhotoDNA,[12] a technique that calculates the unique characteristics of a digital image and creates a unique identifier, called a "hash value." The technology was donated to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in the U.S., which works with hotlines all over the world.[13] Databases of known child abuse images were scanned and hash identifiers created for each image. This tagging system is now used by large Internet service providers, such as Microsoft, Facebook, Google, and most recently Twitter, to identify and eliminate images of child sexual abuse and to notify law enforcement agencies that an offender is transmitting illegal images. Internet service providers recognize that their services are being used by criminals who commit serious human rights violations. Unlike a decade ago, many of them are more willing to work with police to stop their services from being used for sexual exploitation.

The possibility of deleting sexual abuse images provides a much needed service to the children who were abused during the creation of these images. One of the most painful aspects for survivors who were used in the production of child abuse images is the knowledge that somewhere someone can again view that image. The technique enables the removal of these images from the Internet. We might even imagine that a time will come when very few people will ever see child sexual abuse images, and consequently don't search for more and eventually turn to sexually abusing children or paying to rape trafficking victims.

---

[10] Latonero, Mark. "The Rise of Mobile and the Diffusion of Technology-Facilitated Trafficking," November, 2012, Accessed at: https://technologyandtrafficking.usc.edu/files/2012/11/HumanTrafficking2012_Nov12.pdf

[11] Wescott, Lucy. "Human Trafficking Investigators Play Catchup as Criminals Go Hi-Tech," *The Guardian*, 29 July 2013.

[12]The technique was further developed by Hany Farid, a digital-imaging expert and professor of computer science at Dartmouth College, USA.

[13] Microsoft, "New Technology Fights Child Porn by Tracking its 'PhotoDNA,'" 15 December 2009, http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/news/features/2009/dec09/12-15photodna.aspx

Prevention of Human Trafficking

The best way to reduce the incidence of human trafficking is to take effective measures to prevent it from occurring.

Presently, there is a focus on forced labor in the supply chains of many of the products we use every day. Over the past decade there is increased consumer awareness about labor exploitation, trafficking, and poor working conditions in agriculture, mining and manufacturing industries. Corporations are signing agreements to keep slavery out of their supply chains. There is a role for technology in keeping supply chains free of forced labor.

Awareness raising about human trafficking has been and is an ongoing effort. Technology has been widely adopted to create awareness raising campaigns online. These warnings should be placed on all sites where potential victims are likely to see them and where victims are likely to be contacted, groomed, and recruited. All warnings about human trafficking should include a help-line number. Victims or potential victims should be able to reach out for help or get more information.

We are seeing that awareness raising campaigns do not always stop victims from responding to risky offers. In areas of high recruitment, there may already be a high level of awareness of the risks involved in traveling and accepting offers of work, but the push factors are so strong, people are willing to weigh the risks. The International Organization for Migration's has done a report on the re-trafficking of victims.[14] No one should be able to understand the harm of trafficking more than a victim, yet because of the circumstances at home, such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, victims will again accept risky offers. The people most likely to be re-trafficked are children and women.

Root Causes

I have talked a lot about technology, but we must remember that the crime of human trafficking is first of all a crime against people. The root causes of human trafficking are human, not technological. And there is much we can do to end these crimes with a good analysis of the human causes and applying the political will to makes changes. Since most of the digital technologies are used for sexual exploitation, we should focus on the root causes and to the laws and policies that exist to combat them.

The European Union has adopted a very ambitious anti-trafficking policy and framework for the eradication of human trafficking.[15] [16]

---

[14] Jobe, Alison, "The Causes and Consequences of Re-trafficking: Evidence from the IOM Human Trafficking Database," International Organization for Migration, 2010.
[15] 2011/36/EU, European Union Anti-Trafficking Directive.

One of the elements of this new policy is to address the gender dimension of human trafficking. As I mentioned previously, in the EU, 80 percent of all victims of human trafficking are women and girls, and 96 percent of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls.

Sexual exploitation involves a violation of a different sort than forced labor. Sexual exploitation is more than gendered labor. It is a form of violence against women. Using a victim of trafficking is a serious and sustained violation of bodily integrity of a woman or girl's body, over and over again, causing enormous emotional and physical trauma. The four percent of victims of sexual exploitation who are men and boys are exploited and harmed in the same way.

The right to bodily integrity is a basic human right. When a person is trafficked for sexual exploitation, these violations of fundamental human rights are linked to organized crime. And when the state chooses to passively allow these violations, it creates a serious climate of gender discrimination.

Another element of the new EU policy is crucial for the eradication of human trafficking: criminalizing the buyers who knowingly buy sex from victims of trafficking.

Each member state has its own policy and laws on prostitution, but studies and investigative reports have shown the link between legalization of prostitution and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. [17] Police and justice officials acknowledge the connection between prostitution districts and organized crime, human trafficking, and money laundering.[18] [19]

The European Commission acknowledges that sex industries' demand for women and girls is a root cause of human trafficking.[20] According to the new policy, EU member states have a legal obligation to discourage and reduce the demand for victims.

The sex buyers are not ignorant of their contribution to human trafficking. Recent studies in countries of the EU have found that significant numbers of sex buyers are aware that the

---

[16] European Union Strategy Towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings, 2012-2016.

[17] Cho, Seo-Young and Dreher, Axel and Neumayer, Eric, Does Legalized Prostitution Increase Human Trafficking? (January 16, 2012). World Development, 41 (1), 2013, pp. 67-82. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1986065 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1986065

[18] Meyer, Cordula, Conny Neuman, Fidelius Schmid, Petra Truckendanner, and Steffen Winter, " Unprotected: How legalizing prostitution has failed," Spiegel Online, 30 May 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/human-trafficking-persists-despite-legality-of-prostitution-in-germany-a-902533.html

[19] O'Sullivan, Feargus, "Amsterdam's Latest Quest to Tame Legalized prostitution," *The Atlantic Cities*, 25 March 2013, http://www.theatlanticcities.com/politics/2013/03/amsterdams-latest-quest-tame-legalized-prostitution/5072/

[20] European Commission, "An EU Strategy Towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings," 19 June 2012

woman or girl may be underage or a victim of trafficking. The same studies also found that sex buyers purposefully travel to countries where prostitution is legal. [21] [22]

There is an insightful question that is being asked: Is there any other crime where the user gets involved and is not criminalized?

Instinctively we know why the sex buyers of trafficking victims aren't being held accountable: gender inequality. Because of the continuing gender inequality, men have the privilege to buy sex and victims are surrendered to criminals to meet that demand. The gender of the victim and the sex buyer are the reason that people tolerate this crime and why governments do not pass laws against it.

The member states of the European Union have a range of laws and policies on prostitution. Over the past 15 years, some states have shifted their laws on prostitution. One of the goals of the new laws was to suppress human trafficking. We should now be able to use that goal as a measure of the success of the new law: has the amount of trafficking for sexual exploitation decreased, increased or stayed the same? No country has eliminated trafficking, but countries that aimed to reduce the demand for victims have had greater success in preventing the exploitation of victims. Decreasing the demand for victims attacks the root cause of human trafficking.

There is a disturbing international trend occurring: More agencies and governments are focusing on trafficking for forced labor than trafficking for sexual exploitation. All types of human trafficking are serious crimes and human rights violations. We should not allow trafficking for sexual exploitation to slip off the agenda. I believe it is the gender dimension of sexual exploitation that makes people uncomfortable and creates controversies. But it is not fair to victims to ignore their plight because the work is difficult.

The biggest enabler of a crime is tolerance. The best deterrent is the certainty of punishment. The EU has an ambitious, forward thinking policy on human trafficking. The transposition and enforcement of these laws will make a difference to victims of trafficking. States should make a commitment to identifying more victims and prosecuting every perpetrator. And they should look to technology to assist them in investigating and prosecuting criminals. The evidence collected through technology may help the victims by decreasing the burden on them to testify.

---

[21] Forty-eight percent of London sex buyers who were interviewed said that most women in prostitution are victims of pimps. Farley, Melissa, Julie Bindel and Jacqueline M. Golding, "Men who buy sex: who they buy and what they know," December 2009.
[22] European & International News, "Ireland: One in four sex buyers believe prostitutes trafficked, controlled or underage," 22 February 2013.

Gender equality is considered an important right and goal. States should not allow organized crime groups and human traffickers to profit from inequality and contribute to its persistence. States should be willing—and in fact, they are now required—to criminalize sex buyers who voluntarily engage in the criminal exploitation of victims. By discouraging one gender from exploiting another it raises the standard of equality for all women in the country.

This year, Europol conducted an assessment of serious and organized crime in the E.U. They concluded that trafficking in human beings is a high priority threat and recommended a high level response. [23]

By combating and eradicating the serious crime of human trafficking, states could have the secondary benefit of taking another step to gender equality.

---

[23] Europol, "EU Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment," 2013