

# Human Trafficking—How Technology is Helping to Fight this Crime

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To many the ideas of human trafficking and slavery are only found in history books. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that more people are enslaved today than any time in our history. Although the media may focus on sex trafficking, it remains only one component of a global epidemic.

While sex trafficking is a tragic contributor to this illicit, multi-billion-dollar market, human trafficking encompasses a far larger palette of crimes that include: child sex trafficking, forced labor, domestic servitude, debt bondage, forced marriage, and the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers.

War, civil unrest, and oppressive governments are among the many causes of current human migrations that we're witnessing today on a scale never before encountered. These massive population shifts have provided an ever-growing source of potential victims for traffickers. The growth in technology, particularly in mobile communications networks and devices, has only fueled the trafficking fire, opening new communication channels that traffickers have been quick to exploit. The result is that human trafficking has now grown to epidemic proportions, forcing resource-strapped law enforcement agencies to fight on yet another crime front.

Lack of resources, time (these cases are very time-consuming to investigate), training, cultural differences, traumatized victims, and language barriers are just a few of the difficulties that those trying to stop these heinous crimes must overcome.

Even when strong leads on traffickers or their victims have been generated, sifting through massive data banks in search of images, texts, phone messages, geolocation data points, and other crucial information, make the task of gathering sound evidence and bringing traffickers to justice even more difficult.

Fortunately, new breakthroughs in high-tech digital intelligence tools from Cellebrite are making the job easier, allowing investigators to set up customized dashboards to search for very specific types of information—faces, images of all types, text messages, and call logs—to focus their investigations, expedite locating traffickers, and free those who have become victims.

This article will discuss those advances, but it's important to start by understanding exactly what human trafficking is and how frighteningly widespread this crime has become. We'll then move to the challenges of gathering evidence in human trafficking cases then discuss the new digital intelligence tools that can help simplify and expedite the time-consuming, evidence-gathering process

1 Out of 7: The estimated number of runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children are likely victims of child sex trafficking..



## What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking encompasses a wide spectrum of crimes; all of which involve some form of forced compliance. The United Nations' [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking as follows:](#)

“Trafficking in Persons’... mean[s] the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

“Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3, paragraph (a)).”

Those who profit from trafficking don't care who they hurt. Men, women, children—they are simply a commodity in the eyes of traffickers. What matters is profit, which has led to corruption within governments and even among the ranks of law enforcement agencies sworn to protect innocent citizens. The statistics are horrifying

## Trafficking By The Numbers

Human trafficking traps millions of people worldwide in terrible situations run by traffickers who generate billions of dollars at their expense.

### **40.3 million:**

The number of victims estimated to be ensnared in human tracking according to the International Labour Organization.

Of these:

- **81%**  
of them are trapped in forced labor.
- **25%**  
of them are children.
- **75%**  
are women and girls.

**“40.3 million:** The number of victims estimated to be ensnared in human tracking according to the International Labour Organization.”



**\$150 Billion:** Estimated revenue generated by the human trafficking industry according to the International Labour Organization.

**75 Countries and 148 Goods:** The number of countries worldwide and the number of goods being produced by forced child labor according to the [U.S. Department of Labor](#).

**1 Out of 7:** The estimated number of runaways reported to the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) are likely victims of child sex trafficking.

**Hundreds of Thousands:** The number of adults and minors trapped by human trafficking within the United States as estimated by [Polaris](#), a leading organization in the fight to eradicate human trafficking.

## The Challenges

For police, investigators, and prosecutors, dealing with human trafficking cases presents a minefield of problems.

**Lack of Trust:** Many human trafficking victims come from countries where there is widespread corruption. They don't trust the police in their own countries, so they have a natural fear of law enforcement agencies in foreign countries who they may believe will treat them as criminals, causing them to be incarcerated, separated from their families, or deported.

**Lack of Training:** In order to overcome victims' fears, many of whom have been physically abused or may be worried about threats to their families at the hands of traffickers, investigators need to be trained in how to properly help traumatized victims to become cooperating witnesses. Most are not.

**Psychological Barriers:** All trafficking victims suffer from trauma in one form or another, but other barriers including language, gender, and cultural differences also hamper investigations.

Women and children who have been trafficked have frequently been exposed to violence and sexual abuse. They are ashamed and traumatized and thus very reluctant to seek help and disclose what's happened to them for fear of being stigmatized.

Traditional views of masculinity are also a contributing factor in the low rate of men who come forward. Admitting that they have been victimized may put them at risk of feeling as if they no longer have control of their lives and have suffered permanent damage to their perception of themselves as men.

**“\$150 Billion:** Estimated revenue generated by the human trafficking industry according to the International Labour Organization.”



**A Hidden Crime:** Unlike common crimes, where victims are much more apt to report a problem to the police, human trafficking is a crime where the victims are so entrapped and cut-off from sources of help that their plight goes unreported.

Traffickers are experts at covering their tracks and because victims are frequently moved from location to location, tracking traffickers and those they exploit is almost impossible.

**Victims Don't Identify Themselves as Victims:** Because they know that what they have done—prostitution or entering a foreign country without permission—is illegal, victims don't necessarily see themselves as victims of human trafficking and are highly unlikely to report their problems or seek help.

**Connections to Their Traffickers:** Victims may also rely on or have an intimate connection with their exploiters, which makes coming forward unthinkable.

**Misidentification:** Sadly, some of the victims that do come forward are misidentified and may be arrested and treated as offenders, thus adding to the distrust of the authorities.

## Cultural Problems

Jim Dibble, a 36-year veteran of law enforcement who spent 20 years in the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, points to other obstacles that are deeply engrained in certain cultures around the world:

**Indentured servitude:** Families may be kept in bondage, literally forever because they can only afford to pay the interest on monies owed to their traffickers. Worse yet, their children often assume the debts of their parents and work in sweat shops in a desperate attempt to pay their families' way out of bondage.

**Trafficking is an Accepted Practice:** Dibble adds that in many places the culture simply accepts human trafficking as a practice.

In Calcutta, for example, Dibble says some 12,000 prostitutes work in the 5-block area that comprises the red-light district. Dibble went undercover to identify just how many of the prostitutes were underage girls. What he discovered was that although the practice of prostitution and the use of underage girls is widespread, the laws against these practices are not enforced. In fact, sex trafficking is condoned.

“Many human trafficking victims...don't trust the police in their own countries, so they have a natural fear of law enforcement agencies in foreign countries who they may believe will treat them as criminals.”



**A Multi-generational Crime:** Human trafficking is a crime that is commonly shared between generations as well. Dibble pointed to the town of Agra Wali, about 100 miles from Delhi, India, where multigenerational prostitution is not only accepted but encouraged.

“It is close to temple prostitution from biblical times,” Dibble describes. “Men don’t work, all women engage in prostitution and girls age 16 and 17 are offered to highest bidder. It’s hard to break the cycle because grandma’s cousins are all involved.”

**Finding Trusted Sources:** “The biggest problem,” says Dibble, “was determining who to trust because even the police were perpetrating the crimes in India. Because there is a lot of corruption in law enforcement, investigations become compromised. Many times, [outside investigations showed] that the authorities gave security to brothel managers or organized the prostitution rings themselves.”

**Replacing the Income:** Dibble also says that the problems are perpetuated because participants don’t have any other means of replacing the income from sex-trafficking. “Trying to emancipate them [victims] is difficult without giving them something to replace that form of income.”

**Lack of Safe Houses:** Even for those who do come forward, not having proper safe houses where victims can reclaim their lives without fear of retribution is another obstacle that Dibble says must be overcome to eliminate this problem.

## Organizations Worldwide Join to End Human Trafficking

The human trafficking problem is complex as there are more modern-day slaves in our world than ever before. Although the statistics, issues and politics can seem overwhelming there are organizations creating awareness and being advocates for change on this issue. They are dedicated to act for those who are exploited and forced into slavery. Once such organization is [Freeland](#) who believe that collaboration is key to fighting modern slavery. But even with collaboration the challenge is daunting. It’s very difficult to raid a trafficking operation unless an officer has a warrant, and to get that, evidence must show that trafficking is occurring under that business or person. To get that evidence is dangerous. To get the warrant risks leaking the undercover enforcement operation,” Steven Galster, director of Freeland said.

But even when organized human trafficking rings are prosecuted there remains the issues of the victims. “If an enforcement action does take place, the victims realize that if they confess to being a victim, and risk shame with their family or friends, not to mention revenge by the trafficker.” Said Galster

“While shutting down human trafficking worldwide may seem impossible, new hope is coming from tech companies like Cellebrite.”



## How Cellebrite Is Fighting Human Trafficking

While shutting down human trafficking worldwide may seem impossible, new hope is coming from tech companies like Cellebrite, whose digital intelligence tools are at the frontline of the battle.

Gaining access to mobile and other devices belonging to traffickers is the key to uncovering crucial data. Phone numbers, texts, contact lists, photos, videos, and locations can easily be extracted using

Once the data is extracted, breaking it down into categories so that investigators can quickly focus their investigation to generate leads on traffickers or their victims can be done in minutes thanks to Cellebrite's AI Solutions <https://www.cellebrite.com/en/Pathfinder/> This powerful tool provides the means for investigators to set up a customized dashboard to search for very specific types of information by automatically merging large quantities of disparate mobile, cloud, computer, and telco data sources so users can simultaneously identify patterns, reveal connections, and uncover leads with greater speed and accuracy.

As Senior Product Marketing Manager Yohai West describes, Cellebrite Pathfinder provides a way for investigators to focus their investigations. "Everyone today needs a dashboard because there is just so much data," West explains.

"What we provided with [Cellebrite Pathfinder] is the dashboard that gives you all the possible 'eureka moments' and organizes them into categories that you can search." For example, images are categorized into common categories. The top apps and the key words are called out along with a listing of the websites to investigate.

"[Cellebrite Pathfinder] shows what threads to pull on first," West continues. "Sometimes you'll use it only to focus on locations or to focus on a face. It's a way to get all of the analytics to surface."

### See How Cellebrite Pathfinder Works

<https://www.cellebrite.com/en/Pathfinder/> to see how Cellebrite Pathfinder can help you:

1. Streamline Cases
2. Focus on What Matters
3. Recognize People, Places and Objects
4. Skip to Relevant Scenes Within Video
5. Create Your Own Media Categories
6. Analyze any Video Format
7. View Identifiers as a Single Person
8. Visualize Case Reports



One of the major advantages of Cellebrite Pathfinder is that it is AI driven, so investigators can “teach” the system to seek specific kinds of data. Being able to customize search criteria in this way allows investigators to cut through mountains of data to find actionable leads and evidence in minutes, not months—a significant advantage when trying to track down victims or traffickers who are constantly moving.

## Applying Pathfinder to Human Trafficking

Jim Dibble, who has years of experience in digital forensics, describes the benefits of using Cellebrite Pathfinder to jumpstart human trafficking investigations this way, “When we have an unknown victim, we try to identify them so we can extricate them from a dangerous environment and bring the perpetrators to justice.”

In cases involving human trafficking, Dibble starts by trying to analyze images, looking at things in the background to determine where the photo was taken. External images of a hotel, bus station, airport or vehicle can all provide clues to a victim’s location. He also studies internal images—rooms, objects, colors—anything to help find consistency among multiple victims.

“We train the system to look for similarities between victims’ cases to determine if a simple case is part of a larger conspiracy,” Dibble says. “This is done by identifying patterns between multiple images.”

An example of identifying patterns in multiple images is hotel rooms. The [Exchange Initiative](#) shares a statistic that 75% of underage sex trafficking victims said they had been advertised or sold online. (Thorne). As hotels are a common venue where traffickers exploit their victims. In response they have developed an app where ordinary citizens can take pictures of their hotel room and those pictures are uploaded to a national law enforcement database to trace back images of sex trafficking advertisements.

Being able to customize your search criteria and easily share your findings with other departments or agencies is another area where Cellebrite Pathfinder excels. No other digital forensic tool in the marketplace can compare and its applications in the fight against human trafficking are unmatched.

Putting an end to human trafficking takes time, the right technology, training and a will to evoke change. We cannot turn our backs on the millions of men, women, and children being abused. We have the technology to take this global problem head on. If exercised properly, we can stop human trafficking and make this a safer world.

To learn more about how your team can take advantage of this amazing technological breakthrough: [Cellebrite.com](http://Cellebrite.com)

### Sources

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Bales and Steven Lize, “Investigating Human Trafficking: Challenges, Lessons Learned, and Best Practices: (609012007-004)” (American Psychological Association, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1037/e609012007-004>.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Farrell, et al, “Identifying Challenges to Improve the Investigation and Prosecution of State and Local Human Trafficking Cases” (Northeastern University, 2012), <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/Identifying%20Challenges%20to%20Prosecution.pdf>



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