

SOCIAL MEDIA & MODERN SLAVERY

Summary of trends, risks, and
recommendations



RESEARCH PROJECT

- Walk Free partnered with the Social Media Data Lab at Curtin University to use big data analytics to provide a comprehensive understanding of trends related to modern slavery across 6 social media platforms.
- One key research objective was to understand how risks manifest in recruitment posts for prospective migrant workers to the Arab States, particularly in the construction, domestic work, and garments sectors.
- Guided by the UNODC's indicators of human trafficking and other research into the application of computational criminology to identify forced labour online (De Vries & Radford, 2021), we focussed on labour trafficking among migrant workers to fill a gap in the evidence base.



METHODOLOGY

- **Step 1: Create a bucket of potentially risky posts to analyse**

- Data collection via 200 key words
- Python collected user data and post information for 573,363 posts across 6 platforms

- **Step 2: Transform the data to ready it for analysis**

- Machine learning techniques to obtain text-based information from text and visual-based data
- Walk Free risk marker criteria (developed with reference to UNODC indicators) applied to textual based data



METHODOLOGY

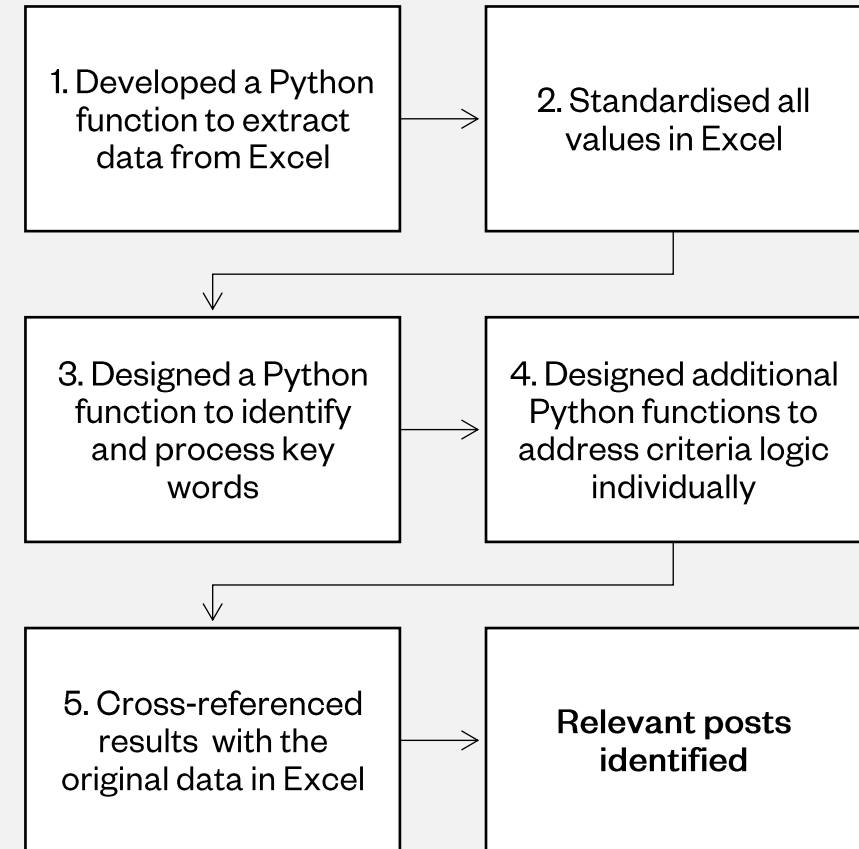
- **Step 3: Data analysis**

- Posts that met at least one criteria identified through a 5-step data filtering process in Python

- **Limitations**

- Identifying duplicates
- Movement on/off platforms (eg some accounts disappeared)
- Unable to verify “indicators” of forced labour

Python data filtering process



USER TRENDS

Traffickers and recruiters:

- Used more hashtags, concise captions
- Redirect people to encrypted third party platforms
- Job information in picture, not caption
- Target multiple audiences across different locations
- Multiple job opportunities in a single post
- Different tactics in recruiting worker for a job versus marketing worker to ultimate employer

Migrants and survivors:

- Tended to use more hashtags and emojis, less words
- In multiple languages
- Often use platforms to ask for help, access information on their rights, or raise awareness
- Build online communities where exchange advice on working abroad, including seeking help/ enduring



MOCKUP OF COMMON RISK MARKERS



Shared accommodation.

Mention of administrative or finders' fees.

"Free" or "Sponsored" visa or flights advertised.

Image, caption, or user bio say 'contact me through WhatsApp' or some other third party application or provide a mobile number only.

Information is in the picture or in an image in the video (e.g., a video or photo of a business card with contact details and nothing in the caption).

Create a sense of urgency e.g. "Urgent jobs" or "urgent vacancies".

Previous work/skills/qualifications not required.

Job posts contain multiple jobs in one post - e.g., "Now hiring domestic helper, carer, nurse, nanny".

Unrealistically high promises of pay.

Help with settling in is provided (e.g., opening up bank accounts, setting up accommodation).

No mention of address for the recruitment agency.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Social media platforms**

- Must proactively search for risk markers
- Raise awareness among users
- Improve the due diligence and monitoring ecosystem

- **Governments**

- Ensure laws require all businesses to identify and remedy risks in their entire value chain – including end-users
- Consider potential unintended consequences

- **Academia and advocates**

- Increase understanding of migrant posts to develop accurate algorithms for identifying more relevant risk markers
- Verify cases of forced labour to move from risk ‘markers’ to true risk ‘indicators’

WALK  FREE