

Crossing borders: Does it matter? Differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex traffickers, their victims and modus operandi

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Abstract

Hardly any research exists that empirically compares (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking. The few studies that do, are based on relatively small samples, and only represent US data. This study substantially extends the scarce scientific knowledge about the differences between the two types of sex trafficking, based on European data. Our sample consists of all 658 (near-)domestic sex traffickers, and all 424 cross-border sex traffickers, registered by the prosecution service in 2008–2017, who are brought to court in the Netherlands. We collected data on these traffickers from registers of the prosecution service, from a file analyses on the indictments/verdicts, and from registers of Statistics Netherlands. These data provide insight into the characteristics of the traffickers, their victims and modus operandi. Our findings show that significant differences between the two types of sex trafficking exist, which is of great importance for better tailored prevention and identification strategies. The most prominent finding is that the threshold to get

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involved into (near-)domestic sex trafficking is lower than for cross-border sex trafficking. (Near-)domestic sex traffickers are, compared to cross-border sex traffickers, younger (as are their victims), they seldom need to migrate, they operate on a smaller scale (more one-to-one and for a shorter period of time) and practically never in a criminal organization. Furthermore, they use violent means of coercion to control their victims more frequently than cross-border sex traffickers, which can be interpreted as additional evidence for a less organized practice. These findings contribute to a more complete understanding of sex trafficking, in particular of the traffickers who were seldom the direct subject of research.

Keywords

domestic sex trafficking, cross-border sex trafficking, trafficker, victim, modus operandi, the Netherlands

Introduction

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation (further: sex trafficking) is typically associated with *cross-border sex trafficking*, in which victims are recruited in one country, and subsequently transported to, and sexually exploited in, another country (usually a country with a higher standard of living, Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018). However, sex trafficking also manifests itself more regionally in *(near-)domestic sex trafficking*,¹ in which victims are recruited and exploited in the same or (an adjacent area of an easily accessible) neighboring country (Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018). In the Netherlands, (near-)domestic sex trafficking is often referred to as the ‘loverboy phenomenon’, which became apparent since the mid-1990s, but actually has always existed (Bovenkerk and Van San, 2011).

According to an estimation of the number of human trafficking victims in the Netherlands (UNODC and National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children, 2017), (near-)domestic sex trafficking is the most prevalent form of human trafficking in general, accounting for 46% of all victims: almost 3000 a year. Cross-border sex trafficking accounts for roughly a fifth (21%): about 1300 victims a year. The remaining 33% are victims of trafficking for nonsexual exploitation (mainly for labor, services or criminal activities).

To understand and address the phenomenon of human trafficking, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate its multifaceted nature. For one, human trafficking can manifest itself in different forms of exploitation (see e.g. Cockbain and Bowers, 2019). However, the so-called route of trafficking (i.e. (near-)domestic versus cross-border trafficking, see Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018) might also be a relevant factor when it comes to distinguishing different types of trafficking. For example, there are reasons to believe that (near-)domestic sex trafficking involves a different type of trafficker, victim, and modus operandi than cross-border sex trafficking. After all, the threshold for traffickers and victims to get involved into (near-)domestic sex trafficking is assumed to be lower – both on an organizational and psychological level – than for cross-border sex trafficking, since no migration is necessary (Aronowitz et al., 2010; DiRienzo and Das, 2017; Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018). If there are meaningful differences, addressing these two types of sex trafficking may require different strategies, which is of great importance to combat these serious violations of human rights more effectively.

But hardly any research exists that compares (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking. A systematic review by Reid (2012) did so, but is based on studies on only one type or the other and compares only victim vulnerabilities. To our knowledge, only three *empirical* studies have been published that specifically look into a broader range of differences between the two types of sex trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Denton, 2016; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020).² These studies are, however, based on relatively small samples of sex trafficking cases (respectively 38, 296 and 114 cases).

In this study, we investigate all 1082 prosecuted sex trafficking cases in the Netherlands in the period 2008–2017. This enables us to investigate in much more detail than previous studies, the differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking, with regard to the characteristics of the traffickers, their victims and modus operandi.

Legal and societal context

In the Netherlands, human trafficking (for sexual exploitation) is criminalized under Article 273f of the Dutch Criminal Code (DCC), which is largely based on the definition as stated in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (UN Palermo Protocol, 2000):

“‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, . . . , for the purpose of exploitation.” (Article 3(a) of the UN Palermo Protocol)

In other words: human trafficking requires an act, with a means, and with a purpose of exploitation. The means can be violent, as well as non-violent in nature, such as deception or abuse of a position of vulnerability. Consent on the part of the victim is irrelevant if a means is used (Article 3(b) of the UN Palermo Protocol). In the case of a victim younger than eighteen years, the existence of a means or consent is irrelevant (Articles 3(c) and 3(d) of the UN Palermo Protocol).

In addition, article 273f (1)(3) of the DCC considers recruiting, taking or abducting a person with the intention of inducing that person to be available for prostitution in another country, which is based on the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age (1933). Until a few years ago, neither means (forms of coercion), nor the intention of exploitation was required. However, in 2016 the Dutch Supreme Court ruled that the intention of exploitation is actually a latent part of this subsection of the Dutch definition (Dutch Supreme Court 17 May 2016, ECLI:NL:HR:2016:857). So since this ruling, the Dutch definition has become narrower and more fully in accordance with the UN Palermo Protocol, thereby increasing its comparability internationally.

The Dutch legal definition of sex trafficking only distinguishes the victim (supply side) and the trafficker (profit side). But the consumer (demand side) is also a relevant actor in the social construct of sex trafficking. Because both the selling and buying of sexual services (prostitution) is legal in the Netherlands under certain conditions

(as well as in neighboring Belgium and Germany), a consumer is only punishable by law when he or she violates the conditions set. However, his or her crime then constitutes a sex crime – for example when buying the sexual services of a minor – not sex trafficking.

Literature review

Below, we give an overview of what is already known about sex trafficking in general, with regard to the characteristics of the traffickers, their victims and modus operandi. When available, we describe what has been reported on the differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking.

The traffickers

As the legal definition of human trafficking covers various behavioral acts (see the behaviors as stated in the UN Palermo Protocol), some sex traffickers are involved in every phase of the trafficking process (from recruitment to exploitation), while others only fill one or a few particular roles. Some of these roles are applicable to both (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking (e.g. recruiting victims), but other roles are only applicable in the case of the latter (e.g. transporting victims across borders). The characteristics of sex traffickers might be (partly) related to the role(s) they fill.

However, very little research exists in which the trafficker is the direct subject of the study. Most of our knowledge comes from studies that contain indirect information about traffickers (e.g. through the accounts of victims). With regard to gender, studies on human trafficking agree on the fact that the majority of traffickers are male. Nevertheless, it is also widely recognized that female traffickers are no rarity, and actually more common in comparison to most other types of crime (Denton, 2016; UNODC, 2020). Female traffickers are often assumed to be (former) victims (so-called ‘supporters’, ‘bottoms’, or ‘main girls’) who are forced to recruit or enforce other victims (i.e. ‘survival-offending’ or ‘second wave recruitment’) (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Denton, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2007; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015; Siegel and De Blank, 2010; Surtees, 2008). However, based on a social network analysis, Denton (2016) concludes that it is not true that the majority of female traffickers is subservient to their male counterparts. Especially in the case of cross-border sex trafficking, different studies show that female traffickers also fulfil more prominent and even leading roles (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Denton, 2016; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020; Wijkman and Kleemans, 2019). With regard to age, Denton (2016) finds that traffickers are remarkably older than offenders of other crimes. In her study, the mean age of the traffickers whose age could be established is 38.43, but this also includes traffickers involved in nonsexual exploitation. Busch-Armendariz et al. (2009) report that all sex traffickers in their sample are adults. They, however, remark that there are recent cases of (near-)domestic sex trafficking that do involve minor traffickers, but these were not included in their sample. Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2017) find 13 minors in their sample of 1416 (near-)domestic sex traffickers of underaged victims in the US. The average age of the traffickers in their sample is 28.5 years. Further, the literature is consistent in finding that the

traffickers' countries of origin are often similar to those of their victims (Denton, 2016; Siegel and De Blank, 2010), particularly in the case of traffickers who fulfil the task of recruitment (Surtees, 2008). The study of Denton (2016) shows that the inclusion of native traffickers (i.e. originating from the country of exploitation) is a rarity in cross-border trafficking (less than 10%), as are migrant traffickers in (near-)domestic trafficking (6%).

The victims

The vast majority of identified victims of sex trafficking around the world are females (UNODC, 2020). Male victims, however, do exist, but they are probably underrepresented in operational data and research, because they do not comply with the stereotypical image of a sex trafficking victim (Cockbain and Bowers, 2019; Moore et al., 2020; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020). Sex trafficking victims can be minors as well as (young) adults. (Near-)domestic sex trafficking victims are underaged more often than cross-border sex trafficking victims (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020). (Near-)domestic sex trafficking victims are recruited and exploited in the same country. Therefore they are predominantly natives. Cross-border sex trafficking victims are recruited in another country than the country of exploitation. This country of recruitment most of the time corresponds to the victim's country of origin, and is usually a more impoverished country than the country of exploitation (Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018).

Victims of sex trafficking are often – already before their recruitment – in a vulnerable position of which the trafficker takes advantage. This is found in studies on both (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking. There are a lot of studies that look into these vulnerabilities (i.e. risk factors of victimization), especially when it concerns (near-)domestic sex trafficking of minors. These studies are summarized in several systematic reviews (De Vries and Goggin, 2020; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hampton and Lieggi, 2020; Reid, 2012). According to three reviews (Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hampton and Lieggi, 2020; Reid, 2012), the most common vulnerability of victims of sex trafficking prior to their recruitment is a history of childhood abuse, particularly sexual abuse, but also other types of abuse (e.g. physical, emotional, neglect). Based on a meta-analysis, De Vries and Goggin (2020) conclude that sexual abuse indeed increases the risk of victimization of sex trafficking with a factor of 2.5. However, they do not find specific significant impacts for physical and emotional abuse, although they note that this could be due to co-occurrence of different types of abuse. Franchino-Olsen (2021), Hampton and Lieggi (2020) and Reid (2012) also mention dysfunction of parents or other caregivers as a commonly reported vulnerability. Franchino-Olsen (2021) and Hampton and Lieggi (2020) emphasize that an unstable home life, often as a result of childhood abuse or caregiver dysfunction, is connected to other vulnerabilities, of which the most important one is running away from home. Once on the street, homeless youth are susceptible for recruitment into sex work because they need food, clothing, and shelter. Franchino-Olsen (2021), Hampton and Lieggi (2020), and Reid (2012) also mention growing up in neighborhoods where sex work and crime are normalized (including involvement of friends or

family in trafficking or sex work) as a risk factor. Other frequently cited vulnerabilities are: substance (ab)use (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Franchino-Olsen, 2021; Hampton and Lieggi, 2020; Moore et al., 2020), mental health problems (Franchino-Olsen, 2021), intellectual disabilities (Reid, 2018) or being lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual (Fedina et al., 2019). Reid (2012) concludes in her systematic review that there are more commonalities than dissimilarities between the vulnerabilities of victims of (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking. However, victims of cross-border sex trafficking are more often pressured into sex trafficking to provide economic support for family members, more often experience community crises in their country of origin, and more often originate from unbeneficial societal settings, than (near-)domestic sex trafficking victims in countries with a relatively high standard of living.

Modus operandi

Studies on both cross-border and (near-)domestic sex trafficking show that traffickers predominantly recruit victims in a subtle/manipulative way, and only rarely employ violence (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Kennedy et al., 2007; Raphael and Myers-Powell, 2010; Reid, 2016; Surtees, 2008; UNODC, 2020). Recruiters often play upon the specific needs/vulnerabilities of their potential victims (i.e. personalized recruitment, Surtees, 2008). The methods of recruitment are diverse, and they might be more related to the (vulnerabilities of the) potential victim than to the trafficker (Kennedy et al., 2007). Further, a lot of studies mention that traffickers often deploy victims to recruit new victims (Moore et al., 2020; Raphael and Myers-Powell, 2010; Reid, 2016; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015; Siegel and De Blank, 2010; Surtees, 2008; UNODC, 2020). An enticing proposal from a befriended or acquainted female peer is perceived as more trustworthy and is therefore more effective, also because it normalizes sex trafficking behavior. Furthermore, since victims often feel guilty and fear prosecution, traffickers can use this offending behavior of their victims as a mechanism to control them (Surtees, 2008). Finally, deploying victims to recruit new victims is also a way of keeping themselves out of range (Raphael and Myers-Powell, 2010; UNODC, 2020). It is important to note, however, that it is not always the trafficker (or a victim deployed by the trafficker) that initiates the first contact. Sometimes victims take the first step and in a way 'recruit their trafficker' (Denton, 2016; Horning, 2013; Marcus et al., 2014).

The literature shows that traffickers and victims often already know each other prior to recruitment (e.g. family, friends, acquaintances), what provides a basis of trust (Reid, 2016; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2017; Surtees, 2008). However, according to the latest Global report on trafficking in persons, the internet is increasingly used by traffickers to select, contact and recruit victims (UNODC, 2020). This can be passive, by posting ads on websites that potential victims may visit (i.e. 'fishing'), or more active, by directly contacting potential victims on fora or social media where they have exposed their needs/vulnerabilities (i.e. 'hunting'). Contacting potential sex trafficking victims this way, can be seen as an example of a cyber-enabled crime, which allows a crime to be carried out more efficiently by using the internet (Wall, 2017).

In the case of cross-border sex trafficking, a common method of recruitment is promising a good job, good money in prostitution, or education abroad. This is not seldom supported by success stories of ‘predecessors’ from the social environment of the victims (Aronowitz et al., 2010; Surtees, 2008). Another popular method of recruitment is feigning or promising a loving relationship with the victim. This has proven to be an effective method, because victims are less inclined to turn against their ‘lover’ and are easier to manipulate and control during exploitation. While this method is often associated with (near-)domestic sex trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Kennedy et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2020; Raphael and Myers-Powell, 2010; Reid, 2016), it is also mentioned in the literature on cross-border sex trafficking (Surtees, 2008). Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al. (2020) do not even find a significant difference between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking in this respect. As opposed to the recruitment of victims, the exploitation of victims is often accompanied by the use of force in order to control them. During exploitation, threats, intimidation and physical and sexual violence are common, in both (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking (Reid, 2016; Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2017; UNODC, 2020; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020).

In the case of cross-border sex trafficking, traffickers are believed to operate mainly in criminal groups, defined by loose network structures, flexibility, and adaptability (Denton, 2016; Surtees, 2008). While almost always multiple traffickers and victims are involved (one trafficker can victimize multiple victims, and at the same time one victim can be victimized by multiple traffickers), the networks vary in size and by level of organization (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Surtees 2008). In (near-)domestic sex trafficking, on the other hand, Denton (2016) does not find evidence that traffickers operate in organized networks. However, a study on (near-)domestic sex trafficking in the United Kingdom (Cockbain, 2018), shows that offenders, as well as victims, are heavily networked – but not in a classic hierarchical manner – and mostly connected by strong pre-existing social bonds. Bekken et al. (2021) also found that most offenders in their sample of (near-)domestic sex trafficking in the Netherlands co-offend (60%), and are connected by – mostly non-hierarchical – social bonds based on friendship or family. Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al. (2020) conclude that there are significant differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking with regard to both the number of traffickers and the number of victims involved in a sex trafficking operation. (Near-)domestic sex trafficking is more often small scale: 56.2% of the (near-)domestic cases involve just a single trafficker compared to 22.0% of the cross-border cases, and 41.0% of the (near-)domestic cases target a single victim compared to 14.7% of the cross-border cases. Cross-border sex trafficking, on the other hand, is more often large scale: 17.1% of the cross-border cases involve seven or more traffickers compared to 1.4% of the (near-)domestic cases, and in 36.6% of the cross-border cases more than ten victims are targeted compared to 14.8% of the (near-)domestic cases.

To our knowledge, no research exists that pays attention to the duration of traffickers’ involvement into sex trafficking. There is, however, some information available on the duration of victimization. According to the study of Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2017), minor victims of (near-)domestic sex trafficking in the US experience on average 154 days of trafficking (recruitment and exploitation) before being identified by law enforcement, with a wide range of one day to eleven years. This is quite similar to the finding of

Kulig (2018), who finds that victims are sexually exploited for approximately six months (excluding recruitment) before they are rescued or escaped.

Current study

Studies that empirically compare (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking hardly exist. The few that do, are based on relatively small sample sizes, and only represent US data (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Denton, 2016; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020). These studies are not necessarily representative for other (European) countries, with different prostitution policies and/or human trafficking legislation. Furthermore, we do not know much about traffickers, because studies in which they are directly the subject of research are relatively scarce. While much more is known about the victims, most of this literature focusses solely on (near-)domestic *minor* sex trafficking, specifically of female victims in the US.

The purpose of the current study is to gain more insight into the characteristics of, and differences between, (near-)domestic sex trafficking in the Netherlands and cross-border sex trafficking from other countries to the Netherlands. We analyze all 658 prosecuted (near-)domestic sex trafficking cases, and all 424 prosecuted cross-border sex trafficking cases – of unique traffickers – registered by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service in the period between 2008–2017. These data are used to address the following research question:

How do the characteristics of traffickers, their victims and modus operandi, differ between (near-)domestic sex trafficking in the Netherlands, and cross-border sex trafficking to the Netherlands?

More specifically, we investigate: (a) the gender, age, country of birth and migration history of the traffickers, (b) the gender, age, country of recruitment and vulnerabilities prior to recruitment of their victims, and (c) the ways of recruitment (i.e. internet-based first contact, love form of recruitment), the use of violent means of coercion, and the scale of the sex trafficking operation (i.e. presence of co-offenders or even a criminal organization, number of victims, duration of trafficking).

Methods

Sample

In this study, we use the legal definition of sex trafficking provided by the DCC, based on the UN Palermo Protocol. Situations identified by law enforcement are more likely to meet the legal criteria, than situations identified by other professionals, such as social workers. In the Netherlands, there are two law enforcement agencies (i.e. the police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee) responsible for identifying situations of sex trafficking. When a law enforcement agency identifies enough indications, it proceeds to a criminal investigation that is conducted under the authority of the Dutch Public Prosecution Service. So, from the moment an investigation starts, a prosecutor gets involved.

In order to minimize false positives and negatives, our sample consists of alleged sex traffickers whose involvement in sex trafficking – according to the prosecutor – is provable given the evidence gathered in criminal investigations, that is: alleged sex traffickers who are brought to court.

Our initial sample is based on all 2264 human trafficking cases registered by the Dutch Public Prosecution Service.³ Cases were excluded if the suspects were not summoned for human trafficking, mainly due to insufficient evidence ($n = 735$), if they concerned legal entities instead of persons ($n = 9$), or if they were not cases of (near-)domestic sex trafficking or cross-border sex trafficking to the Netherlands ($n = 227$).⁴ Moreover, we excluded 80 cases because some of the traffickers were summoned for human trafficking more than once, resulting in multiple incidents of two or more cases regarding only one trafficker. Because we want our dataset to reflect unique traffickers, we chose only their most recent case as the criterion case. Subsequently, we excluded 30 cases because we could not access the corresponding indictments to conduct a file analysis. Finally, for reasons of comparability – in time, as well as internationally – we excluded the 101 sex traffickers who were solely summoned for article 273f (1)(3) of the DCC and allegedly committed this offence before the Supreme Court ruling that narrowed the Dutch legal definition of sex trafficking, resulting in a definition more fully in accordance with the UN Palermo Protocol (see Legal and societal context).⁵ For the cases registered in 2013–2017 ($n = 520$), we also collected and analyzed verdicts (when available), that generally include more context information than only the indictments. We obtained the indictments and verdicts from the local registration systems of the prosecution service, the public prosecutors specialized in human trafficking, the courts of first instance, and the website www.rechtspraak.nl on which some anonymized verdicts are published.

Our final sample of 1082 traffickers represents nearly all the sex traffickers registered by the prosecution service in the ten year period 2008–2017, who are brought to court in the Netherlands for (near-)domestic ($n = 658$) and cross-border sex trafficking from other countries to the Netherlands ($n = 424$) according to the international definition as stated in the UN Palermo Protocol. The only exceptions are the few traffickers whose files could not be retrieved, and the possible few traffickers whose case did not yet had a prosecution decision registered at the time of the reference dates (for the years 2008–2012: April 2013, for the years 2013–2017: April 2018), but who were eventually summoned for (near-)domestic or cross-border sex trafficking to the Netherlands.

Operationalization of the variables

Following Kragten-Heerdink et al. (2018), we classify a case as (near-)domestic sex trafficking, when all the victims are recruited and exploited in the Netherlands and/or the neighboring countries Belgium and Germany. When at least one victim is recruited in another country than the Netherlands, Belgium or Germany, and exploited in the Netherlands, we classify this case as cross-border sex trafficking.

Gender, date of birth, country of birth, and (if applicable) the date of migration to the Netherlands of the *traffickers* are obtained from Statistics Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands was able to identify 1047 of the total of 1082 traffickers in our sample and anonymized our dataset by replacing all the identifiable information with unique

irreducible registration numbers. Subsequently, we linked our dataset to the non-public data made available by Statistics Netherlands. For the 35 traffickers who are not identified by Statistics Netherlands, the gender, date and country of birth are obtained from the registration of the prosecution service. We determine the age of the traffickers on the basis of the date of birth, and the date when the alleged sex trafficking started that we obtained through the file analysis. We categorize the countries of birth of the traffickers as follows: the Netherlands, traditional countries of origin of Dutch immigrants (Morocco, Turkey, Surinam, former Netherlands Antilles), countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and other countries. To describe the migration history of the traffickers, we distinguish five different categories: born in the Netherlands – natives, born in the Netherlands – immigrant parents, immigrants who migrated to the Netherlands as a child (<18), immigrants who migrated to the Netherlands as an adult (≥18), and those who never officially migrated to the Netherlands.

Each case in our data equals one unique trafficker. In the case of co-offending, different traffickers may victimize the same victims. Because we do not have identifiable information on the victims at our disposal, we analyze our data on victims on the level of the trafficker. All the information on the *victims* is derived from the file analysis on the indictments/verdicts. The dichotomous variable ‘male victim’ indicates whether the trafficker victimized at least one male. The dichotomous variable ‘underaged victim (<18)’ indicates whether the trafficker victimized at least one minor.⁶ Different country variables were created that indicate if at least one of the victims was recruited there. We categorize these country variables into eight different dichotomous region variables, including four different regions in Europe respecting the free movement of persons within the European Union (EU): the Netherlands (EU), neighboring countries Belgium and Germany (EU), Central and Eastern European countries that are part of the EU, other European countries, Latin-America and Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and a variable ‘other countries or not further specified’. We classify the more qualitative information that we collected from the files on the vulnerable position of the victim prior to recruitment into the following twelve dichotomous variables: caregiver dysfunction (e.g. fighting with caregivers, substance abuse by caregivers, involvement of child protection services, childhood (sexual) abuse), homelessness (including running away from home), already involved in sex work/revictimization (including normalization of sex work), substance (ab)use (prior to recruitment), mental health problems (including receiving professional treatment/guidance), living in an institution (e.g. in foster care homes or treatment centres), intellectual disabilities, providing for others (including having children), unbeneficial societal settings (including financial problems and no or low educational background), being underage or a young adult (e.g. ‘just turned eighteen/twenty/twenty-two’, ‘very young’), the variable ‘other vulnerabilities’ (including a dependent position towards trafficker, being in or just coming out of a violent/bad relationship, having children under child protection services or placed in foster care),⁷ and the variable ‘non-specified vulnerabilities’.

The variables about the *modus operandi* of the traffickers originate from the registration of the prosecution service or our file analysis. The dichotomous variable ‘internet-based first contact’ indicates whether the first contact between the trafficker and at least one victim was established through the internet. The dichotomous variable ‘love form of recruitment’ indicates that there is (a promise of) a (false) loving relationship

between the trafficker and at least one victim, also when this relationship was already established long before the recruitment phase started. The dichotomous variable ‘use of violent means of coercion’ includes violent offences, sexual offences, deprivation of liberty offences (like stalking), and weapon offences that are registered by the prosecution service in the same case as the sex trafficking offence(s). It is, however, incidentally possible that the other registered offences in a case, are not committed in the context of the alleged sex trafficking offence(s), or even not against the same victim(s). The dichotomous variables ‘co-offending’ and ‘criminal organization’ indicate whether co-offending as an aggravation or being part of a criminal organization is registered by the prosecution service. The variable ‘number of victims’ is obtained through the file analysis, as well as the variable ‘duration of trafficking’. This latter variable is based on the start date of the first, and the end date of the last, sex trafficking offence included in the indictment. It is possible though, that multiple registered sex trafficking offences in a case, are actually not consecutive.

Data analysis

We present descriptive statistics for all variables: for the total of 1082 sex traffickers, as well as for the 658 (near-)domestic and 424 cross-border sex traffickers separately. Further, following the research question, we perform a series of chi-square tests, t-tests and Mann-Whitney U-tests to determine whether significant differences exist between the two groups of sex traffickers on each of the variables. Because we also analyzed the verdicts for the cases registered in 2013–2017, our data are more complete for these recent years. This regards specifically the vulnerable position of the victim prior to recruitment, internet-based first contact and love form of recruitment. To minimize bias, we only show the results of the 520 cases registered in these five most recent years for these variables.

Results

Trafficker characteristics

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the traffickers and presents the results of the analyses in which these were compared between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex traffickers.

The cross-border sex traffickers in our sample were significantly more often female than the (near-)domestic sex traffickers (21.5% vs. 12.0%), who were, in turn, significantly younger (mean age of 27.6 years vs. 32.7 years). Table 1 further shows that the majority (64.4%) of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers was born in the Netherlands and about a fifth (21.7%) in one of the four traditional countries of origin of Dutch immigrants, while seven out of ten (71.4%) of the cross-border sex traffickers were born in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary (27.4%), Romania (17.9%) and Bulgaria (17.6%). In total, nine out of ten (91.9%) of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers were, at least partly, raised in the Netherlands (i.e. born in or migrated to the Netherlands as a child) – which is far more often than the cross-border sex traffickers (23.9%). Moreover, 42.3% of the cross-border sex traffickers even never migrated to the Netherlands, compared to only 3.0% of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers.

Table 1. Trafficker characteristics (2008–2017).

| | (Near-)domestic sex trafficking (n = 658) | Cross-border sex trafficking (n = 424) | Total sex trafficking (n = 1082) |
|---|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Gender*** | | | |
| Male | 88.0% | 78.5% | 84.3% |
| Female | 12.0% | 21.5% | 15.7% |
| Age in categories*** | | | |
| Underaged (<18) | 5.9% | 22.2% | 39.0% |
| 18–24 | 43.9% | | |
| 25–39 | 39.7% | | |
| 40 and older | 10.5% | | |
| Mean age (sd)*** | 27.6 (9.1) | 32.7 (9.0) | 29.6 (9.4) |
| Country of birth*** | | | |
| Netherlands | 64.4% | 15.0% | 45.2% |
| Morocco/Turkey/Surinam/ former Netherlands Antilles | 21.7% | 5.2% | 15.3% |
| Central and Eastern Europe | 4.1% | 71.4% | 30.3% |
| Other countries | 9.7% | 8.3% | 9.2% |
| Migration history*** | | | |
| Born in the Netherlands – native | 26.0% | 10.9% | 20.1% |
| Born in the Netherlands – immigrant parents | 38.4% | 3.8% | 24.9% |
| Migrated to the Netherlands <18 | 27.5% | 9.2% | 20.4% |
| Migrated to the Netherlands ≥18 | 5.0% | 33.8% | 16.3% |
| Never migrated to the Netherlands | 3.0% | 42.3% | 18.4% |

Notes. The results for gender, age in categories, country of birth and migration history are based on chi-square tests, the result for age in categories on a Mann-Whitney U-test and the result for mean age on a t-test. Only the combined percentage of the age categories 'underaged' and '18–24' is shown for the cross-border sex traffickers and for the total of sex traffickers, because the number of underaged cross-border sex traffickers is smaller than 10.

***p < .001. The country of birth of 4 cross-border sex traffickers and the migration history of 1 cross-border sex trafficker is unknown, resulting in totals of 1078, respectively, 1081 sex traffickers.

Victim characteristics

Next, the characteristics of the victims of (near-)domestic and cross-border sex traffickers were compared. Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

On average, only 2.3% of all the sex traffickers in our sample victimized at least one male victim. The results in Table 2 further indicate that about half of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers (48.5%) was involved in minor sex trafficking, which is significantly more often than the cross-border sex traffickers (15.6%). Moreover, the (near-)domestic sex traffickers, by definition, exclusively recruited (and exploited) victims in the Netherlands (97.4%) and/or in the neighboring countries Belgium or Germany (3.8%). The large majority (83.5%) of the cross-border sex traffickers recruited victims from EU-countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary (34.0%), Romania (23.1%) and Bulgaria (17.5%).

Victims' vulnerabilities prior to recruitment

The various vulnerabilities of the victims, prior to recruitment by (near-)domestic and cross-border sex traffickers, are summarized and compared in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 show that the vulnerable position prior to recruitment of at least one victim was significantly more often mentioned in the files of the (near-)domestic sex

Table 2. Victim characteristics, per trafficker (2008–2017).

| | (Near-)domestic sex trafficking (n = 658) | Cross-border sex trafficking (n = 424) | Total sex trafficking (n = 1082) |
|--|--|---|---|
| At least one male victim | 1.7% | 3.3% | 2.3% |
| At least one underaged victim*** | 48.5% | 15.6% | 35.6% |
| At least one victim from the Netherlands (EU)*** | 97.4% | 3.3% | 60.5% |
| At least one victim from neighboring Belgium or Germany (EU) | 3.8% | 2.1% | 3.1% |
| At least one victim from Central and Eastern European countries (EU)*** | 0.0% | 83.5% | 32.7% |
| At least one victim from other European countries*** | 0.0% | 4.0% | 1.6% |
| At least one victim from Latin America & Caribbean*** | 0.0% | 5.0% | 1.9% |
| At least one victim from Africa*** | 0.0% | 3.5% | 1.4% |
| At least one victim from Asia*** | 0.0% | 3.5% | 1.4% |
| At least one victim from other or not specified countries*** | 0.0% | 4.0% | 1.6% |

Notes. The results are based on chi-square tests. The different regions of recruitment are not mutually exclusive (they add up to more than 100%), as a trafficker may recruit multiple victims in different regions.

*** $p < .001$. The gender of the victims of 1 (near-)domestic and 6 cross-border sex traffickers is unknown, resulting in a total of 1075 sex traffickers.

Table 3. Victims' vulnerabilities prior to recruitment, per trafficker (2013–2017).

| | (Near-)domestic sex trafficking (n = 341) | Cross-border sex trafficking (n = 179) | Total sex trafficking (n = 520) |
|---|--|---|--|
| Vulnerable position of at least one victim mentioned in file, any of the below*** | 93.3% | 69.3% | 85.0% |
| Underaged or young adult*** | 63.3% | 22.9% | 49.4% |
| Unbeneficial societal settings, including financial problems and no or low educational background *** | 19.9% | 46.9% | 29.2% |
| Homeless, including ran away from home*** | 29.3% | 6.7% | 21.5% |
| Caregiver dysfunction, including childhood (sexual) abuse*** | 19.6% | 7.8% | 15.6% |
| Providing for others*** | 7.3% | 29.1% | 14.8% |
| Living in an institution*** | 19.6% | 0.0% | 12.9% |
| Mental health problems*** | 14.4% | 2.8% | 10.4% |
| Intellectual disabilities*** | 15.5% | 0.6% | 10.4% |
| Substance (ab)use** | 11.4% | 2.8% | 8.5% |
| Already involved in sex work/ revictimization, including normalization of sex work | 5.0% | 8.4% | 6.2% |
| Other vulnerabilities* | 27.6% | 17.9% | 24.2% |
| Non-specified vulnerabilities | 8.8% | 5.0% | 7.5% |

Note. The results are based on chi-square tests.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

traffickers (93.3%), than in the files of the cross-border sex traffickers (69.3%). Victims of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers were significantly more often described as vulnerable because of their young age, homelessness, caregiver dysfunction (although childhood (sexual) abuse was very rarely mentioned in the files), living in an institution, mental health problems, intellectual disabilities, substance (ab)use, and diverse vulnerabilities categorized under 'other'. Victims of the cross-border sex traffickers were significantly more often described as vulnerable because of unbeneficial social settings, and the need to provide for others.

Modus operandi

Finally, Table 4 shows the results of the comparison between the modus operandi of (near-)domestic and cross-border sex traffickers.

On average, 12.5% of all the sex traffickers in our sample got in contact with at least one victim through the internet, and 37.7% recruited at least one victim by feigning or promising a loving relationship. While both types of sex traffickers used violent means of coercion to control their victims, (near-)domestic sex traffickers did this more often

Table 4. Modus operandi, per trafficker (2008/2013–2017).

| | (Near-)domestic sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 341) | Cross-border sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 179) | Total sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 520) |
|---|---|--|---|
| First contact with at least one victim via internet | 14.4% | 8.9% | 12.5% |
| Love form of recruitment of at least one victim | 40.5% | 32.4% | 37.7% |
| Use of violent means of coercion, any of the below*** | 40.4% | 17.7% | 31.5% |
| Charged with violent offences** | 15.0% | 8.3% | 12.4% |
| Charged with sexual offences*** | 24.9% | 7.8% | 18.2% |
| Charged with deprivation of liberty offences | 4.4% | 2.8% | 3.8% |
| Charged with weapon offences* | 5.8% | 2.8% | 4.6% |
| Co-offending, any of the below*** | 54.4% | 71.9% | 61.3% |
| Charged with co-offending as an aggravation*** | 53.3% | 69.1% | 59.5% |
| Charged with operating in a criminal organization*** | 2.4% | 10.4% | 5.5% |
| Number of victims in categories*** | | | |
| 1 victim | 66.1% | 35.5% | 54.1% |
| 2 or 3 victims | 27.5% | 35.5% | 30.6% |
| 4 or more victims | 6.4% | 29.1% | 15.3% |
| Mean number of victims (sd)*** | 1.6 (1.3) | 3.0 (2.5) | 2.2 (2.0) |
| Duration of trafficking in categories*** | | | |
| ≤ 1 month | 20.5% | 6.6% | 15.1% |

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

| | (Near-)domestic sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 341) | Cross-border sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 179) | Total sex trafficking (2013–2017, n = 520) |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| >1 month & ≤6 months | 30.5% | 27.8% | 29.5% |
| >6 months & ≤2 years | 29.9% | 36.6% | 32.5% |
| >2 years | 19.0% | 29.0% | 22.9% |
| Mean duration in days (sd)** | 458.4 (745.5) | 603.3 (697.1) | 515.1 (730.0) |
| Median duration in days*** | 181.0 | 375.5 | 243.0 |

Note. The results for first contact via internet, love form of recruitment, violent means of coercion, and co-offending are based on chi-square tests, the results for number of victims in categories, duration of trafficking in categories, and median duration of trafficking in days are based on Mann-Whitney U-tests, and the results for mean number of victims and mean duration of trafficking in days on t-tests.

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05. The number of victims of one cross-border sex trafficker is unknown, resulting in a total of 1081 sex traffickers.

(40.4% vs. 17.7%). Cross-border sex traffickers, on the other hand, were significantly more often charged with co-offending as an aggravation and/or operating in a criminal organization (71.9% vs. 54.4%). They also victimized significantly more victims (29.1% made four or more victims, vs. 6.4%) and the sex trafficking for which they were summoned, lasted significantly longer (median duration of more than a year, vs. only six months).

Discussion

This study adds to the scarce available literature on the differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking, in particular with regard to European countries. We compare the characteristics, victims and modus operandi of all 658 (near-)domestic and all 424 cross-border sex traffickers registered by the prosecution service in 2008–2017, who were brought to court in the Netherlands. In line with the few other studies that empirically compare both types of sex trafficking (Busch-Armendariz et al., 2009; Denton, 2016; Veldhuizen-Ochodničanová et al., 2020), our study demonstrates that significant differences indeed exist.

Findings in line with the assumption of a lower threshold for involvement in (near-)domestic sex trafficking

A lot of the differences we found, support the assumption that the threshold for traffickers and their victims to get involved into (near-)domestic sex trafficking is lower, than for cross-border sex trafficking. For example, the younger age of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers and their victims, and the indication that they – as opposed to cross-border sex traffickers – seldom have to migrate in the context of sex trafficking. Most of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers are born in the Netherlands, or migrated to the Netherlands as a child. Their migration is therefore less likely related to the sex trafficking offence, than the migration during adulthood of a large group of cross-border sex traffickers.⁸ Also, the finding that (near-)domestic sex trafficking, in general, is carried out on a smaller scale (more one-to-one, shorter period of time) than cross-border sex trafficking, contributes to the notion of a lower threshold. Still, the majority of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers in our sample did co-offend. In light of the findings of Cockbain (2018), this might be an indication that also (near-)domestic sex traffickers (as well as their victims) are often connected to each other in social networks.

A perhaps remarkable finding is that (near-)domestic sex traffickers more often use violent means of coercion. At first glance, this may seem as an indication that they are more hardened than cross-border sex traffickers. However, according to Surtees (2008) the use of more subtle – instead of violent – means of coercion can be seen as a strategic decision to maximize profits and discourage escape. She identifies this as the ‘‘professionalization’ of the trafficking industry’. Following this interpretation, the relatively high prevalence of violent means of coercion among (near-)domestic sex traffickers should be seen as an indication of a less organized and more easily accessible practice. However, another possible explanation for this finding is that – once in the country of

exploitation – victims of cross-border sex trafficking are often alienated and depend on their trafficker for shelter, food, clothing etc. Cross-border sex traffickers might therefore not always need threats, intimidation and (sexual) violence to control their victims. Further, the finding that the (near-)domestic sex traffickers are more often charged with sexual offences (one of the indications of the use of violent means of coercion), might also be explained by the finding that they more often victimize underaged victims. Some sexual offences in the Dutch Criminal Code are only punishable when committed against an underaged victim.

Findings that differ from the literature: Victims' vulnerabilities and criminal networks

Although most of our findings are in line with the limited available literature, we also found some striking differences, especially with regard to the vulnerabilities of victims prior to recruitment (De Vries and Goggin 2020; Franchino-Olsen 2021; Hampton and Lieggi, 2020; Reid, 2012). While the young age of the victim is an important vulnerability according to our study – especially in the case of (near-)domestic sex trafficking – it is *not* mentioned in the literature that we reviewed. This is most likely due to the fact that the literature on vulnerabilities/risk factors overwhelmingly focusses on (near-)domestic *minor* sex trafficking. In these studies all the victims in the samples are already underaged per definition, which makes the risk factor 'underaged/young age' irrelevant to examine.

Another important difference is that, according to the literature, childhood (sexual) abuse is the most important vulnerability of victims of sexual exploitation, while this is almost never mentioned in the indictments/verdicts we studied. This absence, however, does not necessarily represent an actual absence of histories of childhood (sexual) abuse, it rather represents the limited information included in these documents (see Limitations).

Finally, while according to the literature, cross-border sex traffickers operate predominantly in criminal groups (Denton, 2016; Surtees, 2008; UNODC, 2020) and also (near-)domestic sex traffickers are heavily networked (Cockbain, 2018), only 10.4% of the cross-border sex traffickers and 2.4% of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers in our sample, are charged with operating in criminal organizations. This difference is most likely explained by the fact that a lot of sex traffickers in our sample probably work together in network structures that do not meet the legal criteria of a criminal organization according to the DCC.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge that the sex trafficking cases we examined, might differ from sex trafficking cases that occur and are prosecuted in other (European) countries. For one, because prostitution is legalized under certain conditions in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. In addition, the Schengen Agreement makes the crossing of borders between these countries very easy. These conditions are likely to affect the

situations of cross-border sex trafficking to this region, as well as, near-domestic sex trafficking in this region.

Secondly, our dataset consists of sex traffickers who are identified by law enforcement and subsequently brought to court by the prosecution service. Because there are sex traffickers who are not brought to court, or not even arrested at all, the traffickers in our sample, as well as their victims and modus operandi, are not completely representative for all sex trafficking. After all, it is to be expected that some of the characteristics, victims and/or modus operandi of traffickers are related to the probability of detection, which means our findings are somewhat distorted. For example, the focus (based on the priorities, knowledge, available capacity and resources) of the authorities responsible for the identification, investigation and prosecution of sex trafficking situations, strongly influences which sex trafficking situations end up being brought to court. Moreover, also the kind of information that is gathered in these cases might depend on what is considered as relevant or irrelevant by these authorities. Therefore, sex trafficking situations outside the more typical narratives, are less likely to be identified and brought to court eventually, than the more typical associations. In addition, it is also possible that our dataset contains some traffickers who did not actually commit the alleged sex trafficking (i.e. false positives).

Thirdly, our data are all secondary data, which means that, originally, they serve other – operational – purposes, and are not collected to answer our research question. The information included in the indictments/verdicts is a description of the alleged trafficking that is *provable in court* according to the prosecutor, rather than the alleged trafficking that was identified during the criminal investigation. Therefore, some of the reported results are probably underestimations of the actual situation. For example, a prosecutor may not always charge a trafficker that uses violent means of coercion with separate violent, sexual, deprivation of liberty and/or weapon offences. The same applies to co-offending and/or operating in a criminal organization, the number of victims, and the start and end date of sex trafficking of which the duration of sex trafficking, but also the age of the trafficker, are derived. With regard to the duration of sex trafficking, it is also worth noticing that – since probably most sex trafficking situations that are brought to court stopped because of an intervention – it might tell us more about the priorities of law enforcement agencies, than about the actual nature of the two types of sex trafficking.

Further, not all the verdicts contain information on the vulnerable position of victims prior to recruitment, the first contact between trafficker and their victims (through the internet), and the methods of recruitment (love form of recruitment), because this information is not always legally required. For example when the victim is a minor, the existence of a vulnerable position is already assumed legally, thereby removing the need to proof another element that constitutes her or his vulnerable position (or another means). Moreover, it is possible that in the case of cross-border sex trafficking, information on the phase of recruitment is lacking more often than in the case of (near-)domestic sex trafficking, for the mere reason that the recruitment took place in another country. Gathering evidence in another country is harder, and therefore it might be omitted in cases in which it is not necessary to proof sex trafficking in court. Legally, it is irrelevant if the vulnerable position of a victim of which a trafficker takes advantage, is already

present prior to recruitment or arises during a subsequent phase of the trafficking process (recruitment, transportation, exploitation). This might explain our finding that almost all the different vulnerabilities of the victims prior to recruitment were less often mentioned in the files of the cross-border sex traffickers compared to the files of the (near-)domestic sex traffickers.

Another limitation is that our data are collected on the level of the trafficker. This means that the characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims who are victimized by multiple traffickers in our sample are overrepresented. Because cross-border sex traffickers co-offend more often than (near-)domestic sex traffickers, this overrepresentation is larger in the case of cross-border sex trafficking. On the other hand, characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims who are victimized alongside other victims by the same trafficker can be underrepresented. After all, the shared characteristics and vulnerabilities of multiple victims who are victimized by a single trafficker, are only registered once. Because cross-border sex traffickers victimize more victims per trafficker than (near-)domestic sex traffickers, this underrepresentation is larger in the case of cross-border sex trafficking.

A last important limitation regards the role(s) sex traffickers fill in a trafficking process. These roles can vary greatly and some are only applicable for cross-border sex trafficking (e.g. transporting victims across borders). Unfortunately, we did not collect data on the specific roles, so we were not able to include this information in the results. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the roles might have been of some influence on the differences found between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking, especially with regard to the trafficker characteristics.

Conclusion

We found significant differences between (near-)domestic sex trafficking and cross-border sex trafficking. The most prominent finding is that (near-)domestic sex trafficking is the less organized and more easily accessible practice of the two types of sex trafficking. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the harm that is caused to victims may be similar for both types. Knowledge about the differences between the two types of sex trafficking is important, not only because it extends our scientific understanding of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, but also because it may contribute to better tailored prevention and identification strategies. Nevertheless, we examined only a few basic characteristics and, following our research question, merely in a descriptive manner. For future research, it would be very interesting to look at the differences between (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking from a more explanatory view, by testing hypotheses and conducting multivariate analyses to see what differences are most decisive. Previous studies do not provide us with much more information on traffickers either. Consequently, and in contrast to most criminological research (and theories), both (near-)domestic and cross-border sex trafficking are generally only explained by the reasons why someone becomes victimized (e.g. vulnerable position), instead of the reasons why someone becomes a trafficker. Therefore, more research on traffickers is needed, because the story of sex trafficking can only be clearly understood by unravelling the complex dynamics between trafficker and victim.

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Notes

1. In this study we use the term '(near-)domestic sex trafficking' consequently. However, in some cases – especially when referring to other studies – it only regards domestic sex trafficking.
2. Kragten-Heerdink et al. (2018) categorize human trafficking cases into, among other, (near-) domestic and cross-border sex trafficking, based on the countries of recruitment and exploitation. However, comparisons between the characteristics of the different types of trafficking are not made.
3. Registered under article 250bis(old), 250ter(old), 250a(old), 273a(old), or 273f of the Dutch Criminal Code.
4. For example: trafficking for nonsexual exploitation or trafficking for sexual exploitation where the Netherlands is used only as the country of recruitment or transit.
5. In additional analyses we included the 101 sex traffickers solely summoned for article 273f (1)(3) DCC to the analytic sample. This yielded similar results and led to the same conclusions.
6. To further complete the information on underaged victims, we have also used the applicable (sub)sections of the law registered by the prosecution service that indicate this.
7. But also: chronic illness or physical disability, sextortion, being alienated/having an illegal status etc. With regard to the latter: alienated victims are not familiar with the language, the customs, the law (enforcement agencies), and/or do not have people they know and can rely on nearby etc. This vulnerability is often mentioned in the files of cross-border sex trafficking. However, these cross-border sex trafficking victims are brought in an alienated position in the country of exploitation (the Netherlands) by their traffickers, after being recruited in their country of recruitment/origin. While this is of relevance for the legal case, it does not comply with our research question that explicitly requires the vulnerability to be present already *prior to recruitment*. Therefore, we have only registered 'alienated' in the cases in which a non-native victim is already in an alienated position in the country of recruitment (e.g. an asylum seeker or a refugee) before the recruitment started.
8. The fact that another large group of cross-border sex traffickers was born outside the Netherlands and never migrated to the Netherlands, can probably be explained by the fact that they often originate from EU countries in Central and Eastern Europa. Because of the free movement of persons within the EU, they can stay in the Netherlands without having to migrate officially. Nevertheless, due to the geographic distance, also in these cases

traffickers (and their victims) will probably have to move away from home for considerable periods of time, in order to carry out the sexual exploitation in the Netherlands, which contributes to a higher threshold.

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