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THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION  
RESEARCH AND POLICY INSTITUTE

**BRIEFING**

# Commercial sexual exploitation: The impact of technology

Insights from the Irish sex trade

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THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION RESEARCH AND POLICY INSTITUTE

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# About The SERP Institute



The Sexual Exploitation Research and Policy Institute is Ireland's only independent research body dedicated to the study of commercial sexual exploitation. Our research influences academic discourse and creates useful knowledge for law and policy makers, practitioners, survivors and activists.

The SERP Institute is a centre of excellence in generating new evidence and informing policy to combat the harms of all forms of commercial sexual exploitation in Ireland and beyond. The team has over 35 years of expertise combined in research, policy and advocacy work on these issues. We monitor and investigate the nature and impact of the sex trade on victims, survivors and wider society, bridging the gap between research and frontline practice to disrupt the myths and expose the truth about the commercial sex trade.

The SERP Institute investigates, with integrity, the ways in which sexism, poverty, racism and individual vulnerabilities are exploited in the pursuit of profit. In doing so, the Institute's work enhances the broader understanding of commercial sexual exploitation and the different manifestations of the sex trade in all its guises including:

- Prostitution
- Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- The sexual exploitation of children and young people
- Pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation that take place online
- New and emerging forms of commercial sexual exploitation, occurring both on and offline.

For more information on our work and previous research, please visit [www.serp.ie](http://www.serp.ie)

# Defining technology-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation

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Technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings is defined internationally as the use of modern communications and information technologies, such as the internet, social media platforms, smartphones, and other digital tools, to engage in various aspects of human trafficking. Technology is utilised, and indeed misused, by human traffickers at all stages of exploitation.<sup>1</sup> In the context of commercial sexual exploitation specifically, technology is relied upon by both pimps and traffickers to:

- Identify, target, groom and recruit victims into the sex trade, often via social media and messaging platforms
- Organise many aspects of victims' transportation and travel
- Threaten, coerce and control victims via digital means (including by tracking their movements and threatening to 'dox' or out them by sharing explicit content with their family and friends)
- Advertise victims online for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- Directly connect victims with their 'users' – i.e. sex buyers
- Film and/or livestream the exploitation and abuse of victims
- Process payments and launder the profits earned through the exploitation of their victims, often using cryptocurrencies.

Experts have determined that cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation that have *not* been facilitated by technology during at least one stage of the process are becoming increasingly rare to find.<sup>2</sup>

# Sexual exploitation advertising websites

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This briefing focuses in particular on the central role played by prostitution advertising websites in facilitating and amplifying trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation by seamlessly connecting victims to a very broad ‘customer base’ of sex buyers.<sup>3</sup> Sites such as these – also known as ‘sexual exploitation advertising’ websites (SEAs)<sup>4</sup> – have proliferated across the globe<sup>5</sup> and serve as a primary venue for commercial sexual exploitation. According to an analysis by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (the OSCE):

**‘Unlike labor trafficking, in which the services of victims do not usually need to be advertised to third parties, advertising targeted at sex buyers is core to the business model of those who traffic persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation... The online method has many benefits for exploiters, including allowing traffickers to expose victims to a geographically broader customer base, as well as being correlated with higher numbers of buyers per day compared to solicitation in the context of street-based prostitution.’<sup>6</sup>**

As the ‘shop window’ of the sex trade, SEAs are essential to supplying women in prostitution to meet the demand created by sex buyers.<sup>7</sup> But these sites also seek to further encourage and inflate this demand by offering sex buyers an almost unending supply of women whose bodies they can purchase sexual access to, and curating buyers’ preferences by allowing them to choose women from a ‘menu’ of options such as age, nationality, ethnicity, dress size, shoe size, breast size, and sex acts provided, to name but a few.

While women in prostitution are advertised in this very public way using titillating or explicit photographs in which they can very often be clearly identified, both sex buyers and those who organise and exploit women in prostitution benefit from the anonymity the online environment provides. Having selected their chosen woman, buyers need only supply a first (often fake) name over the phone when ‘booking’, while pimps and traffickers can easily remain anonymous and avoid detection by law enforcement by advertising their victims as ‘independent escorts’ to create the illusion of free will.<sup>8</sup>

Previous research has demonstrated that sex buyers are largely indifferent both to women in prostitution’s current wellbeing, and the circumstances that drew them into the sex trade in the first instance.<sup>9</sup> Pimps and traffickers are aware of this, and therefore seek to integrate those they are exploiting into the ‘mixed populations’<sup>10</sup> of the mainstream sex trade, hiding them in plain sight. The OSCE echoes this point, noting that: **‘Traffickers usually do not advertise human trafficking victims per se, but create the appearance of services being delivered willingly by the victim.’<sup>11</sup>** A large study of survivors of human trafficking in the US found that 75% were advertised for prostitution online.<sup>12</sup>

It must be noted that the platforms that advertise prostitution are rarely ‘neutral players’ in this context – in many cases such platforms, knowingly or with gross negligence, facilitate and indeed profit from sexual exploitation, as the evidence presented below shall demonstrate.



## A brief profile of the Irish sex trade

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It has been determined that over 1000 women are involved in prostitution in Ireland at any one time, primarily in indoor locations, but the real total is likely to be higher because the trade is extremely mobile, with many women having no fixed address in Ireland, constantly moving or being moved around different prostitution markets throughout the EU.<sup>13</sup> More than 90% are migrant women<sup>14</sup> – with over 40 nationalities represented in SERP’s research – primarily from Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and Africa. Approximately 6% of those in the trade are transwomen.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, a smaller group of vulnerable Irish women are being sexually exploited in locations including the street, homeless accommodation and crack houses. A proportion of all women involved were groomed, coerced or trafficked into prostitution as girls under the age of 18 – this was the case for 18% of the sample in SERP’s recent study.<sup>16</sup>

Based on extensive evidence from multiple sources gathered by SERP on the Irish commercial sex trade over the last eight years, it has been established that approximately 10-15% of women in prostitution in Ireland fit the ‘classic’ definition of trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation recognised in Irish law,<sup>17</sup> while approximately 5-10% have entered prostitution by choice, in circumstances where they had other choices available to them. Meanwhile, the majority of approximately 80% fall into a much larger ‘vulnerable’ grouping – these are mainly migrant women, new to Ireland and often with limited English, who have been drawn into prostitution primarily by poverty and the urgent need to support family/loved ones. These women have been left with no other option but to enter prostitution in order to survive – described in the literature as making a highly constrained or indeed ‘choiceless choice’.<sup>18</sup>

In stark contrast to the profile of prostituted persons outlined above, Ireland’s 100,000+ sex buyers are overwhelming male, Irish, married or in a relationship, well-educated, with incomes above the average.<sup>19</sup> SERP’s research has previously demonstrated that Irish sex buyers are primarily motivated by a sense of sexual entitlement and pursuit of their own desires in purchasing sexual access to the bodies of women in prostitution, and that they largely have complete disregard for the welfare or circumstances of these women at the point of purchase.<sup>20</sup>

The pursuit of profit drives the businesses of commercial sexual exploitation, with criminality a core feature of sex trades in all their guises. In Ireland, the highly mobile domestic sex trade is tightly controlled by a series of organised crime networks, both domestic and international.<sup>21</sup> It is these networks (crime gangs) that take charge of moving women around the country for the purposes of prostitution, arranging their ‘bookings’ with as many sex buyers as possible in order to maximise their own profits.

Since the early 2000s in Ireland, prostitution has primarily been advertised online. In line with international trends, as noted above, the vast majority involved are advertised as ‘independent escorts’ to create the impression of autonomy. Women are advertised in this way from all of the aforementioned groupings in the trade, including those who have been pimped, controlled, exploited and trafficked.<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that both the advertising of prostitution and the purchase of sex are illegal in Ireland,<sup>23</sup> pimps and traffickers continue to profit handsomely from sexual exploitation, facilitated by the websites that advertise women to sex buyers – a multi-million euro business in itself.

# Monitoring and analysis of SEAs

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Building on SERP's international work with the OSCE on the issue of technology-facilitated trafficking, in 2023 SERP collaborated with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) to demonstrate the role and nature of sexual exploitation advertising in Ireland.<sup>24</sup> This latest analysis develops this evidence base further through the regular monitoring of the website most commonly used by sex buyers to find women in prostitution in Ireland.

STIM – the Sexual Trafficking Identification Matrix – is employed in this context to identify indicators of sexual exploitation in the Irish commercial sex trade. STIM is a tool developed by academics in Sheffield University in the UK which sets out a series of 'risk indicators' (essentially red flags) for sex trafficking that appear on prostitution advertising websites.<sup>25</sup> The original development of the STIM indicators involved synthesising evidence from the international literature and the professional experiences of expert interviewees drawn from law enforcement, the legal profession, NGOs and academia. STIM comprises 28 separate indicators of potential sex trafficking and sexual exploitation that are often found on prostitution advertising websites (see Table 1 below) – such as those relating to youth, nationality, the provision of risky sex acts and the organisation and control of prostitution by third-party profiteers. This present analysis is also informed by the OSCE's work internationally in developing red flags for sexual exploitation and trafficking identifiable in prostitution advertising, which has many commonalities with STIM.<sup>26</sup>

For the purposes of this exercise, the advertising website selected for analysis was closely monitored over the course of a four-week period in August–September 2024 to assess whether indicators of sexual exploitation were present. Data were systematically gathered and analysed regularly once per week from the site (on four separate occasions across

the four-week monitoring period) in relation to the following variables:

- The total number of profiles advertised on the site
- The number of profiles advertised in different locations across the island of Ireland
- The ages of those advertised
- The nationalities of those advertised
- The prices being charged<sup>27</sup>
- The sex acts being provided.

In addition, the site was monitored over the same four-week period to gather snapshots of the following:

- The profile descriptions of women advertised on the site, with a focus on young women, women advertised at a 'low price' and those advertised as 'duos'<sup>28</sup>
- The photographs used in women's profiles, with a focus on how the subject is presented and posed, the location and setting.

While the latter approach is not systematic and must be considered a snapshot rather than a comprehensive analysis of all site content, it nevertheless proved useful in providing some sense of the nature of the profiles advertised during this time period. In this process, profiles of concern were very quickly identified and then cross-referenced with STIM. It must be borne in mind that an analysis using STIM that positively identifies any of its indicators should not be taken as definitive proof that trafficking or sexual exploitation are occurring on the website in question. Rather, the identification of STIM indicators points to the potential for these harms to be occurring on the platform and the need for further investigation.

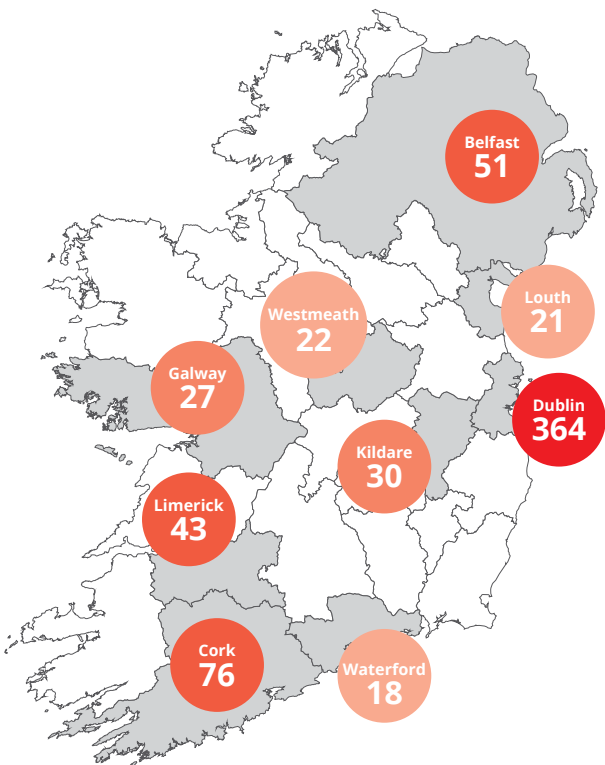


# Indicators of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation

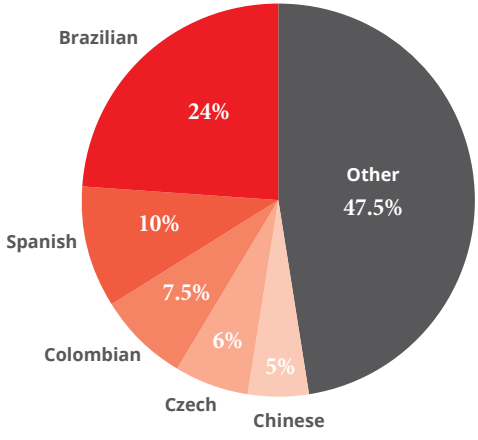
## Overview

On average across each of the four monitoring dates, 878 individual profiles were advertised on the site.<sup>29</sup> Reflecting the highly gendered nature of the sex trade, less than 1% (0.7%) of profiles on average were advertised as ‘male.’ Ages advertised ranged from 18 to 67, with more than one fifth (20.5%) advertised as between the ages of 18 and 25.<sup>30</sup>

As anticipated based on previous evidence,<sup>31</sup> the sex trade is active across the whole island of Ireland – the locations with the most profiles typically advertised were: Dublin (364 profiles on average), Cork (76 profiles), Belfast (51 profiles), Limerick (43 profiles), Kildare (30 profiles), Galway (27 profiles), Westmeath (22 profiles), Louth (21 profiles) and Waterford (18 profiles on average).



Reflecting the global nature of the sex trade, the most common nationalities featured on the site were five nationalities that comprised over half (52.5%) of all site profiles, as follows:



- Brazilian – representing 24% of all site profiles on average
- Spanish<sup>32</sup> – 10%
- Colombian – 7.5%
- Czech – 6%
- Chinese – 5%.

**In total, 19 of the STIM’s 28 indicators of exploitation were found on the website in question over the 4-week monitoring period. In many cases multiple indicators were found within the same advertising profiles – see Table 1 below and the discussion that follows.**

**Table 1:** Presence of STIM Indicators on the prostitution advertising website analysed

INDICATOR	FOUND ON SITE	DETAILS
Age / Youth		
Age explicitly under 18 or implied	Y	Language & imagery used in some profiles implies extreme youthfulness
If over 18, subject no older than 24 years old	Y	15.2% advertised as aged 18-24; some 18 and 19-year-old teenagers advertised
Subject's weight/size <50kg	N	Weight details not provided on the site
References to youth: 'young and cute' / 'sweet' / 'fresh' / 'candy'	Y	'Young', 'cute', 'small', 'playful' and 'sweet' used often
Use of emojis e.g.: peach/cherries	N	Emojis not widely used on the site
Nationality / New to Ireland / Language used		
Subject's nationality/ethnicity matches local marketplace	Y	Nationalities in the profiles match the local market – primarily Latin American, Western European, Eastern European and Asian
References to being new: 'new in town' / 'just arrived' / 'new for you'	Y	'New in town', 'new for you', 'fresh' used very often in profiles
Poor grammar and misspellings in the text	Y	Found in the vast majority of profiles
Risky sex acts		
Long list of services offered in ad e.g.: 10 or more services	Y	Many 'full service' profiles list a minimum of 15 sex acts
Specific services: bareback / anal / OWO (oral without a condom)	Y	Risky sex acts widely available, including OWO (43% of 'female escort' profiles on average); DT (39%); being submissive (19%); CIM (18%) and anal sex (13% of profiles on average)
Organisation and control		
Low price	Y	14% of profiles advertised as 'low' price, with some as a low as €50 for 30 minutes 'full service'
Use of 's/he' / 'they' / 'we' instead of 'I'	Y	Observed in a small number of profiles
In-calls only	N	Not observed during this monitoring period
Same/similar text as other ads for different subjects	Y	Many profiles show use of near identical text

INDICATOR	FOUND ON SITE	DETAILS
Inconsistencies in username or age or 'story'/location	Y	Different names used for the same woman in different sections of her profile – found in a small number of profiles
Multiple services available e.g.: 'duo' services	Y	Between 2 and 5 'duos' advertised on the monitoring dates
Availability in multiple locations	N	Not observed during this monitoring period
Services offered at an 'All inclusive' price	Y	Observed in a small number of profiles
Additional services at no extra price or very low price	N	Not observed during this monitoring period
Nature of photographs		
Multiple subjects in one photo	Y	Used in 'duo' profiles
Background looks like non-private residence (hotel, etc)	Y	Observed in many profiles
Background is familiar	Y	Numerous profiles show individuals photographed in the same location
Neutral expression or subject showing distress	N	Not observed during this monitoring period
Low quality / resolution image	Y	Found in some profiles
Contact/identifying details		
Same contact number in different ads	N	Not analysed on this occasion
Same poster/user ID across multiple ads	N	Not analysed on this occasion
Other indicators of sexual exploitation		
Little or no further information in Q&A section	N	Not relevant – the site does not use a Q&A section
X factor <sup>33</sup>	Y	Many profiles advertised with non-stop 24/7 availability; one profile observed in which subject's body is visibly bruised in several places; one profile observed in which the subject is visibly pregnant

## Age / Youth

The STIM indicators relating to age/youth suggest the presence of very young women on advertising websites who are potentially being exploited or trafficked. On the site in question, more than 15% are advertised as being very young – between the ages of 18 and 24. Teenagers feature regularly on the site – on average over the monitoring period seven 18- and 19-year-olds were being advertised, all of whom are migrant women. A further analysis of young women's profiles also reveals regular use of language employed to describe or imply extreme youthfulness – again an indicator of potential exploitation – terms/descriptors identified during the monitoring period include:

**'Slim and small girl here'**

**'I can be your small little sweetheart'**

**'skinny and small Chinese girl'**

**'petite and slender'**

**'It's my first time to do this job here. I have cute face...'**

**'I am a Friendly, youngest, sensual and Femininely person!'**

**'playful'**

**'I am a delicate and cute girl!'**

**'i am affectionate... pretty sweet smiles'**

**'I like to wear pretty dresses'**

**'Treat me like a little princess...'**

**'your naughty girl is here.'**

Previous research on the Irish sex trade has demonstrated that some sex buyers greatly prize youth, regardless of their own age,<sup>34</sup> so advertising young women in this way is

designed to meet this particular demand. Many of the young women advertised on the site appear extremely youthful in their profile photos and are sometimes posed, including their facial expressions, in a childlike way. In some cases, Photoshop technology is used to slightly alter the contours of their faces and enlarge their eyes to create an even more youthful and 'innocent' appearance.

During the monitoring period, multiple profiles were observed in which the young women wear small costumes, such as schoolgirl uniforms (sometimes replete with schoolbooks) or sailor-girl uniforms, wear ribbons, bows or plaits in their hair, wear headbands with bunny or cat ears, hold or lick lollipops, or are posed next to teddy bears. A particular trend was noted in which very petite Asian women in particular (primarily those advertised as Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean) are presented in their profiles in this childlike way. Of further concern is that intelligence related to the sex trade suggests that certain 'clues', such the presence of teddy bears/soft toys in profile photos, indicate to sex buyers that there may be girls under the age of 18 available at the same location or via the same contact details.

## Nationality / New to Ireland / Language used

This range of STIM indicators broadly refers to the presence on advertising websites of migrant women, new to the country and with limited knowledge of the local language who could potentially be exploited or trafficked. Less than 3% of those advertised on the site over the monitoring period are Irish, in line with previous research which demonstrates that the vast bulk of those involved in prostitution in

Ireland are migrant women,<sup>35</sup> and many have limited English when they first arrive.<sup>36</sup> The top five nationalities featured on the site (Brazilian, Spanish, Colombian, Czech and Chinese) do indeed reflect the local marketplace, characterised mainly by women originating from countries less wealthy than Ireland.

The existing evidence demonstrates that buyers value variety and ‘new girls’, ‘fresh’ and ‘inexperienced’ women are always in demand.<sup>37</sup> Women are therefore advertised to meet this demand, as the following language – indicating potential exploitation – identified during the monitoring period suggests:

**‘...NEW NEW NEW NEW NEW Dear Gentlemen!!! I am new in town!’**

**‘new petit in town’**

**‘first time come to town’**

**‘I am a new girl down in the country’**

**‘This is my first time come to Ireland for holiday’**

**‘I’m 22 years old, new for escort’**

**‘a sexy asian girl, first time in Ireland’**

**‘I’m a girl from China, very sexy and fresh in town’**

It should be noted that the vast majority of profiles on the site contain poor grammar and misspelling but also vocabulary and structural errors that indicate English is not the poster’s first language. Many profiles note that the woman advertised only has ‘basic’ English and in some cases, this is also referenced in the ‘Introduction’ section of their profile – for example **‘My English no good’**.

This lack of English undoubtedly makes navigating the dangers of the Irish commercial

sex trade particularly challenging and hazardous for those advertised on the site, likely rendering them especially vulnerable to ongoing or further sexual exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

## Risky sex acts

The number of sex acts on offer and the availability of riskier acts have been identified within the STIM matrix as indicators of potential exploitation because they imply that the women in question may have limited or no control over the number and nature of acts they are required to provide to buyers to meet their demands. The vast majority of profiles on the site in question that are advertised as providing ‘full service’<sup>39</sup> list a minimum of 15 sex acts that they are said to provide to buyers, well above the number (10+) STIM indicates should be cause for concern.

Previous research has already documented Irish sex buyers’ demands for sex acts which carry increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, as well as acts that carry the potential for discomfort, pain and injury to the women who must submit to them.<sup>40</sup> Such acts, as they are advertised on the site in question, include OWO (oral sex provided to a man without a condom), DT (‘deep throat’ penetration of a woman’s mouth with a penis), CIM (‘cum in mouth’ – ejaculation in a woman’s mouth, typically without a condom), anal sex and being ‘submissive’ -i.e. being dominated and controlled by the sex buyer. Amongst the women on the site providing ‘full service’, monitoring revealed that 43% are advertised in their profiles as providing OWO, 39% as providing DT; 19% as being ‘submissive’, 18% as providing CIM and 13% as providing anal sex.



## Organisation and control

These particular STIM indicators relate to the presence on advertising websites of women subject to the influence or control of prostitution organisers, including pimps and traffickers. Prices being charged that are lower than average for the local market are understood to indicate a method used by organisers to entice as many buyers as possible in a short space of time to purchase sexual access to the women the organisers control. During the monitoring period, 14% of profiles were charging prices defined as ‘low’, with some women advertised as providing 30 minutes of ‘full service’ for as low as €50 or €60. These low prices were most often associated with young women from Asia and Eastern Europe.

A small number of profiles employed the third person in their description – a clear indicator that the profile is not controlled by the woman being advertised – for example: **‘[Name and nationality of woman redacted] radiates a charming presence with her affectionate and outgoing character which makes her a vibrant and joyful company...’**

Profiles which share many similarities point to the presence of a group of women being controlled in prostitution, often by an organised crime gang. Profiles of this nature are prevalent on the site. During the monitoring period a group of at least six women were all advertised as 20-year-old-Brazilians. Their profiles used different names and photos showing different young women, but all were being advertised in the same two areas of Dublin using the following near-identical profile text, with only very minor

variations in some words detected in a failed attempt to make each profile sound different: **‘Hello dear, please text me on Whatsapp. Your passionate girlfriend just arrived here to make your fantasies become true, I am 20yo with a lot of sensual techniques... Everyday possible Lets enjoy it together.’**

Separately, profiles were found of five very young women of seemingly unconnected nationalities (Irish, Hungarian, Russian, Japanese and Ukrainian) advertised in different locations all around Ireland that also contained near identical text, including as follows: **‘Welcome to my world where unforgettable experiences are a promise no just a possibility... Crafting incredible experiences that cater you to wishes is my speciality..’**

Further inconsistencies in profiles were also detected during the monitoring period, such as the use of one woman’s name in the main profile but a different woman’s name in the more detailed description, again suggesting the reuse of profile elements for different women by prostitution organisers. Further indicators of organisation were also detected in this context – including the advertising of ‘duos’<sup>41</sup> (three duos on average were advertised during the monitoring period), and, in a limited number of cases, the advertising of women as providing ‘all-inclusive services’.

## Nature of photographs

STIM indicators that relate to profile photographs on the advertising websites also point to levels of organisation in the commercial sex trade. On the website in question multiple subjects appear in the photos of 'duo' profiles (see above), which are themselves indicators of sexual exploitation. During the monitoring period many profiles were found to feature photographs taken in hotel rooms, but also in the same private residences – for example the profiles of four young Chinese women show each of them alone in exactly the same room, posed in front of the same wallpaper with the same fluffy cushion, again indicating the potential presence of an organised group.

While many of the profile photos on the site are located, posed and lit in a relatively 'glamorous' way, there is also evidence of low-quality profile photos taken in haste in dingy locations such as stairwells, cramped kitchens or in small rooms with barely any furnishings and no bedding on the bed. Profiles with photos of this kind are often also advertised at a low price, potentially indicating that organisers are saving time and money on 'marketing', whilst trying to maximise the number of buyers that will have access to these women.

## Other indicators of sexual exploitation

**It should be noted that the majority of profiles analysed during the monitoring period contained multiple indicators of exploitation.** Additionally, in the course of monitoring, a number of other indicators of potential exploitation were also noted on the site that contain what STIM identifies as the 'X factor' – essentially other factors of potential concern, particularly regarding the welfare of the subject in the profile, that may require further investigation. During the monitoring period those identified in this category include:

- Women who are being advertised as being available 24/7 or 'available any time'
- Women whose faces are hidden, covered or blurred out in their profile pictures
- One woman whose body featured visible bruising in several places
- One woman who was advertised as being visibly pregnant and her pregnancy was being used as a feature to attract sex buyers.

# Conclusions and recommendations

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A short period of monitoring identified 19 out of a possible 28 indicators of potential trafficking and sexual exploitation present on the site in question. Findings of particular concern include:

- The presence of profiles containing multiple indicators of exploitation
- The presence of teenagers and very young women advertised in a childlike way, often alongside visual clues that may suggest the availability of girls under 18 for exploitation
- The presence of mainly migrant women, with many advertised as new and ‘fresh’ to the market, and often with very limited English
- The availability of risky sex acts, often at low prices, that have the potential to cause infection, pain and injury to the women who must submit to providing them to sex buyers
- Multiple indicators that suggest the presence of prostitution organisers ‘managing’ multiple advertising profiles, who may be sexually exploiting and controlling groups of women for commercial gain.

It is clear, based on this analysis, that the site in question is quite a typical example of an SEA – a sexual exploitation advertising website – facilitating sex buyers across the island of Ireland to purchase sexual access to the bodies of vulnerable, young, migrant women, while helping to maximise the profits of pimps and traffickers. On the basis of these findings, a series of recommendations is made, which echo those recommendations made previously by both SERP and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission:<sup>42</sup>

- Develop a phased legal and enforcement strategy with a view to investigating and prosecuting the companies that own and manage prostitution websites for advertising the sale of controlled and trafficked women and for profiting from the prostitution of others
- Resource the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) and its divisional and specialist units to strengthen dedicated law enforcement measures to disrupt the business model and profits of SEAs, including through the use of market-leading technology tools designed to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation

- Use the review of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017 as an opportunity to greatly strengthen this legislation and improve its implementation as follows:
  - » enhance the powers and resources of An Garda Síochána to vigorously pursue both sex buyers and the organised crime gangs profiting from prostitution in order to reduce the size of the sex trade and therefore the exploitation and violence that are inherent within it
  - » provide additional resourcing to the GNPSB and its divisional and specialist units to strengthen the protections they provide to vulnerable persons in prostitution throughout Ireland
  - » ensure that all women in prostitution have access to the specialist services and exiting supports provided by Ruhama that can assist them to recover from their experiences of sexual exploitation and build new lives<sup>43</sup>
- Continue to undertake research to monitor and analyse prostitution advertising websites, moving beyond snapshots to apply a broader, more comprehensive strategy in order to identify and flag current, new and emerging trends in relation to sexual exploitation in Ireland
- Gather evidence on the ways in which newer platforms, such as Telegram, are being used to organise prostitution in Ireland<sup>44</sup> and are increasingly being used by some sex buyers to locate those in prostitution,<sup>45</sup> as well as exploring how technology is being employed by pimps and traffickers in Ireland and beyond to store, distribute and sell explicit content – including images, videos and livestreamed content – featuring sexually exploited women and girls.

## Notes

- 1 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2022. [Policy Responses to Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings: Analysis of Current Approaches and Considerations for Moving Forward](#). Vienna: OSCE.
- 2 During 2023 the lead author was invited to participate and present as one of the international experts in a series of regional workshops coordinated by the OSCE's Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on the issue of technology-facilitated trafficking across the OSCE region. The experts present highlighted the extent to which multiple aspects of the crimes of human trafficking and exploitation are now hugely reliant on the use and indeed misuse of technology.
- 3 A phenomenon evidenced across the world – see for example: OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2020. [Leveraging Innovation to Fight Trafficking in Human Beings: A Comprehensive Analysis of Technology Tools](#). Vienna: OSCE; OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2022; *op cit*; Ibanez, M., and Gazan, R., 2016. 'Detecting Sex Trafficking Circuits in the U.S. Through Analysis of Online Escort Advertisements', ASONAM '16: Proceedings of the 2016 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining; Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2021. [Online Pimping: An Inquiry into Sexual Exploitation Advertising Websites](#). Scotland: Cross-Party Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
- 4 *Ibid*; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 2024. [Men Who Buy Sex: Understanding the Demand for Prostitution and Sex Trafficking in the UK](#). London: APPG.
- 5 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2023. [Mapping the Online Landscape of Risks of Trafficking in Human Beings on Sexual Services Websites across the OSCE Region](#). Vienna: OSCE.
- 6 *Ibid*; p. 3.
- 7 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023. [Trafficking in Human Beings in Ireland: Second Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#). Dublin: IHREC.
- 8 *Ibid*; Ibanez and Gazan, 2016; *op cit*.
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- 20 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020; *op cit*; Breslin, R., 2020. [Exploitation 'as usual': Emerging Evidence on](#)



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22 Kelleher Associates, O'Connor, M., and Pillinger, J., 2009. [Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: The Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland](#). Dublin: Immigrant Council of Ireland; O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023, *op cit*.

23 The *Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994* made it an offence to publish or distribute advertisements for prostitution, while the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 2017* outlawed the purchase of sex while decriminalising those who sell sex.

24 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023, *op cit*.

25 L'Hoiry, X., Moretti, A., and Antonopoulos, G.A., 2021. 'Identifying Sex Trafficking in Adult Services Websites: An Exploratory Study with a British Police Force.' *Trends in Organized Crime*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-021-09414-1>

26 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, 2023, *op cit*.

27 Prices on the site are typically presented according to length of 'booking' – 30 minutes, 45 minutes, first hour, additional hours, half day etc.

28 Two people, usually women, that can be 'booked' together at the same time.

29 In considering this analysis it should be noted that while each profile advertised on the site is supposed to relate to a single individual, there are instances in which someone may advertise or be advertised under more than one profile, whilst conversely a single advertising profile may 'front' more than one individual.

30 The searchable information contained in profiles, such as age, nationality, ethnicity, language ability, physical appearance and so on may be provided based on what is deemed to entice sex buyers, rather than the whole truth. For example, women are sometimes advertised as being younger than they actually are to attract buyers who seek out younger women. This caveat should be borne in mind throughout any reading of this analysis.

31 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*.

32 Frontline support providers note that some women from Latin America are often advertised as Spanish, either because this is deemed to be more 'attractive' to buyers, or to avoid bringing attention from immigration authorities to women who may not have the official immigration permission to be in Ireland. It is therefore likely that the number of women from Spain is overstated here. For further details see: O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*.

33 This measure was included in the STIM to capture any other factors of potential concern/that require further investigation.

34 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*.

35 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*; Breslin, R., Latham, L., and O'Connor, M., 2021, *op cit*.

36 Breslin, R., Latham, L., and O'Connor, M., 2021, *op cit*.

37 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*.

38 Breslin, R., Latham, L., and O'Connor, M., 2021, *op cit*.

39 'Full service' typically involves penetrative sex acts of all kinds – see *ibid*.

40 O'Connor, M., and Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*; Breslin, R., 2020, *op cit*; Breslin, R., Latham, L., and O'Connor, M., 2021, *op cit*.

41 Two people, usually women, that can be 'booked' together at the same time.

42 See for example: Breslin, R., and Canning, M., 2023, *op cit*; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023, *op cit*.

43 Breslin, R., and Canning, M., 2023, *op cit*.

44 Rajmon, A., 2024. *Elis: Irish Call Girl*. UK: Amazon.

45 Mooney, J., 01/09/24. 'Telegram arrest tipped to signal end of soft-touch approach for tech sector.' *The Sunday Times*.



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