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SURF AND SOUND

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Beneficiaries

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02

Smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings

The smuggling of migrants (hereinafter also referred to as ‘people smuggling’) and trafficking in human beings (hereinafter also referred to as ‘human trafficking’ or ‘THB’) have become agenda-topping issues over the past twenty years, since global geopolitical changes have exacerbated conditions conducive to clandestine population flows and the development of transnational illegal enterprises associated with those flows. According to Europol (2016), over 90% of the more than one million undocumented migrants who entered the EU in 2015 used some form of ‘facilitation service’, generally provided by smuggling networks.

The increased awareness of the issue, and the recognition that it presents a major area of focus for the effort to address and suppress transnational organised crime, has resulted in the formation of a new global prohibition regime (Andreas and Nadelmann, 2006; Papanicolaou, 2011), by means of the introduction of two major international instruments (supplementing the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime), namely the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children*, and the *Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air*.

Often combined or confused with each other, trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants are substantially diverse. According to Article 2 of the Trafficking Protocol, trafficking in human beings is ‘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’ (United Nations, 2000). In a nutshell, victims of trafficking are displaced and forced into sexual exploitation, labour, slavery, servitude or other forms of exploitation.

On the other hand, Article 2 of the Protocol against people smuggling states that ‘smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident’. Unlike THB, smuggling always traverses national boundaries and only occasionally the migrants, in the destination country, are sent to work in the drug market, the sex market, as beggars or as black labour.

Although smuggling migrants and trafficking in human beings are not new phenomena (see Morrison, 2002),

over the past decades or so, they have experienced an unprecedented boom due to the development, advancement and proliferation of digital technologies (Di Nicola and Musumeci, 2015; Hughes, 2014; Latonero et al., 2011, 2012; Sarkar, 2015). According to a recent Europol report regarding the trafficking in human beings in the European Union, online interactions and encounters have been observed as facilitating ‘several aspects of human trafficking and exploitation: targeting of potential victims; access to personal data; arrangement of logistics and transportation; recruitment through social media, chat forums and other websites; advertisement of victims; their exploitation and surveillance’ (Europol, 2016a: 12 EUROPOL, 2016b). A group of specialists engaged by the Council of Europe found that ‘the Internet industry and the sex industry are closely interlinked and the scope, volume, and content of the material on the Internet promoting or enacting trafficking in human beings for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation [...] are unprecedented’ (Council of Europe, 2003:107).

The burgeoning dissemination of digital technologies, in particular the Internet, has afforded new, creative opportunities for individual criminals and collectivities of criminals. As such, these groups have been empowered to operate with greater efficiency and anonymity, given that they are able to instantly communicate with potentially large audiences over extensive distances and across geographic boundaries (see Hughes, 2014; Latonero et al., 2011; Mendel and Sharapov, 2014; Sykiotou, 2007). The expeditious dissemination and usage of the Internet and other digital technologies such as smartphones have added a new dimension to the trafficking and smuggling of human beings, creating new ways and means of facilitation, as well as affecting various aspects of trafficking, including the recruitment, control and exploitation of victims (Sarkar, 2015). For instance, it has been underlined how the Internet facilitates the role of traffickers because it ‘can rapidly connect buyers of commercial sex with trafficking victims while simultaneously distancing the perpetrator from the criminal transaction’ (Finklea et al., 2015:2).

Despite this, at present, there is relatively limited scholarly work investigating the role that digital technologies play in the processes of people smuggling and human trafficking or the particular ways in which the Internet has been used to shape the criminal strategies of traffickers and smugglers (see, for example, Di Nicola, Cauduro and Falletta, 2015; Latonero et al., 2011, 2012).



03

Project Surf and Sound

3.1 The project

Project 'www.surfandsound.eu – Improving and sharing knowledge on the Internet's role in the human trafficking process' (hereinafter also referred to as 'Surf and Sound') was coordinated by the eCrime research group of the Department 'Faculty of Law' of the University of Trento (Italy), in cooperation with the Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and the Teesside University (United Kingdom) and with the support of the Romanian Center for European Policies and at the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy. The project was co-financed by the European Commission within the ISEC 2013 'Prevention and Fight against Crime – Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)' programme of the Directorate-General Home Affairs (HOME/2013/ISEC/AG/THB).

Project Surf and Sound refers to priorities 4 and 5 of the targeted 'Call for proposal', which foster the 'prevention of trafficking in human beings, in particular through education programmes and targeted training for officials', requesting 'research into, and development of tools to prevent and address different forms of trafficking in human beings' with a focus 'on the use of internet and social networks for recruitment of all forms of trafficking in human beings'.

In light of the Special meeting of the European Council of 23 April 2015 on the smuggling of migrants, the European Union considers as a priority to 'use EUROPOL to detect and request removal of internet content used by traffickers to attract migrants and refugees, in accordance with national constitutions'. To this aim, project Surf and Sound addressed this need by broadening the aim of the research to the phenomenon of smuggling of migrants.

The project aimed to improve the knowledge on the use of the Internet (including social networks) in the THB and the smuggling process in four key EU member states (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and United Kingdom) and spread such knowledge through workshops for LEAs and NGOs and dissemination activities. Specific objectives were:

1. To explore visible/Dark web to draft a research protocol about the use of the Internet in the THB and smuggling processes by identifying potential at-risk web contents and/or other abuses of the Internet (e.g. use of chats, VOIP) in the THB and smuggling processes;
2. To use the research protocol to collect and organise a significant amount of information from the web;
3. To understand the use of the Internet in the THB and smuggling processes by analysing collected data, in order to: a) draft guidelines to identify potential at-risk web contents and other abuses of the Internet (e.g. use of chats, VOIP) and to raise awareness for them; b) spread the knowledge and guidelines via dissemination activities and workshops for LEAs/NGOs involved in the prevention and fight against THB and smuggling.

3.2 Methodology

A preliminary exploratory analysis of the visible and Deep/Dark web was conducted in the four member states involved in the project. Specifically, online searches were conducted on Google and Torch, on social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), and on web forums by using a list of keywords related to trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants retrieved by Council of Europe reports and Latonero's research (see Table 1). Keywords were translated in the four languages of member states involved in the project as well as in Arabic. Once defined the keywords, a snowball-like search on the web, also using Boolean operators, was carried out. A preliminary analysis of web elements was conducted to identify those keywords leading to web contents potentially related to the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings. Further keywords that, during the period of exploration, resulted to be often related to the concerned phenomena, were later added to the list.

Table 1. Suggested list of keywords for a snowball-like search on the web including the use of Boolean operators

THB			Smuggling of Migrants		
General process	Recruitment and transportation phases	Exploitation phase	General process	Recruitment phase	Transportation and entry into another country phases
Human trafficking	Job offer	Sex	People smuggling	Movement of persons	Smuggler
Trafficking in human beings	Job agency	Sex tourism	Smuggling of migrants	Transfer	Passenger
Trafficking in persons	Travel agency	Prostitute	Migrant smuggling	Transport	Migrant
Sex trafficking	Temp agency	Sex worker	People smuggling	Move	Seasonal
Labour trafficking	Foreign job	Brothel	Illegal migration	Borders	Boat driver
Sex market	Advertising agency	Massage parlour	Recruitment	Financial gain	Pontoon
Labour market	Dating service	Escort	Transport	Money	Lorry
Trafficking process	Matchmaking service	Dancer	Migrant	Asylum seekers	Truck
Recruitment	Dancer	Dancing-girl	Migrant worker	Refugees	Cargo van
Transport	Dancing-girl	Au-pair girl	Asylum seekers	ID	Airplane
Exploitation	Au-pair girl	Model		VISA	Vehicle
Coercion	Student	Wedding		Residence permit	Driver
Fraud	Model	Wife		Fee	Pilot
Trafficker	Waiter	Worker		Payment	Sea
Victim	Bartender	Waiter/bartender		Debt	Land
	Home assistant	Home assistant			Air
	In-home nurse	In-home nurse			Borders
	Caregiver	Caregiver			Transit
	Wedding				ID
	Wife				VISA
	Farmer				Residence permit
	Bricklayer				Fee
					Payment
					Debt

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

The information gathered during the preliminary exploratory phase was then employed to develop a research protocol to fine tune the collection of data on the use of the Internet in human trafficking and people smuggling. More in detail, the research protocol contains:

- working definitions of trafficking in human beings and of smuggling of migrants;
- a list of websites (per typology) and keywords that shall be used to facilitate the search of relevant data on the web;
- suggested methods to search data on the Dark web (e.g. using Tor).

The research protocol was used to investigate the visible and the Dark web in order to collect a significant number of at risk web contents and information on the use of the Internet in in the trafficking in human beings

and smuggling of migrants processes (from websites, forums, social media websites, etc.). More in detail, during research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project, 939 web contents were identified and stored in a database in order to elaborate ad hoc risks indicators.

National-based virtually ethnography¹ was conducted to acquire primary data on the role played by the Internet in the recruitment, transportation/entry into another

¹ As a research method, virtual ethnography extends the ethnographic field and situated observation from the examination of face-to-face researcher-informant interactions (Lenihan and Kelly-Holmes, 2016) and ‘transfers the ethnographic tradition of the researcher as an embodied research instrument to the social spaces of the internet’ (Hine, 2008: 257). In this regard, the virtual ethnographer immerses themselves in a virtual environment, observing and interacting using media relevant to that site for an extended period of time (Turney, 2008).

country phases of the process of migrant smuggling and in the recruitment/transportation and exploitation phases in the process of trafficking in human beings, and in particular: 1. how the Internet facilitates recruitment and communications, guarantees anonymity, and accelerates exchanges between victims/migrants; 2. how the Internet favours the match between demand/supply for the services provided by victims (i.e. for sexual purposed and forced/black labour).

Specifically, the research questions were:

- What are the main types of websites used by traffickers/smugglers to recruit and transport their victims/clients (favouring their entry into another country)?
- What are the main types of websites used by traffickers/smugglers to exploit their victims/clients?
- What are the main modalities used by traffickers/smugglers to recruit and transport their victims/clients (favouring their entry into another country) in the web (or Dark web)?
- What are the main modalities used by traffickers to offer the services provided by their victims in the web (or Dark web)?
- What are the observable common patterns in the traffickers/smugglers behaviours?

With regards to the smuggling of migrants, an active virtual ethnography research was also conducted. Facebook accounts were created in order to observe pages, groups and people that were advertising smuggling services, such as ways and means of transportation and aiding one's entry into another country. During this activity researcher interacted directly with smugglers by using social media chats, web forums, as well as telephone services provided by mobile applications (such as Viber and WhatsApp). Moreover, part of the virtual ethnography was conducted on the Dark web. In addition, the role of the Internet and digital technologies in facilitating THB for labour recruitment and exploitation of victims was examined, by investigating popular online classified and recruitment websites that were advertising jobs and employment in each labour markets of the four member states involved in the project. Furthermore, we captured and attained screenshots of images and text from websites, online classifieds, forums and social networking sites.

For instance, the following types of websites were searched and analysed:

1. Social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram);
2. Marriage agencies websites;
3. Escorts' websites;
4. Dating websites;
5. Job offering websites for activities, such as:
 - a. Home assistance;
 - b. Waitress/bartender;
 - c. Au Pair/Care;
 - d. Modelling/Entertainment (e.g. dancer, hostess);
 - e. Construction/factories/agriculture;
 - f. Educational courses;
 - g. Matrimonial offers;
 - h. Tourism;
 - i. Work in the sex market (the fact that a woman is already a prostitute does not exempt her from being trafficked).
6. Advertising websites (e.g. Kijiji);
7. Travel agency websites;
8. Porn websites and forums;
9. Streaming websites.

Most of the job postings – both for sexual services and cheap labour – were dubious and unclear in content and were thus considered as risky web links. While direct evidence for trafficking could not be obtained from this research process alone, it contributed to the enhanced identification of online sites that potentially facilitate the recruitment and transportation of victims of THB, and serve as effective communication channels between traffickers.

The period of passive observation offered evidence of the fact that both the observed phenomena exploit digital communication channels; however, it brought about the need to develop appropriate tools that can be used to identify online contents related to the observed crimes. Hence, to facilitate the exploration and the collection of information, we developed indicators to identify potentially at-risk web contents and other forms of abuses on the Internet (for instance: chats, VOIP). These same indicators were divided in relation to the crime and the respective phase they referred to.

Table 2. Prospectus of stakeholders interviewed in each member states involved in the project

Stakeholders interviewed	Country			
	Bulgaria	Romania	Italy	The United Kingdom
Traffickers/smugglers	3	4	4	2
Victims of trafficking/migrants/asylum seekers	5	4	5	-
Representatives of LEAs	4	4	2	6
Representatives of NGOs	3	2	4	4
Experts on cyber-crime	-	-	-	2

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

In order to integrate the information gathered from the exploration of the web, 58 semi-structured interviews were also undertaken to accumulate data, which took place with a variety of key actors in the key member states, including non-governmental organisation representatives (NGOs), law enforcement agents (LEAs), smugglers of migrants, traffickers of human beings, and experts on cyber-crime.

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face, by telephone or through Skype/Viber/WhatsApp, with the participants' responses being recorded with a digital voice-recorder. An interview guide was used as the basis for the questions, which was conditional to the particular participant interviewed (see Annex B). During the interview process, however, these interview guides were not followed slavishly.

Table 2 shows the prospectus of stakeholders interviewed in each country involved in the project.

During the interviews, each interviewer followed the definition of THB as per Article 2 of the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims; and definition of smuggling of migrants/asylum seekers as per EU Commission Fact Sheet on Smuggling of Migrants of 13 January 2015 and article 3 of the Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime of 2000.

The interviews focused predominantly on the recruitment and transportation phases, but also paid attention to the exploitation phase of the THB process. With regard to the recruitment, the internal and

the external trafficking are closely connected. The questions were customised according to the type and background of the specific groups of respondents, their experiences and professional capacities. They encompassed topics such as:

- Recruitment methods used in general;
- Transportation methods used in general;
- Methods of advertising victims' services and methods for matching demand and supply;
- The role of the Internet and mobile applications among all methods used;
- Specific Internet and mobile modalities and options used for each phase – recruitment, transportation, advertising, and running THB and SHB 'businesses' in general;
- Possible use of the Dark web.

Finally, a web survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums, was administered in each member states involved in the project (N=995). In specific, information was requested about at-risk websites visited and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on actions related to the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. More in detail, the final version of the online questionnaire was composed by 4 sections (see Annex C):

- Section I – Introduction: this section provided respondents with general information about the project, the aim of the questionnaire, some general instruction on how to fill out the questionnaire, contacts detail to receive further information, etc.).
- Section II – Information about you: this section was aimed at collecting socio-demographic information about the respondents;
- Section III – THB: this section was aimed at collecting respondent experience on web contents potentially linked to human trafficking (e.g. suspicious online job advertisements).
- Section IV – Smuggling: this section was aimed at collection respondent experience on web contents linked to people smuggling (e.g. online advertisements of illegal travel services to Europe).

The online questionnaire was translated in the four languages of the member states involved in the project (i.e. Italian, Romanian, Bulgarian and English) and then uploaded in the LimeSurvey platform for the administration phase.

Research activities were carried out with strict respect for ethical research principles, as well as all laws applicable. Specific suggestions concerning research ethics was provided to the partners and researchers involved in the project. Moreover, any action to overcome factors delaying research ethics was discussed with the Steering Committee and/or via telephone, email, Skype.



04

The role of the Internet in the smuggling of migrants

The expression ‘smuggling of migrants’ refers to a criminal activity aimed at the transportation of persons across national borders, for the sake of economic profit (or other kinds of benefit). The smuggling of migrants is an activity that entails two phases: recruitment and transportation, and it normally follows an ‘agreement’ between the smuggler and the wannabe migrant. In fact, the migrant autonomously contacts the smuggler or the criminal organisation of smugglers in order to plan his travel, agree on the price and plan the transportation.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by smugglers to reach specific users and by the migrants to search for smugglers who can help with migrating to Europe through criminal channels. Facebook and Instagram play a significant role in this criminal activity. On these social networks, in fact, there are dedicated Pages and Groups explicitly used to spread information and advertise travels and documents.

This Chapter presents the results of research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project (i.e. Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom) concerning the role of the Internet in the smuggling of migrants and asylum seeker. Specifically, for each country the results related to recruitment and transportation phases are presented. Finally, the main results of the web survey designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums are briefly provided to support the research findings.

4.1 Bulgaria

4.1.1 Recruitment

During the recruitment phase, smugglers use the Internet but the interviewed person is not inclined to define it as a main recruitment mechanism. Rather, it is used to attract those who have not yet reached Bulgaria, through a dedicated webpage on Facebook. The page is written in English and is aimed at attracting people who have not yet crossed the Bulgarian border:

“ Facebook used to help me as far as through my site the information could reach some migrants still before they come to Bulgaria, during their stay, for instance, in Turkey. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

The risks of using Facebook are fully realised by the interviewee. He shared that the page was not publicly available and stood on the opinion that the manner in which the page is disseminated gives some safety guarantees:

“ Facebook allows you to communicate freely; however, there is a risk in it, as you don’t know who is in front of you. This page, though, is disseminated in the right way – through friends. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

Regarding those who already reside in Bulgaria, regardless of their status (illegal, seeking protection, or with refugee status), the methods of recruitment are not shared with the interviewer but is mentioned that they are ‘simpler’ than the Internet. This could mean that connections are made by phone and/or through trusted people only, but in all cases reveals the usage of offline methods.

The interviewed immigrant involved in smuggling, generally confirmed the statements of the smuggler regarding the role of the Internet. The person is a Syrian asylum seeker who had considered illegal arrival from Bulgaria to Germany, but changed his mind at the last moment. He evidenced that the process of finding smugglers and all arrangements with them were implemented entirely ‘offline’: through persons with Syrian nationality residing in Bulgaria for longer periods:

“ To accommodate, one of my friends from Bulgaria helped me. I did not understand Bulgarian, but with him I spoke the native language. He introduced me to some guys who spoke English, and I speak it well. We have not used the Internet – the connection was direct. I could turn to them on any matter. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Migrant)

However, the person admitted that before leaving Syria, he searched the Internet for information about different EU countries, to choose where to go, and connected through Facebook with acquaintances that already lived in Bulgaria for years. Therefore, in the initial phase, the Internet in general and Facebook in particular still play a very important role, although the immigrant persons and not the smugglers are the active side at this phase. Moreover, with or without using the Internet, the national migrant Diasporas have very important functions, as informers and mediators with the local smugglers:

“ The Internet helped me to see where I can emigrate... In Bulgaria I have friends, Syrians who married Bulgarians and settled well. I connected with them through Facebook, even before I came to your country. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Migrant)

The opinions of the LEA representatives regarding the role of the Internet in the recruitment process for the smuggling of migrants differ in some extent, but generally they confirm, enrich and explain the information received from the persons directly involved in the process.

One of the four LEA representatives interviewed expressed the opinion that the Internet facilitates the smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants, without giving approximate quantitative estimates regarding the share of cases in which the Internet is used.

“ Very much (is used), especially Facebook and Twitter. There are different sites created where there are many publications about the ‘beautiful’ life in Europe and somewhere in lowercase wording about possible assistance. These pages are distributed carefully; it is sometimes difficult to understand what it is about. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Regarding the recruitment for smuggling, another LEA representative is categorical that it is initiated by the potential migrants and is done entirely in person.

“ Refugees from Syria and Iraq, who want to go to Europe, connect with a local man who is known to be involved in smuggling. For example, Iraqis – 10 people, a father and all generations. They set a price of 8,000 dollars per person to Germany. I wondered why, if you have 80 thousand dollars, do you want to emigrate? But how does it actually happen? The father and his brother mortgage the house they live in, but the brother who stays there, will sell it only when they get to Germany. They do not pay anything except for food and shelter. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

The other two representatives of LEAs stated that they could not provide answers regarding the smuggling process, as it is no longer within their powers after the change in legislation several years ago. However, they admitted that Facebook might be used:

“ It is highly probable Facebook is used here as well; but we could not say so for sure. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

The usage of mobile applications is clearly described only by one of the respondents of this group, for the purposes of smuggling, and along with the traditional telephone conversations:

“ Those refugees located in Bulgaria who wish to emigrate to Europe, post on their wall their desire to leave the country. They criticise our country for its inhospitality. They directly connect with our traffickers, as on Facebook there are groups... ‘Smugglers’ in the groups on Facebook or Twitter then directly contact those willing (to leave). From there, communication is transferred to the phone... (The mobile apps) ease the direct communication. In addition, the smugglers frequently change the numbers, which makes it harder to get caught. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

The same respondent was also the only one among the interviewees from all groups who gave clues, although minimal ones, that the Dark web had been used by Bulgarian smugglers:

“ At least I have not had the occasion to use the Deep networks. As far as I know from colleagues, they are used rarely. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

And the explanation why the Dark web is rarely used, if at all, is that ‘the job’ could be easily and safely done through traditional Internet means, or offline.

Among NGO representatives, only one of them commented on the recruitment process in cases of smuggling. However, she admitted that her knowledge of the smuggling is entirely based on publications in the media. According to her statements, it is pretty easy to find a smuggler through the Internet, in specialised forums written in Arabic. Like the interviewed refugee, she confirmed the participation of persons from old Arab Diasporas in Bulgaria in this process:

“ If you open the Internet, you see that yesterday there was a publication about a Syrian who has lived in Bulgaria for 20 years. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

It should be noted here that in general, NGO representatives relatively less frequently in comparison with LEAs representatives get known details regarding the exact ways in which immigrants and asylum seekers come to the country. Their role is exclusively humanitarian and their primary aim is to help and support vulnerable migrants. In addition, those migrants who would like to receive support are not always interested in revealing the actual facts of their journey to Bulgaria.

4.1.2 Transportation

In the case of smuggling, mobile applications might be used by migrants to arrange the travel details with the smuggler; but keeping in mind the illegal nature of their crossing of the border, traditional phone calls are more feasible, according to the opinion of the interviewed smuggler:

“ I’ve not been interested in how they would reach Bulgaria. I left a phone number for them to connect with me in order to know when they would arrive... When the connection is made and the approximate day of their arrival is known we wait for them near the border, I won’t say where exactly. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Smuggler)

The interviewed asylum seeker did not personally use the Internet or any mobile application for his travel to Bulgaria.

The statements of LEA representatives regarding the role of the Internet in transportation/entering other countries by refugees and illegal migrants again differ. According to one of the respondents from this group, the Internet facilitates this process; but only insofar as to facilitate the connection between the smugglers and their ‘clients’ (e.g., the recruitment process). The other two LEA representatives refused to give definitive answers on the topic out of their range of powers; however, one of them supposed that transportation means might be sorted out through sites like Trivago and Booking.com. For the same reasons, respondents did not comment on the possible use of the Dark web for advertising and transportation purposes. And the fourth respondent, like the interviewed smuggler, suggested that mobile applications might be used, but the gathering of evidence is not possible:

“ It is possible the major organisers might use mobile applications between them, because they know that there is no way to be monitored. They keep conversations in Kurdish and Arabic, which further hinders the investigation. Payment by customers occurs in countries of origin and in Turkey with the money in cash, no bank accounts or traceable transactions.. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

And the only NGO representative who commented on the use of the Internet in the smuggling process stated that it facilitates transportation, as far as facilitating the initial connection with the smuggler (the recruitment).

4.2 Italy

The expression ‘smuggling of migrants’ refers to a criminal activity aimed at the transportation of persons across national borders, for the sake of economic profit (or other kinds of benefit). The trafficking of migrants is a crime that entails two phases: recruitment and transportation, and it normally follows an ‘agreement’ between the smuggler and the wannabe migrant. In fact, the migrant autonomously contacts the smuggler or the criminal organisation of smugglers in order to plan his travel, agree on the price and plan the transportation.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by smugglers to reach specific users and by the migrants to search for smugglers who can help with migrating to Italy or to Europe through criminal channels. Facebook and Instagram play a significant role in this criminal activity. On these social networks, in fact, there are dedicated Pages and Groups explicitly used to spread information and advertise travels and documents.

While the web contents collected on Instagram and Twitter are mostly single images and text contents, on Facebook there are Pages, Groups and Profiles entirely or almost entirely dedicated to the advertisement of illegal migration. Some of these Facebook pages have been active for many years and count hundreds or thousands of members/followers. Other pages are more recent and are used in a less systematic and structured manner. Some of these groups and profiles are ‘public’: any user can visualise their content. Others are ‘closed’ or ‘private’, meaning that any users must obtain an ‘approval’ from the administrator (‘friendship’ or ‘membership’) to access the content. For this crime, the use of keywords in the Arabic language has been fundamental to identify and track the development of the crime on the Internet. However, during the exploration period, the importance of also using keywords in the English language emerged to identify contents related to the smuggling of migrants, especially on social networks. These keywords, in fact, allowed us to reach pages and profiles related to the various phases of the criminal activity.

Even if the relation of the contents to illegal migration (to Europe and to Italy) was clear for most of the time, the research showed that there are some elements that more than others denote the relation with illegal migration.

The indicators that we identified are:

- Specific images (i.e. European flag, visa, etc.)
- The wording ‘visa Schengen’ in the name or title of the page/profile/post;
- Offer of documents to purchase;
- Offer of travels towards Europe;
- Explicit contents related to specific routes or destinations;
- Request from the author of the advertisement to be contacted only through the social network or mobile applications;

These indicators and the analysis of the web contents allowed for the differentiation of the two phases characterising the criminal activity: recruitment and transportation.

4.2.1 Recruitment

The research referred to the recruitment phase those web contents (pages, groups, social networks’ posts, etc.) that provide (1) information on the travel towards Europe, (2) offers of documents to purchase (especially, visa), and (3) information on the asylum request. Internet and social networks play a significant role in this phase: the continuous advertisement and exchange of information on travels to Europe facilitates the recruitment of persons and represents an important push factor for illegal migration.

“ Usually, Internet is really the starting point [...] Internet does facilitate the travel; it facilitates the departure and the recruitment. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

In general, the analysis of the Internet contents showed that the criminals involved in this business are highly informed on visa requirements and procedures for asylum requests, and this expertise allows them to exploit the weaknesses of national and international regulations.

Figure 1 represents a word cloud² showing the words that are most used by smugglers online to recruit migrants. During the exploration of the web, researchers identified 46 web contents – then collected in a dedicated database – referred to the recruitment phase. The dimension of the words vary in relation to the number of times they were found in the online contents. The word ‘visa’ was found more frequently than all the others; words like ‘asylum’, ‘interview’, ‘Finland’, ‘Greece’, ‘office’ – related to the asylum request or to the obtainment of documents in certain Schengen countries – were also found many times.

Figure 1. Word cloud of the collected textual web-contents related to the recruitment phase

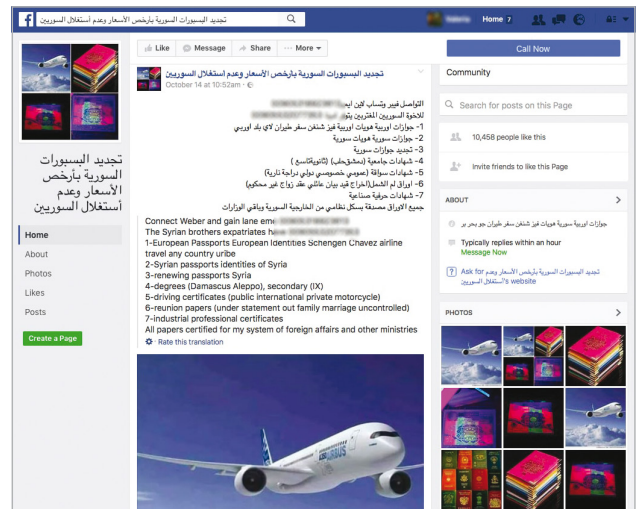


Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

On the Internet, many pages, posts and profiles (especially on social networks) used by smugglers to provide information on the asylum request procedure and on the various destination countries were identified. For instance, Figure 2 shows a Facebook page where it is possible to buy the visa to enter Schengen countries. On the Facebook page, a post in Arabic lists various documents that can be purchased and the phone numbers to be used to obtain them.

From the research, it emerged that on these pages it is often possible to find the ‘call-now’ button (see Figure 2): a Facebook additional service that allows users to directly contact the administrator of the page through a simple click on the page. This element shows the high level of efficiency and expertise of the smugglers operating online to recruit new migrants. What is offered is a modern, efficient and practical way of communication.

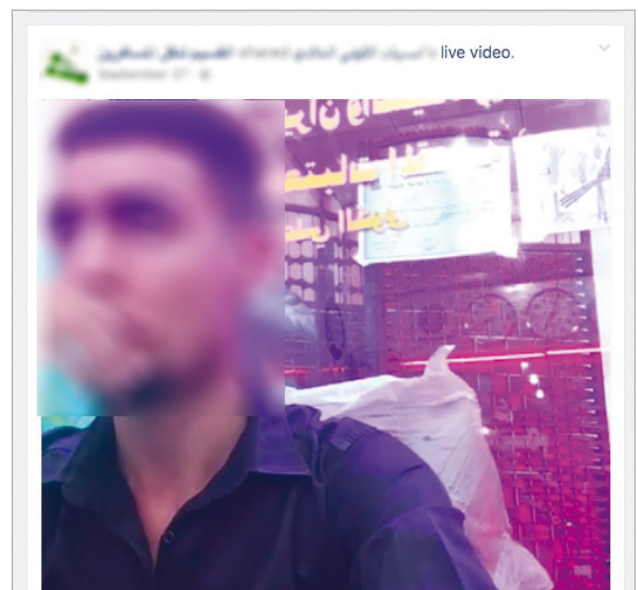
Figure 2. Facebook page for the selling of visa and other documents



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Moreover, on the concerned Facebook pages, the presence of live videos (see the screenshot in Figure 3) emerged of smugglers available to respond in real time to users’ questions, giving information and recommendations on illegal migration to Europe or Italy. This service, in fact, is aimed at putting the migrant in direct contact with the smuggler, so that they can organise the travel, agree on the price and on the methods to reach the destination country.

Figure 3. Live video on a Facebook page dedicated to illegal migration

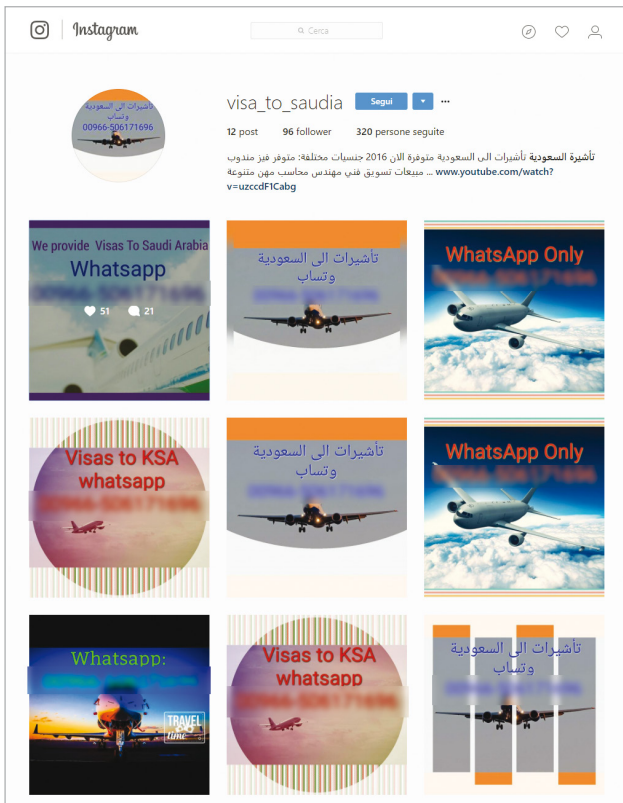


Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

² The word cloud is a visual representation of the keywords that are most used on a website, in advertisements or posts. In the word cloud, the dimension of a word is directly proportional to the number of times it has been used in the examined text. The more a word has been used, the bigger it will appear in the word cloud.

On Instagram, on the other hand, images of airplanes and visa documents contain contact information (phone numbers) and advertise the possibility to purchase specific falsified documents. See, for some example, Figure 4.

Figure 4. Example of Instagram images advertising the selling of European visas



Source: Instagram. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

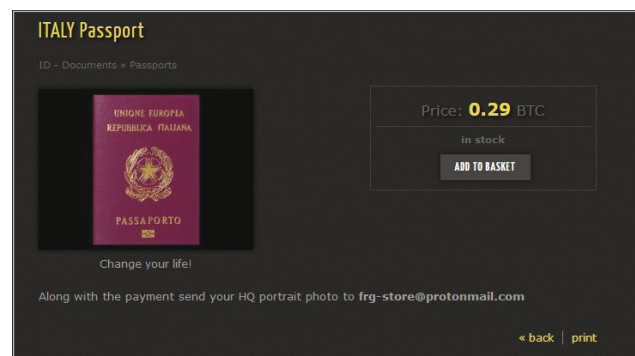
On the Dark web, websites dedicated to the selling of false documents were found, not only for Italy and Europe but also for the US and Canada. In particular, researchers found many websites and advertisements dedicated to the production and the selling of Italian documents. Figures 5 and 6 show the advertisement of falsified Italian passports, while Figure 7 displays the selling of a forged electronic Italian ID. These elements were easily found using the search engine 'Torch'³.

Figure 5. Forged Italian passports on sale



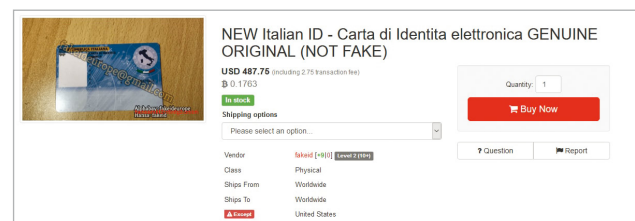
Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 6. Forged Italian passports on sale



Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 7. Forged Italian ID card on sale



Source: Dark web. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound


Moreover, in the context of the research on migrants smuggling on the visible web, a fake Facebook profile was created in order to interact with users linked with profiles and pages related to the smuggling of migrants. Initially, a request of information was posted regarding travels toward Italy, on some pages that are accessible without the need of 'friendship' or 'following' confirmation. After a few hours, the profile created had received many offers related to the travel requested. After having opened and observed the profiles of some of the users sending us the offers, researchers decided to contact them through the Messenger chat. All the con-

³ Torch is one of the most popular search engines on the Dark web.

versations were conducted initially on the Messenger chat and then through Viber, a mobile-app that resulted to be commonly used in this context, together with WhatsApp. Figure 8 shows an advertisement identified on Facebook and a piece of conversation between the researchers and a smuggler. The conversation regards the various offers of travel and the related costs that

the smuggler can offer to the user. Moreover, the attention is focused on the Moroccan origins of the person who needed to be transported: this could determine the repatriation of the migrant in the case he arrives in Italy or Greece. The smuggler proposes to solve this problem using fake Syrian documents that can be used in Turkey.

Figure 8. Transcription of a Viber phone call between the researcher (R) and a smuggler (S)

	<p>Translation</p> <p><i>Good morning, for the brothers who want to travel from Istanbul on 80-meter long boats, the departure is Monday for everybody [phone number], Viber: [phone number].</i></p>
---	--

R	I want to take my Moroccan brother from Turkey to Italy. He lost all the documents and he is in Turkey illegally. What can he do?
S	You have three different options. First: directly from Turkey to Italy with a 20-meter long touristic yacht, 60/70 people. Price: 7,000 euros. We will leave your brother on an unmonitored beach, 20 minutes away from a train station. The second option: from Turkey to Greece and then from Greece to Italy. Price: 6,200 euros. The third option, instead, is from Turkey to Greece and then from Greece to Austria by land: 800 euros.
R	Are the travels safe? Which assurances can you give me?
S	The travel is safe, <i>in šā' Allāh</i> [if God wills it]. I do my best, God does the rest. Many people arrived safe and well in Europe thanks to my work: this is my assurance. Call your brother and let me know.
<i>[After a long conversation about the details of the travels and after kind regards from both of the speakers, the conversation is interrupted. After 5 minutes, the smuggler calls back]</i>	
S	Dear friend, I forgot to tell you that there is a problem. Your brother is Moroccan and if he gets caught by the Italian or Greek police he will be repatriated. But there is a way to solve this problem.
<i>[The smuggler offers another service: to create a false Syrian Quaid (an official document with the personal information) and a false Syrian driving license]</i>	
S	<p>With these documents, he will be able to go to the Syrian embassy in Turkey, pretend to be Syrian and ask for a new passport. We are doing the same thing with people coming from Lebanon. Your brother has to talk in standard Arabic language. If they realize that the accent is strange, he has to say that he has Syrian parents but that he grew up in Morocco. [...] With the Syrian passport, he will be able to ask for political asylum when he arrives. [...] 800 euros for the documents, 200/300 for myself, as a tip. I am solving a big problem for you. [...]</p> <p>Think calmly, speak with your brother and when you have made a decision call me back and I will take care of satisfying your requests. If he doesn't want to travel but he only wants the documents, there are no problems: I will be of service anyway.</p>

Source: Viber call. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

modalities to reach Greece from Turkey. The transportation means that are published are a car and a yacht: for the former the price is 1,700 euros, for the latter 2,100 euros. Finally, the post displays a phone number to be used in order to communicate with the administrator of the page.

Figure 12. Facebook post advertising travels from Turkey to Europe



Translation

Travels with touristic yacht directed to Athens 2,200 euros, travels by land from Istanbul 1,700 euros, two hours of walking. Payment after arrival through any insurance office in Turkey or Greece. For those who are serious and ready for the travel, call [phone number], contact through WhatsApp.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 13 shows a web content found on a Facebook group dedicated to illegal migration. In the post, it is possible to see a picture, probably taken during a travel, posted by the smuggler himself. On the same post, the smuggler lists the possible modalities and the relative costs to reach various European countries, the means of transportation available and how to conduct the travel.

Figure 13. Facebook group dedicated to illegal migration



Translation

Non-stop travel from Turkey to Greece \$350. As soon as the island is reached, assurance to be able to use Kharitya in Athens after two days, everything is guaranteed on the island of Kyos, \$650. Afterwards by plane, from Athens to Germany for 2,500 euros, if we agree on 3,500 euros there is the assurance of having a place to sleep. There is a path by land from Turkey to Greece for 3,500 euros. There is a commercial boat from Turkey to Italy for 3,800 euros. There is a flight from Turkey to European countries for 6,500. Visa is guaranteed from Lebanon to Turkey for \$2,300. To contact me [phone number] WhatsApp.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Specifically, many of the identified web contents were related to routes toward Italy. The two following Figures (Figure 14 and 15) are examples of these contents that were easily found on Facebook. Specifically, Figure 14 displays a post advertising travels to reach the Italian peninsula from Egypt. The advertised travel is by sea, at least twice a week, and to participate it is necessary to contact the phone number written in the post.

Figure 14. Post advertising travels towards Italy**Translation**

Translation: Good morning to all who want to travel to Europe twice a week from Egypt to Italy by sea, safe and organized travel, [phone number].

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Figure 15, instead, shows a Facebook group on which a travel from Turkey to Italy on a boat carrying wheat is advertised. The travel lasts between 4 to 6 days and food and accommodation services are provided.

Figure 15. Group advertising travels toward Italy**Translation**

To all who want to travel to Europe we have a 60-meter long boat transporting wheat, it leaves from Turkey to reach Italy. The travel lasts between 4 to 6 days, food and water are guaranteed. On Viber Abu Adi [phone number].

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

The online advertising of the means of transportation not only describes its characteristics, but it also announces the requested price. One aspect that emerged from the interviews with the smugglers is that the price increases or decreases in relation to different factors: the kilometric distance to be covered, the means of transportation, the urgency of the departure and the presence of kids – for which a price reduction is usually provided.

“ If someone wants to leave with a boat in 30/40 people can go, pay little money and go. You can pay even a thousand euros. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ For the prices: from Libya from 1,000 to 4,000 dollars per person. A mother with children will always have a discount, 1,700 – 2,000. A person bringing 5/7 persons can even go for free. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ The first experience was with a Syrian customer for 4,000 euros. He left 2,000 euros to my friend and he (the friend) travelled with the customer. The travel was easy because it takes 15 minutes more or less; the whole roundtrip takes 30 minutes. Easy! ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

Generally, the faster the transportation means are, the higher the probability of reaching the destination is, and the higher the price will be.

“ Brother, my method is the nickel method (that is the most perfect method), my method is safe, and safety has its price, am I right? ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

For this reason, some of the smugglers offer their travel services only to a specific target of customers: those who can effectively pay the high prices imposed for the transportation.

“ I have my method and my method is easy, for this reason also on the Internet, I use my methods to attract people, not too many people, but only those who can pay the price I ask. Because the travel I set up is 100% safe. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

However, in case the migrant needs to move and does not have the economic means to afford the costs, he will probably be able to find cheaper, less safe options.

“ Then it depends, those who come from the starting point have time to bargain. Those who come from far away are in a hurry to leave, for instance those who come from Iran, Pakistan, etc. do not have time to lose in order to leave. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

The in-depth interviews with smugglers allowed to verify the increasingly common tendency to use the web for criminal activities directed to the smuggling of migrants. Particularly, through the advertisement of routes, the Internet became ‘one of the easier ways to bring a lot of people. I always use Facebook and YouTube, I have a page that is all mine, when I have some free time I always go on Facebook, in internet points’ (Int. Italy – Smuggler 1). After this first contact online between the two users, the conversations take place on mobile applications (WhatsApp, Viber or Skype) to better define the details of the travel and to reach a level of acquaintance between the migrant and the smuggler:

“ Firstly, I have to establish that he is not from the police. As I told you, I talk to him, I leave him time to ask, do some research, and I have my own mechanisms to know whether he is one from the State or whether he is a serious one who wants to travel, because we are not joking. Then I meet him for a coffee far away from my place [of work]. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ First comes the greeting ‘good morning – good morning’, I have to know him, know where he comes from. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

As emerged by the interviews, there are various reasons justifying the choice of using these mobile applications. Among these reasons, there is the possibility of using encrypted messaging services, which enhance the privacy of the exchange of information on the travels. This aspect also emerged from the interviews with the national LEAs – which conducted investigations on migrant smuggling toward Italy:

“ They also use the most advanced technological tools such as social networks, Internet, WhatsApp, one of the means for communication also among themselves, with the aim of establishing encrypted and hardly trackable forms of communications. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

The interviews with the stakeholders, in fact, allowed to define the real reasons pushing these criminal organisations to use technological and digital tools. Firstly, these technologies allow to be able to communicate and use the same profile even when changing phone or SIM, and, in order to function, they simply need an Internet connection. Moreover, it is possible to rapidly change the name of the page/group/profile in order to avoid investigations and monitoring activities from the part of LEAs and Internet service providers:

“ Even if you change phone number or SIM, WhatsApp leaves you the option, if you want, to keep the same [old] profile, even those who change number because I always know who they are. I receive messages from the people that arrived even if they changed number. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

“ It’s a form of communication that is ‘free’: so the migrant, let’s say, that has a phone connecting to any Wi-Fi can be immediately reached – something that may not be possible with a ‘normal’ phone line. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

Therefore, social networks and technological tools such as smartphones facilitate these networks. Those who benefit from them, in fact, are not only the smugglers but the migrants as well. The NGOs interviewed report some experiences regarding their work with migrants who arrived in Italy that confirm what was said above:

“ I decide to leave, but do I board on whichever boat, or do I [try to] understand in which conditions to leave? Do I try to understand which moment is the most appropriate to leave based on the weather forecasts? Do I discover what is happening on the Greek coast rather than on the Italian one? Well, let's hear what my friends in Catania tell me? ”

(Int. Italy – NGO representative 4)

Figure 16. Negative review of a smuggler published by some users on Facebook



Translation

Warning! You have to be careful with this Tunisian thief, his nickname is [nickname]. He took 5,000 euros from 8 people to bring them to Budapest, and instead he left them on the Serbian-Hungarian border. Then he ran away.

Source: Facebook. Elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

Through the continuous exchange with other customers or family/friend's networks, those who intend to leave can – through social networks – collect information on routes and on most 'reliable' smugglers and get in

contact with the latter through mobile applications. The professionalism of a smuggler and of its network is demonstrated by the success of the travels he sets up, and these increase his reputation and fame among potential customers. During the period of using the fake profile, researchers found conversations and comments from the part of smugglers, related to routes and travels with some of the smugglers that were not considered reliable. In particular, it often mentioned the bad reputation of the travels organised by the captain of the boat called 'JetBoat', that has allegedly caused the death of many people – among which many children and a woman, close to the Turkish sea. Moreover, the case of a Tunisian smuggler was often cited who, after leaving eight people on the Serbian-Hungarian borders, ran away with all the money.

Through the social networks migrants' travels are monitored by friends and families, so that it is possible to verify the level of trust gained by the smuggler. Hence, the use of digital technologies creates chain effects that consolidate and reinforce the organised criminal organisations.

“ Those who left first give the number to another, saying that everything went alright and in this way they spread the word to new customers [... when the smuggler or an intermediary have a reputation, that they are fair, etc. Usually, those who have already travelled with them recommend them. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 1)

“ He [talking of a friend] found his contact [of the smuggler] on Facebook, I saw that his experience was successful and I wanted to do the same. ”

(Int. Italy – Migrant 1)

After the online exchange of information and the establishment of trust between the two parties, there is, according to the interviewed smuggler, a meeting in person, far away from the locations usually frequented by the smuggler. This is aimed at finalising the agreements on the travel's practicalities.

“ At the end, there is the contact in person [physically] so that I make sure, I see how he talks, how he moves...and we talk about important things, price, assurances, modalities, everything. ”

(Int. Italy – Smuggler 2)

In conclusion, considering that they deal with an international criminal activity, the interviews with national LEAs confirmed the presence of a network of criminal groups aimed at the execution of different but interconnected activities. The investigations carried out by the LEAs interviewed, in fact, allowed for the discovery of the presence of links between various networks that are geographically fragmented: from central and northern Africa to northern European countries – especially affecting Scandinavian countries.

“ We found the presence of criminal organisations operating in a transnational dimension. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

Italy, given its strategic geographical position to the aim of migrant smuggling toward Europe, represents one of the major ‘transit’ countries:

“ There are organisations operating on the transit territories, such as Italy, where there are also subjects in charge of intercepting the migrants – when they are transferred in reception centers – and organising the continuation of their travel toward northern Italy and northern Europe and so on. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

However, as it also emerged from the literature (UNODC, 2009), the involvement of persons of Italian nationality in criminal activities related to the smuggling of migrants results to be very low.

“ So far, we have reported very few Italians, trifling numbers [...] a few units. ”

(Int. Italy – LEA representative 1)

4.3 Romania

Smuggling in human beings has seen important changes in the last decade, adapting to the new technological possibilities (Dark web, online advertising, social media platforms), but more importantly the current challenges in terms of migration have created a new fertile ground for this type of criminal activity. The dramatic events of the last years encouraged the development of illegal migration, especially in the Mediterranean, but also on the Western Balkans route, and dramatically raised the number of smuggling activities.

More than a quarter of a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe in 2014 and more than one million in 2015. According to the latest Europol report on migrant smuggling, dated February 2016, migrant smuggling became the fastest growing criminal market in Europe, with criminal networks estimated to have had a turnover of 3-6 billion euros in 2015 from this activity. With a low risk of detection and punishment and law enforcement authorities facing huge challenges in countering this activity, new policies of preventing the exploitation of migrants by criminal networks and a reduction of incentives for irregular migration were needed.

In 2015, the European Union launched the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020), identifying migrant smuggling as a priority and setting specific goals in this regard: improved policing and legal procedure; collection and sharing of data and strengthening the role of Europol; providing better assistance for vulnerable migrants and deploying awareness campaigns; opening readmission agreements with the main countries of origin of irregular migrants; financing activities to strengthen the cooperation with third countries.

Currently, Romanians represent a significant source of people smuggling across Europe, involving people subjected to forced labour (agriculture, construction, domestic work, but also forced begging and theft) as well as sex trafficking. Eurostat 2015 Trafficking in human beings notes that Romania was one of the top five countries of origin for victims of human trafficking in the EU, alongside Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Hungary, and Poland, but also as the source country of traffickers, alongside Bulgaria, Romania, Belgium, Germany, and Spain. But, following the migrant crisis in Europe, there has also been an increase of smuggling and trafficking of migrants operated by Romanian smugglers, mainly passing them through from non-Schengen countries such as the Balkan Countries, Bulgaria or Romania to Schengen countries, mainly Hungary.

The ‘closed border’ policies, adopted by some of the Schengen countries, namely Hungary – the main

migrant route towards Western countries, led to an increasing number of asylum seekers/refugees remaining in the Balkans and the creation of temporary camps in the region. The pressure put on the Balkan countries, together with the final goal of the migrants – that of reaching wealthier EU countries, created new incentives for smuggling and new routes towards Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden.

In this context, Romania has seen a high rise in the smuggling of human beings and migrants, becoming mainly a transit country. In the case of people smuggling, Romanian criminals are not involved in the recruitment of migrants or refugees. Romanian smugglers, regardless of the fact that they may be part of a transnational smuggling network or may work on their own, act mostly as intermediaries in the smuggling process. Their role is to transport refugee or migrant groups on or from Romanian territory, taking them from their point of entry to the Western border. The data is also confirmed by Europol statistics – ‘Romanian suspects arrested in the last year typically acted as drivers’.

According to Europol, the most common nationalities of the suspects of criminal networks, coming from within the EU, engaged in smuggling human beings and migrants are Bulgarians, Hungarians, Poles and Romanians, with the suspects being active not only in their country of origin, but also in the final destination countries such as Germany and The Netherlands.

The research conducted within the project has revealed several patterns regarding the smuggling of human beings: it is a criminal network with clear assignments for each member; there are no clearly defined links between members; smugglers are often contacted by the migrants that wish to travel to Western countries; there is a low use of social media or traceable devices – with most of the smugglers using prepaid phone cards or personal communication.

4.3.1 Recruitment

Europol underlines the new technological options (Internet, social media) as some of the key features of smuggling, used for recruiting migrants, but also for recruiting drivers, sharing information on developments of migration routes, law enforcement activities or changes in the asylum procedures. But, as the analysis reveals, when it comes to the recruitment phase, the high number of refugees and LEA crackdown/surveillance on criminal networks created new patterns in recruiting: more and more migrants are personally seeking smugglers to pass into the Schengen area and, in order not to be traced by authorities, the latest

are using direct conversation or prepaid phone cards for communication. The Internet plays a minor role in migrant smuggling, as the analysis suggests in Romania’s case, where the activities are promoted and done in face-to-face interactions.

The latest dramatic events in Europe have created new smuggling possibilities: people who live in areas of conflict are directly interested in finding information about transportation and ways to enter other countries and, consequently, are actively looking to contact the smugglers themselves.

“ At the moment, all people from Syria want to migrate to Europe. We do not need advertising. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

According to the interviewees, Syria is the most common country for the recruitment of migrants travelling to countries of Western Europe or to Turkey, which is a waypoint for these immigrants.

“ I have connections in Syria, Turkey and Greece and we have developed a network of guides to reach the desired destination for each migrant, and each person within the network is responsible for his segment. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

As such, when it comes to the recruitment phase, the Internet or social media is rather used in the behaviours of traffickers/smugglers who posted job offers that did not correctly reflect the pay for the type of work, the benefits promised upon signing the contracts, such as hiring bonuses, free transportation abroad, free accommodation/very low rent or boarding.

But as for smugglers recruiting refugees or illegal immigrants, the Internet is rarely used and all actors involved in the various phases of the smuggling processes communicate personally and by telephone, using coded language. Only one trafficker has mentioned the Dark web, stating that the Dark web is rarely used as a way of communication, mainly due to lack of technological knowledge and use of it.

And the main reason lies with the relatively easy possibility of their devices being monitored by authorities. According to the interviewers, all communication within the criminal network and also with the potential victims

is done by phone or in person. In their interactions with each other or with migrants, smugglers are using communication codes, which are changed every month, together with their phone cards.

“ Never recruited on the Internet, only by phone. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

“ I am using the Internet, but not too often. I prefer the phone, it works faster and I can change the numbers I use monthly. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

“ [I did my business] by connecting people and guides who know their language, Syrians and Turks who speak English. [...] Now, in Syria I have a close/trustworthy man, who takes [migrants] to Turkey, and then I get them further. ”

(Int. Romania – Smuggler)

In addition, all LEA representatives that were interviewed believe that, in Romania, the Dark web is not used in trafficking in human beings or people smuggling, as there are few Internet users skilled enough to use this option.

“ This Dark net [...] It might be used when it comes to refugees, to migrant smuggling, for communication on the Dark net, but that involves advanced knowledge on the Internet, it's not enough to have access to a computer. [...] Not in Romania, I don't know anything about this system being used here. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

“ I haven't encountered it [the use of Dark web], because us, as a country, when it comes to technology, we aren't sufficiently prepared for something like this – not even accepting that there is a Dark area on the Internet. No... And even if there was [Dark web use], it did not surface in the cases I've had. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The migrants themselves are extensively using social media and the Internet, especially to communicate with friends or members of the Diaspora communities already living in their destination country. Seeking guidance on possible dangers on their route or receiving emotional support, most of the time refugees seek destination countries with existing communities with whom they share national or linguistic ties. In some of the cases, members of the Diaspora communities living in these countries are part of the criminal network, easing the access to accommodation, travel or employment.

According to the interviewees, smugglers almost never use the Internet to promote their services, as this crime is strictly monitored by law enforcement authorities and the risk of being discovered and caught is very high. They prefer direct contact with the migrants. In Romania, they say, there are no websites promoting migrant smuggling services to Western European countries. Recruitment is, most often, done through intermediaries (person to person), both when refugees are searching for smugglers to help them leave their home countries and when smugglers from across the borders contact Romanian criminals that are willing to guide migrant groups when transiting the country.

“ Usually, all this information [on recruitment] you get from people who want to leave the country, from immigrants [refugees] that are housed in various asylum centres in Romania: in Bucharest, Galați, Timișoara, and they talk among themselves: «We want to leave for Austria. Do you know anyone that can help us? » «Yes, there's X. [...] This is his phone number. » And then they discuss: what, how, how much, where, when, all the details. That is how they do it. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

In the case of illegal migrants, the main reason for this is the fact that recruitment does not take place in Romania, but abroad, especially in refugee camps, such as the ones in Greece. The smugglers in Romania are but intermediary links in much larger people smuggling transnational networks. Usually, they are contacted by smugglers in origin countries and are only involved in the transit of migrants in Romania, to its Western border.

“ Usually, the Romanians are never the initiators; they are only the middle link. That is trafficking... For example, Greeks recruit them [migrants] from camps readily available and have connections with people in Romania who transit them, so that it is not so obvious that a foreigner, otherwise monitored, enters Romania. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

4.3.2 Transportation

Romania has become, in the last years, a transit country for illegal migrants or refugees to their final country of destination. In the smuggling framework, criminal networks in Romania most often consist of drivers, being a rather small link to the entire network, data also confirmed by the latest Europol reports. Their role is to transport refugee or migrant groups on or from Romanian territory, taking them from their point of entry to the Western border. But Romanian drivers are not operating solely on Romanian territory and are often operating in the destination countries.

Especially following the impossibility of entering the Schengen area directly through Hungary from the Balkans, new routes have been created via Romania, creating the incentives for the development of a criminal network featuring easy access to transport infrastructures used for illegal activities.

An increasing number of refugees are trying to pass the border from Serbia to Hungary via Romania; the border passes from Sânnicolau Mare and Lunga (the border points between the Serbian, Romanian and Hungarian territory) being the ones used most often by the migrants. However, the figures are low compared to other EU countries, with 1,076 people who tried to illegally pass the border in 2015 and a similar number in 2016, according to the Border Police.

As per the transportation process itself, details on the route to follow, meeting places, as well as information on how to identify the transport vehicles to be used is most of the times given through phone conversation or face-to-face contact. Usually, the details regarding travel arrangements and prices are personally given to those who request such services, thus the smugglers do not advertise their business on the Internet. The smuggling victims are often transported in extremely dangerous conditions, hidden in ordinary trucks, passenger vehicles, or bigger trucks. In addition, refrigerated trucks are being used.

As per the communication process during the transportation, most of the interviewed stakeholders (including NGOs, migrants or LEA officers) revealed that the Internet and/or mobile apps were not used during the transport phase or had a rather minor role. In a strategy to minimise the risks of being caught, the smuggler crosses the border by car and directs the migrants to cross by foot, on certain known paths. If successful, the driver will collect those who managed to cross without being intercepted by the border police a few kilometres away from the border.

“ I haven't seen the Internet [communication between smugglers] so far. Just phones with prepaid cards, which are very difficult to monitor, especially since Romania doesn't have legislation to compel you to give your identification information when you buy a prepaid card. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The Internet is rarely used in this process, although one of the LEAs interviewed within the research stated that the Internet also plays a major role in this aspect:

“ Such a criminal group keeps in touch. Transporter, host, recruiter – to the final destination. So, they keep connected, obviously, through the Internet, through the same social media, until the group gets there [in the destination country]. [...] [The migrants] are trained, in a way, they are told what they have to do if they get caught, what they need to do, which route to follow, what transportation to use. All these things have something to do with the Internet and, of course, with social media. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

The reasons why communication during the journey is made through other means as opposed to over the Internet are connected to both the migrant's characteristics and the authorities' vigilance. Many migrants do not have phones and, for those who do, connecting to the Internet is difficult, because it implies having access to wireless networks or to mobile phone services in the transit countries – which involves high costs and the risk of being identified by the authorities.

“ Some had phones, but most of them did not. In addition, it is not enough to have this kind of phone, a smart phone; you need an Internet connection, you need a SIM card that works in that country, or access to, I don't know, a store or something, that has wireless Internet, but the risk of being found out is high. ”

(Int. Romania – LEA representative)

Also, a new critical issue needs to be underlined when discussing the relationship between the smuggler and the smuggling victims. More and more often, migrants are also double-crossed by smugglers promising transportation towards Western countries but ultimately ending up in Romania. Respondents to this project recount various stories about how migrants sometimes end up in Romania by accident (abandoned or simply misled), and how their documents are forged.

4.4 The United Kingdom

4.4.1 Recruitment

The overwhelming majority of the findings relating to the function of the Internet and digital technologies that facilitate the processes of people smuggling to the UK were attained from social networking websites, in particular Facebook. The virtual ethnographic research demonstrates that social networking sites are a key instrument for migrants and smugglers to broadcast information about travelling routes, the occurrence of border closures, transportation services and involved costs of arranging trips.

The Figure 17 shows a very popular smuggling page on Facebook broadcasting information of brutal attacks on migrants by border guards and guard dogs on migrants travelling via a land route attempting to cross through the Bulgarian border.

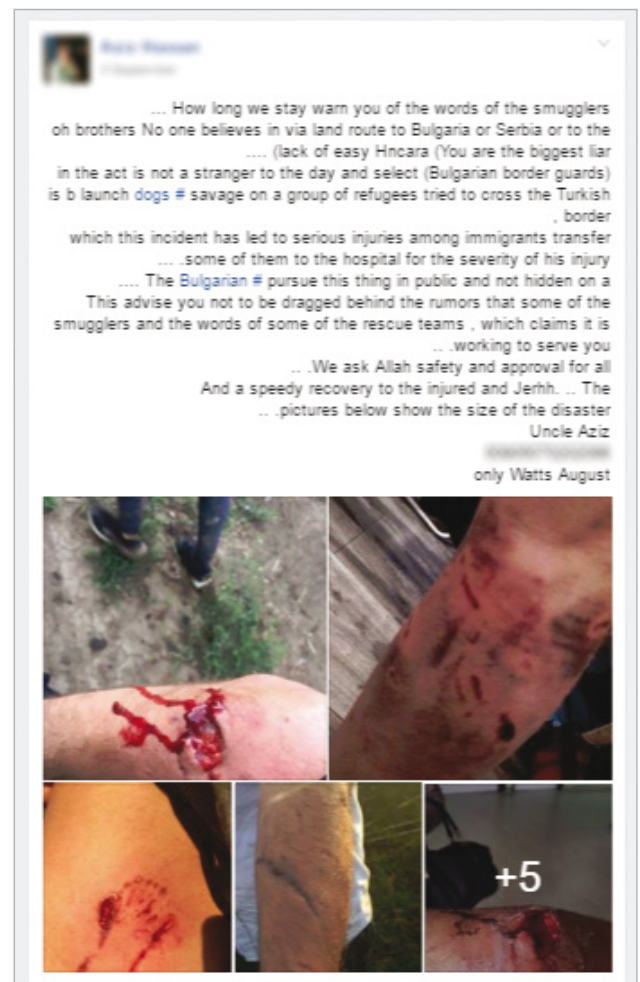
The research identified numerous active and highly popular smuggling-related pages and groups on Facebook that advertised transportation services, the sale of counterfeit travel documents such as passports, visas and identification papers including driving licenses, as well as general discussions of the navigation of paths into the UK, as well as in wider Europe. As one of interviewed experts mentioned, communication and the broadcasting of important information, such as which countries are easy to enter, where borders are open to travel through and where they have been closed, play powerful roles in the recruitment

of migrants to be smuggled and influence their decision-making processes:

“ It [the Internet] would be spreading news, if it's easy to get through the process of an asylum application, the news spreads very quickly, for example 'it's more relaxed in this country or the other country', then people will plan destinations accordingly. Again, it's communication, it's how you spread the news. ”

(Int. UK – Expert on Cybercrime)

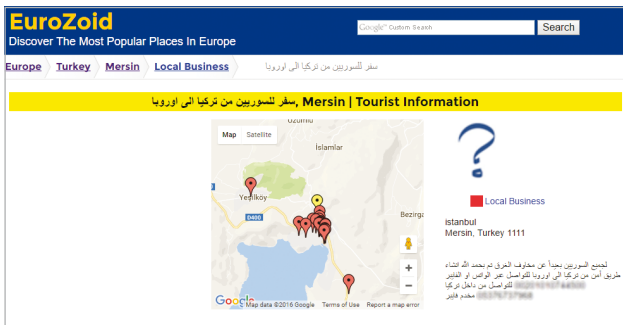
Figure 17. Example of broadcast information about smuggling of migrants on Facebook



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

In another typical site, it has been encountered smugglers advertised services by highlighting danger and urging potential clients to connect via Viber app.

Figure 18. Example of advertisement of a transportation service based in Turkey to travel to Europe, on a popular Europe travel guide website



Translation

For all the Syrians who wish to escape from their drowning fears, we have successfully set up a safe transit from Turkey to Europe through the Alwats. Connect via Viber or [phone numbers]. To communicate inside Turkey use Pra server for Viber.

Source: Website. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

Given that most of these pages and groups were private and unable to be freely accessed, it has been added these pages and groups as ‘friends’ in order to gain entry and also to receive notifications of new postings and updates relating to transportation journeys, the advertisement of new trips, usually dependent on suitable weather conditions, and the sale of passports or other such counterfeit documents. Owing to the illicit nature of these pages, researchers noticed that the names would be changed constantly, possibly as a means of avoiding detection, or accounts closed altogether. Indeed, one of interviewed smugglers remarked that on a frequent basis, human smugglers would continuously create and close pages on Facebook to evade possible law enforcement efforts:

“ I closed them [Smuggling pages on Facebook] all. There are not there anymore. There is no point in having them. I had many because I used each page for a little bit and then I opened another one and so one. For protection, you know. You don’t want to be stable in this business, you need to ‘move’ again and again for protection. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

The interviews with human smugglers revealed that the Internet was an important tool in their smuggling activities, in particular the recruitment phase to advertise their services, albeit at different levels of use:

“ Yes [using the Internet] but not as much as you may think. Most of my business in the beginning [recruitment] happens by people [offline]. People know you, they know what you do, they know you are a kacakci [smuggler], and they come to you and tell you what they want... I don’t trust the internet so much anyway because you never know who might be watching... My business partner in Kurdistan will send messages to friends, e-mails and ask ‘do you know anyone who wants to go to Europe? If you do, tell them to send me a message at so and so... ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 1)

“ Yes, I have used the internet many, many times! Internet along with mobile phones, of course, is the best to have business from a distance! I have been helping people to come to the UK since 2002. I enjoy being a kacakci [human smuggler]. [...] I used Facebook before I come to England for a year, a year and a half. I had many pages in face book and advertised my services. Transportation, travel to Europe, good prices, best service. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

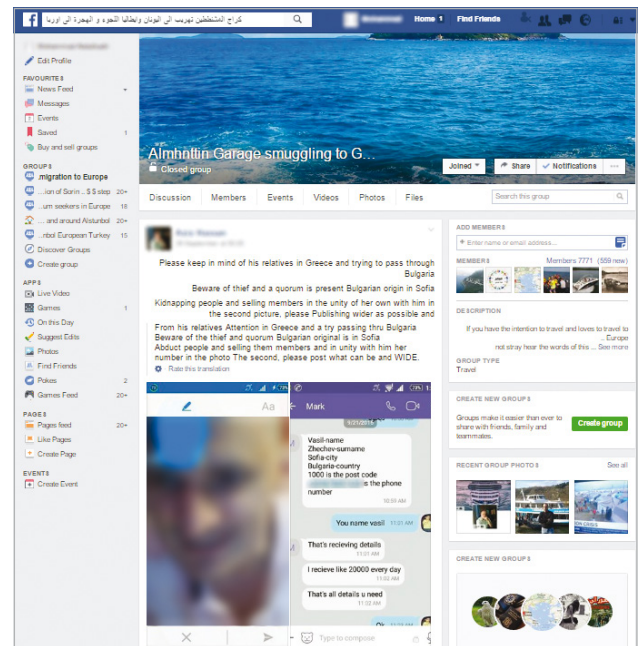
It is important to mention that Smuggler 1 emphasised that often, recruitment took place offline, as people who knew them either directly or indirectly, through friends or relatives, and their occupation as a smuggler would initiate contact in person and make enquiries on how to travel to the UK for themselves or for their relatives. According to Sanchez (2017), those seeking

to migrate explore potential smuggling options usually by consulting their friends and relatives who have made and undertaken successful smuggling journeys, often meeting with smugglers in person or chatting via telephone and may meet several smugglers until a suitable option is chosen. Moreover, a small number of smugglers manage to form a client base and positive reputation attesting to the reliability, degree of communication throughout the journey and the quality of the transportation, all of which contribute to the duration of a smuggling enterprise, enabling smugglers to generate and conduct business with prospective customers.

A compelling finding pertaining to the recruitment phase of people smuggling was that some pages, particularly the ones that were more active and popular, would expose fraudulent smugglers who were advertising deceptive transportation services. These posts would often be very lengthy, detailing the unscrupulous smuggler's name, nationality, the country and city they were operating in, how they had defrauded their victim or victims, particularly in regards to payment, with a photograph of the person also attached to the post. Some people would comment on the post to confirm that they too had been deceived by the duplicitous smuggler, and would strongly urge others to be aware and use caution. Researchers speculate that these pages that would routinely uncover deceptive smugglers act as a very effective form of benevolent recruitment, by demonstrating that they were looking after and protecting potential migrants by raising awareness of dangerous swindlers masquerading as smugglers, and instilling confidence of their services, which would encourage migrants to making arrangement trips of transportation with these pages instead.

Figure 19 shows a popular and active smuggling page on Facebook entitled 'Uncle Aziz' exposing fraudulent smugglers deceptively claiming to offer transportation services to Europe and the UK, by exhibiting screenshots of Viber chats in which travel arrangements were discussed.

Figure 19. Example of Facebook pages exposing fraudulent smugglers deceptively claiming to offer transportation services



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

4.4.2 Transportation

The research found a significant number of Facebook pages that were actively advertising transportation services, including boat, yacht or flight trips and to a lesser extent, land routes where the journey would be made on foot, to various countries in Europe, with one popular method of travel being from Turkey, in particular the cities of Izmir and Mersin, to various islands in Greece, and then utilising various routes to and within an assortment of European countries to the destination of the UK. One of interviewed smugglers mentioned that a relative of theirs would advertise the sale of European passports to facilitate transportation and entry to the UK:

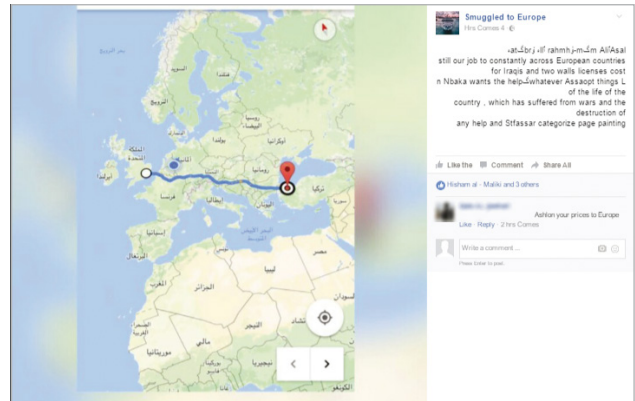
“ My cousin is in France and in his facebook account has a post about European passports. With one of those you get to England with no problem. You just need the money, 800-1000 euros is OK. [On being showed the particular Facebook account, including the advert/post translated from Arabic to English] ‘Want to buy passport, ID, visa and driving license with no hassle? We make really high quality documents for travel to European countries. We sell only best documents. Guaranteed success. We make perfect passports for UK, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, USA, Canada. Very competitive prices. Discount available for families. The passport can be ready in 5 days. For more information, send an e-mail: [address]@gmail.com / tel. [phone number]’ ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

Figure 20 shows a smuggling page on Facebook named ‘Smuggled to Europe’, advertising transportation services, and including a screenshot captured from Google Maps that demonstrates a transit route from Turkey to the destination of the UK.

The research found that, typically, these pages would post photographs of the particular means of transport, usually of boats, cruise liners and yachts, providing information on its size and dimensions, and the duration of the journey. In addition, these posts would also outline the prices charged for the routes and journey, and include a contact number to make further enquiries. Moreover, by way of perhaps gaining the confidence and trust of potential customers and by extension migrants, the research discovered that many of these pages extensively posted photographs and videos of ‘successful’ trips made, both during the journey, and after the destination had been reached.

Figure 20. Example of Facebook page advertising transportation services



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

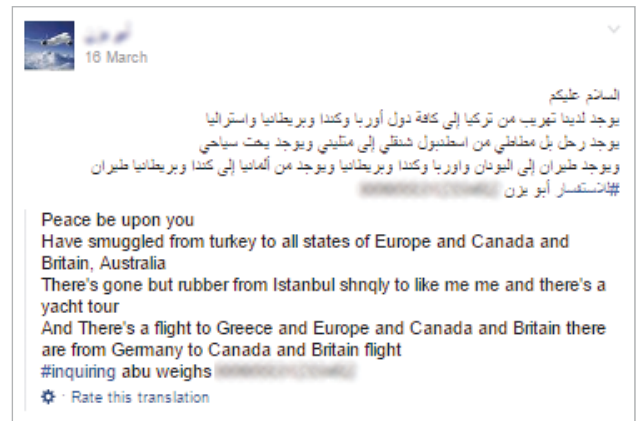
Figure 21 screenshots of transportation journeys being undertaken: the first image during the transportation process, and the second after arrival to the destination had been completed.

A box was featured on many of these pages that attested to how quickly the persons behind these pages would reply to messages, with some of the pages marked as ‘very responsive’, as replying within an hour, and others as ‘extremely responsive’, responding to messages in minutes. Some pages would also post status updates of successful journeys made, alert potential migrants of adverse weather conditions and of new routes into Europe using screenshots of Google Maps to demonstrate these routes in terms of distance and how to travel through the route without discovery by border guards or officials.

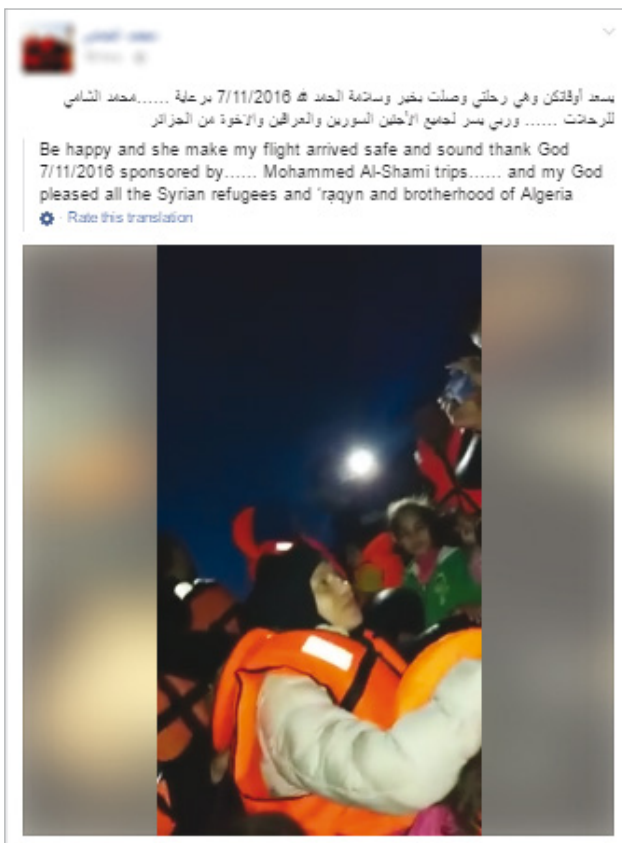
Figure 21. Example of Facebook group advertising transportation services



Figure 22. Example of Facebook page advertising the sale of transportation services



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

Figure 22 shows a smuggling page advertising the sale of transportation services. In this instance flight trips to the UK, with communication for further enquiries undertaken via WhatsApp.

Strikingly, the research came across numerous instance of the interplay between various forms of technology, in this instance between the Internet and mobile phone applications, the most widely used being WhatsApp and Viber. In this regard, researchers observed that when used in this way by smugglers, Facebook operates as a gateway, in that it introduces potential migrants to services through advertisements, with further communications, most likely to arrange transportation journeys and discuss payment taking place through WhatsApp and Viber, usually through the telephone numbers that were listed in the post. This was the usual method that took place for the interviewed smugglers, in which initial questions would be answered through private chats in Facebook but would then take place via mobile phone to make further arrangements between the smugglers and the clients, or between smugglers working alongside other smugglers:

“ This [private chats in Facebook] was very rare after they contacted me. Most of clients gave me a call; I offered a telephone number in the post, so they called me and made all arrangements. There are a few of, usually very young, people who will send messages in private chat in Facebook. Young boys who are on-line the whole time and are interested in going to Europe and they may want to ask something before the arrangements are made. You know to ask whether they can come with less money. Maybe because they don't have a phone, I don't know. Most of the people called me and I answer any questions they have. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

“ I just use mobile phones to communicate with my partners in places like Istanbul and Izmir. This is how we take care of business. Once the people get to Greece, there are others who take care of them. I also talk to people I know about the travel and advise them what to do when in Istanbul because Istanbul is very big and people from my town find it difficult. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 1)

Primarily when it comes to the smuggling of Asian and African migrants, all smuggling groups and/or individuals ‘cooperate’ (without even considering it) in an attempt to bring the bulk of migrants from Asia and Africa to the United Kingdom (as well as other countries of Western Europe). This takes place via a smuggler-to-smuggler approach that does not allow irregular migrants to be lost (see İçduygu & Toktas, 2002). Smugglers often unwittingly ‘collaborate’ with other smugglers, and are not known to one another, as they may live and operate in different villages, cities, regions, and countries (see, for example, Sanchez, 2017). In the event of arrest of one of the smugglers, or if the chain is sometimes broken during the journey (e.g., due to policing operations), other individuals, groups and networks, who have no connection with the smugglers of the initial stage, take over in the smuggling migrants. Information and communication technologies are instrumental at this part. Scholars have noted that smugglers and their clients rely on basic mobile phones for communication purposes, alongside social media and to recruit and guide clients, although as Sanchez (2017) points out, this usage is better understood as a reflection of the affordability and availability of mobile technology, rather than as a marker of the technological sophistication of smugglers. Significant sections of the communications that place between various smugglers working together take place through mobile technology, including phone calls, text messages (SMS), as well as WhatsApp and Viber and social media websites. These undertakings, when executed productively and in coordination, will guide clients to their final destination.

Figure 23 shows active and popular Facebook pages advertising smuggling services to the UK, as well as Europe, in particular transportation services via yacht and flight trips. Typically, cost breakdowns in Euros are included in the postings, with all further communication regarding these services taking place with phone chats using WhatsApp, through the phone numbers listed.

Figure 23. Example of Facebook pages advertising smuggling services to the UK



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

As a means of a more active engagement with this aspect of the virtual ethnography, researchers tried to contact some of the more popular smuggling Facebook pages, in particular those who were likely to respond swiftly to messages. The rationale for this approach was to try and discover whether there were particular pages or smugglers and ‘brokers’ that would be able to provide information on ways of transportation and routes taken to travel, specifically to the United Kingdom. Researchers contacted these pages with a simple inquiry of how it would be possible to travel to the United Kingdom, from Syria as well as the costs involved as a lone traveller for the journey. As a means of initiating conversation, researchers used an online translation tool to translate text to Arabic, and then proceeded to send messages to the pages via Facebook’s web (and desktop)-based Messenger feature. Whilst some of these pages did indeed provide swift responses, the majority of the time the researchers were informed that further information could only be discussed through mobile phone applications such as WhatsApp and Viber, with contact numbers provided to do so. However, given that these conversations would be conducted entirely in Arabic, and with researchers possessing insufficient knowledge of the Arabic language, this, unfortunately, was an impossible, challenging task. Advantageously, however, creating and setting up a Facebook account yielded much data, in that researchers were able to gain more access and insight into previously inaccessible content, such as relevant smuggling groups and pages.

Figure 24 shows the initiating and engaging in conversation with a smuggling page on Facebook, enquiring as to the ways in which it would be possible to be transported to the UK, and what routes the journey would entail.

Figure 24. Example of a Messenger chat with a smuggling page on Facebook



Source: Facebook. Elaboration by Teesside University – project Surf and Sound

The smugglers interviewed also remarked on the use of the Internet, in particular social media and mobile phones as being key mechanisms in the logistics of the transportation process, specifically keeping in contact with the clients during the transportation journey, as well as the arrival of their clients to the destination and, importantly, the arrangement of payment. Irregular migrants (or their families who very often see the facilitation of their migration as an investment) pay the full or at least 50% of the total smuggling fee in advance. This 50% is in most occasions used towards paying important actors of the journey before the actual journey starts. The rest of the fee is paid upon the migrants’ arrival in the destination country. In many occasions advance payments are made to a middleman, a trusted and prominent member of the local community, who then forwards the payment to the organiser upon the end of the migrants’ facilitated journey:

“ Once we have a customer, I have used Facebook and I have also been using e-mail in order to take care of details with regards to the details of the trip from Kurdistan to Istanbul and from Istanbul to Izmir, from Izmir into the Greek islands. Sometimes, especially when I know the person I helped to travel e-mails and Facebook are used to let me know that they have reached the destination and to sort out any outstanding money issues. We have to get paid too! You know, where to go and who to pay and so on. Sometimes there are problems any people are getting lost, they cannot find a place to stay, they cannot find someone to talk to, etc. etc. etc. the travel is full of problems and you cannot do this without e-mails, and phones. ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

As well as advertising transportation services, one of interviewed smugglers would also provide information on available accommodation and where to charge phones during journeys for which the duration of the trip to the destination country was uncertain:

“ In most of the places people have to stay [transit points], they need a house, a bed to sleep on. The best way for them to know what is there, cheap places to stay, is Facebook. You can find a hotel anywhere in Europe but the problem is that they are very expensive. When they travel for months or even years they want to spend as little money as possible. You never know how long the trip will last, and in some place, they ask them for a lot of money, 5 euros for a bottle of water, 10 euros for a sandwich, and some people Greece, in Italy, in France, they ask you 20 euros to let you recharge your mobile battery. So, in the internet, in Facebook, you can advertise accommodation for as little as 10 euros a night. When people travel, they are always on their mobiles to find the cheapest solutions to their everyday problems... my cousin does the same for cheap rooms. [On being showed a relevant post on Facebook on available accommodation in France] ‘Cheap rooms in Calais. 15 euros per night, TV included. Common toilet with shower. Clean. Available for families. Discount negotiable. For more information, [phone number]. ’ ”

(Int. UK – Smuggler 2)

4.5 Web survey

A web survey based on an online questionnaire, designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums, was administered for each key member state (N=995). Specifically, this section presents the data about at-risk websites visited and/or other possible abuses of the Internet (use of online chats, VOIP communications, etc.) on actions related to the smuggling of migrants.

For this scope, the following questions were administered, among others (see Annex C), to the Internet users:

- Have you ever encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers?
- Do you know where these contents were published?
- Why do you think these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky?
- Have you or someone you know ever used these services?

The results of the web survey supported, in toto, what already emerged with the exploration of the web and thanks to the in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

According to the results of the web survey about half of the sample declared to have never seen or heard cases in which the Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertised cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers (Table 3).

Table 3. Have you ever encountered Internet or mobile application contents (e.g. websites, posts on social networks, messages on websites/chats) advertising cross-border travelling or transferring of immigrants or asylum seekers? Percentages (N=966). Results from the web survey

Yes, I did	7.6%
No, but my relatives, friends or acquaintances did	4.0%
No, but I know about similar contents from the media	20.0%
No, but people say that similar contents exist	20.0%
No, I have never seen or heard about similar contents	48.4%
Total	100.0%

Source: elaboration by eCrime – project Surf and Sound

However, more than one out of ten stated that this is not an unknown phenomenon: in fact, 11.6 per cent declared to have seen or heard similar cases, directly (7.6%) or indirectly from their relatives, friends or acquaintances (4%). The rest of the respondents claimed to not know these cases personally or through their relatives, but from the media (20%) or other people (20%).

Although 38.5% of people claim to have never seen or heard instances of Internet or mobile content (such as websites, social networking messages, web/chat posts) that promote cross-border travel or transfer of immi-

grants or asylum seekers, and do not know or are not sure where these contents are published, it can be noted that the rest of the sample claimed that Facebook is the most frequent channel in which this published content was found (23.6%), followed by specific websites with announcement (10.6%) and other social networks such as Instagram (9.2%) (see Table A1, Annex D). Finally, they thought these ads were suspicious, dangerous or risky mostly because the offered travel was unhindered and did not mention bureaucratic bounds (36.6 %) or because the prices were unusual (too high or too low) (31.3 %) (see Table A2, Annex D).



50

The role of the Internet in the trafficking of human beings

The term ‘trafficking in human beings’ refers to the ‘the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those 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’. It is also considered exploitation ‘the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs’. This definition, to be found in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, of 5 April 2011, represents an important achievement for the legislation on trafficking of human beings, at the European level. This document, in fact, represents a first comprehensive legislative response to this growing phenomenon, and it reflects the effort to implement preventive actions and to offer a clear and unique definition.

The exploration of the web allowed for the discovery of how the Internet and social networks are used by traffickers to reach specific users. Facebook and dedicated websites play a significant role in this criminal activity.

This Chapter presents the results of research activities carried out in the four member states involved in the project (i.e. Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom) concerning the role of the Internet in the trafficking of human beings. Specifically, for each country the results related to recruitment/transportation and exploitation (sexual and labour-related). phases are presented. Finally, the main results of the web survey designed for users of e.g. social networks, dating websites, web forums are briefly provided to support the research findings.

5.1 Bulgaria

5.1.1 Recruitment

Unlike the process of smuggling, where the Internet is used only in part of the cases but could exhaust the whole process of recruitment, in the process of trafficking both for sex and labour exploitation, online contacts represent only the first phase of the recruitment. It is followed by offline meetings in person aimed at further selection of ‘candidates’:

“ I arranged a meeting with the girl and we preliminarily agreed on the payment. But another man goes for me to estimate whether she fits. When everything is done, I usually appear as well with a direct ‘job’ offer. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

“ Once they have transferred the first payment we call them for a direct meeting in the office or on the spot – that is, our man goes to their town for a meeting. If from a certain city 20 people are called, a general meeting is set up to advertise the job. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

Sexual exploitation

According to the interviewed sex trafficker, the Internet has not only replaced the old outdated methods, but it has also facilitated, to a great extent, the process of recruitment of potential victims and has speeded it up significantly:

“ It is the main mean for the recruitment of girls; it helps me a lot. It’s not necessary to persuade the girl, she wants to herself... Years ago I used the old methods as well: I liked a girl, sent a boy to court her – I used to choose pretty ones from poor families – overwhelmed her with gifts and then she ‘worked’ them back. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

Also, the new Internet-facilitated methods seem quite widespread, at least among the circle of ‘colleagues’ of the interviewee:

“ All who engage in it, which I do, use the Internet and mobile applications. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

According to the interviewed person, he now exclusively recruits girls who independently engage in prostitution, and for this reason checks the dating sites where they could be frequently met:

“ We regularly follow the dating sites (Elmaz, Twoo, Gepime, etc.) ... I most frequently seek girls in Elmaz and Facebook... I pretend to be a man who needs a companion and try to be cautious, but they disclose to me on their own that they seek sex for payment. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

Although Facebook is largely used, it is perceived as being a bit harder to use to recruit in comparison with the dating sites:

“ But on Facebook the girls who offer themselves are more cautious. I judge whether they are a fit and whether I can count on income from them. I’m careful not to deal with minors, there are many. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – Trafficker)

The interviewed person shared that the girls recruited from the mentioned sites are used for exploitation and trafficking within the country, while the girls for international trafficking are recruited through Tinder, because those who are registered there speak at least two Euro-

pean languages, and the profits they bring, respectively, are double in comparison with profits made in their home country.

Regardless of whether Facebook or dating sites are used, in all cases the communication is made through private chats, and then transferred to applications like Skype or Viber, or directly to mobile phones.

Unlike the general cohesion of information provided by both sides in cases of smuggling and labour trafficking, the victims of sex trafficking presented a more diverse picture than that presented by the trafficker. Only one of the three interviewed victims was recruited through the Internet and estimated it as a main recruitment method:

“ It all started with my registrations on dating sites – Twoo, ELMAZ... The second month of my registrations I met my current pimp. He introduced himself as a man seeking adventures. The photo that was placed on the site did not correspond to his true appearance. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

“ Almost all of the more intelligent girls looking for income in this way use the Internet. It’s much easier, and so you have access to more people. I know at least 6 girls who do it that way. But some work for themselves. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

The second victim was recruited through the ‘lover boy’ method, and the third – through false information from friends regarding the nature of the work:

“ I met a boy. He offered me a job. He told me what the job was, that a lot of money could be made and I agreed because there was nothing to do, plus I also believed he was in love with me and we would do something together. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

“ They placed the ad like that – maids sought. However, not maids, but prostitutes. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

The difference in recruitment could be connected with the victims' socio-demographic status. The first victim is about 23-25 years old, with a Bulgarian ethnic background, with secondary education completed and at least an average knowledge of foreign languages. The second one is a few years older, has not completed secondary school (dropped out of it to arrive with the 'boyfriend'), and of Roma ethnicity. And the ethnicity of the third one could not be clearly defined, but she is about ten years older than the first two victims, with apparently lower educational level and expressive skills. She has never used the Internet nor mobile apps. However, usage of the Internet as a recruitment method could not be ethnic-defined. The Roma victim evidenced the Internet recruitment of girls with Roma ethnicity:

“ A man, whom I know – when I was pregnant I was with him – and he was busy with other girls, he was trying to take 2-3 girls and it worked. They obviously knew what type he was; they needed work or simply were of that sort. Just the first week they were chatting on Facebook and the next week they came to him to work. Knowing what it was all about... ”

(Int. Bulgaria – THB victim)

The opinions of the LEA representatives regarding the role of the Internet in the recruitment process differ to some extent. One of the interviewed four representatives expressed the opinion that the Internet facilitates the recruitment both in trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, as well as in the smuggling of refugees and illegal migrants, without giving approximate quantitative estimations regarding the share of cases in which the Internet is used.

“ To a great extent, they allow free communication, which in definite cases facilitates the recruitment of victims of trafficking. It is hard to follow all cases because not one but many networks are used. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

According to another LEA representative:

“ Internet hardly has a role. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

He explained that recruitment in the process of trafficking for sexual exploitation is usually done in person, through acquaintances. Victims are usually from small, poor settlements and know in advance the nature of the 'job'.

The LEA representatives estimate that the share of recruitments through the Internet for sex trafficking is approximately half of the cases, while the respective share for labour trafficking is perceived as much lower, or insignificant:

“ Through the Internet it's about 50-60 per cent of the cases... For labour exploitation, it is done without the Internet, because Gypsies are predominantly recruited, for low-qualified labour. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

“ The Internet is used in less than 50 per cent of the cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation and much less in cases of trafficking for labour exploitation. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Also, the interviewees from this group of respondents specify:

“ In both types of traffic, the process of recruitment may not be performed solely through the Internet. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

They explain that the initial contact between traffickers and victims might be done through the Internet, but to complete the recruitment, a personal meeting is needed as well. In another type of recruitment described, the Internet is the intermediary phase of the process:

“ Also, there is a scheme in which victims are first spotted in places they frequent – at school, in malls, in bars and discos. Then the names of those spotted are asked to be identified by their acquaintances and they are then looked for on Facebook. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Regarding the question of which Internet options are used for recruitment, the LEA representatives do not fully agree about the predominant model. One of them puts the stress on the circumstance of whether it is internal or external trafficking:

“ I will dare to say that dating sites are used mainly for recruiting of girls for ‘work’ abroad. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

Another one outlined Facebook as a main instrument:

“ They create pages on Facebook that are closed groups, and the girls add them as their place of work. The recruiter finds potential victims, he identifies them, and then he writes in a personal chat. Then they might also use Viber, WhatsApp and the like, but we cannot know that for sure. Such opportunities exist on Twitter, and Google Books, but are not used for the purpose of trafficking; in Bulgaria, the main social network is Facebook. Websites of dating agencies and for studying abroad are also used, but very rarely. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – LEA representative)

And the third respondent of this group stated that advertisements on different websites are the main Internet instrument for recruitment, but also gave a concrete example of when Facebook and Skype were used as well.

All of the three interviewed NGO representatives estimated the role of the Internet in the recruitment process for sex trafficking as increasing; but their assessments regarding its current role, as well as the mechanisms of involvement they described, differed substantially.

The representative according to whom the current role of the Internet is already the major one, described a mechanism very similar to those described by the sex trafficker and the victim recruited through the Internet: that the primary target are girls who already try to use the Internet to make money through prostitution.

“ She has decided that she will earn money this way and he gives her... He pays her and he shares, ‘I sleep with her, decide if she is good enough and naturally I make an offer to her (to work for me)... ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

She emphasizes that the existing dating sites are the primary initial means of contact that is then transferred to Skype or phone and followed by a personal meeting. According to her statements Facebook is also used, including for checking whether someone has accounts on dating sites. Regarding the type of victims who had not been engaged in prostitution (and the respondent stated they are an increasingly smaller share of all), the traffickers infiltrate within school groups of girls and play ‘lover boys’, e.g., the recruitment happens entirely offline.

The other two NGO representatives stated that the primary recruitment method is still the ‘lover boy’ method, and that the Internet just assists the traditional methods. They paid attention to victims who hadn’t personally thought about the possibility of prostitution.

“ With regard to the recruitment of victims the most popular method is ‘Lover Boy’, in which he wins the trust of the victim, builds a romantic relationship that ends with an offer to go abroad and thus start the exploitation. There are also other options – acquaintances, acquaintances of the victim, relatives abroad. ”

(Int. Bulgaria – NGO representative)

According to one of the respondents-NGO representatives, both job postings and social media are used for recruitment, and equally for sex and labour exploitation: