



Wilton Park



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Report

## The role of digital technology in tackling modern slavery

Monday 12 – Wednesday 14 June 2017 | WP1546

In association with:

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**NOKIA**





## Report

# The role of digital technology in tackling modern slavery

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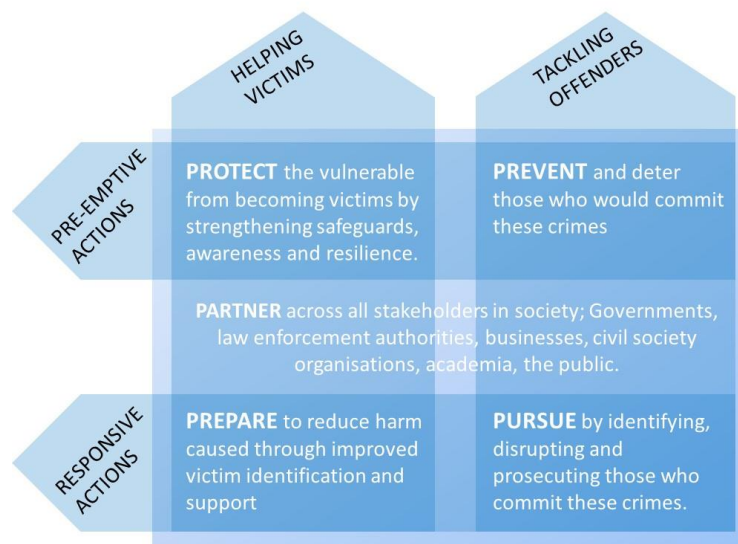
Modern slavery is a complex, thriving crime that impacts every country. There are an estimated 45.8 million people worldwide in some form of slavery, generating many billions of dollars in illegal profits. Organised crime is heavily involved and attracted by the high-profits but, in spite of legislation and increasing efforts to raise public awareness, the crime remains largely hidden. The global supply chain demand for cheap labour remains a significant systemic driver. Perpetrators of modern slavery are increasingly using modern technology to exploit people, for example by recruiting victims through online grooming and controlling them through mobile phones and webcam surveillance.

However, it is encouraging that even within this challenging context, digital information and communication technologies can provide opportunities for a step change in tackling modern slavery. Technology could be a powerful tool to: disrupt and reduce modern slavery; prevent and identify crimes; and provide a remedy mechanism for victims and support survivors. It could also play a significant role in addressing data gaps and increasing the efficiency of data sharing, leading to more effective use of resources and co-ordination between law enforcement, businesses, government and civil society.

The conference sought to explore these opportunities, bringing together experts from governments, law enforcement, international and civil society organisations, academia and technology providers. The aims were to:

- Understand how and where technology is being used to facilitate and enable slavery
- Consider positive ways that digital technology can be used to tackle the crime and support victims
- Explore prospects for greater multi-stakeholder collaboration
- Identify tangible steps towards the next stage of cross-sector coordination

Experts discussed their perspectives to help understand where technology solutions could be deployed to make an effective impact, using a '5P' framework of Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Partnership, to guide discussions across the three days.



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### Key points

- The conference was the first time many of the participants have engaged collaboratively on the role of technology in tackling modern slavery, providing an opportunity to share perspectives and seek a common understanding of what is possible.
- There is a clear intention from delegates to build on discussions with an ongoing initiative to collaborate and shape technology solutions to tackle modern slavery. A range of options for further collaboration will be explored.
- Technology alone will not stop modern slavery, but could offer tools and solutions to significantly advance the effectiveness of society’s response. These require skilful deployment and trained users with the capacity to maximise their application. Enabling law enforcement and civil society to use technologies for better collection, measurement, analysis and sharing of data in order to tackle modern slavery, offers an opportunity for immediate impact.
- Technology providers already have a range of solutions which could help at different stages of the modern slavery ‘journey’, from vulnerability to victim to survivor. Existing solutions should be shared, piloted and measured for success before scaling up or developing new proposals.
- Technology providers need to collaborate more closely as a sector and with experts deeply involved in the fight to stop slavery to identify, understand and respond better to the specific problems they encounter. Understanding the modern slavery ‘journey’, the human rights challenges and risks at each stage, and the range of existing solutions at each point will help target future technology solutions.
- Confirming the specific needs of law enforcement and civil society organisations, and taking into account the critical consideration of privacy, should be a priority so that technology providers can offer the most appropriate and effective solutions.

### Modern slavery - scale and scope of the problem

“Current best estimates indicate that over 45 million people globally are in some form of modern slavery”

1. Modern slavery has recently received significant attention from some governments and business but far more needs to be done to tackle this crime. The full scale of the crime is unknown: current best estimates indicate that over 45 million people globally are in some form of modern slavery. These estimates suggest an increasing trend but it is not clear how far these figures are indicative of more accurate measurement. The hidden nature of the crime and low levels of victim identification mean that estimates are more

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likely to be lower than the reality. It is clear that measuring data accurately and consistently, and developing insight from that data, is fundamental to understanding where to make effective interventions. Whilst there are increasing volumes of data being collected to help tackle modern slavery, the capabilities and capacity to gain actionable insights from the data are limited or lacking.

2. Modern slavery varies across the world in terms of a common definition, scale and scope, with initial exploitation generally greatest in the least economically developed countries. It is important to recognise the many different types of modern slavery and that prevention requires different solutions, policies and systemic change. It also demands a deeper understanding of the issues from different perspectives; the victims and vulnerable communities, the perpetrators of these crimes, and those who are involved in stopping slavery and supporting survivors. This involves getting to grips with the ‘what, why, when, how, where, who’ of modern slavery.

## Challenges and opportunities

3. The 5Ps framework (Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare and Partnership) provides a useful lens for exploring different responses where modern slavery can be challenged, barriers identified and technology opportunities sought. Other frameworks and angles of approach were also discussed, for example using the lens of criminal law, the victim perspective, labour migration, labour markets and conflict zones. No framework is perfect and it is important to consider different perspectives in order to avoid thinking in silos.
4. The central challenge in the debate around the role of technology in tackling modern slavery is that of ‘dual use’. Whilst technology offers tools which can be used to enhance humanity and uphold human rights, technology can also be misused to abuse individual rights. How to ensure that the positive use of technology is maximised whilst minimising the negative? The key challenges and opportunities for a more positive role for technology are mainly focussed on assisting organisations working to stop slavery and support survivors; and law enforcement and civil society organisations (including non-governmental organisations and charities). The major technology and policy challenges that need to be overcome or at least mitigated are:
  - **Poor connectivity.** Limited access to the internet in countries of origin or transit hampers the effectiveness of technology solutions and the ability to engage and support vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees.
  - **Low capacity and capability.** Technology solutions and the skills and resources to use them are often lacking amongst people involved in the front line of tackling slavery, particularly law enforcement and civil society organisations.
  - **Underfunded budgets.** Law enforcement agencies and civil society organisations often have insufficient budgets, limiting the use of technology solutions which could provide a step change in their response to modern slavery.
  - **Inefficient procurement.** Slow and onerous procurement processes can be a significant barrier for law enforcement agencies, limiting the active engagement of technology providers and their solutions.
  - **Insufficient data.** Insufficient quality data is being collected by all organisations- especially by businesses- around potential incidents of slavery, how slavery affects them and vice versa. There is no clarity on what data is required and on gaps in data. Reliable data collection from victims and survivors could help build the best datasets.
  - **Limited data sharing.** Datasets are being used in silos and not efficiently shared across law enforcement and civil society organisations to improve the collective response. Issues around data privacy protection and security inhibit a systematic sharing of data. A better understanding of how to use existing

“Few agreed norms and standards for measuring modern slavery characteristics exist”

regulatory regimes in a manner consistent with human rights standards would be beneficial.

- **Inconsistent measurement.** Analysis of datasets is only worthwhile if sufficient data points can be accurately compared. This relies on the quality and consistency of how data points are measured. Few agreed norms and standards for measuring modern slavery characteristics exist at local, regional, national and international levels.

5. Technology can offer opportunities for a step change in the response to modern slavery if these challenges can be overcome. The most promising areas in which to explore solutions include:

- **National Helplines** that become trusted hubs of data collection, analysis and sharing to advance the understanding of and response to modern slavery.
- **Basic technology and training** made more easily available by technology providers to the many front line civil society organisations supporting vulnerable groups, victims and survivors. Many of these organisations lack laptops, smartphones, case management systems and the skills to use them to their full capacity.
- **Smartphone Apps** to help first line responders and vulnerable workers take some control of the modern slavery environment; enabling them to report concerns and providing easier access to training resources and language translation services.
- **Data analysis tools** to deal with the problem of data overload that can disable effective responses, and identify connections in the data that would otherwise be missed.
- **Blockchain** or distributed ledger technology to improve traceability and transparency of supply chain labour standards and workers' identity papers.
- **Biometric identity management** to help identify and empower victims to protect themselves from exploitation, in particular at border controls.

“Modern slavery in the digital age requires a modern policing response in a digital context”

## Technology and law enforcement

6. The law enforcement community acknowledge their efforts can sometimes be limited by a technology gap in policing. Modern slavery in the digital age requires a modern policing response in a digital context. Law enforcement needs the capacity and capability to collect, analyse and share relevant data efficiently across agencies and other stakeholders at local, regional, national and international levels, in a way which is necessary, proportionate and sensitive to privacy. There are tensions in achieving balance between protecting vulnerable people from crime and respecting the privacy of people whose personal data might be in scope.

## What data is needed?

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7. The ubiquity of smart devices around the world offers tremendous potential to capture data and report concerns. Online tools to improve the efficiency with which people can report crimes and provide intelligence could be cost effective and simplify data collection. Analytical tools to collate datasets from different sources and apply artificial intelligence, or data science to spot connections that would otherwise be missed by manual analysis, can greatly reduce investigation time and increase breakthroughs on complex cases. At a macro level, big data analytics could have an impact in identifying and analysing migration flows of vulnerable people and identifying patterns. This analysis could inform policy makers and law enforcement as to where targeted interventions can best take place. These tools exist but adoption across law enforcement is patchy. Without the capacity and capability to focus data analysis tools, there is a real danger of data overload which can burden progress.

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8. The Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (adopted in 2000) is one of a number of international conventions that recognise the need for consistent data. The Protocol, alongside other relevant Conventions and Protocols, provides a framework for the rule of law on forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking. Regional and national bodies have developed strategies in accordance with this framework but nonetheless, law enforcement agencies are frequently compelled to focus on their own jurisdictions, prioritising the rescue of victims and arrests of offenders, often at the expense of opportunities to disrupt the wider network.
9. Modern slavery is often linked to wider organised crime activity, including illicit drugs, cybercrime, fraud and financial crime. Enforcement may draw on existing expertise and technologies, for example, the capability to identify block hotel bookings and flights from countries of interest. The financial sector has mechanisms to identify fraudulent activity, acting within the anti-money laundering regulatory framework.
10. Technology provides tools to enhance responses to transnational crime, map typologies, enable cross-border co-ordination and investigation and disrupt criminal networks. However, effective data sharing is limited by incompatible systems, processes, frameworks, the understanding of how to use them effectively, and gaps in knowledge. There are over 2,500 organisations listed on the Global Modern Slavery Directory each with their own approaches and platforms for sharing data. A deeper level of international cooperation and collaboration across the sectors would greatly enhance the ability to tackle transnational crime.
11. National borders are key points for intervention and disruption of human trafficking. Technology supporting biometrics, better document checks and ‘smart’ CCTV imaging with in-built facial recognition can better monitor vulnerable people and suspected offenders passing through border controls. Increasingly, other data could be used to profile and trace criminal networks, as the data relationship between consumers and businesses deepens. However the trade-offs regarding privacy and security are complex and would benefit from deeper discussion. People willingly sign terms and conditions, handing personal information over to companies in exchange for free services and thereby allowing data which may be used for profiling. There should be adherence to regulatory mechanisms that govern data sharing; the use of data to profile and trace criminals should continue to be subject to rigorous assessment in order to prevent infringements of privacy.
12. Victim protection is the primary concern for law enforcement: police responses tend to focus primarily on rescuing victims, sometimes at the expense of building a strong case to pursue the criminals involved. Survivors are sometimes fearful of deportation or retribution from their captors, so can struggle to provide admissible evidence. Court technology such as recorded video or live streaming evidence can help, but prosecutors need to build a body of evidence in order to secure convictions. Technology can make it much easier to pull together court ready documents from across disparate data sources.
13. Delivering information at the tap of a button is increasingly the domain of smartphone apps not just business systems. In the hands of law enforcers and first line responders, apps on mobile devices could offer readily available modern slavery resources to improve immediate response to victims (e.g. access to language translation services), guide evidence gathering investigations and fulfil a duty to notify authorities.

## **Technology, business and civil society organisations**

14. Smartphone apps and technology solutions can empower vulnerable workers to provide direct feedback on their working conditions and access to trusted information. This helps to reduce risks when seeking employment and assists businesses to increase transparency through their supply chain.

“Smartphone apps and technology solutions can empower vulnerable workers to provide direct feedback on their working conditions”

“A more detailed understanding of anti-slavery organisations would help technology providers to define better solutions.”

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15. Smartphone apps rely on network connectivity, but many civil society organisations on the front line of tackling modern slavery often lack the most basic equipment and training. Without laptops, smartphones, and online case management systems and awareness of resources they will always lag far behind the criminals.
16. A mechanism which matches the needs of smaller anti-slavery organisations to technology providers, along with ongoing support to adopt and deliver the benefits they offer, would be a significant breakthrough. Alongside this, a more detailed understanding of anti-slavery organisations would help technology providers to define better solutions.
17. Overall, greater emphasis on collaboration across all actors is the gateway to a step change in a collective response to modern slavery. A promising use of technology which illustrates this is the operation of national helplines. Businesses, civil society organisations and the public are likely to have information about potential victims and criminals which could enable a more effective and co-ordinated response. Helplines provide an always available, confidential and single number call to report suspicions, get help or seek advice and information. They can be a vital lifeline for victims to get to safety. Many countries do not have a national helpline. Helplines in the US, the United Kingdom and elsewhere show that they can become trusted hubs of data collection, analysis and sharing to advance understanding of and response to modern slavery. A single global shortcode to access these national helplines could increase the value they add by promoting awareness of a single national and international number, particularly useful for migrants, refugees and internationally trafficked victims.
18. Another area which would benefit from greater insights is on labour practices and working conditions within global supply chains. Blockchain, a distributed ledger technology, was frequently highlighted as a way of providing deeper transparency and trusted verification of the ethical provenance of manufactured products and services as well as the working conditions of people involved in production. It could also reward transparent businesses with better terms of trading finance, thwart corruption practices and make it easier to share information. For vulnerable workers and migrants, recording their identity and legal entitlements in a Blockchain could help them stay safe and resilient to identity fraud and confiscation of identity papers by people seeking to exploit them.

## Conclusion and next steps

19. Technology could deliver a step change in how we tackle modern slavery, support victims and reduce crime, but it should be deployed effectively and in compliance with human rights standards. This includes the development of solutions for better collection, measurement, analysis, sharing and transparency of data and will require training to ensure people have the necessary skills to maximise the available tools. This can only be achieved through ongoing and sustainable multi-stakeholder efforts to collaborate. An early aim should be a shared understanding of the specific modern slavery problems which would benefit from technological solutions and clarity about successful applications to date.
20. It was concluded that this conference was the start, not the end of this exploration of the role of technology in tackling modern slavery. There was unanimous support for further collaboration. The next steps are for delegates to explore and propose a range of options to convene and facilitate progress on addressing the challenges and opportunities this event identified.

**Craig Melson and Eric Anderson**

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