CYBER
THREAT
ANALYSIS

Recorded Future®

By Insikt Group®

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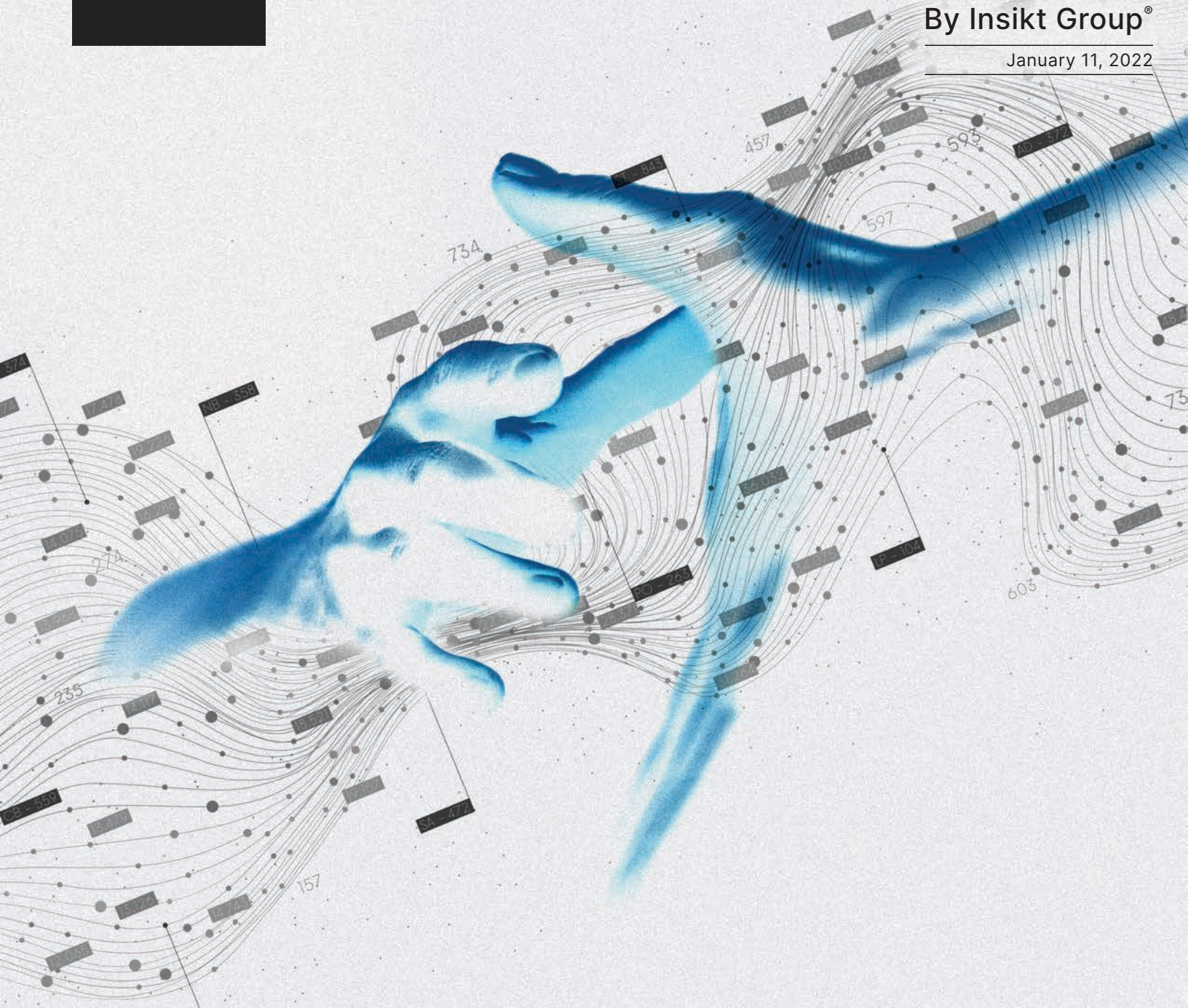

Combating Human Trafficking With Threat Intelligence — **Prevention**

Recorded Future analyzed current data from the Recorded Future® Platform as well as dark web, closed sources, and open sources to identify threat intelligence solutions to aid prevention efforts in combating and mitigating human trafficking. In this report, the first of the 4-part series, Insikt Group will provide threat intelligence solutions to aid prevention efforts to combat human trafficking. In subsequent months, Recorded Future will publish 3 additional reports covering protection, prosecution, and partnership efforts, offering threat intelligence solutions, where applicable, and mitigation recommendations.

Executive Summary

Eradication of human trafficking requires the expertise, resources, and efforts of many individuals and organizations. It is a complex issue requiring a multifaceted approach set in the United Nations' Palermo Protocol known as the "4P" paradigm — Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership. The 4P paradigm serves as the foundational framework used universally to combat human trafficking.

Threat intelligence[1] can aid in preventing human trafficking by identifying warning signs and potentially malicious behaviors. Through a compilation of crowdsourced keywords and search terms, researchers can use threat intelligence solutions, such as the Recorded Future Platform, to monitor and pull data from sources affiliated with the trafficking of persons. While a great first step, querying for such information can result in noise or false positives; therefore, we believe in the necessity of human analysts — knowing what to look for and where to look are essential for uncovering leads, building more effective queries, and setting up alerts. The Recorded Future Platform can serve as this pivot point for first responders, policymakers, and private entities in their prevention efforts by enabling research and analysis of human trafficking indicators across the dark web and other sources.

[1] Threat intelligence is the act of formulating an analysis based on the identification, collection, and enrichment of relevant threat information. Threat intelligence includes information and analysis from a rich array of sources, presented in ways that make it easy to understand and use. It is valuable to all the major teams in the cybersecurity organization and can be handled mostly by the existing security staff (with the right tools and support). From sources 1 and 2.

Key Judgments

- Threat intelligence can help first responders and policymakers surface human trafficking indicators, better understand the scale and magnitude of the problem, and produce additional data sets to inform prevention and response measures.
- Using the Recorded Future Platform to build lists of human trafficking keywords and searching them against a particular digital platform, as well as closed or open sources, can help surface deceptive posts, active lures, and potential trafficking situations to further alert first responders.
- Internet-facilitated human trafficking has evolved. Traffickers have historically been known to use classified web pages but in recent years have begun expanding their recruitment and advertisement operations to free-standing web pages, social media, and messaging platforms.

Background

21 years have passed since the adoption of the 2000 United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Additional Protocols. Most countries worldwide signed and ratified the Convention and its Additional Protocols, such as the "Palermo Protocol" — the Protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The Palermo Protocol serves as the foundation of the 4P paradigm, where "prevention" is about establishing comprehensive anti-trafficking policies, programs, and other measures, such as research, information and mass media campaigns, and social and economic initiatives to prevent and combat trafficking in persons.

Human trafficking is also known as trafficking in human beings and trafficking in persons. Many scholars and practitioners commonly address human trafficking as modern-day slavery. There are many forms of human trafficking, but one consistent aspect is the abuse of the inherent vulnerability of the victims.

Forms of human trafficking include exploitation in the sex, entertainment, and hospitality industries, forced labor as domestic workers, and forced marriages. Victims are forced to work in factories, on construction sites, or in the agricultural sector, without pay or with an inadequate salary, living in fear of violence and often in inhumane conditions. Some victims are tricked or coerced into having their organs removed. Children are forced to serve as soldiers or to commit crimes for the benefit of the criminals.

Figure 1: Forms of human trafficking (Source: UNODC)

Today, despite legislative and enforcement efforts, human trafficking endangers millions of people around the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that human trafficking is the third-largest international crime industry, ranking only behind illegal drugs and arms trafficking. Human trafficking earns profits of approximately $150 billion a year, which according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) may underestimate the actual scope of the problem.

Global law enforcement data provided in the 2021 US State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report indicates that 109,216 victims of human trafficking were identified globally in 2020, in contrast to the 40 million women, men, and children living in slavery-like conditions, according to the latest ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour. These numbers underscore multiple issues — different agencies track statistical data differently, but most importantly, the TIP Report estimates are largely derived from official data provided by foreign governments and their law enforcement agencies (which can downplay the magnitude of the problem), while the ILO's estimates are based on national probabilistic surveys and aggregate data sets collected by the UN agencies. Still, the ILO considers their estimates to be conservative.

Tackling human trafficking goes beyond the competencies of law enforcement agencies. As a multi-dimensional crime, it requires a multi-faceted response from a wide range of actors. In any given country or context, various stakeholders are involved in eradicating human trafficking, including international organizations, government agencies, civil society organizations (both national and international), and private entities. Threat intelligence can offer additional visibility and assistance to first responders, policymakers, international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations in their work to eradicate human trafficking.

Threat intelligence can offer proactive research, monitoring, and analysis of underground and open sources, trafficking-suspect websites, and communities. Threat intelligence research can, for example, be text- or image-based, allowing first responders and policymakers to surface crime, better understand the scale and magnitude of the problem in a specific region, and produce additional data sets to inform prevention and response measures.

Threat Analysis

Using Threat Intelligence to Prevent Human Trafficking

Human traffickers use online platforms for advertising, recruiting, and exploiting victims and marketing exploitative services. Victims are recruited through social media, messaging applications (apps), online classified ads, and deceptive job offers posted on various websites. According to the UNODC, webcams and live streams have created new forms of exploitation and reduced the need for the physical transportation and transfer of victims of sexual exploitation.

The Recorded Future Platform provides threat intelligence solutions that can assist in identifying deceptive posts aimed at recruiting or exploiting victims. In many cases, we need to know what to look for, which means we need to know the keywords and terms used by traffickers to lure victims or advertise exploitative services. First responders, law enforcement, and organizations assisting human trafficking victims and survivors know about human traffickers' methods, the terms they use, and the digital platforms they operate on.

Human Trafficking Keywords

Shared Hope International, a US-based non-governmental organization (NGO) that strives to prevent the conditions that foster sex trafficking, created a list of keywords and terms used by human traffickers. According to this and similar lists, people who are bought and sold are extremely commodified and are often described as items, such as “alien”, “automatic”, “bottom”, “illegal”, “lover boy”, “meat”, or “stock”. Other terms posted in online ads that may identify potential trafficking scenarios can include “new arrivals”, “fresh off the boat”, “J1 visa arrivals” (which is applicable for the US cases), “no experience needed”, “young needed”, or “travel to get paid”.

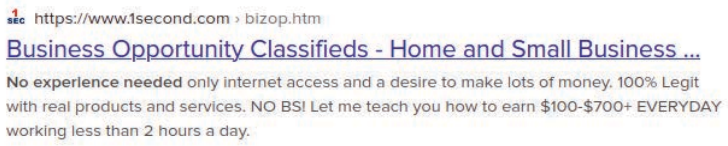

Figure 2: An example of a search engine result for “no experience needed” that may need further investigation (Source: 1second[.]com)

Using the Recorded Future Platform to build lists of human trafficking keywords and searching them against a particular digital platform, as well as closed or open-source websites, can help surface deceptive posts and potential trafficking situations to further alert law enforcement and service providers. A sample list of keywords is provided within the Appendix of this report.

Human traffickers sometimes use onion (Tor) websites, sometimes called the “dark web”, to remain anonymous and evade law enforcement attention. Contrary to a common belief that human trafficking only happens on the dark web, we also found that open sources, such as stand-alone websites, classified ads, social media, and messaging platforms, can provide valuable leads for surfacing human trafficking indicators. According to a Recorded Future report that investigated 260,000 onion pages, the idea of a dark web that is hidden and mysterious is more likely the extrapolation of a tiny portion of these onion websites — a set of invitation-only and unpublicized communities buried in the most shadowy corners of this part of the internet. As with all of these source types, the contents of live onion pages can be searched within the Recorded Future Platform by using specific keywords and queries to surface actionable intelligence.

The keywords for making useful searches depend on the analyst’s knowledge of human trafficking forms, traffickers’ operations, slang, and survivors’ testimonies. That is why the UN’s 4P paradigm remains relevant decades after its adoption. Successful prevention of human trafficking depends on other parts of the 4P paradigm, where a partnership between investigators and other actors with visibility into the matter is crucial for understanding and stopping human trafficking.

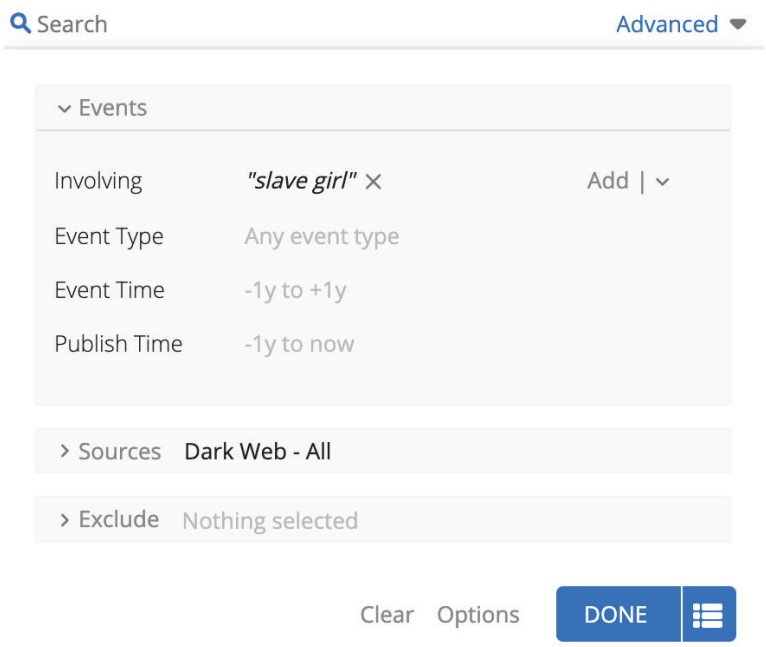

Figure 3: Recorded Future search for keywords “slave girl” with a source type “Dark Web - All” (Source: Recorded Future)

Figure 4: Tor site claiming to sell “slave girls” for sexual exploitation (Source: dark web)

Research queries can be noisy and prone to false positives; knowing what to look for and where is essential for building effective queries and setting up alerts. In some cases, search results may give initial leads that require further investigation of a particular post, source, or author. Not all posts containing keywords of interest will be useful to investigators, but search results can provide a place to start in some scenarios.

Figure 5: Potential lead on the forum Club2CRD (Source: Recorded Future)

Internet-Facilitated Human Trafficking

Internet-facilitated human trafficking surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially sex trafficking. According to the US State Department's 2021 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which engages foreign governments on human trafficking, reports from several countries indicated increases in online commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, including the online sexual exploitation of children, as well as increased demand for and the distribution of child sexual exploitation material. Additionally, the report shows how COVID-19 restrictions have exacerbated human trafficking-related obstacles, including fewer resources and operations for anti-trafficking efforts. As a result of restricted resources and disrupted justice systems, traffickers experienced increased impunity and lower arrest rates.

Different forms of human trafficking have their own contextual references. Traffickers use various points of contact (email, phone, encrypted messaging platforms, and more) as they advertise exploitative services or buy and sell people online. Identified and known points of contact can be used to surface other posts, online communities, and threat actors to detect traffickers and behaviors associated with internet-facilitated human trafficking.

After US law enforcement seized the notorious classified website backpage[.]com, which served as a platform for advertising prostitution and sexual exploitation services, multiple alternative websites appeared. Knowing where to look for leads on human trafficking and employing threat intelligence solutions that help collect, aggregate, and analyze sources and data can provide additional visibility, ways to surface the crime, and enable data analysis for additional insights.

Internet-facilitated human trafficking has evolved. Traffickers have historically used classified web pages such as the aforementioned Backpage; however, they have also expanded their recruitment and advertisement operations to free-standing web pages and social media platforms. In some trafficking cases, specifically in Russian-speaking countries, criminals used fake profiles on the social media platform Vkontakte to advertise modeling jobs abroad. Under the premise of international employment, traffickers recruited and subsequently exploited approximately 100 women, according to 2020 and 2021 data from UNDOC and the United States Department of State. Information about the online sources of human traffickers' operations and visibility into those sources, which threat intelligence providers enable, can help investigators identify questionable posts that may indicate human trafficking scenarios.

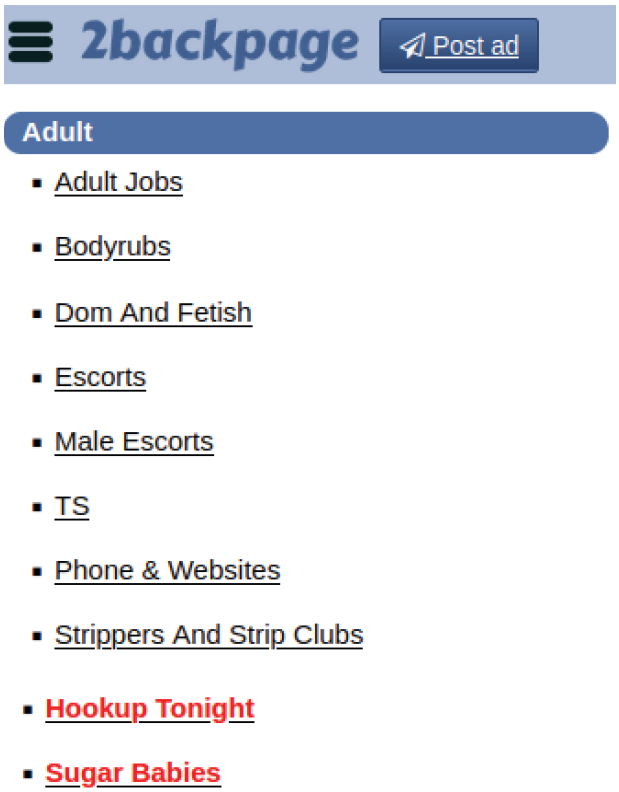

Figure 6: One of the backpage[.]com alternatives, website "2backpage" with its "Adult" content section (Source: 2backpage[.]com)

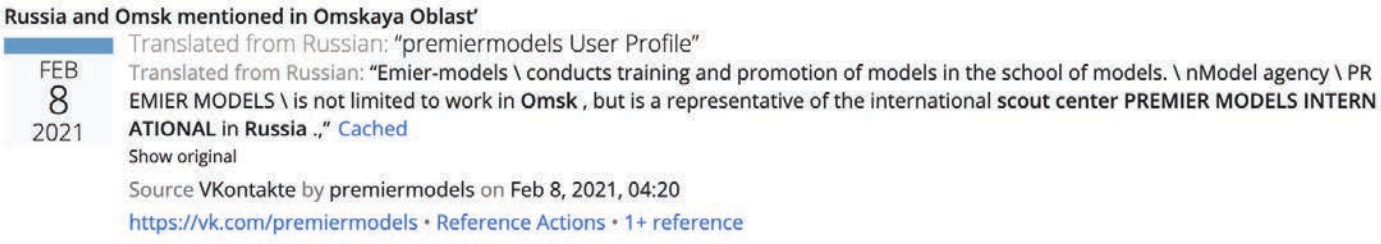

Figure 7: VKontakte post by an international scout center offering modeling jobs (Source: Recorded Future)

Social media and encrypted messaging platforms provide traffickers with vast networks and rapid communication methods to recruit victims and connect with potential clients. According to the UNODC report, victims tend to be younger in cases of trafficking through social media, likely due to the popularity of social media platforms among younger audiences. Traffickers were also found to take advantage of publicly available personal information on social media websites to scope out potential victims based on their backgrounds. CNN's review of leaked internal documents from Meta (formerly Facebook) shows that the company was aware of the use of its services to recruit trafficked victims, specifically for forced labor and domestic servitude, and advertise exploitative services.

UNODC also found that human traffickers coerce victims to commit identity and data fraud in some instances. One court case surfaced by the UNODC shows that a group of trafficking victims was kept in an abandoned building under inhumane conditions, using stolen payment card data to obtain products from companies and committing tax fraud with fraudulent digital signatures to receive tax returns.

Outlook and Conclusions

Human trafficking will continue to threaten individuals, countries, and organizations worldwide — no country is immune. Understanding human traffickers' operations, contextual references, and the internet-connected platforms where traffickers operate on is essential to grasping the threats posed by human trafficking and the direction in which these threats may evolve. We suggest monitoring sources of interest using the Recorded Future Platform and keywords provided in the Appendix to this report.

Human traffickers will continue to target vulnerable people through social media, messaging apps, online classified ads, and deceptive job offers posted on various websites. Organizations should monitor sources of interest for relevant company information, references, and mentions as part of a proactive strategy to prevent and mitigate human trafficking.

Organizations should consider creating and maintaining a robust and frequent training plan for employees, contractors, and third-party vendors to raise awareness about human trafficking. Refreshing these groups with training is crucial for identifying signs of human trafficking and taking steps to eradicate it. Training examples can be found on the UNODC website and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) website.

We recommend using the Recorded Future Platform to help create monitoring alerts and watchlists to identify potential human trafficking indicators. Underground sources that advertise and discuss human trafficking should continue to be monitored as part of any mitigation strategy.

Appendix A: Sample List of Human Trafficking Keywords

English	Chinese	Russian	Spanish	Comment
Automatic	自动的	На автопилоте	*Automático*	*Needs to be used with the word "Pimp"*
Bottom	底部	Мамочка	*Fondo*	*Supervisor of workers*
Branding	品牌	Татуировка	*Marca*	
Brothel	妓院	Бордель	*Burdel*	
Bottom Bitch	底婊子	Мамка	*Perra inferior*	
Puta inferior				
Buyer	买方	Покупатель	*Comprador/cliente*	*Associated terms: John/ Romeo/date/pimp*
Cat house	猫房子	Публичный дом	*Casa de gato*	
Caught A Case	抓住了一个案例	Присел	*Cogió un caso*	
Choosing Up	选择	Всех посмотреть	*Eligiendo*	
Daddy	爸	Папочка	*papi*	
Date	日期	Свидание	*Acompañante*	*Associated terms: Romeo/ pimp*
Escort Service	陪伴服务	Эскорт услуги	*Servicio de acompañantes*	
Exit Fee	退出费用	Выкупить	*Tarifa de salida*	
Finesse	技巧	Ухажер	*Finura*	*Associated term: Pimp*
Guerilla	Guerilla.	Сутенер	*Guerrilla*	
Head Cut	头切	Отрезать башку	*Corte de cabeza*	
In the life	生活中	На панели	*En la vida*	
John	约翰	Клиент проститутки	*John*	*Associated terms: Romeo/ date/pimp*
Kiddie Stroll	kiddie漫步	Панель	*Paseo para niños*	
Loose Bitch	松散的婊子	Свободная сука	*Perra suelta*	
Lot Lizard	很多蜥蜴	Шкура	*Lagarto del lot*	
Lover Boy	情人男孩	Мальчик	*Amante*	
Madam	女士	Госпожа	*señora*	
Out of Pocket	从口袋里掏出	Индивидуалка	*Fuera de su bolsillo*	
Papi	Papi.	Папик	*Papi*	
Casanova	卡萨诺瓦	Казанова	*Casanova*	
Business Manager	业务经理	Начальник	*Gerente de negocios*	
Bitch	婊子	Сука	*Puta, Perra*	
Ho	妓女	Проститутка	*Ho, Puta, Perra*	
Home girl	家里的女孩	Домашняя девочка	*Chica casera*	
Whore	妓女	Шлюха	*Puta*	
Stroll Ho	漫步何	Бродяжка	*Pasear*	
Worker	工人	Работник	*Trabajador*	
Call girl	应召女郎	Девушка по вызову	*Prepago*	

English	Chinese	Russian	Spanish	Comment
Escort	护送	Эскорт	*Escolta*	
Dancer	舞蹈家	Танцовщица	*Bailarín*	
Entertainer	艺人	Артистка	*Artista*	
Companion	伴侣	Спутница	*Compañero*	
Fresh meat	鲜肉	Свежее мясо	*Carne fresca*	
Crash-test dummy	碰撞试验假人	Груша для битья	*Maniquí de prueba de choque*	
wet behind the ears	小白	Мелкая	*humedad detrás de las orejas*	
vic in training		Жертва	*vic en formación*	
Wifey	老婆	Женушка	*Esposa*	
Wife-in-law		Жена	*Esposa*	
Purchaser	买方	Покупатель	*Comprador*	
Patron	赞助人	Покровитель	*Patrón*	
Client	客户	Клиент	*Cliente*	
Vic	vic.	Терпила	*Víctima*	
Regular	常规的	Обычный	*Regular*	*Associated terms: John/ date/buyer/client/vic/patron*
Sugar daddy	傍大款	Спонсор	*Papi dulce*	*Also commonly used as "Sugar Daddy" in Spanish*
money man		Толстосум	*Hombre de dinero*	
Incall	inc		*Incondicionado*	
Outcall	outcall.		*Superar*	
Hitting licks	击中舔		*Golpeando lame*	
Hitting a lick	击中舔		*Golpeando un lamido*	
Backpage	后页	Объявления	*Mochila*	
Special	特别的	Особенный	*Especial*	*Arranged deal for sex*
Seasoned	调味料	Опытный	*Sazonado*	
Vet	兽医		*Veterinario*	*Experienced victim*
turned out	结果是		*resultó*	
the lifestyle	生活方式	На панели	*el estilo de vida*	
breaking bad	绝命毒师	Во все тяжкие	*Breaking Bad*	
burned up	烧起来了	Сгореть	*quemado*	
work the red carpet			*trabajar la alfombra roja*	
Pimp	拉皮条	Сутенер	*Chulo*	
Pimp Circle	皮条客圈	Туса сутенера	*Círculo chulo*	*Associated term: Out of pocket*
put it on the wire	把它放在电线上	Прослушка	*ponlo en el alambre*	
Reckless Eyeballing	鲁莽的眼球	Явный флирт	*Evidente imprudente*	
Renegade	叛变	Изменник	*Renegado*	
Romeo	罗密欧	Ромео	*Romeo*	*Associated term: Pimp*

English	Chinese	Russian	Spanish	Comment
Seasoning	调味料	Опытный	*Perito, competente*	
Serving a Pimp	服务皮条客	Работа на сутенера	*Sirviendo un chulo*	
Stable	稳定的	Стабильный	*Estable*	
Squaring Up		Встреча	*Cuadrado*	
The Game	游戏	Панель	*El juego*	
The Life	人生	Панель	*La vida*	
Track	追踪	Отслеживать	*Pista*	
Trade Down	折价	Торговать	*Comprar algo más barato*	
Trade Up		Торговать	*Intercambiar*	
Trick	诡计	Обманывать	*Truco*	*Associated terms: John/ Romeo/date/pimp*
Turn Out	结果发现	Оказаться	*Apagar*	
Quota	配额	Квота	*Cuota*	*Use with Trick*
Whorehouse	妓院	Публичный дом	*Burdel*	
Wifeys	妻子	Жены	*Esposas*	
young needed		Требуются молодые	*Necesitamos jóvenes or se necesitan jóvenes*	
no experience needed	无需经验	Без опыта	*no se necesita experiencia*	
J1 visa arrivals	J1 签到	Виза J1	*Llegadas de visa J1*	*Applicable for US cases*
fresh off the boat	新来的	С корабля на бал	*recién salidos del horno*	
new arrivals	新来的	Новые поступления	*Llegadas recientes*	
travel to get paid		Путешествуй за зарплату	*te pagan para viajar*	

About Insikt Group®

Recorded Future's Insikt Group, the company's threat research division, comprises analysts and security researchers with deep government, law enforcement, military, and intelligence agency experience. Their mission is to produce intelligence that reduces risk for clients, enables tangible outcomes, and prevents business disruption.

About Recorded Future®

Recorded Future is the world's largest provider of intelligence for enterprise security. By combining persistent and pervasive automated data collection and analytics with human analysis, Recorded Future delivers intelligence that is timely, accurate, and actionable. In a world of ever-increasing chaos and uncertainty, Recorded Future empowers organizations with the visibility they need to identify and detect threats faster; take proactive action to disrupt adversaries; and protect their people, systems, and assets, so business can be conducted with confidence. Recorded Future is trusted by more than 1,000 businesses and government organizations around the world.

Learn more at recordedfuture.com and follow us on Twitter at @RecordedFuture.