

LatinMUN 2025

**United Nations
Office on Drugs
and Crime
(UNODC)**

**Topic: Addressing the Exploitation of the Dark Web for
Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery**

Committee Background

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was established in 1997 to combat global challenges like illicit drugs, crime, corruption, and terrorism. Operating in over 80 countries, it works closely with governments to strengthen legal systems, support law enforcement, and develop social programs aimed at addressing crime-related issues. Guided by key UN conventions on drug control, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism, the UNODC plays a vital role in shaping policies, dismantling criminal networks, preventing terrorism, and promoting anti-corruption initiatives. It also helps countries reform their criminal justice systems, ensuring stronger and fairer legal frameworks.

Key areas of work include reducing illicit drug supply and demand through initiatives like the World Drug Report, eliminating organizations involved in trafficking and cybercrime, and promoting transparency through the UN Against Corruption. It also helps in fighting terrorism, helping governments develop legal frameworks, counter extremist propaganda, and improve border security. UNODC ensures fair legal systems by advocating for prison reforms, legal aid programs, and victim protection. It also focuses on emerging threats such as cybercrime and the illegal wildlife trade, adapting its policies to address new forms of crime.

Despite its efforts, UNODC faces challenges such as limited funding, political constraints, and evolving criminal tactics. Issues like cybercrime, synthetic drugs, and human trafficking require continuous innovation in crime prevention strategies. Future priorities include enhancing international cooperation, expanding rehabilitation programs for drug users, and strengthening crime prevention efforts. The agency aims to enhance technology and data analysis to improve intelligence-sharing and crime-fighting capabilities.

As crime and drug related issues evolve, UNODC continues to adapt, providing essential resources and frameworks for member states. Delegates you should focus on innovative solutions, multilateral cooperation, and sustainable policies to enhance UNODC's impact and contribute to global security.

Topic Background

Human trafficking and modern slavery remain pressing global issues, with millions of victims worldwide. The rise of the dark web has provided traffickers with an anonymous platform to facilitate these crimes, making detection and prevention more difficult. The dark web, a hidden part of the internet accessible through special software, allows illicit transactions and communication to occur without easy track-ability. Traffickers use encrypted marketplaces, cryptocurrency, and private forums to buy and sell victims, creating a dangerous challenge for law enforcement.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. Modern slavery includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude. These crimes violate fundamental human rights and persist due to high demand, lack of enforcement, and the anonymity provided by online platforms.

Several international efforts have been made to combat this issue. The Palermo Protocol, adopted by the UN in 2000, established a global framework to prevent trafficking, prosecute offenders, and protect victims. INTERPOL has conducted cybercrime operations targeting illegal activities on the dark web, shutting down trafficking networks. However, these efforts are not always enough, as traffickers continuously adapt to new technologies.

Addressing this issue requires a multi effort approach. Governments should strengthen cybersecurity measures, regulate cryptocurrency transactions, and enhance cross-border cooperation. Tech companies must improve AI-driven monitoring systems to detect illicit activities. Additionally, public awareness campaigns can help educate people on the dangers of online trafficking and how to report suspicious activities.

The international community must take urgent action to dismantle trafficking networks operating on the dark web. By strengthening legal frameworks, investing in advanced technology, and promoting global collaboration, we can take significant steps toward ending human trafficking and modern slavery in the digital age.

Current Situation

Research conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime shows how victims are being targeted and recruited via social media and online dating platforms, where personal information and details of people's locations are readily available.

Sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation are taking place virtually and photos and videos sold further on different platforms to customers worldwide, resulting in even more money for the traffickers at no additional cost.

These are some ways human trafficking and sexual exploitation is active:

Dark Web Exploitation

Traffickers are currently using technology to profile, recruit, control and exploit their victims as well as using the Internet, especially the dark web, to hide illegal materials stemming from trafficking and their real identities from investigators.

The illicit proceeds from this highly profitable crime are also being laundered online through crypto currencies, which makes it easier for traffickers to receive, hide and move large amounts of money with less risk of being detected.

Today, the Internet provides easy access to a much larger group of potential victims because traditional physical and geographical limitations no longer exist.

Traffickers create fake websites or post advertisements on legitimate employment portals and social networking websites.

Live chat scams

Some of these sites feature the option of a live chat. This gives the trafficker immediate contact and the opportunity to obtain personal information, such as passport details, enhancing their power over the targeted victims.

Victims can be repeatedly exploited through live streaming on multiple websites, and there is no limit on the number of times videos of their abuse may be viewed and by how many people.

The global nature of human trafficking and the abuse of technology makes it even more difficult for law enforcement authorities to tackle this crime.

Remote control

Traffickers use technology to control their victims remotely, sometimes without having to ever met them in person.

Location-tracking applications and use of global positioning systems in mobile phones can be used to know the victim's location, while cameras in smartphones used during video calls enable traffickers to see their victims and their surroundings. Traffickers also maintain control over their victims by threatening to release intimate photos or videos of them to families and friends if they do not comply with their demands.

One of the panellists at the Working Group, Alexandra Gelber, the Deputy Chief for Policy and Legislation at the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the United States' Department of Justice, highlighted the links between trafficking and online technology in her country.

Online marketplace

Data shows that in the United States approximately 40% of sex trafficking victims are recruited online, making the Internet the most common place where victim recruitment takes place.

For over a decade, online advertising has been the main tactic used by traffickers to solicit buyers for commercial sex. In 2020, over 80% of the [Justice Department's] sex trafficking prosecutions involved online advertising.

Technology is also being used to commit "virtual child sex trafficking" which takes place when an offender in the United States sends a digital payment to a trafficker in another country.

The trafficker will then sexually abuse a child in front of a web camera, while the offender in the United States watches a livestream of the abuse.

The rise and expansion of the digital world has enabled traffickers to expand and streamline operations - and allowed more people to enter the trade. With estimates of the global number of victims of human trafficking and modern slavery now hovering around 50 million, this is a more pressing issue than ever. Virtual currencies are increasingly used to facilitate trafficking, with many online commercial sex marketplaces accepting - and, indeed, offering discounts to customers who use - them and Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, which have diversified into human trafficking, using cryptocurrencies to launder the proceeds of their criminal activity, as observed by the US Department of State. Cryptocurrencies' relative anonymity and many exchanges' limited or lacking implementation of Know Your Customer (KYC) measures has added to the challenges law enforcement face when trying to prevent and discover illegal activity.

Earlier in 2023, a new lawsuit was launched accusing Mark Zuckerberg and other Meta Platforms Inc executives and directors of failing to do enough to stop sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation on Facebook and Instagram. Notably, the lawsuit was filed by several pension and investment funds that own Meta stock, stating that its leadership and board had failed to protect the company's and shareholders' interests by turning a blind eye to "systemic evidence" of criminal activity, and that given the board's failure to explain how it attempts to tackle the well-known use of its platforms for trafficking, "the only logical inference is that the board has consciously decided to permit Meta's platforms to promote and facilitate sex/human trafficking".

The company has known about Facebook being used for human trafficking activities, including to advertise for victims for the purpose of domestic servitude and forced labour, since at least 2018: company documents describe how women trafficked through its platform are subjected to physical and sexual abuse, deprived of food and pay, and have their travel documents confiscated. Indeed, in 2019, Apple even threatened to pull Facebook and Instagram's access to the App Store over concerns linked to human trafficking - concerns which Meta managed to assuage at the time, but which weren't adequately addressed. In 2021, an internal Facebook report noted that "gaps still exist in our detection of on-platform entities engaged in domestic servitude", detailing how its platforms are used to recruit, buy and sell "domestic servants."

Airbnbs are increasingly used to facilitate trafficking activities, too - both as places for sex trafficking, where clients can visit in a more private and anonymous capacity than at a hotel, and where there's a lower risk of information being fed to law enforcement by staff or other guests who notice unusual behaviour. New accommodation can be found and changed at late notice if traffickers suspect a risk of detection, and to keep victims on their journeys to being transported elsewhere. Law enforcement authorities in Canada have previously noted that Airbnb is cooperative with them on the issue of human trafficking - and indeed, the company is looking at ways to help identify patterns and flag reservations with the firm that runs the US National Human Trafficking Hotline. However, the company states that without greater due diligence on the part of individuals renting their private residences, it's a hard issue to resolve. Individuals renting their property on Airbnb can integrate due diligence into their process, such as by asking for IDs and other documentation on all guests who will be staying at their property.

Conclusion

The rise of digital technology has drastically transformed the landscape of human trafficking, making it more pervasive, efficient, and difficult to combat. Traffickers now exploit social media, online marketplaces, live chat platforms, and the dark web to recruit, control, and profit from their victims. The anonymity and accessibility provided by the internet allow them to reach a much larger pool of potential victims without the traditional physical and geographical constraints. Meanwhile, the use of virtual currencies such as cryptocurrencies further complicates law enforcement efforts, as these financial tools enable traffickers to launder money with reduced risk of detection.

The role of major online platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, in facilitating trafficking activities has come under intense scrutiny. Despite being aware of these issues for years, companies like Meta have been accused of not doing enough to prevent the use of their platforms for recruitment and exploitation. The recent lawsuit against Meta executives highlights the growing pressure on tech companies to take responsibility for their platforms and implement more effective safeguards. Similarly, the rise of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb has created new opportunities for traffickers to operate in a more discreet and transient manner, making detection and intervention more challenging.

Additionally, advancements in technology have enabled traffickers to exert greater control over their victims, often without meeting them in person. Through GPS tracking, live video calls, and the threat of exposing sensitive images, traffickers can manipulate victims from a distance, further diminishing their chances of escape. Victims are often subjected to continuous exploitation through live streaming and online content, which can be sold repeatedly with no geographical limitations.

The global nature of this crime and the sophisticated methods employed by traffickers necessitate a more coordinated international response. Governments, law enforcement agencies, and technology companies must collaborate to develop stronger cybersecurity measures, enforce stricter regulations, and enhance digital monitoring to prevent the misuse of online platforms. Moreover, public awareness and education are crucial in helping individuals recognize and avoid potential dangers, reducing the likelihood of falling victim to trafficking schemes.

Ultimately, while technology has facilitated the growth of human trafficking, it also presents opportunities for combating it. Artificial intelligence, data analysis, and improved digital forensic techniques can aid in identifying and tracking traffickers. However, the success of these efforts depends on the willingness of stakeholders—governments, private companies, and civil society—to prioritize anti-trafficking initiatives and commit to ongoing action. Without significant intervention, the continued expansion

of the digital world will only deepen the crisis, placing more vulnerable individuals at risk of exploitation.

Guiding Questions

1. How can governments enhance international cooperation to combat human trafficking on the dark web?
2. How can tech companies be held accountable for detecting and preventing illicit activities on their platforms?
3. What legal and technological measures can be implemented to track and dismantle trafficking networks operating on the dark web?
4. How can awareness campaigns and education help prevent individuals from becoming victims of human trafficking?
5. What are the challenges in enforcing existing anti-trafficking laws of the dark web?

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