

UNOTC COP Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (12-13 October 2021)

Successful strategies for addressing the use of technology to facilitate trafficking in persons and to prevent and investigate trafficking in persons.

Introduction of the THB Liberi Project

by

Helga Gayer, Federal Criminal Police Office, Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the invitation to this very important conference and the opportunity to contribute to this panel.

We are all witness to the accelerating development of ICT-enabled THB which has been enormously fueled by the Pandemic and urges us to find new solutions.

It is my pleasure to share with you the experiences from our ongoing Project THB LIBERI and highlight some strategies to address this development

The THB LIBERI Project

The THB LIBERI project, running from 2018 until 2025, is co-funded by the Internal Security Fund (ISF) of the European Union. It is led by the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA-SO41) and involves police departments of seven German federal states as well as the Austrian Federal Criminal Police Office.

Liberi is Latin for “children”. The goal of THB LIBERI is to fight trafficking and exploitation of children and young people (up to the age of 21) through a multidisciplinary approach combining knowledge from different sectors. The project covers three main topics:

- 1. Exploitation of children and young persons by family structures**

2. Strengthening child and young persons' testimonies

In today's context I concentrate on the

Third Topic: Exploitation of children and young persons through the Internet

The Internet offers a world of opportunity and challenges, not least to children, but also to traffickers. This topic covers the recruitment of young victims through the Internet, how they are advertised and used to lure clients through escort websites. It also covers the role of the Darknet in relation to the sexual exploitation of children, the needs and opportunities coming to light during investigative procedures, and online prevention. The Covid 19 pandemic has caused a significant increase in online child sexual abuse and exploitation and makes this topic even more important.

THB Liberi is a whole package of concerted action, which comprehends networking, capacity building, prevention measures, training courses, development, testing and promotion of technical solutions and strategies which lead to, identification of victims, investigations and the arrest and sentencing of perpetrators.

The results since the start of the project in July 2018 are

- Several networking events and conferences
- A checklist for front-line officers
- A concept on how to operate police investigations on THB in the context with the internet
- A prevention video about the Loverboy method with huge reach
- 23 investigative procedures have been supported financially, with analysis and international coordination.
- Identification of 40 suspects
- In addition, 12 perpetrators have already been sentenced.
- Identification of more than 60 victims
- The Webcrawler: Prostitution takes increasingly place in hotels and apartments. This makes it difficult to keep an overview of the prostitution scene and to identify possible victims of sexual exploitation. The Internet is increasingly being used to advertise prostitution offers. Searching these announcements manually for suspicions of possible exploitation of prostitutes is nearly impossible. Information on possible exploitative conditions can be obtained by using web crawler supplied by the LIBERI-project. This evaluation tool will be used to automate the monitoring of suspicions about THB. Since June 2020: 56 services have been equipped with the tool throughout

Germany, which allows to filter information in open and legal prostitution advertisements on relevant internet portals in order to detect exploitative facts. Several investigations are currently being conducted which can only be attributed to the use of the crawler. The initial experience is generally positive and is seen as an enrichment of the analysis to generate investigations.

- Last not least, the Conference Ending Trafficking in Children and Young persons - Together towards a future without child trafficking in Europe had been organized by the THB Liberi project and the council of Europe Expert Group on trafficking in Human beings GRETA within the framework of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and brought together knowledgeable experts from all levels in the fight against THB.

Allow me to close with a quote from the ETIC Conference Conclusions:

Human Trafficking is a dynamic crime with an ever-growing use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Recruiting victims through the internet, via websites advertising jobs, dating sites or social media is a growing trend.

Governments must take further steps to prevent online-recruitment of children, including by co-operating with internet service providers and raising awareness of children, parents and education professionals of the risk of recruitment of children through the internet.

The development of innovative technical means and capacity building on cyber-crime and e-evidence are a crucial part of the response to human trafficking. Cooperation with the private sector is vital in combating human trafficking.

In the fight against THB we need sustainable action of all involved actors in a trustful multi-disciplinary cooperation.

Thank you very much