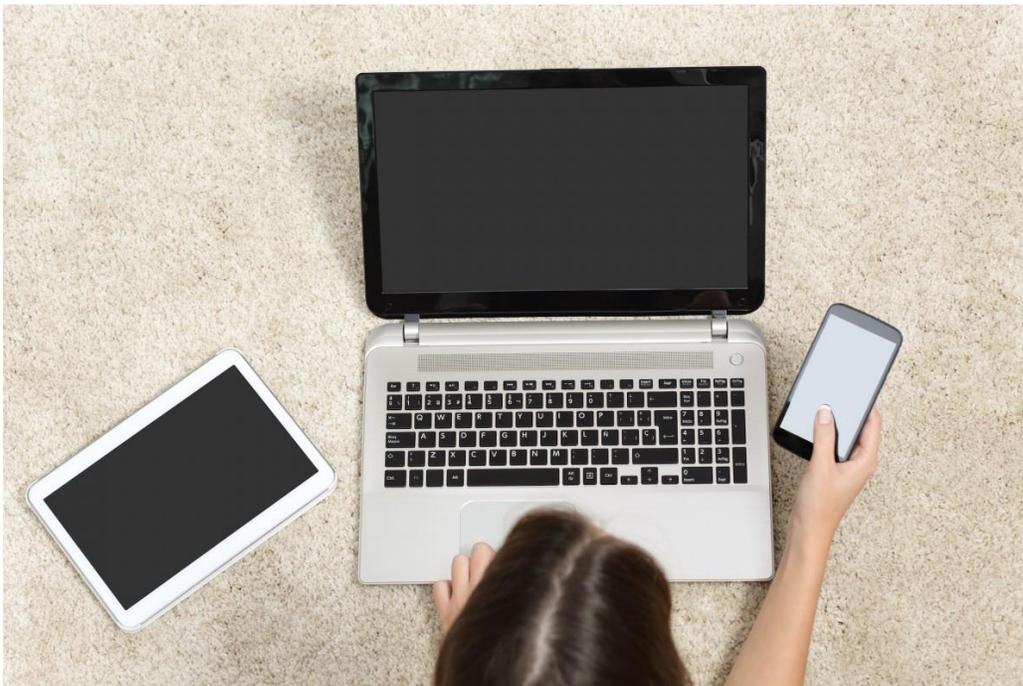[Rebecca Sadwick](#) Contributor

I write about the societal impacts of the tech sector.

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8 Tech Innovations That Would Counter Sex Trafficking

Youth are surrounded by increasingly accessible mobile devices, creating new opportunities for traffickers and service providers alike.

This month, the [UCLA Luskin Center](#) for Innovation published a [comprehensive report](#) outlining existing knowledge of the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in the United States. With

support from Google's Counsel on Civil and Human Rights and guidance from leading anti-trafficking stakeholders—including law enforcement, service providers, and nonprofit organizations—the report details effective legislative, judicial, technological and local policies curtailing domestic and global human trafficking.

As governments, law enforcement, policymakers, and social service providers increasingly come to recognize the collaborative nature of trafficking rings—and the means traffickers use to exploit their victims—there is greater emphasis on cross-sector cooperation to counter the illicit and highly clandestine crime. In recent years, this emphasis has successfully given rise to multidisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration that has bolstered the anti-trafficking movement and provided new insight into the trafficking landscape.

According to available data, the most commonly identified victims of human trafficking in the United States are domestic-born females sold for sex on the street-level, through Internet-based advertisements, at motels and hotels, and in commercial-front brothels (brothels disguised as legitimately-operating businesses). Research shows that youth of color, especially African-American girls, and the LGBTQ community, are overrepresented as victims of sex trafficking. At alarming rates, there is significant overlap between commercially sexually exploited youth and those involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Still, there is a dearth of comprehensive data on these populations with cases involving sex trafficked boys and adults, and labor-trafficked victims tend to go unidentified and under-investigated.

Highly populated states (e.g. California, Texas, Florida, and New York) with diverse communities and several points of entry often experience disproportionate demand for sex trafficked minors. Though transportation across state lines does not need to be present to classify exploitation as human trafficking, traffickers tend to be transient to increase profitability, decrease the likelihood of police detection, and maintain control over their victims.

Demand for purchased sex fuels the domestic trafficking landscape, influencing regional, legislative, and technological trends responding to exploitation. Globally, men of all ages and backgrounds (regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicities, or religion) have been known to purchase sex from girls, boys, and women. In the US, it is estimated that 10 and 20% of men have purchased sex, though the sex industry's driving force is the .6% of men known as "hobbyists" and "habitual buyers." Across jurisdictions, the most commonly identified purchaser of sex is White, male, married, middle to upper class, and college-educated. Victims of sex trafficking are criminalized and detained on prostitution-related charges far more often than purchasers of sex are prosecuted.

Law enforcement, service providers, and activists agree that curtailing demand, reforming prosecution of traffickers, and eradicating the criminal narrative for trafficking victims are the most effective ways to counter sex trafficking.

Through an extensive analysis of extant literature and interviews with 70 anti-trafficking stakeholders, 8 recommendations for action by the public and private sectors emerged; these include local, state, and federal government agencies, anti-human trafficking organizations, technology-based companies, and socially conscious corporations. They are listed below and

have been vetted through technology-based companies and anti-human trafficking organizations at the forefront of the movement.

1. Creation of a **national database** for FBI and local law enforcement to enter, access, and share pertinent information on human trafficking cases across jurisdictions would dramatically impact prosecutions of traffickers, who tend to move victims across states and regions.
2. **Enhancing existing social media platform(s)** to include a space for survivor leaders, recent survivors, and service providers to communicate and share information on available services for victims and at-risk youth.
3. Expansion of existing **mobile-based apps** for survivors, service providers, and law enforcement to provide vital information on local services available for survivors. The GraceCity Resource App is California-based example that can be scaled across the U.S.
4. Enhancing existing mobile-based apps commonly used by youth (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, KIK) to include an **emergency function** that instantly notifies specified contacts (e.g. caregivers, social workers, etc.) and/or local law enforcement with a message that includes geospatial information. The Aspire App, aimed at assisting domestic violence victims, is an example of an inconspicuous app that provides immediate assistance to those in need.
5. **Creating a digital platform for service providers** that facilitates secure and prompt cross-sectional information-sharing for stakeholders involved with human trafficked survivors receiving rehabilitative services.
6. **Internship and employment** opportunities for human trafficking survivors that teach employable skills (e.g. accounting, coding, etc.). AnnieCannons is an example of an anti-trafficking organization that provides survivors with technical training and employment opportunities. For-profit companies can support anti-human trafficking efforts by funding services and research and recruiting trafficking survivors.
7. Facilitating an **app-based challenge for survivors** to develop ways to prevent sex-trafficking of youth, intervene with victims, enhance after-care services, and reduce recidivism rates.
8. Further research on the **interplay of technology** with the following populations: **at-risk youth** in schools and the child welfare system; mental and physical health of human trafficked victims and survivors; child labor practices; labor and sex trafficking of adults.

The role technology plays in both facilitating and curtailing sex trafficking is well-documented. As traffickers work to out-maneuver law enforcement and the ubiquity of mobile devices provides new ways to access vulnerable youth, anti-trafficking stakeholders should use available tools and create others to mitigate trafficking and exploitation.

Victims and community members can contact the National Human Trafficking Resource

Center toll-free at   1-888-373-7888 FREE, or text the words "help" or "info" to 233733 (BEFREE).

Guest post written by **Sarah Godoy**

Sarah Godoy, MSW, is an anti-human trafficking researcher and activist who has worked with NGOs in Los Angeles and New Delhi.