

IMPACT REPORT • AUGUST 2026

WHAT THE WORLD BUILT

Findings from Call for Code AI: United Against Trafficking

A global challenge hosted by UN Human Rights and Call for Code AI, co-hosted and produced by Austin AI Hub

6

CONTINENTS REPRESENTED

10

TEAMS HONORED

TOP 5

SELECTED FOR THE AUSTIN AI
HUB INCUBATOR

400+

WRITTEN EVALUATIONS

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Prepared for press and partners

1 Purpose of this report

This report summarizes what a global community of builders created when asked to turn artificial intelligence against human trafficking. It is prepared for press and partners, and it answers four questions:

- **What problems** did the entries set out to solve, across all submissions and among the ten selected solutions?
- **Who built** these solutions: social workers and field practitioners, professional developers, artists, or others?
- **How rigorous** and how responsible was the work?
- **What happens** to the winning solutions next?

All percentages are computed from the official submission records and from the more than 400 written evaluations produced during judging. Global statistics are drawn from the United Nations and International Labour Organization sources listed at the end.

2 Background

Call for Code AI: United Against Trafficking is the first Call for Code AI activation, hosted by UN Human Rights (Host and Global Impact Partner) and Call for Code AI (Host and Global Platform), co-hosted and produced by Austin AI Hub (Co-Host, Producing Partner and Official AI Hub), with the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery as Official Charity Partner. Builders joined from six continents, and the response was far beyond expectations. Winners were honored on July 30, 2026, the UN World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, at Capital Factory in Austin, Texas.

Entries competed in three challenge tracks, plus a special recognition category: tools that anticipate and disrupt trafficking before it reaches victims; tools that assist and amplify survivor support; tools for accountability and justice; and, as the special recognition category, Art Against Trafficking, for awareness work powered by AI. Participation required no coding background, a design choice that shaped the results described below.

3 The problems the entries set out to solve

This section responds to the question: “The third-place winner highlighted a paperwork problem that TRACE attempts to solve. What issues did other entries highlight?”

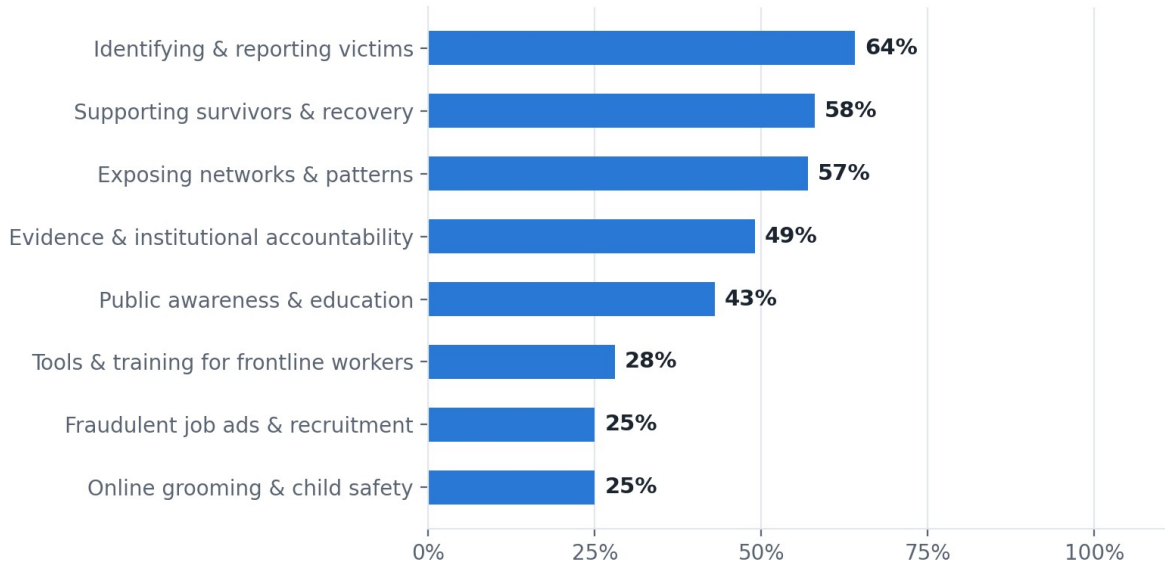
Trafficking is not one problem but a pipeline: recruitment, exploitation, escape, recovery, justice, and prevention. The entries, taken together, covered nearly the entire pipeline. Each entry was classified against eight problem areas based on its own submitted problem statement; most entries address more than one area, so shares sum to more than 100 percent.

3.1 All submissions

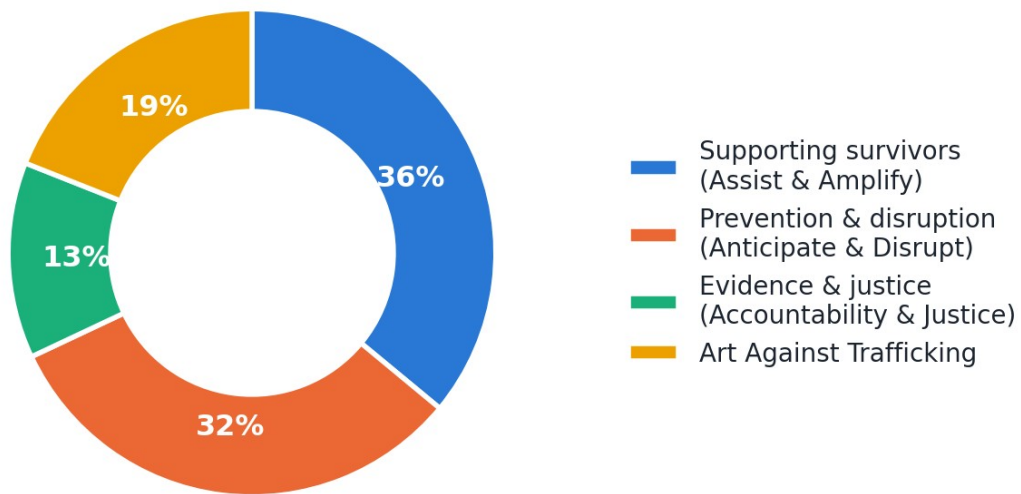
Across the full field, the single most common target was the identification gap: the fact that the overwhelming majority of trafficking victims are never found. Survivor support and network detection followed closely.

Problem areas addressed: all submissions

Share of entries addressing each area; entries often address more than one



Track composition: all submissions

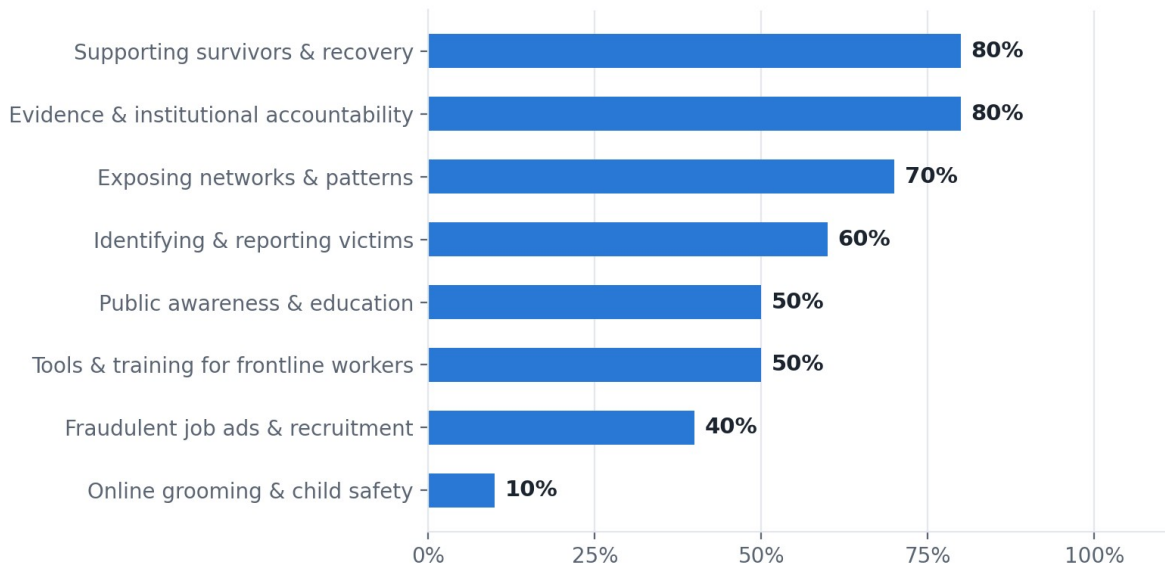


3.2 The ten selected solutions

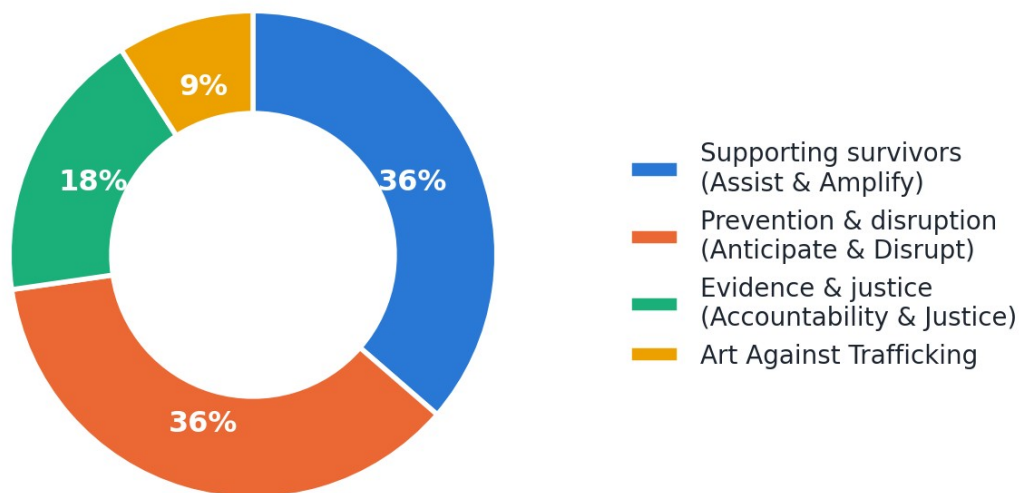
Among the ten entries honored by the judges, the emphasis shifts visibly toward survivor support, institutional accountability, and tools that make frontline workers more effective. The judging process rewarded entries that chose a narrow, well-verified problem over broad platforms.

Problem areas addressed: the ten selected solutions

Share of the ten honored entries addressing each area



Track composition: ten selected solutions + Art Award



3.3 Recurring problems the builders surfaced

Reading across the problem statements, five findings stand out:

- **The paperwork burden is universal.** Multiple entries, built independently on different continents, converged on the same insight: frontline workers lose the time they should spend with survivors to documentation, and warning signs are missed because notes never become structured records.

- **Language is a wall.** Entries repeatedly treated language access as the core problem: reporting assistants working in six languages, a plain phone-call service in French, Wolof, and Moore for callers without smartphones, and offline case tools for francophone Africa. Existing anti-trafficking infrastructure largely speaks the wrong languages.
- **The recruitment moment is the cheapest place to intervene.** A quarter of all entries, and three of the top ten, focused on the start of the pipeline: the fraudulent job ad, the recruiter's message, the sponsorship offer. Exploitation is recognizable in language before it is recognizable in harm.
- **Accountability paperwork goes unread.** A distinct cluster targeted institutions rather than criminals: more than 100,000 corporate modern-slavery statements sit in the UK registry alone, largely unread, and two of the ten selected solutions exist to make that disclosure data meaningful.
- **Training proves attendance, not skill.** Frontline officers who cross paths with victims are typically trained by passive video modules; one honored entry replaces that with interview practice against an AI-simulated traveler, scoring the officer's technique rather than profiling the traveler.

4 Who built the solutions

This section responds to the question: "The third-place winner mentioned she is not a developer, but AI allowed her to make her tool. Were many submissions coming from social workers like her? Or developers? Other?"

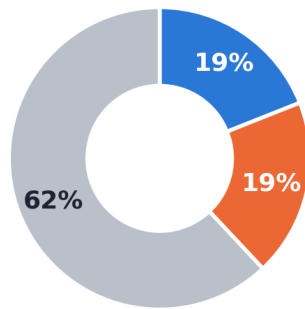
The third-place winner, a humanitarian professional with no engineering degree, built her tool in roughly two weeks using AI development tools. The question is how typical she was. The challenge was designed so that a coding background was not required to participate, and the field reflected that decision.

4.1 Developers or not: what the record shows

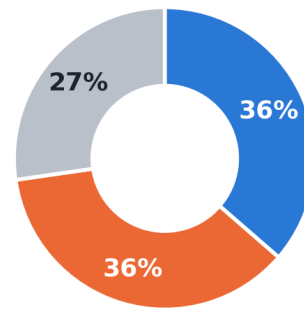
Builder background was not a required submission field, so the classification below is evidence-based and conservative. For all submissions, the non-developer share is verified through the Art Against Trafficking category, and the engineering share is inferred from each entry's own submitted technology stack: entries that shipped public code built on production-grade infrastructure, such as databases, containerization, and backend frameworks, were classified as coming from software or engineering backgrounds. Entries between those two poles, including mixed teams, students, and builders who did not state a background, are shown as indeterminate.

Who built the solutions: outside software engineering vs. developers

All submissions



Honored solutions
(ten selected + Art Award)



- Verifiably outside software engineering (art, field work, economics, research)
- Software / engineering backgrounds (verified or strong engineering evidence)
- Indeterminate from the record (mixed teams, students, unstated backgrounds)

Left: art track verifies the non-developer share; engineering share inferred from production-grade technology stacks with public code.
Right: based on public builder profiles and submission materials. Backgrounds were not a required submission field.

The result is symmetrical and striking: across all submissions, roughly one in five entries verifiably came from outside software engineering (artists, designers, and storytellers of the art category), and roughly one in five showed the unmistakable footprint of experienced software builders. The remaining three in five sit in between, a spectrum of students, humanitarian field workers, researchers, economists, and self-taught builders, often combined on one team, whose backgrounds the record does not settle.

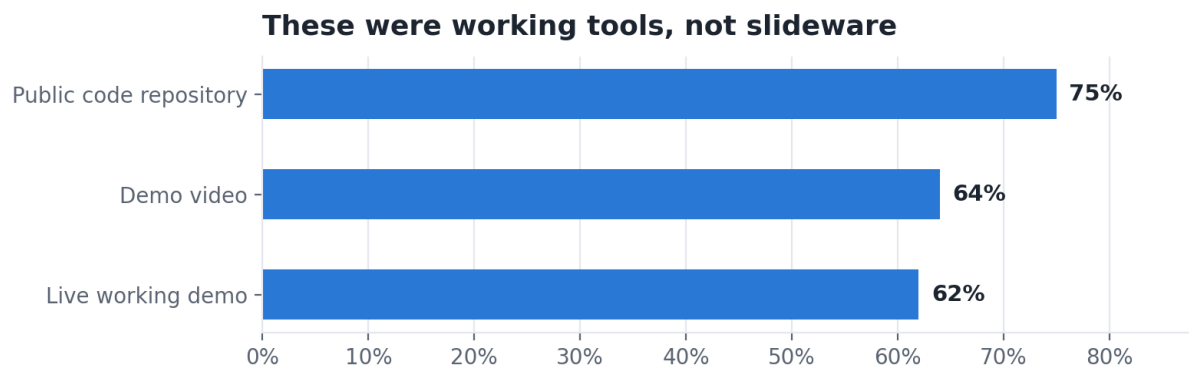
Among the honored solutions, the picture is sharper because the builders are public, and the verified non-developer share nearly doubles, to 36 percent: humanitarian field work, development economics and community work in West Africa, geospatial research, and sculpture. A roughly equal share are professional engineers or computer science builders. The remainder are mixed teams pairing a domain expert with an engineer, or builders whose backgrounds are not publicly stated.

Two observations follow. First, non-developers did not merely participate; they were selected at a higher rate than the field overall and reached the very top of the results, including the podium. Second, even the honored solutions built by professional engineers drew their decisive advantage from domain understanding, of courtrooms and of recruitment fraud, rather than from code alone.

A panel discussion at the awards ceremony placed this shift in context: prototypes of the quality seen in this competition would have cost on the order of half a million dollars to build only a few years ago. Today, a domain expert with modern AI tools can produce one in weeks. The practical bottleneck in AI for social good has moved from engineering capacity to problem understanding.

4.2 Working tools, not concepts

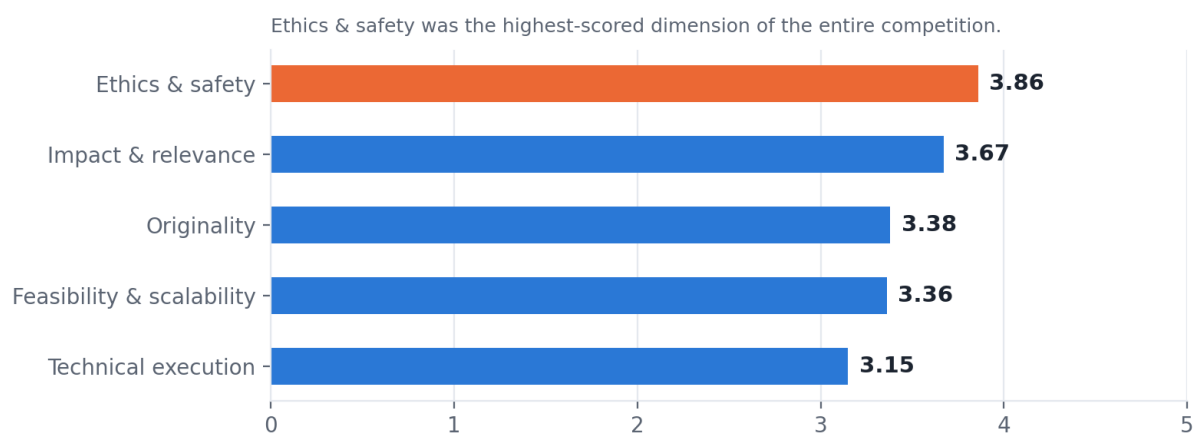
Despite the mixed backgrounds, the entries were substantially real software. Judges verified live demos and, in several cases, reviewed the underlying code line by line.



4.3 A community that led with care

Every submission was required to include a statement on survivor-centered design, and the requirement showed in the results. Across all judge evaluations of the competition, ethics and safety was the highest-scoring dimension, above technical execution. For a field whose end users are survivors and frontline workers, this is arguably the most important measurement of the event.

How the community scored, across every judge evaluation (scale of 5)



5 The global context

The numbers below, from United Nations and International Labour Organization sources, frame the problems the builders chose:

Statistic	Figure	Source
People in modern slavery worldwide	About 50 million (27.6M forced labour, 22M forced marriage)	ILO Global Estimates
Annual illegal profits from forced labour	US \$236 billion	ILO, Profits and Poverty (2024)

Statistic	Figure	Source
Victims ever identified	Commonly estimated at under 1%	Derived from ILO prevalence vs. UNODC detections
Change in detected victims, 2019 to 2022	+25%	UNODC Global Report (2024)
Children among detected victims	38% (child detections up 31%)	UNODC Global Report (2024)
Scale of cross-border trafficking	162 nationalities trafficked into 128 countries	UNODC Global Report (2024)
People forced into online scam operations in Southeast Asia	Hundreds of thousands (~120,000 in Myanmar, ~100,000 in Cambodia)	UN OHCHR (2023)

These figures connect directly to what was built. The fraudulent job advertisement, the entry point examined by the second-place winner and others, is the recruiting front door of an industry generating a quarter of a trillion dollars a year, and of the Southeast Asian scam compounds now holding hundreds of thousands of people. The identification gap, under one percent of victims ever found, is precisely the problem the largest share of entries chose to attack.

6 Questions and answers

Q How were the winners selected?

A 32-member judging panel, combining AI and engineering leaders with anti-trafficking practitioners, survivor advocates, and policy experts, produced more than 400 written evaluations across five criteria: impact and relevance, technical execution, originality, feasibility and scalability, and ethics and safety. Several judges verified code and live demos directly rather than relying on pitch materials.

Q How was survivor perspective built into the process?

In three ways. Every entry was required to include a survivor-centered design statement. The judging panel included survivor advocates and practitioners alongside technologists. And the awards ceremony keynote was delivered by Toni McKinley, a survivor advocate, clinician, and Executive Director of Magdalene House Austin, who framed the standard for the room: technology cannot help survivors if it does not understand survival.

Q Is AI not also a tool for traffickers?

It is, and the competition treated that honestly. AI lowers costs on both sides; the Southeast Asian scam compounds are themselves technology-driven criminal operations. This is why ethics and safety carried full weight in judging, and why it emerged as the highest-scoring dimension of the competition. The response to misused technology is not the absence of technology; it is technology built with survivors at the center and safeguards verified in the code.

Q What happens to the winning solutions now?

The top five teams enter the six-month Austin AI Hub Incubator beginning this fall, with mentorship drawn from the judging network and a pathway to pilot their solutions with partner organizations. The remaining honored teams have been invited to join. The measure of success is deployment: tools in the hands of caseworkers, analysts, and survivors.

Q Why Austin?

Austin combines a deep technology workforce, an active anti-trafficking ecosystem including redM, Allies Against Slavery, Not On Our Watch TX, and Magdalene House of Austin, and a strong culture of community building. The partnership structure paired that local execution with global reach: UN Human Rights as Host and Global Impact Partner and Call for Code AI as Host and Global Platform.

7 Sources

- International Labour Organization, Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour (2024): ilo.org
- ILO / Walk Free / IOM, Global Estimates of Modern Slavery
- UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024
- UN OHCHR, Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia (2023)
- Austin AI Hub, official submission records and judging evaluations, Call for Code AI: United Against Trafficking (2026). Percentages computed from submitted entries; entries may address multiple problem areas.

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