

Combating Human Trafficking



Key Points

- While technology can be used to facilitate the insidious practice of human trafficking, technology can also help combat it.
- Microsoft applies its experience in addressing technology-facilitated crime and investing in research, programs, and partnerships to support human rights and advance the fight against human trafficking.
- Issues related to human trafficking are complex and require a multi-part solution, including strong public-private partnerships and intervention efforts founded in solid research.

BACKGROUND

Human trafficking includes commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, and other forms of modern-day slavery, and technology can play a role both in facilitating and combating these horrific human rights abuses. Currently, there is insufficient research data to determine the extent to which technology is increasing human trafficking, or to what degree law enforcement and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can use technology to better identify perpetrators and victims. However, advances in research and data sharing suggest that there is great potential in using technology to help address trafficking.

Anti-trafficking advocates, law enforcement agencies, and governments around the world have long been working to combat human trafficking. As with the fight against other forms of technology-facilitated crime, Microsoft believes technology companies also have an important role to play in driving deeper research and innovation to use technology to more effectively disrupt the trafficking of people.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

Microsoft recognizes its responsibility as a global corporate citizen to respect human rights and aid in the fight against human trafficking. Microsoft expresses its commitment in the Human Rights statement it released in July 2012 in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The company puts its commitment into action through the collaborative efforts of Microsoft Research, the Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit, and the newly established Microsoft Technology and Human Rights Center. Efforts include:

Research and innovation. Microsoft invests in research to develop a more accurate understanding of the role that technology plays in child sex trafficking in particular.

- In December 2011, Microsoft Research and the Digital Crimes Unit issued a request for proposals for academic research into the role of technology in the sex trafficking of children. Microsoft distributed \$185,000 to six winning teams whose research results are anticipated later in 2013.

- Microsoft is collaborating with the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and the University of Southern California Annenberg School on additional research.
- Microsoft works with leading technology institutions and NGOs on efforts such as the International Girls Only Hackathon, which helps foster technology innovation directed at addressing trafficking.

Partnerships. Microsoft works with anti-trafficking advocates, such as the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, and law enforcement agencies around the world to help protect children against technology-facilitated sexual exploitation. PhotoDNA, an image-matching technology partially developed by Microsoft is used by NGOs, law enforcement, and other technology companies like Facebook and NetClean to help identify images of child abuse.

Microsoft collaborates on public-private initiatives to address human trafficking with the Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the Council on Women and Girls, UN.GIFT, U.S. state attorneys general, and local police agencies.

In September 2010, Microsoft joined the Thorn Foundation as a founding member of a technology task force with Facebook, Twitter, Google, and others to explore new ways technology can address the child sex trafficking problem. In addition, Microsoft supports NGOs that combat trafficking and support its victims, such as the Polaris Project and the International Justice Mission.

Disruption. Microsoft believes that disruptive action plays an important role in shifting the dynamics that fuel the trade of human trafficking. Through cooperative efforts that raise the cost, risk, and difficulty of doing business for traffickers, Microsoft can help make it a less lucrative, and therefore less appealing, trade.

Policies and best practices. Microsoft works to help prevent its technologies and processes from contributing to exploitation in its operations and those of its suppliers.

All companies doing business with Microsoft must agree to abide by the company's Vendor Code of Conduct, which outlines required ethical business practices, including an explicit prohibition of the use of forced labor. For its hardware manufacturers and packaging suppliers, Microsoft has invested in a social and environmental accountability program, which includes independent third-party auditing to help ensure compliance with its Code of Conduct and local and national regulations. If these standards are not met, suppliers risk remedial action including termination of their contracts.

Microsoft also uses such technologies as PhotoDNA on Bing and SkyDrive to help mitigate the use of its online services for the exploitation of children and distribution of child pornography.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft supports enacting and enforcing human trafficking laws that recognize and protect victims while holding traffickers accountable.
- Researchers and technology companies should continue to work with governments, law enforcement, and those in the anti-trafficking community to help understand and address the abuses of technology that facilitate trafficking, look for effective intervention techniques based on research, and develop anti-trafficking initiatives.
- The technology industry can establish best practices that include investment in scientific research, enforcement of codes of conduct, the provision of mechanisms for customers to report potential problems, and promotion of trafficking hotlines and information for victims.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft's human rights statement
aka.ms/Human-Rights-Statement

Microsoft's research initiative on the role of technology in child sex trafficking
aka.ms/human-trafficking-rfp

Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit
www.microsoft.com/dcu

Microsoft Research
research.microsoft.com

Microsoft PhotoDNA
www.microsoftphotodna.com

Global Business Coalition Against Trafficking
gbcat.org