Combatting Human Trafficking Through Social Science

Worldwide, an estimated 20.8 million people are victims of human trafficking, contributing to an industry that generates more than $150 billion in illegal profits. Human trafficking touches all communities regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity; however, human trafficking victims are disproportionately immigrants, women, and children. These victims often do not self-report out of fear or because of intimidation, making the true scale of human trafficking hard to quantify. This and the overall complexity of human trafficking makes combatting it challenging, particularly for decision makers, policy makers, and operational partners on the front lines.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) seeks to address the growing problem of human trafficking through social science-based research. Through operationally relevant, end-user focused applied social and behavioral science research, S&T strives to enable, inform, and assist operational partners, decision makers, and policy makers in lessening the human and monetary costs of human trafficking. S&T has embarked on two unique efforts to support this goal: (1) the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Foundational Effort and (2) the Human Trafficking System Analysis and Technology Roadmap.

Current Human Trafficking Portfolio (FY18-19)

Combatting Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Foundational Effort

The aim of this effort is to ensure S&T's understanding of human trafficking and modern slavery is holistic, both domestically and internationally. Outcomes of this effort will be:

- Identification of the agencies, organizations, and entities involved in combatting and responding to human trafficking;
- A map of the relationships between the identified agencies, organizations, and entities;
- A taxonomy used to classify and sort these organizations and programs; and
- Classification of the types of human trafficking and their respective warning signs, indicators, and signatures.
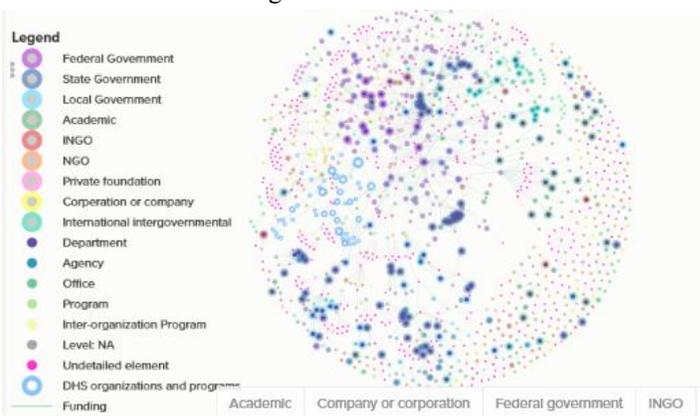
Human Trafficking System Analysis and Technology Roadmap

Stakeholder Engagement and Domain Analysis

S&T is conducting a domain analysis of human trafficking, including the U.S. government's counter-human trafficking response. In addition to gathering insights from key government stakeholders, S&T engages with leaders in the non-governmental organization (NGO) domain. This includes a work process flow analysis of key stakeholders, review of current software and tools, and assessment of stakeholder information priorities. The results of this analysis will enable DHS S&T to answer questions that help develop an effective counter-human trafficking response capability, including:

- What agencies and departments within the U.S. government are combating human trafficking, and what are their roles?
- What are the research and technology gaps within the human trafficking domain, and how should they be addressed?
- Beyond the current government working groups, who are the key stakeholders from the NGO and academic communities, and who will be good partners for future S&T programs within the human trafficking domain?

System Analysis and Technology Roadmap Development

In addition to performing stakeholder analysis, S&T is developing a technology roadmap to enable DHS to combat human trafficking effectively. This roadmap will consist of both near-term small-scale technology recommendations for quick implementation, as well as large-scale nationally disruptive technology recommendations. The recommendations address software and hardware needs, law enforcement and legal needs, information sensing and collaboration needs, among others.

Future of Human Trafficking Research at S&T

The results of these two efforts will form the foundation of a social science-based program at S&T to combat human trafficking and modern slavery. Using the data collected and needs identified through these two projects, S&T will develop and pursue a research strategy that will directly enable, inform, and assist operational partners, decision makers, and policy makers working to combat human trafficking.