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Topic: *Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Combating Human Trafficking and Enhancing Protection of Women and Children*

Strengthening the Protection of Women and Children: Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking through a Victim-Centred Approach

Fulan

Faculty of Law, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung (UNISSULA) Semarang, Indonesia,

E-mail: fulan@gmail.com

Abstract. *Human trafficking constitutes a serious violation of human dignity and fundamental human rights, disproportionately affecting women and children due to their particular social, economic, and developmental vulnerabilities. Despite the strengthening of national and international legal frameworks, trafficking continues to develop through increasingly complex recruitment networks, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, online recruitment, and transnational criminal activities. This condition demonstrates that criminal prosecution alone is insufficient to provide comprehensive protection for victims. This article examines the strengthening of protection for women and children through a victim-centred approach that integrates prevention, law enforcement, victim protection, recovery, restitution, and reintegration. The research employs a normative juridical method using a statutory and conceptual approach. Legal materials are analyzed qualitatively through literature study to examine the relationship between legal protection, institutional responses, and victim recovery mechanisms. The analysis demonstrates that preventing and combating human trafficking requires stronger coordination between criminal justice institutions, government agencies, social services, law enforcement authorities, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. Legal responses should not focus exclusively on identifying and punishing perpetrators but must also address structural factors that increase vulnerability to trafficking, including poverty, gender inequality, limited educational opportunities, unsafe migration, and economic dependency. Within the victim-centred framework, women and children must be recognized as rights-holders rather than merely as witnesses or sources of evidence. Protection mechanisms should therefore guarantee access to safe accommodation, healthcare, psychological assistance, legal aid, identity protection, and other essential services while preventing secondary victimization during investigation and judicial proceedings. Particular attention must be given*



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to children through the application of the best interests of the child and age-appropriate protection measures. Furthermore, victim protection should extend beyond rescue and criminal prosecution toward comprehensive recovery and sustainable reintegration. Restitution and compensation should constitute essential components of recovery, particularly where victims have suffered economic losses, unpaid wages, physical or psychological harm, and other consequences of exploitation. Reintegration should include education, vocational training, economic empowerment, family support, and measures preventing re trafficking. Ultimately, an effective anti-trafficking framework requires a shift from a predominantly perpetrator-centred model toward an integrated victim-centred system. Such an approach can strengthen legal certainty, institutional accountability, victim participation, access to remedies, and long-term recovery, ensuring that efforts to combat human trafficking produce meaningful and sustainable protection for women and children.

Keywords: *Human Trafficking; Restitution; Victim-Centred Approach; Victim Reintegration; Women and Children.*

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1. Introduction

Human trafficking constitutes a serious violation of human dignity, fundamental rights, and human security, with women and children among the groups particularly exposed to exploitation. Trafficking may occur through various forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude, and other practices that deprive individuals of their freedom and autonomy. The development of digital communication, international migration, informal employment, and increasingly sophisticated recruitment networks has created additional opportunities for traffickers to identify and manipulate vulnerable individuals. Consequently, preventing and combating human trafficking requires legal and institutional responses that are capable of addressing both traditional and emerging forms of exploitation. (Angkasa, Rani Hendriana, Filep Wamafma, Ogiandhafiz Juanda, and Bhanu Prakash Nunna; 2023).

The legal response to trafficking has traditionally emphasized criminalization, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of perpetrators. While these mechanisms remain essential, a predominantly perpetrator-oriented approach may fail to address the complex needs of victims. Women and children who experience trafficking may suffer physical violence, psychological trauma, economic loss, social stigma, and disruption of family and educational relationships. Children face additional risks because trafficking can interfere with their development, education, and long-term well-being. Therefore, anti-trafficking policies must move beyond the prosecution of offenders toward comprehensive systems that prevent trafficking and protect victims throughout the legal and recovery process. (Ardin, Andi Jefri, and Beniharmoni Harefa; 2021).

Strengthening legal and institutional responses requires effective coordination among law enforcement agencies, government institutions, social services, healthcare providers, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners. Prevention should address structural factors that increase vulnerability, including poverty, gender inequality, limited educational opportunities, unsafe migration, unemployment, and economic dependency. Law enforcement must also be strengthened through effective investigation, victim identification, cross-border cooperation, and accountability for individuals and entities involved in trafficking. Such measures are particularly important because trafficking networks can operate across multiple jurisdictions and exploit gaps in institutional coordination. (Djohan, Naufal Hasanuddin; 2023).

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Within this framework, a victim-centred approach provides an important foundation for strengthening protection. Victims should be recognized as rights-holders rather than merely witnesses or sources of evidence. Protection mechanisms should guarantee access to safe accommodation, healthcare, psychological assistance, legal aid, identity protection, and accessible complaint procedures. Women and children should be protected from intimidation, retaliation, discrimination, and secondary victimization during investigation and judicial proceedings. For child victims, the best interests of the child should guide every decision concerning protection, recovery, and reintegration. (Indrawati; 2015).

Protection must also extend beyond rescue and criminal prosecution. Comprehensive recovery requires access to restitution, compensation, education, vocational training, economic empowerment, family support, and sustainable social reintegration. Effective remedies are particularly important because trafficking may produce long-term economic and psychological consequences. Restitution should therefore be understood not merely as financial compensation but as part of a broader process of restoring dignity, rights, security, and opportunities. Accordingly, this article examines how legal and institutional reform, victim-centred protection, and comprehensive recovery mechanisms can be integrated to create a stronger and more sustainable system for preventing and combating human trafficking against women and children. (Syaufi, Ahmad; 2011).

2. Research Methods

The research employs a normative juridical method using a statutory and conceptual approach. Legal materials are analyzed qualitatively through literature study to examine the relationship between legal protection, institutional responses, and victim recovery mechanisms.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Preventing and Combating Human Trafficking against Women and Children: Strengthening Legal and Institutional Responses

Preventing and combating human trafficking against women and children requires a comprehensive legal and institutional framework capable of addressing both the perpetrators and the structural conditions that facilitate exploitation. Although criminalization remains essential for ensuring accountability, legal protection must extend beyond prosecution and punishment. Women and children may become vulnerable to trafficking because of poverty, gender inequality, limited

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educational opportunities, unsafe migration, economic dependency, and inadequate access to information and legal protection. Therefore, prevention should address these underlying vulnerabilities while strengthening mechanisms for early identification and intervention.

Effective legal responses require clear regulations that define trafficking-related conduct, establish appropriate sanctions, and guarantee the rights of victims throughout criminal proceedings. Law enforcement agencies should be equipped to investigate trafficking networks, including recruitment through digital platforms and informal intermediaries. Institutional cooperation is equally important because trafficking frequently involves multiple jurisdictions and sectors. Police, prosecutors, courts, immigration authorities, labour institutions, social services, and child protection agencies should establish coordinated mechanisms for victim identification, referral, protection, and recovery.

Institutional responses should also prioritize victim-centred protection. Women and children who report trafficking must be protected from intimidation, retaliation, discrimination, and secondary victimization. Access to legal assistance, healthcare, psychological support, safe accommodation, and social services should be available throughout the recovery process. For children, the best interests of the child must guide every intervention. Ultimately, effective anti-trafficking policies require an integrated approach combining prevention, strong law enforcement, institutional coordination, victim protection, and long-term recovery. Such an approach can strengthen accountability while ensuring that women and children are protected as rights-holders rather than treated merely as evidence within criminal proceedings.

3.2. Victim-Centred Protection and Rights-Based Mechanisms for Women and Children Trafficking Victims

A victim-centred approach to human trafficking requires a fundamental shift in the way women and children who experience trafficking are understood and protected within legal and institutional systems. Victims should not be treated merely as sources of evidence for prosecuting traffickers, but as rights-holders whose dignity, safety, autonomy, and recovery must remain central throughout the entire response process. This approach is particularly important because trafficking can produce complex and long-lasting consequences, including physical injuries, psychological trauma, economic deprivation, social stigma, family disruption, and loss of personal autonomy. Women and children may also experience intimidation, coercion, threats, and manipulation that discourage them from reporting exploitation or cooperating with authorities. Consequently,

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protection mechanisms must be designed to respond to victims' individual circumstances rather than applying a uniform approach to every case.

Rights-based protection requires legal systems to guarantee victims' access to information, legal assistance, healthcare, psychological services, safe accommodation, and effective complaint mechanisms. Women and children should be informed about their rights in language and forms that they can understand. Access to assistance should not depend exclusively on a victim's willingness to participate in criminal proceedings. Linking protection services too closely to prosecution may discourage victims from seeking assistance, particularly when they fear retaliation or further exploitation. Protection should therefore be recognized as an independent right and provided according to the victim's needs and vulnerability.

For child victims, the protection framework must incorporate the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. Children require special procedures that take into account their age, maturity, psychological development, educational needs, and family circumstances. Interviews and investigations should be conducted in ways that minimize trauma and prevent repeated questioning. Children should also be protected from direct or indirect contact with alleged traffickers when such contact may create fear or intimidation. Where appropriate, child-friendly justice procedures can allow children to participate in legal processes without exposing them to unnecessary psychological harm. Their education and developmental needs should continue to receive attention throughout the protection and recovery process.

A victim-centred framework must also address the risk of secondary victimization. Victims may experience additional harm when they are questioned repeatedly, blamed for their circumstances, treated with suspicion, or exposed publicly during legal proceedings. Law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, healthcare professionals, and social workers therefore require specialized training on trafficking, trauma, gender sensitivity, and child protection. Institutional procedures should prioritize confidentiality, privacy, informed consent, and respectful communication. Such safeguards can increase victims' confidence in legal institutions and encourage them to seek protection without fear of further harm.

Effective protection should additionally provide access to remedies and long-term recovery. Victims may require restitution, compensation, recovery of unpaid wages, medical treatment, psychological assistance, education, vocational training, and economic empowerment. These measures should not be regarded

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as optional services but as components of meaningful victim recovery. Restitution is particularly significant because trafficking frequently produces material losses alongside physical and psychological harm. Ensuring access to effective remedies can help restore victims' dignity and reduce the economic vulnerability that may contribute to re trafficking.

Ultimately, victim-centred and rights-based mechanisms require cooperation among law enforcement agencies, courts, government institutions, healthcare providers, social workers, civil society organizations, and victim-support services. No single institution can adequately address the complex consequences of trafficking. A coordinated system can ensure that victims receive continuous protection from identification through recovery and reintegration. By placing the rights, safety, dignity, and individual needs of women and children at the centre of anti-trafficking policies, legal institutions can move beyond a perpetrator-focused model toward a comprehensive framework that promotes protection, accountability, recovery, and sustainable reintegration.

3.3. Beyond Criminal Justice: Comprehensive Recovery, Restitution, and Reintegration of Trafficking Victims

Beyond criminal justice, the protection of human trafficking victims must extend toward comprehensive recovery, restitution, and sustainable reintegration. The conviction of traffickers is important for accountability, but it does not automatically restore the physical, psychological, social, and economic conditions of victims. Women and children who experience trafficking may suffer prolonged trauma, loss of income, disrupted education, damaged family relationships, and social stigma. Therefore, the effectiveness of an anti-trafficking framework should also be measured by its ability to restore victims' rights, dignity, security, and opportunities for an independent future.

Restitution constitutes an important component of this recovery process because trafficking frequently causes substantial material and economic losses. Victims should have accessible mechanisms to obtain compensation for unpaid wages, financial losses, medical expenses, and other harm resulting from exploitation. However, recovery should not be reduced to monetary compensation. Victims may also require healthcare, psychological counseling, legal assistance, safe accommodation, education, vocational training, and economic empowerment. For children, recovery must additionally prioritize continued education, developmental needs, family support, and protection from re trafficking.

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Reintegration should be understood as a long-term process rather than a single event following the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Effective reintegration requires cooperation between government agencies, families, communities, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and civil society organizations. Victims should be supported in rebuilding social relationships and developing sustainable livelihoods while being protected from discrimination and retaliation. Particular attention should be given to preventing re-trafficking by addressing the vulnerabilities that contributed to the original exploitation.

Ultimately, a victim-centred anti-trafficking system must move beyond rescue and prosecution toward meaningful recovery and empowerment. Integrating restitution, comprehensive support, and sustainable reintegration can transform legal protection from a purely punitive mechanism into a framework that restores victims' rights, dignity, independence, and long-term security.

4. Conclusion

Human trafficking against women and children requires a comprehensive legal and institutional response that goes beyond the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators. Although criminal enforcement remains essential, an effective anti-trafficking framework must prioritize prevention, victim protection, recovery, and sustainable reintegration. Strengthening institutional coordination among law enforcement agencies, government authorities, social services, healthcare providers, and civil society organizations is necessary to identify trafficking risks, protect vulnerable groups, and ensure effective intervention. A victim-centred approach requires women and children to be recognized as rights-holders whose dignity, safety, and individual needs must remain central throughout the legal process. Protection mechanisms should provide safe accommodation, healthcare, psychological assistance, legal aid, identity protection, and safeguards against intimidation and secondary victimization. For children, the best interests of the child must constitute a fundamental consideration in every decision concerning investigation, protection, recovery, and reintegration. Furthermore, protection cannot end when victims are rescued or when criminal proceedings conclude. Comprehensive recovery requires effective restitution and compensation, together with access to education, vocational training, economic empowerment, family support, and social reintegration. Restitution should therefore be understood as part of a broader mechanism for restoring victims' dignity, rights, security, and future opportunities. Ultimately, integrating prevention, victim-centred protection, accountability, restitution, and sustainable reintegration can strengthen the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies and ensure that women



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and children receive meaningful and long-term protection from exploitation and re-trafficking.

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