

## Written Input from Tech Against Trafficking for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

### *Call for input on the use of technology in facilitating and preventing contemporary forms of slavery*

**Question 3. Are there examples of positive measures taken by civil society organisations and other non-governmental stakeholders in preventing modern technology from being used to facilitate contemporary forms of slavery? If so, please provide details.**

[Tech Against Trafficking \(TAT\)](https://techagainsttrafficking.org/)<sup>1</sup> is a collaborative initiative established by a coalition of technology companies, global experts, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society to identify and create technology solutions that disrupt and reduce human trafficking and support survivors through innovation and information sharing. As such, TAT has developed an interactive map to conduct a landscape mapping of technology tools developed to combat human trafficking. Findings from the TAT Interactive Map, which contains more than 300 technology tools, reveal that civil society organizations (CSOs) have developed 33% of the tech tools identified for the map, showing the important role CSOs are playing in the development of technology tools.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of tech tools developed by CSOs and non-governmental stakeholders are Spotlight and Traffik Analysis Hub (TA Hub). [Spotlight](https://www.thorn.org/spotlight/)<sup>3</sup> has been developed by the US-based CSO Thorn. As of 2020, Spotlight helped identify over 14,874 child victims advertised for sex services on escort sites. The tool also helped law enforcement officials in the US and Canada identify nearly 17,000 traffickers.<sup>4</sup> Such tools are especially needed given that the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a surge in the production and dissemination of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) - in January 2023, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), an independent, non-profit charitable organization dedicated to reporting and removing child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) online, reported that it has seen a 1 058 per cent increase in the number of URLs which it analyzed and scraped, that showed CSAM including images and videos of primary school children since the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://techagainsttrafficking.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: a comprehensive analysis of technology tools, June 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455206>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thorn.org/spotlight/>

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: a comprehensive analysis of technology tools, June 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455206>

<sup>5</sup> Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). 2023. Sexual abuse imagery of primary school children 1,000 per cent worse since lockdown, <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/sexual-abuse-imagery-of-primary-school-children-1-000-per-cent-worse-since-lockdown/>

Similarly, [TA Hub](#),<sup>6</sup> founded by the UK-based CSO Stop The Traffik, in collaboration with / and developed by IBM, provides an intelligence, data-sharing platform which runs in a secure IBM cloud-hosted environment with access for authenticated members, into which they can upload non-personal data related to human trafficking. In addition, using IBM Watson - AI, machine learning, and natural language recognition - an intelligent "golden tagging" schema is applied to the data. This allows analysts to draw from a rich pool of data and more easily identify trafficking patterns, networks and hotspots. TA Hub had as of April 2023 over 160 member organizations, including several universities, foundations like GFEMS and Interpol, several major financial institutions, and NGOs from every continent. TA Hub data scientists continue to develop the platform and build out stronger user interface, working with over 1.1 million data points.

In addition, GI-TOC's research report "[Cambodia's Trafficked Brides: the escalating phenomenon of forced marriage in China](#)" reflects on the experiences of Cambodian women who have been able to escape the forced marriages and return to Cambodia. Many women and girls reportedly used social media channels such as Telegram and Facebook to seek help and obtain support from civil society actors and governments. In addition, local NGOs including Blue Dragon in Vietnam and Kachin Women's Association in Thailand have several programs teaching women and girls how to use WeChat to contact the police in China.<sup>7</sup>

**Question 4. Are there examples of positive measures taken by technology companies to promote access to protection, justice and remedies for victims? How do they cooperate with other relevant stakeholders in this regard?**

One promising example of positive measures taken by technology companies to support and assist victims of human trafficking is the WhatsApp helpline in Bihar, India. Operated by Meta (formerly the Facebook company), the helpline has been developed to assist the Bihar State labor department tracking system to monitor progress made by rehabilitated child laborers in the state. Users can report incidents of child labor to a specific WhatsApp number which provides services in English, Hindi and Magahi.<sup>8</sup>

Other examples of positive measures are the Child Exploitation Tracking System (CETS) and Intercept, both of which have been developed by Microsoft. CEST is a repository that can be filled with records pertaining to OCSEA cases. The tool was developed in collaboration with law enforcement in Canada and seeks to support the work of law enforcement agencies. Intercept is a Microsoft cognitive service-powered chatbot designed by human trafficking survivors. When a potential offender reaches out to an escort ad clearly advertising the

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.traffikanalysis.org/>

<sup>7</sup> GI-TOC, Cambodia's Trafficked Brides: the escalating phenomenon of forced marriage in China, May 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/GITOC-RF-Cambodia-Trafficking.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Tech Against Trafficking, Interactive Map, <https://techagainsttrafficking.org/interactive-map/>

services of an underaged person, Intercept’s decoy chatbot will automatically send this potential offender a message (with a time delay to hide the decoy ad), outlining the legal consequences of their behavior, as well as referring them to a helpline or counselling service for pedophiles.

The Tech Against Trafficking itself is an example of a multi-stakeholder initiative which brings technology companies together with global experts from NGOs, governments, and multilateral organizations to help scale anti-trafficking efforts using technologies. Other multistakeholder initiatives include the partnership between the Mekong Club, a Hong Kong-based NGO partnering with businesses to make improvements in their supply chains, and Diginex, a company that uses blockchain for commercial purposes and is testing the utility of the technology to address certain exploitative practices in the labor recruitment industry.<sup>9</sup>

**Question 6. What are the remaining challenges in preventing modern technology from being used to facilitate contemporary forms of slavery?**

Many of the technology tools developed to counter and prevent contemporary forms of slavery require the collection, storing, sharing and analyzing of personal data and information, which in turn comes with inherent risks and required protection. Some of the major challenges include data privacy, data sharing and data standardization. Preventing the use of modern technology to facilitate human trafficking requires access to personal data, which often conflicts with the need for privacy and data protection of individuals online. In addition, challenges may occur due to differing and sometimes even lacking regulatory frameworks governing the collection and use of digital evidence. Legislation regarding data sharing requests of internet service providers also differs across jurisdictions.<sup>10</sup>

Another challenge is the lack of standardized definitions of human trafficking, the type of data collected and the characterization of the trafficking offences. Data standardization remains a challenge across regions, technology companies and anti-trafficking responses. Very often, tools and technologies are targeting human trafficking through a one size fits all approach to fighting exploitation.<sup>11</sup> Different standards, however, may be required when it comes to data collection and analysis targeting tech-facilitated human trafficking. The lack

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<sup>9</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: a comprehensive analysis of technology tools, June 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455206>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, Hearing Charter: Data Challenges Impacting Human Trafficking Research and Development of Anti-Trafficking Technological Tools, 8 February 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/117/meeting/house/114387/documents/HHRG-117-SY00-20220208-SD002.pdf>

of data standardization decreases the accuracy of that data, and there are no internationally recognized standards regarding the removal of content related to contemporary forms of slavery. Practices vary across tech companies that host such material as well as by country where that material is located.<sup>12</sup> To help address this challenge, TAT, in collaboration with IOM's Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative, developed the Human Trafficking Case Data Standard (HTCDS) that establishes common criteria and language which can be used across organizations managing victim case data, as an outcome of our inaugural 2019 Accelerator Program.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it is vital to ensure that successful approaches to tackling trafficking (such as [Freedom Signal](#),<sup>14</sup> an online app which enables direct service organizations to send targeted, text-based outreach to potential victims of online sexual exploitation) continue to receive funding after the initial development and funding period. The current financing models reportedly do not address the needs of the field. Technology is seen as an "overhead" cost for most civil society groups, and anti-trafficking organizations struggle to find long-term funding with which to scale their efforts.<sup>15</sup>

**Question 7. What practical recommendations would you propose for Governments and technology companies to overcome these challenges?**

- *Comprehend the current and potential role of technological interventions in the Global South.*

The collaborative initiative Tech Against Trafficking has been conducting a landscape mapping of technology tools developed to combat human trafficking. Of over 300 identified tools, there is a strong concentration of tech tools developed and operating in the Global North, amounting to 61 per cent, even though the higher prevalent rates of human trafficking are observed in the Global South. It is also important for technology innovation to be transferred to sourcing countries and suppliers' networks who could utilize these tools.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, there is a strong need for a deeper understanding of the technological

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<sup>12</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Policy responses to technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings: Analysis of current approaches and considerations for moving forward, March 2022, <https://www.osce.org/cthb/514141>

<sup>13</sup> TAT – IOM's Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) 2019 Accelerator Outputs: <https://techagainstrafficking.org/accelerator-outcomes/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.freedomsignal.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Tech Against Trafficking: Leveraging Innovation to Tackle Modern Slavery, October 2022, <https://www.bsr.org/en/blog/tech-against-trafficking-leverage-innovation-tackle-modern-slavery>

<sup>16</sup> Tech Against Trafficking Policy Roundtables, 2022

interventions in the Global South to reflect the reality of this phenomenon while investing more to overcome the potential language and technical infrastructure barriers.<sup>17</sup>

- Focus on technology tools addressing emerging types of human trafficking and avoid duplications.

The donors, developers and practitioners of technology-based solutions should keep up to date with changes in both technology and the human trafficking context particularly in changes in applicable legal frameworks; emerging new forms of exploitation; and potential counter-responses by perpetrators to actions that affect their operations and revenue. Meanwhile, many aspects should also be taken into account when developing new tools including the value added to the existing tools; accessibility, coverage and literacy; alignment with ongoing initiatives; and active engagement and participation of the target group in development process. For governments, they should apply policies and legislation that would incentivize the positive use of tech tools to combat human trafficking.<sup>18</sup>

**Question 8. Is there evidence of modern technology (e.g. applications, artificial intelligence and blockchain technology) being used to prevent contemporary forms of slavery? If so, please provide details.**

The Tech Against Trafficking Accelerator Program is a collaborative program created to advance and scale the work of selected organizations which offer promising technology solutions to combat contemporary forms of slavery. The Accelerator provides potential resources and support from TAT member companies while building an ecosystem of actors to provide ongoing support for the participating organizations. Five company members - Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Salesforce - have committed to working with anti-trafficking experts to identify and support opportunities to develop, improve and help scale the use of promising technologies.<sup>19</sup>

Since February 2023, TAT has been partnering with [Issara Institute](#) and [Polaris Project's Nonechka program](#) to accelerate the impact of the promising technology platforms that these organizations have built to address labor exploitation and trafficking.

[Issara Institute](#)<sup>20</sup> was founded in 2014 with a mission to eliminate labor abuses and exploitation in global supply chains through worker voice, partnership, and innovation. Issara's technology platforms are developed and managed in-house: [the Inclusive Labour](#)

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools, May 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455206>

<sup>18</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: a comprehensive analysis of technology tools, June 2020, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/455206>

<sup>19</sup> Tech Against Trafficking, Accelerator Program, <https://techagainstrafficking.org/accelerator-program/>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.issarainstitute.org/>

[Monitoring \(ILM\) system](#),<sup>21</sup> an online dashboard for business to have ongoing visibility of worker-reported feedback, risk and labor issues, worker validated remediation, and impact, and [the Golden Dreams smartphone app](#),<sup>22</sup> a Yelp-like platform developed in collaboration with jobseekers and foreign migrant workers to empower, reduce vulnerability, and support responsible recruitment. During the Accelerator, Issara Institute will focus on improving its technology architecture and scaling these two solutions to be able to serve more workers, NGOs, and businesses across a wider geography.

[Polaris](#),<sup>23</sup> who runs the US National Human Trafficking hotline, was established in 2002 with a mission to end sex and labor trafficking and to help survivors reclaim their freedom. In partnership with Ulula, Polaris has created a mobile technology platform called [Nonechka](#),<sup>24</sup> a two-way communication tool that connects isolated migrant workers with crucial support networks, and collects information about dynamics of exploitation. Nonechka is primarily used by agricultural workers in the US and Mexico. Over the course of the Accelerator, Polaris will focus on analyzing the data gathered through Nonechka. This analysis will inform prevention efforts and increase accountability.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.issarainstitute.org/the-issara-model>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.issarainstitute.org/golden-dreams>

<sup>23</sup> <https://polarisproject.org/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://polarisproject.org/nonechka/>