

12.04.2023

To: OHCHR | Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

Re: Call for Evidence – Human Trafficking

Trilateral Research welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to OHCHR | Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences.

Trilateral Research has worked in the domain of addressing human trafficking since 2014, when we coordinated a €1M European Commission funded project, Trafficking as a Criminal Enterprise (TRACE). In TRACE we sought to understand the role of technology in fighting and facilitating the crimes of human trafficking; our involvement with the nexus of fighting human trafficking, data and technology was born. Of particular interest was interviewing 200+ traffickers as to their use of technology. Since then, we have undertaken/are undertaking numerous projects across a wide spectrum of issues related to understanding and combating human trafficking, including but not limited to:

- Survivor's Experience, a project commissioned by the UK Home Office in which we interviewed 130 survivors of human trafficking and translated the insights into policy recommendations to support the upcoming Modern Slavery Strategy. **2022.**
- RESTART, funded by PEC (The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre), which aims to provide policy makers with a better understanding of survivor needs. The project uses Trilateral's in-house ethical AI application (Honeycomb) and its Natural Language Capabilities to pull out actionable insights from survivor's narratives to in turn inform resource allocation as it regards supporting survivors. **Ongoing.**
- [CESIUM](#), where Trilateral Research developed an ethical AI solution to safeguard children from exploitation. Leveraging the data held by safeguarding partnerships through the secure sharing of insights among partners, CESIUM augments multi-agency decision-making by identifying and prioritising vulnerable children. **Ongoing.**
- Project SOLEBAY, in which we developed a risk assessment framework on human trafficking in areas of conflict for the UK MOD. **2019.**
- Project HEROES, funded by the European Commission, which seeks to develop a deeper understanding on the use of technology to help law enforcement authorities investigate and discover cases of MSHT and Child Exploitation. **Ongoing.**
- Project CAPE which sought to understand the reasons behind forced labour in Poland, funded by the Council of Baltic States. **2021.**
- Project PATCH on understanding the reasons as to why children join armed groups in the Columbian Conflict. **2020.**
- Ethical evaluation of the National Data Analytics Solution - Modern Slavery Use Case, a tool developed by Accenture. **2022.**

Today, in the space of human trafficking we are predominantly focusing on developing an ethical AI solution, [Honeycomb](#), to help public stakeholders (policy makers, local authorities

and police), better understand and respond to the crime. Honeycomb uses cutting edge AI technology, including Natural Language Processing (NLP).

It is our work in Honeycomb in particular that inspired this submission, and we suggest that **there are remaining challenges in preventing modern technology from being used to address contemporary forms of slavery**. In engaging with the public sector (including police forces and local authorities), whether in a one-to-one capacity or during roundtables and workshops, we noted key ongoing, problematic trends:

- Lack of data literacy amongst stakeholders, leading to poor understanding of how technology can help prevent and address human trafficking as well as help in collecting evidence needed for making impactful changes.
- Lack of budgets to uptake innovative solutions to address modern slavery and human trafficking.
- Siloed data and legacy systems within organisations leading to difficulties in getting the most out of data held.
- Needless, and at times harmful, fear of sharing data.
- Lack of understanding as to how organisations are permitted to share data.
- Poor policy and statutory support regarding embracing innovation to address human trafficking.
- Inadequate use of data in the development of strategic responses to human trafficking, and consequently inefficient allocation of human and financial resources.

Noting the above, it is our submission that the lack of many examples of positive measures taken by stakeholders to embrace the potential of innovation, is due to a dearth of policy and legislation that would support this. This is despite the reality that the call to share data and utilise technology is as old as the fight against human trafficking itself.

Whilst the sector agrees that data-driven approaches provide hard evidence to make impactful decisions, we are still missing out on these, and other key benefits that can make significant strides in the fight against traffickers. By way of an example, through sharing data on trafficking stories, law enforcement agencies and NGOs can identify areas where trafficking is most prevalent. This information can be used to target prevention and intervention efforts in those areas. Sharing data on trafficking routes and patterns, often captured in survivor's stories, can help law enforcement agencies and other authorities to identify and disrupt trafficking networks. This information can be particularly important in cases where victims are moved across borders or between different regions.

Ethical AI solutions and related data analytical tools, underpinned by shared data, can aid to ascertain better ways of allocating scarce public sector resources, discover potentially useful patterns in data, and predict future trends that inform future strategy. While it stands to reason that human trafficking is an area ripe for the use of innovation, including AI, Trilateral Research are aware of only a few isolated studies in which innovative tools have been applied to preventing modern slavery and human trafficking and protecting survivors. This absence of innovative technology is particularly worrying when we note the cost and efficiency benefits that AI can bring. Indeed, low costs and the ability to conduct rapid assessments on a range of data, enables more effective interventions in real time.

International Organisations and Governments have undertaken important steps to address human trafficking and have funded numerous research projects, yet there is more to be done. Noting that OHCHR is ideally placed to encourage Government and other public sector actors to make good use of technology and share data, we recommend:

1. Better policy guidance on the possibility of data sharing, including making it easier for the sector to share data, including across different stakeholders (e.g., NGOs with Local Authorities). This also includes NRM data.
2. Increased awareness and communication around the possibility of data sharing.
3. Increased resources to maintain and enhance data sharing cooperation among law enforcement, local authorities, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.
4. Consideration of whether there is a gap in the current legislation as it regards the use of technology to fight human trafficking.
5. Policy embracement of technology as a means to prevent human trafficking and protect (potential) survivors.
6. Increased funding opportunities to develop ethical technology solutions to address human trafficking.
7. Increased budgets for law enforcement and public authorities to run proof of concepts on the use of technology to address human trafficking, and procure once validated operationally.
8. Continued emphasis that all technology is developed in a responsible way. As a company whose ethos is ethical use of technology, we note that data has been viewed as an almost utopian solution to the world's ills. Imbued with herculean abilities, it is considered as the cure in-and-of-itself. We know this is not the case; the reality is that data and data using technologies, will only help society when used responsibly. For this reason, any directive to share data and use innovative technologies should go hand-in-hand with an emphasis on ethics and data protection compliance.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further information.

Yours faithfully,
Dr Julia Muraszkiewicz (on behalf of Trilateral Research)
julia.muraszkiewicz@trilateralresearch.com