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Dr. Anjali Khandelwal

*Assistant Professor,
School of Law, JECRC University, Jaipur*

Lakshya Tambi

(MBA, CMA, CS), Jaipur

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An In-Depth Examination of Legislative Efforts to Address Human Trafficking and Protect Vulnerable Groups

Dr. Anjali Khandelwal

Assistant Professor,
School of Law, JECRC University, Jaipur

Lakshya Tambi

(MBA, CMA, CS), Jaipur

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ABSTRACT

This research undertakes an in-depth exploration of legislative efforts to combat human trafficking and safeguard vulnerable groups, including women, children, and economically marginalized communities. Today human trafficking remains a grave violation of human rights, perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Moreover, despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, and provisions under the BNS, trafficking persists due to loopholes in implementation, inadequate victim protection, and insufficient rehabilitation measures. The study critically analyzes recent legislative amendments and judicial interpretations to assess their effectiveness in addressing the evolving dynamics of trafficking, including online exploitation and cross-border networks. Furthermore, it explores the role of international conventions, such as the United Nations Palermo Protocol, and their influence on domestic legal reforms. Today a special attention is given to the socio-legal challenges faced by trafficking survivors, emphasizing the need for victim-centric legislation that ensures rehabilitation, reintegration, and psychological support. The research also identifies best practices from global legal systems to recommend strategies for strengthening India's legislative framework. By highlighting the intersection of law, policy, and social justice, this study underscores the importance of a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to combat human trafficking and foster the empowerment of marginalized communities. Ultimately, it advocates for legal reforms that not only criminalize trafficking but also promote a more inclusive and

equitable society.

KEYWORDS

*Human Trafficking, Legislation, Vulnerability,
Rehabilitation, Justice*

INTRODUCTION

Legislative Frameworks and Safeguards against Human Trafficking

The global fight against human trafficking has been more intense between the years 2015 and 2024, which has resulted in the creation and evolution of legislative frameworks that are designed to protect groups that are particularly susceptible. Notwithstanding these developments, human trafficking remains a major issue that calls for ongoing assessment and improvement of legal clauses. Establishing a thorough federal response to human trafficking, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 is applicable in United States. Reauthorized and changed over time, this act now strengthens protections and increases resources. Reportedly passed by the House in January 2024, the Enhancing Detection of Human Trafficking Act (H.R.443) requires the Department of Labor to equip staff members with training so they may better spot and aid in human trafficking case identification.¹ This program emphasizes the need of giving frontline employees the tools they need to identify and handle symptoms of trafficking.

Reflecting improved law enforcement efforts and increasing awareness of the seriousness of trafficking crimes, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics has documented a notable increase in human trafficking convictions over the past ten years. From 805 in 2012 to 1,656 in 2022 the number of prosecutions more than doubled. Comparably, convictions increased from 578 to 1,118 over the same period. These numbers show not just higher court efficiency but also the efficacy of several awareness initiatives and preventive actions meant to stop human trafficking.

There are several reasons why there is this explosion of legal action. Important roles in identifying and punishing traffickers have been performed by improved investigation methods, more cooperation between state and federal agencies, and more law enforcement officer training. Stronger victim protection policies

¹ Kara Abramson, *Beyond Consent, toward Safeguarding Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations Trafficking Protocol*, 44 Harv. Int'l L.J. 473 (2003).

have also encouraged survivors to come forward, therefore supporting effective prosecutions.² Although these developments are admirable, the increasing numbers also reflect the ongoing frequency of human trafficking, therefore stressing the necessity of ongoing efforts to eradicate this crime.³

Globally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that between 2003 and 2021, around 450,000 trafficking victims were found in 141 countries. This astounding number emphasizes the extensive and all-around presence of human trafficking. The transnational character of the crime needs coordinated worldwide efforts to solve its underlying causes, destroy trafficking networks, and safeguard victims. The statistics also emphasizes the important part international treaties and protocols—like the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in fostering world collaboration—have in promoting world cooperation.⁴ The adoption of the Modern Slavery Act of 2015 marks legislative progress against human trafficking in the United Kingdom. Designed to combine charges connected to slavery and trafficking, simplify victim protection protocols, and punish offenders more severely, this innovative piece of law was One of its main clauses was the obligation for companies to document actions taken to stop slavery in their supplier chains, therefore making them answerable for moral behavior.

By 2024, though, complaints about the UK's reaction to human trafficking surfaced that it trailed behind world events. Calls for legislative changes underlined the need of tackling contemporary issues including the exploitation of vulnerable migrants and the emergence of cyber-facilitated trafficking. Experts have highlighted areas lacking victim care systems and the necessity of more all-encompassing policies shielding survivors from re-trafficking. Suggestions for changed legislation have focused on the need of a victim-centered approach, more corporate responsibility, and more worldwide cooperation.⁵ Although legal systems and law enforcement initiatives have achieved great progress against human trafficking, continuous difficulties exist.⁶ The continuation of trafficking networks, the exploitation of weak groups, and changing strategies of traffickers call for flexible legal

² Natalia Szablewska, *Human Smuggling and Human Trafficking*, in *International Conflict and Security Law: A Research Handbook* 1181 (Sergey Sayapin et al. eds., 2022).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Maria O'Neill, *The Transnational Crime of Human Trafficking: A Human Security Approach* (2023).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

reactions and constant awareness.⁷

The first conviction for exit trafficking in Victoria recorded in Australia in 2024 was for a man who had misled his wife into leaving and heading overseas. This story shows the sometimes-disregarded problem of exit trafficking as well as the importance of awareness and legal systems to solve such crimes.⁸ In the United States, the Preventing Child Trafficking Act of 2024 (S.3687) has been proposed to strengthen initiatives aimed at combating child trafficking. This law underlines the government's will to increase protections for vulnerable groups and stresses the importance of thorough policies to stop the exploitation of minors.⁹ Even while legislative frameworks to fight human trafficking and safeguard underprivileged populations between 2015 and 2024 have achieved great progress, the continuation of trafficking emphasizes the need of ongoing assessment and improvement of these laws. Protecting vulnerable groups calls for strong laws as well as good execution, victim support, and worldwide cooperation.

LEGAL MEASURES TO COMBAT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Through the establishment of new legal frameworks and the improvement of existing ones, tremendous progress has been accomplished on a global scale in the fight against human trafficking between the years 2015 and 2024. These steps seek to punish perpetrators, safeguard victims, and stop next instances of trafficking. In 2000, Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) to support anti-trafficking initiatives at the federal level. It has been reauthorized and changed throughout years to improve its clauses.¹⁰ Especially, the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) brought policies aiming at enhancing victim care and raising fines for offenders of trafficking. Established under the JVTA, the Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund by May 2016 had gathered around \$100,000 to assist survivors.¹¹

The Modern Slavery Act the United Kingdom adopted in 2015

⁷ Muhammad Usman, Sohail Amjad & Asif Khan, *Human Trafficking and Smuggling: Intersection with Maritime Law and International Cooperation*, (2021), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4756395> (last visited Feb 05, 2025).

⁸ Rose Broad, Nicholas Lord & Charlotte Duncan, *The Financial Aspects of Human Trafficking: A Financial Assessment Framework*, 22 *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 581 (2022).

⁹ Hila Shamir, *A Labor Paradigm for Human Trafficking*, 60 *UCLA L. Rev.* 76 (2012).

¹⁰ Siddharth Kara, *Designing More Effective Laws against Human Trafficking*, 9 *Nw. U. J. Int'l Hum. Rts.* 123 (2010).

¹¹ *Id.*

included crimes connected to slavery and trafficking. According to a 2016 evaluation, the statute was used for 289 cases convicted in 2015; the number of victims referred for support increased by 40%.¹² Globally, the United Nations has been crucial in developing rules against human trafficking. Complementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children provides a complete worldwide framework. 178 nations have signed this agreement by 2024, therefore highlighting a worldwide will to combat trafficking.

Statistically speaking, the U.S. Department of Justice noted that human trafficking prosecutions jumped considerably between 2015 and 2020, a reflection of improved law enforcement initiatives. The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report also noted that, a notable rise from past years, over 110,000 victims were found worldwide in 2023, pointing to better identification and reporting systems. These developments nonetheless still exist difficulties.¹³

PROTECTING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS THROUGH LEGISLATIVE RESPONSES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

To safeguard vulnerable populations from human trafficking, countries around the world stepped up their legislative efforts between 2015 and 2024. As a result, a wide range of legal frameworks that are suited to particular regional issues have been developed. Although their objective is to fight trafficking, these legislative reactions show substantial variations in their clauses, therefore reflecting different legal traditions and policy agendas. The "3 P's"—protection, prevention, and prosecution—are key to the comprehensive federal response to human trafficking that was established in the United States by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. Several times the TVPA has been reauthorized with major changes improving law enforcement powers and victim care. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005, for example, extended extraterritorial jurisdiction over trafficking crimes carried out by U.S. citizens and residents, therefore increasing the range of prosecutable offenses.¹⁴ By contrast, the Modern Slavery Act of 2015 for the United Kingdom combined current offences pertaining to slavery and trafficking into one piece of legislation.

¹² Dean A. Shepherd et al., *Organizing the Exploitation of Vulnerable People: A Qualitative Assessment of Human Trafficking*, 48 *Journal of Management* 2421 (2022).

¹³ Inger Österdahl, *International Countermeasures against Human Trafficking*, in *Human Trafficking and Human Security* (2008).

¹⁴ FikreJesus Amahazion, *Human Trafficking: The Need for Human Rights and Government Effectiveness in Enforcing Anti-Trafficking*, 16 *Global Crime* 167 (2015)

This legislation brought policies including the creation of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and guidelines for companies revealing attempts to eradicate slavery from their supplier networks. Critics have pointed out, meantime, that the UK's response has lagged behind worldwide developments, which demands for revised laws to handle modern issues.¹⁵

Australia's strategy calls for the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Slavery, Slavery-like Conditions and People Trafficking) Act 2013, which broadens the definitions of forced labour and servitude and adds offences linked to forced marriage. This law captures Australia's awareness of certain kinds of exploitation under its authority. Furthermore, the Australian government has developed the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery 2015–19, so delineating approaches to handle developing trends in trafficking. Complementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, internationally the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, provides a complete framework for combating trafficking. 178 nations have signed this agreement as of 2024, therefore highlighting a worldwide will to combat trafficking via coordinated legislative actions.¹⁶ Notwithstanding these legislative successes, problems still exist. More stringent immigration rules implemented in 2023 have drawn criticism for undercutting support for victims of human trafficking in the United Kingdom.¹⁷ With many victims fearing deportation should they come forward, the rejection rate for support cases climbed from 11% in 2022 to 45% in 2023. With an estimated 130,000 victims of modern slavery thought to exist in the UK, measures that give victim protection top priority are clearly important.¹⁸

According to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number of human trafficking prosecutions in the US has significantly increased during the last ten years. From 805 in 2012 to 1,656 in 2022 the number of people prosecuted for human trafficking offences more than doubled. Likewise, convictions increased from 578 to 1,118 throughout the same period, in line with improved law enforcement activities. These numbers highlight the difficulty in stopping human trafficking as well as the need of constant assessment and improvement of legal

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Caroline Jagoe, Pei Ying Natalie Toh & Gillian Wylie, *Disability and the Risk of Vulnerability to Human Trafficking: An Analysis of Case Law*, *Journal of Human Trafficking* 1 (2022).

¹⁷ Arduizur Carli Richie-Zavaleta et al., *From Victimization to Restoration: Multi-Disciplinary Collaborative Approaches to Care and Support Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking*, 7 *Journal of Human Trafficking* 291 (2021).

¹⁸ *Id.*

systems. Protecting sensitive groups calls for strong laws as well as good execution, victim support, and worldwide cooperation.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Strengthening protections for At-Risk Groups

Global efforts against human trafficking have grown more intense between 2015 and 2024, which has resulted in the creation and improvement of legislative frameworks meant to guard underprivileged groups. Notwithstanding these developments, human trafficking is still a major problem that calls for ongoing assessment and improvement of legal rules. Establishing a thorough federal response to human trafficking, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 is applicable in United States.²⁰ Reauthorized and changed over time, this act now strengthens protections and increases resources. Especially, the 2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA) brought policies aiming at enhancing victim care and raising fines for offenders of trafficking. Established under the JVTA, the Domestic Trafficking Victims' Fund by 2016 had gathered around \$100,000 to assist survivors. Moreover, from 805 in 2012 to 1,656 in 2022, the number of people punished for human trafficking offences more than doubled, suggesting improved law enforcement activities.

Adoption of Directive 2011/36/EU gave the European Union a consistent legal framework to fight trafficking among members states. Emphasizing victim protection, prevention, and prosecution, this directive Reflecting a 41.1% rise over the year before, there were 10,093 registered victims of trafficking in the EU by 2022. This increase underlines both better detection systems and the ongoing difficulties in tackling trafficking. From 2003 to 2021, nearly 450,000 victims of trafficking were recorded worldwide by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), across 141 countries.

Notwithstanding these legislative successes, problems still exist. Human trafficking's covert character makes crime challenging to identify and punish; differences in legal systems throughout nations can impede global cooperation. For example, whilst some countries have thorough anti-trafficking laws, others either lack such legislation or have classifications that contradict international norms. Although legislative frameworks to fight

¹⁹ Candence Wills, *Sexual Minorities and Human Trafficking: Vulnerabilities and Challenges Faced by an Overlooked Population*, in *Human Trafficking* (3 ed. 2022).

²⁰ Joanna Ortega et al., *Survivors of Human Trafficking*, in *Diversity in Action: Case Studies in Cultural Psychiatry* 33 (Steve H. Koh, Gabriela G. Mejia, & Hilary M. Gould eds., 2022).

human trafficking and safeguard underprivileged groups have achieved great progress between 2015 and 2024, the ongoing existence of trafficking emphasizes the need of constant assessment and improvement of these laws. Protecting vulnerable populations calls for strong laws as well as efficient execution, victim support, and worldwide cooperation.