Online and Technology-facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings

Study prepared for Greta/CoE
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Publications and Studies

https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/publications-and-studies
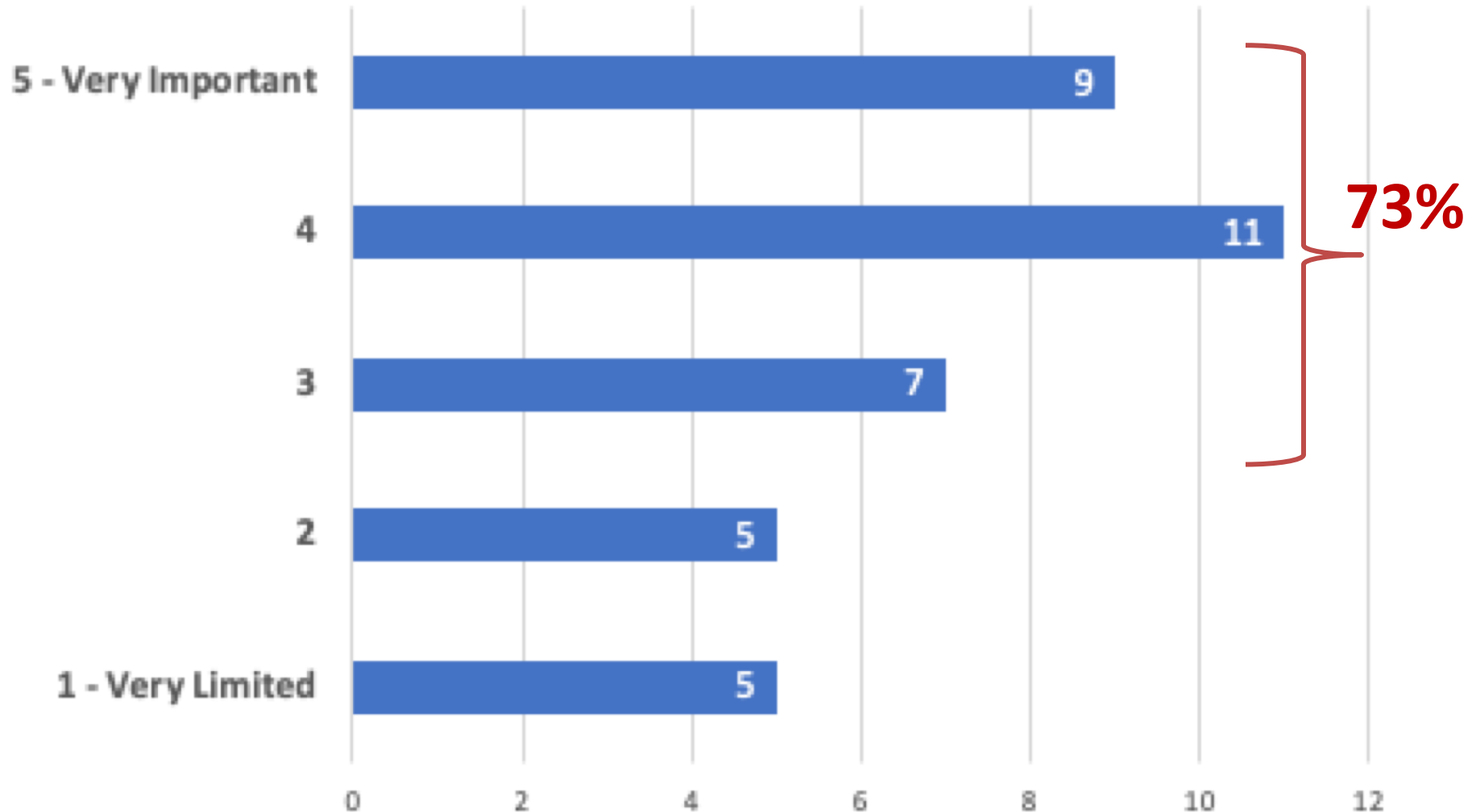
The study

- Explores the operational and legal challenges that State Parties – and to some extent NGOs – face in **detecting**, **investigating** and **prosecuting** online and ICT-facilitated THB, identifying victims and raising awareness among at-risk groups.

- Explores the **strategies**, **tools** and '**good practices**' to overcome challenges and enhance the response to online and ICT-facilitated THB.

Evidence Base

- Evidence *systematically* collected through a purposely built **questionnaire** from:
  - 40 State Parties to the CoE Anti-Trafficking Convention
  - Plus 12 NGOs and 2 Tech Companies.

ICTs Impact on THB: Severity Scale

Answers from State Parties (N = 37)

Challenges to detection, investigation and prosecution (I)

- Constantly growing **volume** of online activities, including volume of online advertisements

- Challenges in **sorting online advertisements** to identify those related to THB (sexual and non-sexual services)

- Difficulties in ascertain **identities** of offenders and victims when operating online

- Use of **encryption**

Challenges to detection, investigation and prosecution (II)

- Shortage of police officers trained in **online investigations**, covert cyber-investigations, etc. and/or shortage of THB investigators with advanced IT skills

- Shortage of **prosecutors** trained on ICT-facilitated THB

- Shortage of **technical equipment** and difficulties in keeping it up-to-date

Challenges to detection, investigation and prosecution (III)

- Short data **retention periods for IP addresses** and difficulties in accessing them

- **Time-consuming process** for obtaining evidence from ICT companies and lack of response from some

- **Fast changing behavioural patterns** of offenders (changes in *modus operandi*) and ICT-users more generally

Recommendations (21)

Training and Capacity Building

- Need to invest in **human capital** as much as in **technological tools**

- Developing training curricula and skills around **digital knowledge**
  - Electronic evidence, Internet monitoring, big data, social network analysis, cyber-patrols, digital undercover officers (cyber-investigations)

- Technology should be a permanent feature of annual reports (to create context-specific knowledge and help pick up changes)

Training and Capacity Building

- Prosecutors should be provided with training on technology-facilitated THB and procedures to request electronic evidence from private companies/other jurisdictions

- Training should be extended to NGOs, e.g. on scenarios and trends; as well as on handling of digital evidence

Institutional Designs

- Reviewing the internal distribution of **digital investigative capabilities** to anticipate and avoid potential **bottlenecks in investigations**

  - Lack of specialist officers at the local level and the overreliance on assistance from (busy) centralised cyber-crime units are likely to create bottlenecks

CoE Cybercrime Convention

- Wider and enhanced training on the possibilities offered by the Cybercrime Convention as not all State Parties are currently using the tools available to their full potential → **procedural provisions** [digital evidence]

- Second Additional Protocol on sharing of **electronic evidence** is open for signature

Designing out opportunities for traffickers

- Enhancing **online confidential reporting mechanisms,** including through chats, chatbots and instant messaging

- Working with private companies to design **content analytics** to detect THB cases and allow users to flag up suspicious activities

Social Advertising and Awareness

- Working with private companies and NGOs to increase online **social advertising** to prevent victimisation and improve detection

- Working with NGOs and private companies to run initiatives to **raise awareness on technology-related risks, including how traffickers might exploit technology** and how potential exploitative situations might begin

Technology Strategy

- Inclusion of a technology strategy in national action plans for combating trafficking in human beings.
  - Including improved data collection

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More info

New report on online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings

https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/new-report-on-online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings

Online and technology -facilitated trafficking in human beings Summary and recommendations

https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-summary-/1680a5e10c