The digitalisation of human trafficking

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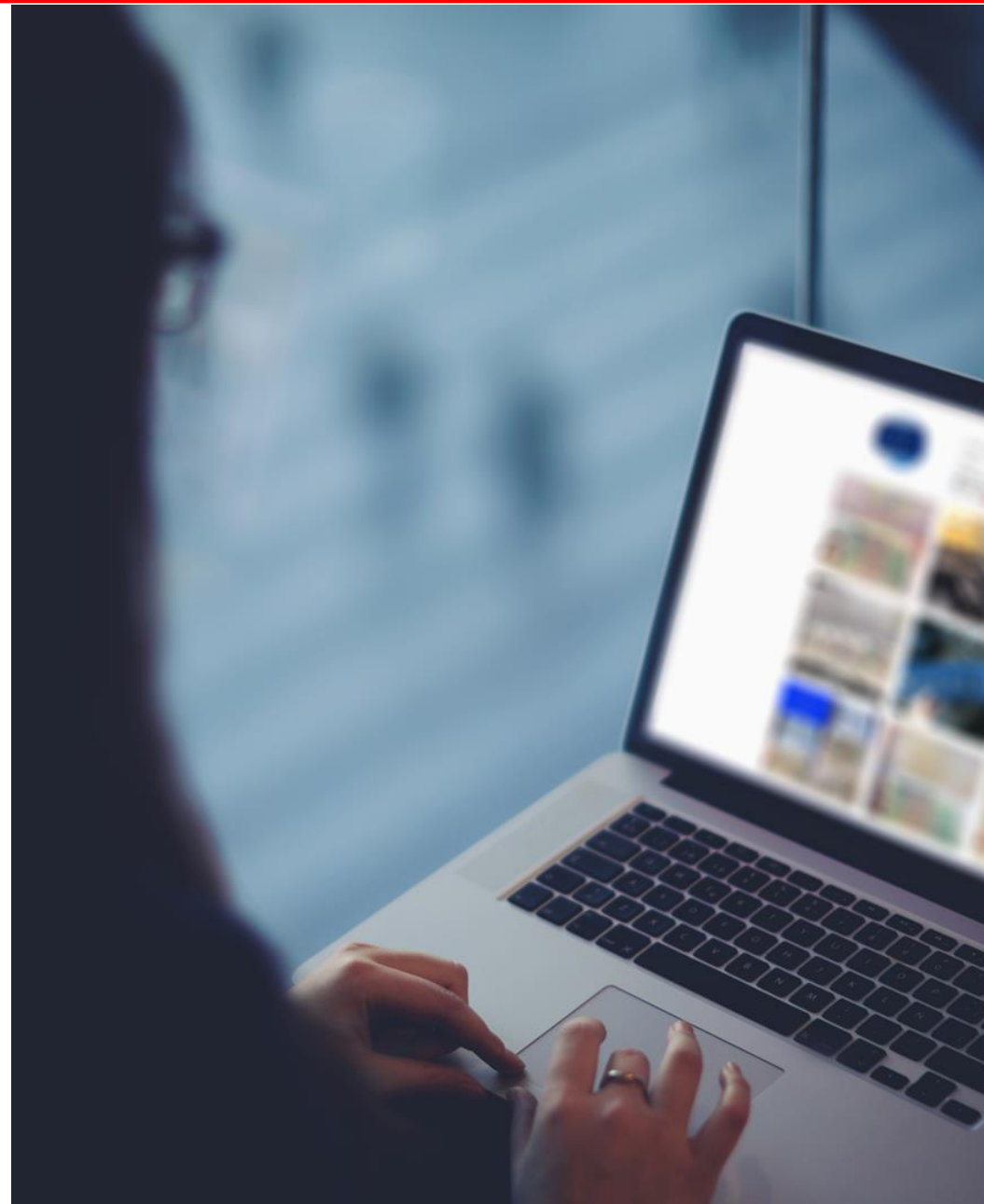University of Trento
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THB and digital society: intro

The digitalisation of human trafficking is **not a new phenomenon**: first case (recorded) in 2004

Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transition (like other criminal activities)
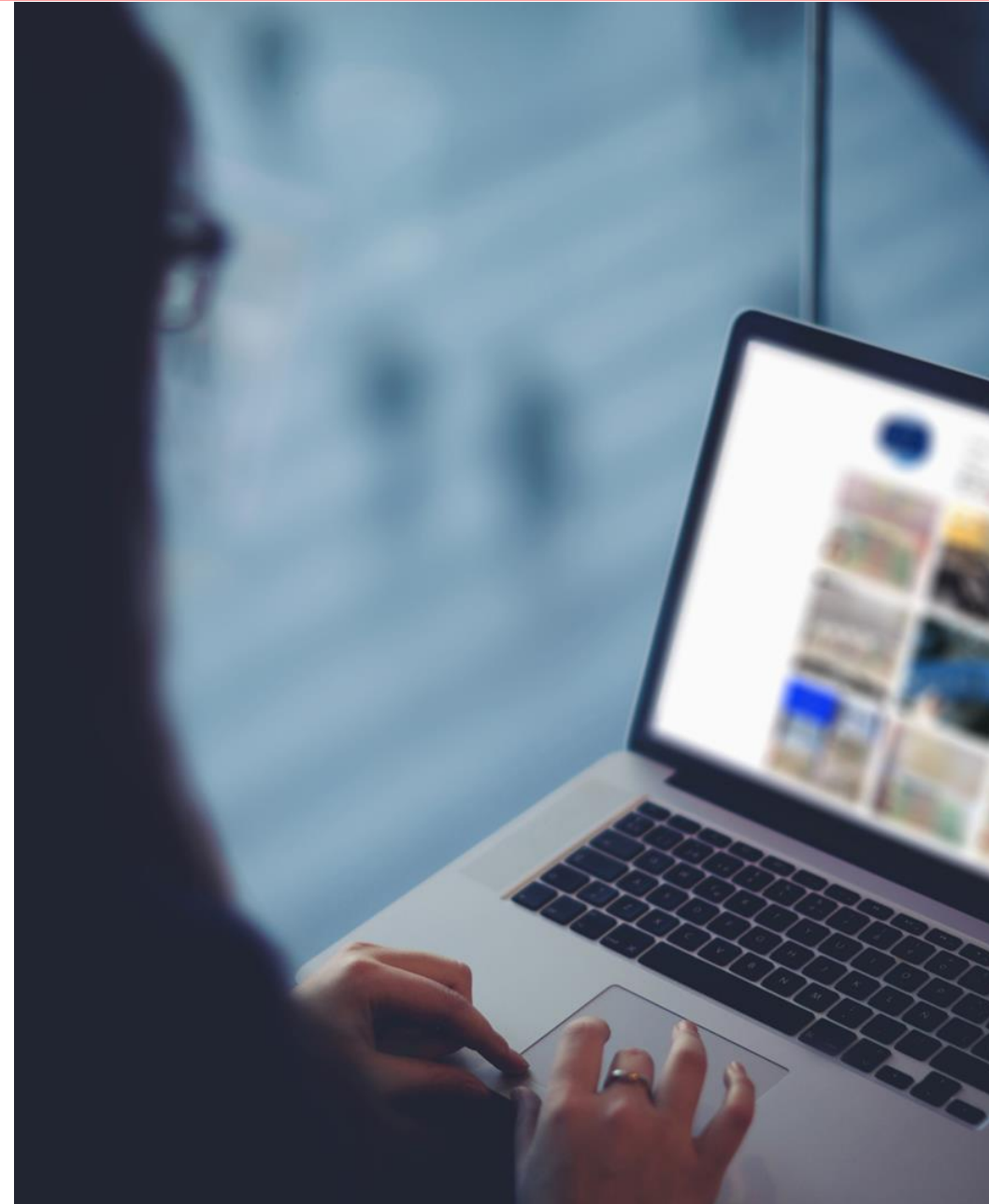
In today's presentation:

- overview of the digitization of criminal activity

- cues/hints based on research results

THB and digital society: sources

Sources:

- Results of the EU project **Surf & Sound** / **further research activities** in this field (es. Di Nicola et al. 2017; Antonopoulos et al. 2020):

    - Methods: **virtual ethnography** (active and passive) | **interweaves** with LEAs prosecutors, operators, victims, traffickers | **case studies**

- **Scientific production** (es. Latonero 2011; Fraser 2016; Volodko et al. 2020; Raets & Janssens 2021; Giommoni & Ikwu 2021; L'Hoiry et al. 2021)

- Reports from **institutions and organisations** (es. UNICEF 2017; Europol 2020; UNODC 2021, GRETA 2021, 2022)

Phase 1: recruitment

Main techniques enabled and / or facilitated by new technologies:

- Misleading **job advertisements** and **offers**

- **Lover-boy** method (via social media and dating apps)

- **Sextortion**

Victim, Bulgarian (exp. In Italy)

"It all started with my registration on dating sites (Twoo, ELMAZ). After two months I met my current exploiter.

He introduced himself as a man looking for adventures. The photo he used on the site does not match his true appearance."
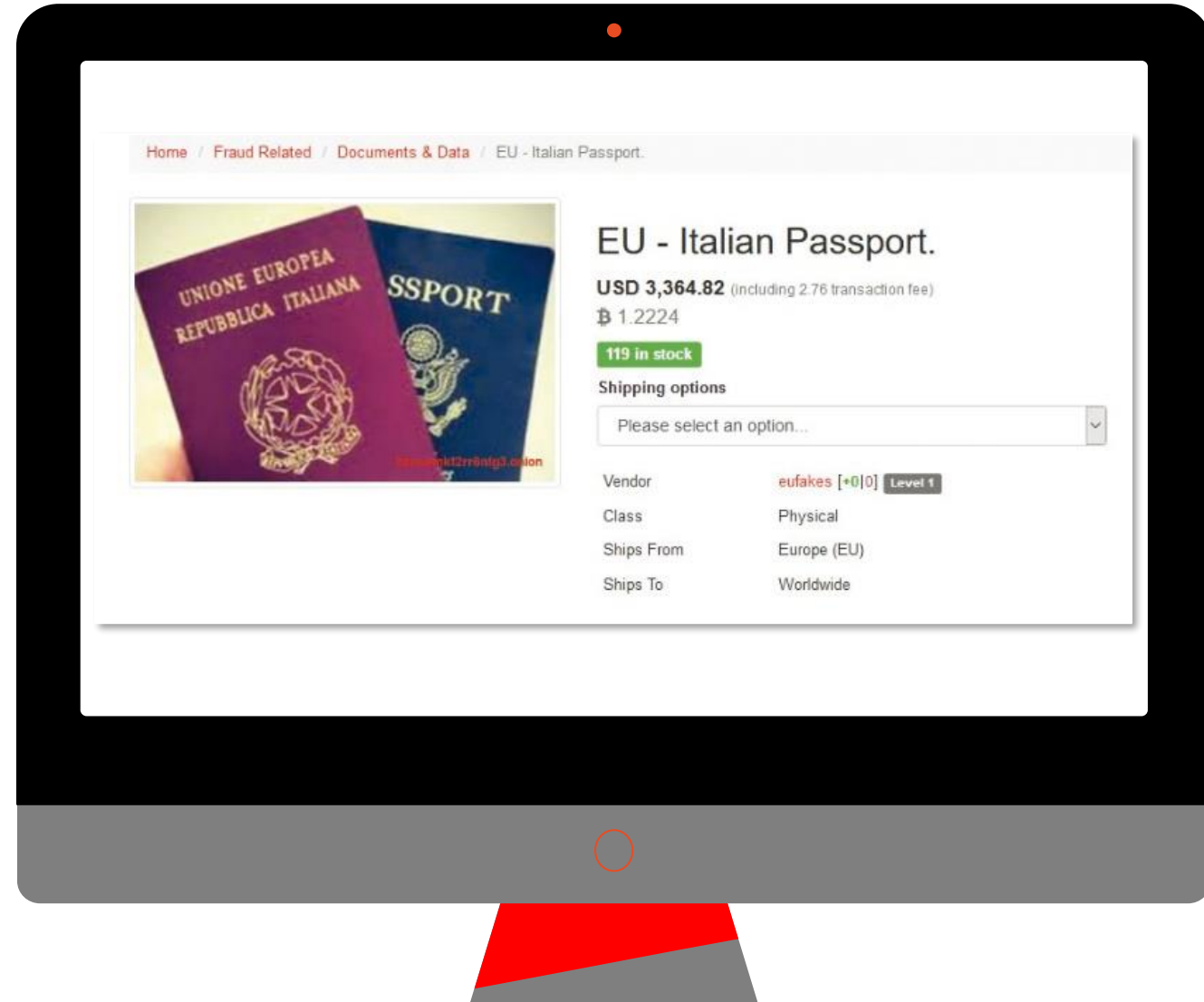
Trafficker, Romania

"Facebook is more useful than it used to be 10-15 years ago.

You stay at home, look at their photos, [...] socialize with them, meet them and it all happens with their agreement "

Phase 2: transportation

ICT facilitates:

- **logistical / organisational aspects** (ticket purchase, room booking, etc.)

- **communications**

- the possibile acquisition of forged documents (role of the dark web)

Phase 3: exploitation

Main techniques enabled and / or facilitated by new technologies:

- **Promotion** of victims' services

- Victim **control tools**

- **Virtual (sexual) exploitation** (livestream, cyber sex, creation of pornographic material)

Unità di strada, Italy

The victim was exploited in an apartment (services were advertised online) where the perpetrator had installed hidden cameras that recorded videos that he uploaded to a paid pornographic website. He then threatened the victims to publish (openly) the videos.

Case Study, UNICEF

An underage girl made a love connection on Instagram with another subject who asked her to send intimate photos. He then required her to send more explicit content (which he resold in virtual environments), otherwise she would have the photos published in her possession.

What do the research findings tell us? Cues/Hints

1. **Submersion**. Especially after the pandemic, human trafficking processes have become increasingly digital. The massive promotion of online victim services is also shaping traditional patterns (increasing indoor exploitation). A submerged phenomenon that is becoming more and more submerged.

2. **Restructuring**. There is a need to avoid possible biases related to consolidated (and crystallized) knowledge about trafficking (e.g., ethnicity and origin of victims, methods of recruitment, forms of exploitation).

3. **Spectrum theory**. There is no dichotomy between "trafficking" and "e-trafficking": there is a spectrum of digitization of trafficking processes. Within that same spectrum, there are specific victims and perpetrator types.

What do the research findings tell us? Cues/Hints

4. **Multidisciplinarity**. A (truly) multidisciplinary approach is needed (to avoid a purely "technological" focus). Collaboration between experts from different fields and actors in different functions involved in prevention / response / support to victims.

5. **Definitions**. Are the traditional definitions still valid in the digital society?

Art.3 THB Protocol – Palermo Convention

"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"

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PROTECTION of victims of human trafficking

E-trafficking is closer than you think

GROUNDING IN CONSOLIDATED EXPERIENCES TO ADDRESS NEW CHALLENGES

SALA DELLE COLONNE
Piazza Palazzo di Città 1 (second floor), Torino

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