



SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

Ambassador to monitor and combat trafficking in persons

**Contribution of the Sovereign Order of Malta
on
“The use of technology in facilitating and preventing contemporary forms of slavery”**

Setting the stage

Human trafficking, a contemporary form of slavery, is an often invisible, global scourge on society. There are more slaves today than ever before in history. Human trafficking is an international problem that affects millions of people worldwide, and it is characterized by the exploitation of a human being combined with coercion and false promises. This coercion can be physical or psychological. Human trafficking is composed of types such as **forced labor** (involving women, men, children in industries like agriculture, fishing, etc.), **recruiting children** (to make them child soldiers), **forced sex** (prostitution and surrogate motherhood), **buying and stealing children** (for involuntary adoption or abuse), **child pornography** (mainly on the internet), **organ theft** (for transplantation), and **forced crime** (begging, theft, drug trafficking and terrorism).

The latest estimates from the International Labour Organization, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration show that the number of victims and survivors of forced labour and forced marriage has increased significantly in the last five years. According to their latest [“Global Estimates of Modern Slavery,”](#) around 50 million individuals were living in modern slavery in 2021. Out of this population, 28 million were being subjected to forced labor, while 22 million were trapped in forced marriages—an increase of 6.6 million since the [2016 Global Estimates](#). In comparison to the 2016 global estimates, the number of people in modern slavery has increased by 10 million. Modern slavery is present in nearly every country worldwide, crossing ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries. More than half of forced labor cases (52%) and a quarter of forced marriages occur in high-income or upper-middle-income countries. The majority of forced labor cases (86%) are present in the private sector. Additionally, approximately 3.3 million children (one in eight of all those in forced labour) are victims of forced labor, with more than half of them involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

High tech promoting human trafficking

Within the framework of human trafficking, high tech is used in the form of telecommunications devices, smart phones, computers, artificial intelligence, information technology, mapping technology, satellites and, of course, websites and social networks. High tech is often abused by human traffickers to identify potential victims on social media and entrap them in exploitation, to recruit victims and ‘customers’ for online child pornography, sex and labour trafficking, to recruit, advertise women and men for sexual exploitation, to advertise deceptive labour recruitment and migration opportunities, to advertise and control victims of slave labour, to hide traffickers and exploiters (through online anonymity of criminals and financial proceeds) and to facilitate illegal organ transplantation and exploitation. Furthermore, apps can also be used by traffickers to attract children and other victims into forms of human trafficking.



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In 2021, [The International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) estimated that there were 49.6 million victims of modern slavery, and a significant proportion of these victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation. In many cases, traffickers use technology to lure and groom their victims. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have become popular recruitment tools for traffickers. They use fake profiles to target vulnerable individuals and lure them into trafficking schemes. One of the most common ways in which traffickers use technology is through the use of online classifieds websites such as Backpage and Craigslist. These websites have been found to be major hubs for sex trafficking, where traffickers can advertise their victims to a wide audience. The anonymity of the internet makes it easy for traffickers to operate without being detected, and it is often difficult for law enforcement to trace the origins of these ads due to a lack of restrictions.

The rise of cryptocurrency has also made it easier for traffickers to move money across borders without detection. Bitcoin, in particular, has become a popular payment method for traffickers, as it provides a level of anonymity that traditional payment methods do not. Technology has also been used to control and exploit victims once they are trafficked. Traffickers use mobile phones and social media to monitor their victims' movements and communicate with them. They may also use GPS tracking devices to track their victims' movements, making it harder for them to escape. This is particularly prevalent in cases where victims are trafficked for forced labor, such as domestic servitude or agricultural work.

The use of technology has also allowed traffickers to operate across borders, making it harder for law enforcement to track and prosecute them. Traffickers can use encrypted messaging apps and virtual private networks (VPNs) to communicate and coordinate with each other, making it harder for law enforcement to intercept their communications.

High tech preventing, combating human trafficking, and rehabilitating victims

As [ICAT, the Inter-agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons](#) stated in a 2019 document, Human Trafficking and Technology, that “the development of technology has had an important influence on the crime of trafficking in persons, presenting both challenges and opportunities. While technology is frequently misused to facilitate trafficking in persons, its positive use can also help practitioners combat the issue, through aiding investigations, enhancing prosecutions, raising awareness, providing services to victims, and shedding new light on the make-up and operation of trafficking networks. Taking this into account, future success in eradicating human trafficking, in its many forms, will depend on how countries and societies are prepared for and equipped to harness technology in their responses.”

Thus, high tech tools can help prevent, combat and prosecute human trafficking and rehabilitate victims. They do this using apps and [tech tools](#) to raise awareness, [train helpers and stakeholders](#), [identify](#) and support victims, [aid in investigation](#) by evaluating a plethora of decision alternatives, and provide actionable insights. The tools enhance prosecution through data aggregation and [analysis](#) with [satellite imagery](#) and [geospatial](#) mapping and through artificial intelligence and facial



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recognition (to identify victims and traffickers). The [Blockchain](#) is used to monitor supply chains; this technology is used to disrupt human trafficking and increase survivors' access to resources—as does the business coalition, [Tech Against Trafficking](#).

According to a report by [GRETA](#) (Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings) entitled “[Online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings](#),” private companies should collaborate with authorities and NGOs to increase social advertising online to prevent technology-facilitated THB. In cooperation with NGOs and companies that provide hosting services for job advertisements, countries should inform individuals about their employment rights in a language they understand, and campaigns should be evaluated regularly. Initiatives should be launched by countries, NGOs, and private companies that offer online and ICT services to raise awareness about technology-related risks and how traffickers might exploit them. This effort should involve schools and educators as children and young adults are exposed to heightened risks. Private companies offering communication and messaging services should work with Governments and NGOs to incorporate information and warnings about the safe use of private channels of communication into their systems. As part of victims' protection and reintegration programs, Governments, international organizations, [business](#), NGOs, [institutes](#), and [academia](#) should provide training on techniques of data protection and safe use of technology. It is important not to disempower victims by cutting them off from technology but to instead ensure their safety while using technology.

High tech as a tool to combat contemporary forms of slavery

However, technology has also provided opportunities for law enforcement to combat human trafficking. Many law enforcement agencies now use social media to monitor and track traffickers and their victims. For example, the FBI has used social media to identify and track traffickers and their victims, leading to the rescue of several victims. The use of big data and machine learning has also provided new opportunities for law enforcement to combat human trafficking. These technologies can be used to identify patterns and connections in large data sets, which can help law enforcement identify trafficking networks and predict where trafficking is likely to occur.

There have also been efforts by technology companies to combat human trafficking. In 2012, Microsoft and the International Organization on Migration (IOM) announced a [partnership](#) to use data analysis and machine learning to combat human trafficking. According to Monica Goracci, IOM's Director of Programme Support and Migration Management, Microsoft Research “share[d] data while protecting the safety and privacy of victims and survivors of human trafficking.” This safe data-sharing allows more data to be published, increasing our understanding of human traffickers and their relationships with victims and survivors. Another example is the development of anti-trafficking tools by NGOs and tech companies. For example, [Thorn](#), a nonprofit organization founded by Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, has developed software that uses artificial intelligence to analyze online ads for signs of sex trafficking. The software can identify patterns in the language and images used in online ads that suggest trafficking and alerts law enforcement.



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Moreover, faith-based organizations are also very active in combating online trafficking. In particular, Don Fortunato di Noto's [Meter Association](#) aims to carry out constant monitoring of the media (via the Internet, TV, telephony, etc.) to ensure its proper use and to help inhibit its distorted and harmful forms for minors. According to their [2022 Annual Report](#), Meter has sent 66,856 reports to the police and reported 219,571 links since 2002. Additionally, alongside monitoring the internet, Meter has established a Listening Center to provide assistance to victims of abuse and vulnerable situations in general. Since the Center was established, 2,193 cases have been followed up and 31,213 telephone requests have been received.

The Order of Malta has been very active in combating contemporary forms of slavery through online resources, especially:

- **Organizing and participating in conferences** with its bilateral and multilateral diplomatic network (112 States)
- **Assisting victims through medical and social programs** through its National Associations and its worldwide humanitarian organization "[Malteser International](#)"
- **Offering a free online training course for helpers** in English, French and now in Italian and German as well, on <https://www.cuhd.org>
- **Organizing webinars on human trafficking** (www.adlaudatosi.org) with subtitles in seven languages ([Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish](#)). Since October 2020, 26 webinars have been organized.

Noteworthy, an [agreement](#) between UNICRI and the Order of Malta was signed in March of 2022 to strengthen cooperation in the field of crime prevention and international justice. The agreement sets the groundwork for developing and implementing training programs related to crime prevention and criminal justice, as well as collaborating on crisis response efforts. The Sovereign Order of Malta prioritizes preventing human trafficking and modern slavery, which is also a significant focus for UNICRI. The conflict in Ukraine has resulted in civilians being displaced and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and both organizations are deeply concerned about the security and humanitarian situation. UNICRI is prepared to evaluate the impact of the conflict on human trafficking in the region and monitor the tragic consequences that arise during times of conflict.

In conclusion, all stakeholders must use high tech to promote cooperation, build partnerships, create coalitions and share best practices. We need to focus on the root causes of contemporary forms of slavery and how they intersect with modern technology. Studies show that, with the increasing prevalence of technology in our society, human traffickers are increasingly utilizing it to recruit victims and commit crimes. Social media platforms and other websites provide human traffickers with the ability to sexually exploit, recruit, and harm victims while being undetected and remaining unprosecuted.



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The private sector, especially tech companies, should do more to combat contemporary slavery by increased monitoring of their devices and websites in order to better protect victims and survivors and to prevent these crimes from taking place, and thus make their contribution to eradicate modern slavery.

The Order of Malta's international status and diplomatic network, as well as its National Associations and its world-wide relief corps, *Malteser International*, will continue to raise awareness of contemporary forms of slavery, provide assistance and protection to its victims and contribute to their rehabilitation in cooperation with like-minded Governments, international organizations, academia, NGOs, and Faith-based organizations. Victims and survivors shall be at the forefront of these efforts.

Geneva, 29 March 2023

MV/EP/LB

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