The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology
ISSN 2693-0803 Volume 08 - 2026

The Criminal-Law Nature of Human Trafficking, Its Concept, Theoretical Approaches, And the Evolution of Criminal-Law Regulation

Khurramov Ravshan Khushvaktovich

Independent Researcher, Tashkent State University of Law, Uzbekistan

Received: 05 March 2026 | Received Revised Version: 22 March 2026 | Accepted: 04 April 2026 | Published: 30 April 2026

Volume 08 Issue 04 2026 | Crossref DOI: 10.37547/tajpslc/Volume08Issue04-26

Abstract

The article examines the criminal-law nature of human trafficking in the context of the transformation of contemporary forms of exploitation and changes in the methods used to recruit victims and establish control over them. It argues that human trafficking cannot be regarded solely as the sale or purchase of a person, their movement, or the restriction of their liberty, since its essence is revealed through the functional interrelationship between the offender's conduct, the means employed to exert influence and control over the victim, and the criminal purpose of exploitation. The article considers the principal theoretical approaches to defining the concept and substance of human trafficking and analyses the evolution of scholarly perceptions of this offence and its place within the system of offences against the person. Particular attention is paid to the challenges of establishing the victim's vulnerability, material and other forms of dependency, de facto control, and the legal significance of the victim's consent. The article also addresses the delimitation of human trafficking from related offences, taking into account the specific objective and subjective elements of the offence. Particular consideration is given to the impact of digitalisation on methods of recruitment and the establishment of dependency, as well as on the emergence of latent forms of labour and other types of exploitation. On the basis of the analysis, the article substantiates the need for further improvement of criminal-law and law-enforcement mechanisms aimed at enhancing legal certainty, ensuring consistency in the classification of trafficking-related offences, and increasing the effectiveness of their detection.

Keywords: Human trafficking, criminal liability, exploitation, recruitment, vulnerability, dependency, de facto control, victim's consent, digital recruitment, labour exploitation, international standards, criminal legislation, Republic of Uzbekistan.

© **2026** Khurramov Ravshan Khushvaktovich. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The authors retain copyright and allow others to share, adapt, or redistribute the work with proper attribution.

Cite This Article: Khurramov Ravshan Khushvaktovich. (2026). The Criminal-Law Nature of Human Trafficking, Its Concept, Theoretical Approaches, And the Evolution of Criminal-Law Regulation. The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology, 8(04), 160–167. https://doi.org/10.37547/tajpslc/Volume08Issue04-26

1. Introduction

Global labour migration, the expansion of digital communication technologies, and the transformation of the labour market have a direct impact on contemporary forms of human trafficking. Whereas human trafficking was traditionally understood primarily in terms of the sale or purchase of a person or their forced movement from one territory to another, contemporary practices of exploitation may involve recruitment through deception, the use of digital platforms, economic dependency, and the exploitation of the victim's vulnerable position. Accordingly, characterizing this offence exclusively through its external manifestations narrows the understanding of its criminal-law content.

The problem is further aggravated by the fact that the very expression «human trafficking» is historically associated with the perception of a person as an object of purchase and sale. In its literal sense, the term «trafficking» implies a transaction involving the acquisition, sale, or exchange of a particular value. Consequently, the initial understanding of this offence was directly associated with the unlawful transfer of a person from one individual to another. However, the development of international law and national criminal-law systems has demonstrated that such an understanding is excessively narrow. Contemporary human trafficking may occur without a traditional transaction of purchase and sale and even without the cross-border movement of the victim. A person may be recruited under the guise of lawful employment, transported within a single State, transferred to another person, placed in a position of dependency, and subsequently subjected to forced labour, sexual exploitation, slavery, or another form of exploitation provided for by law.

The methodological framework of the study comprises formal-legal, systemic, comparative-legal, and historical-legal methods. The formal-legal method was employed to analyse the provisions of the criminal and criminal procedural legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as legislation on combating human trafficking. The comparative-legal method made it possible to compare the national approach with international standards and legislative approaches adopted by individual States.

The scholarly literature views this process as the result of a prolonged transformation in the legal understanding of human exploitation. In particular, A. T. Gallagher conceptualizes human trafficking not as a narrow form of an unlawful transaction involving a person, but as a complex phenomenon of international law associated with subjecting individuals to exploitative relationships and establishing control over them [1]. This approach is particularly significant because it makes it possible to distinguish the contemporary concept of human trafficking from its historical meaning. In turn, J. Allain examines the relationship between human trafficking and the contemporary understanding of slavery, emphasizing the need to distinguish these as separate legal categories despite their close interrelationship [2]. For a national criminal-law system, it is of fundamental importance how the relevant international provisions are translated into the specific elements of an offence. In this regard, the development of the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan demonstrates a gradual shift from a narrower understanding of human trafficking towards a comprehensive legal model.

Of particular importance in this process was the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 17 April 2008 «On Combating Trafficking in Persons», which established an independent set of legal mechanisms for combating this phenomenon, as well as the amendment of Article 135 of the Criminal Code. Subsequently, the legislation was further developed through the adoption of the new version of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan «On Combating Trafficking in Persons» №633 of 17 August 2020 [3]. This Law substantially broadened the legal framework for combating human trafficking by addressing not only criminal liability, but also prevention, the detection and identification of victims, their protection, the provision of social and legal assistance, rehabilitation, and international cooperation.

Of particular importance is the fact that the legislator has established procedures for the preliminary and final identification of victims of human trafficking. This means that State protection should not commence only after all the circumstances of the offence have been conclusively established. On the contrary, where there are sufficient indications of possible human trafficking, a person should be provided with certain safeguards and assistance already at the stage at which they are presumed to be a victim. Moreover, this approach is consistent with the contemporary human rights-based understanding of human trafficking, under which a victim is regarded not merely as a source of evidence, but, above all, as a person in need of protection.

This is of particular importance in cases involving minors. In relation to a child, the principle of the best interests of the child should take precedence, while the identification process should take into account the child's age, psychological condition, dependence on adults, and inability to independently assess the nature and implications of the acts committed against them.

Article 135 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan provides for liability for the sale and purchase of a person, as well as for the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a person for the purpose of exploitation [4]. A single criminal-law provision thus encompasses various forms of conduct that may differ substantially in their outward manifestations but are united by a common purpose and an elevated degree of social danger.

Legal scholarship contains an approach according to which the immediate legal interest protected by the offence of human trafficking is, first and foremost, a person's individual liberty. This understanding has a certain normative basis, since Article 135 of the Criminal Code is placed in Chapter VI of the Code, which is devoted to offences against liberty, honour, and dignity. Moreover, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan directly links the establishment of criminal liability for human trafficking with the constitutional guarantees of individual liberty. In this respect, this approach is well-founded, since many forms of human trafficking cannot be conceived without unlawful interference with a person's ability to determine their own conduct freely and independently.

In this regard, the position advanced by M. A. Rajabova is particularly noteworthy [5]. She regards human trafficking as a criminal infringement upon a person's honour, dignity, and liberty and links the development of the criminal-law framework for combating human trafficking to the evolution of international human rights standards. This position appears to be more comprehensive, as it makes it possible to take into account not only the physical dimension of liberty but also the individual's personal autonomy.

M. H. Rustamboyev conceptualizes the substance of human trafficking in terms of a set of acts committed against a person for the purpose of exploitation, drawing attention not only to the sale and purchase of a person but also to their recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and receipt [6]. This approach is of fundamental importance because it shifts the focus of analysis from the transaction itself to the exploitative purpose underlying the offender's conduct.

In our view, this is precisely the key to understanding the criminal-law nature of the offence under consideration. Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt, taken in isolation, are not in themselves sufficient to characterize conduct as human trafficking in every case. For example, the ordinary transportation of a person cannot be regarded as human trafficking merely because it involves the movement of one person by another. Similarly, the lawful recruitment of a worker does not become a criminal offence solely by virtue of the fact that a person has been sought and engaged in employment. The legal significance of the relevant act depends on its purpose, the manner in which it is committed, and its role within the overall mechanism of the offence.

Therefore, an approach whereby the elements of human trafficking are treated as a mechanical combination of independent acts appears insufficiently accurate. In reality, these acts are functionally interconnected. Recruitment may constitute the initial stage of the offence; transportation may serve as a means of moving the victim to a place of exploitation; transfer may constitute a means of placing the victim under the control of another person; harbouring may serve to maintain such control; and receipt may constitute the acceptance of a person for subsequent exploitation. Although individual acts may be committed by different persons, their criminal-law significance is determined by the common direction and purpose of the criminal activity.

Particular attention should also be paid to the concept of the victim's consent. In cases of human trafficking, a person's initial consent to travel, employment, the provision of services, or other forms of movement does not necessarily constitute free and informed consent to subsequent exploitation. This is particularly evident in situations where a person agrees to employment or to travel abroad on the basis of false information concerning working conditions, the amount of remuneration, accommodation, or the actual nature of the intended activity.

Accordingly, the legal assessment of consent should take into account what exactly the person consented to, how that consent was obtained, and whether the person had a genuine opportunity to refuse further participation in the exploitative situation. Otherwise, the mere existence of initial consent may be unjustifiably invoked to exclude criminal liability, even where the factual circumstances demonstrate that the person was deceived or placed in a position of dependency.

In this regard, the approach adopted by UK legislation is particularly illustrative. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 expressly provides that the consent of an adult or child to their movement is not determinative of whether trafficking has occurred where that movement is arranged or facilitated for the purpose of subsequent exploitation [7]. The legislation also covers not only international movement but movement within the United Kingdom.

Thus, control, vulnerability, and consent should not be considered in isolation, but rather in their interrelationship. It is their combination that makes it possible to determine whether a person genuinely entered into a particular relationship voluntarily or whether their

will was effectively subordinated to a mechanism of exploitation.

This understanding is consistent with the international model established by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 2000 [8]. Under international law, human trafficking is structured around the interrelationship of three elements: the act, the means, and the purpose of exploitation.

Moreover, the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings does not confine human trafficking exclusively to the context of transnational organized crime and also covers cases of trafficking committed at the national level [9]. Of particular significance is the fact that the Convention places the protection of victims' rights at the centre of its legal framework, including their identification, assistance, rehabilitation, and compensation.

The development of these international standards has also influenced the formation and subsequent improvement of the national legal framework of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Despite the substantial development of national legislation and the establishment of a specialized legal framework for combating human trafficking, however, certain issues remain relevant to the criminal-law qualification of the offence and the uniform application of the corresponding provisions.

In this regard, the explanations provided in Resolution No.12 of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan are of particular importance for clarifying the substance of the offence under consideration [10]. According to the Resolution, the sale and purchase of a person may take the form of a written or oral transaction involving the transfer of a person in exchange for money, property, property rights, or other benefits. Such clarification is significant because it demonstrates that the traditional transactional element of human trafficking may manifest itself in different legal and factual forms and cannot be reduced solely to the existence of a formally documented sale-and-purchase agreement.

At the same time, the development of the legal framework itself does not eliminate the need for a more precise delineation of the constituent elements of human trafficking. In particular, difficulties may arise in determining the relationship between the specific act committed against the victim, the means used to influence or control the victim, and the purpose of subsequent exploitation. This issue becomes especially significant in cases where there is no conventional sale-and-purchase transaction and where the victim is recruited through deception, placed in a position of vulnerability or dependency, or subjected to exploitation without being physically transported across a State border. It is precisely in this context that the distinction between human trafficking and kidnapping becomes apparent. Kidnapping involves the unlawful taking of a person and their movement or detention against the victim's will. However, kidnapping may constitute a means of committing human trafficking where it forms part of the mechanism through which a person is subjected to exploitation. In such circumstances, the external similarity between the acts does not mean that the constituent elements of the offences are identical. It is necessary to establish the purpose of the conduct, the role of the relevant act within the overall mechanism, and the offender's attitude towards the subsequent exploitation.

A similar issue arises when distinguishing human trafficking from unlawful deprivation of liberty. The mere fact that a person is detained does not in itself indicate human trafficking. Where the sole purpose is the unlawful restriction of liberty, the specific exploitative mechanism characteristic of human trafficking is absent. Conversely, where detention serves as a means of maintaining control over a person for the purpose of their subsequent exploitation, the legal assessment should take this interrelationship into account.

Human trafficking likewise cannot be equated entirely with forced labour. Forced labour may constitute a form of exploitation that serves as the purpose of human trafficking; however, the existence of forced labour does not, in itself, mean that a person has necessarily been subjected to human trafficking. For conduct to be qualified under Article 135, it is necessary to establish the relevant act-recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt, or another form of conduct provided for by law-and its connection with the purpose of exploitation.

Therefore, it appears justified to regard human trafficking as a more complex criminal-law construct than an individual act of exploitation. It encompasses specifically the mechanism through which a person is subjected to exploitative relations or placed under

corresponding control.

This approach is also directly relevant to the subjective element of the offence in question. The offender must be aware of the nature of the acts being committed, understand the circumstances in which control over the victim is established, maintained, or transferred, and, where required by the applicable form of human trafficking, act with the purpose of subsequently exploiting the victim. It is precisely this purposive element that makes it possible to distinguish human trafficking from otherwise similar lawful or unlawful conduct.

In this regard, it appears insufficient to regard human trafficking exclusively as a «crime against personal liberty» or, conversely, to classify it solely as an «exploitation-based offence». Each of these approaches reflects a particular aspect of the phenomenon but does not fully capture its criminal-law nature. Human trafficking entails an unlawful interference with a person's liberty and autonomy through the establishment, maintenance, or transfer of control over the victim, while the purpose of exploitation determines the content and direction of such control.

Accordingly, the essence of the offence should not be defined by reference to any single element, but rather through their functional interrelationship. It is precisely the relationship between the act, the means employed, and the purpose that makes it possible to establish that a particular case involves not merely an isolated violation of personal liberty, ordinary movement of a person, independent coercion, or exploitation as such, but a unified mechanism of criminal exploitation of a person for the purposes of human trafficking.

For the purpose of identifying possible avenues for further improvement of national legislation, the experience of States in which the criminal-law and institutional mechanisms for combating human trafficking have received more detailed legislative elaboration is of particular interest.

In the United Kingdom, the initial identification of a potential victim and the criminal investigation are organizationally separated. Under Section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, where a public authority has reasonable grounds to believe that a person may be a victim of slavery or human trafficking, it is required to notify the competent authority [11]. Thus, information concerning a potential victim should not remain solely within the remit of the authority that first encountered the person. For children, an additional mechanism of independent representation and support is provided: Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides for the appointment of an independent child trafficking advocate who is required to act in the best interests of the child and ensure that the child receives appropriate support. Where a person's age has not been established, but there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person is a child, the person is presumed to be a child until their age is determined, pursuant to Section 51.

For the criminal-law assessment of subsequent conduct, Section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 is of particular importance. It establishes criminal liability for arranging or facilitating the travel of a person with a view to that person being exploited. The legislation does not, however, restrict the investigation to cross-border movement: movement within the United Kingdom may also be legally relevant, and a person's consent to their movement does not, in itself, preclude the existence of the offence. Accordingly, an investigation must establish not only the fact of movement but, above all, its connection with subsequent exploitation and the transfer or maintenance of control over the victim.

The British model therefore effectively follows the sequence of "identification of a potential victim – referral to a protection mechanism – collection of information concerning the offence – criminal investigation." This is of fundamental importance for the investigation, since the victim is not treated as the sole source of evidence. Information obtained from or concerning the victim serves as a starting point for identifying organizers, intermediaries, methods of recruitment, routes of movement, means of communication, and other elements of the criminal activity.

In Germany, greater emphasis is placed on identifying different forms of exploitation directly within the sectors in which they occur. Under Section 232 of the German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB), human trafficking encompasses recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving a person by exploiting that person's personal or economic predicament or helplessness associated with their stay in a foreign country, where the person is intended for exploitation, including exploitation in employment, begging, the commission of criminal offences, slavery, or conditions resembling slavery. Section 232(2) StGB also covers cases involving the use of force, threats of serious harm, or deception [12].

The practical significance of the German approach lies in the fact that labour exploitation may be detected outside the framework of a conventional police investigation. In Germany, a significant role is played by authorities responsible for combating illegal employment and monitoring labour relations. The Federal Criminal Police Office performs a coordinating function, while investigations into human trafficking are primarily conducted by the police authorities of the Länder. Where trafficking has a transregional or international dimension, the BKA may participate directly in the investigation.

Consequently, the German model makes it possible to detect trafficking before the victim directly approaches the police, for example, through inspections of working conditions, employment documentation, remuneration, and the actual circumstances in which workers are employed. Once indications of exploitation have been identified, such circumstances may constitute the basis for a criminal investigation aimed at establishing the employer, intermediaries, recruitment mechanisms, the victim's economic dependence, and the financial benefit obtained by the offenders. As a result, the evidentiary basis is formed not only through the victim's testimony but also through objective evidence concerning employment relationships and financial transactions.

In France, the investigation of human trafficking is characterized by a more pronounced specialization of criminal law enforcement. Human trafficking is defined in Article 225-4-1 of the French Criminal Code (Code pénal) and includes the recruitment, transportation, transfer, accommodation, or reception of a person for the purpose of exploitation where the circumstances specified by law are present, including threats, coercion, violence, deception, abuse of authority, or abuse of a position of vulnerability [13]. The legislation further identifies specific forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, slavery, forced labour, servitude, exploitation for begging, violations involving undignified working or living conditions, and coercion to commit criminal offences.

The procedural specificity of the French model lies in the fact that complex human trafficking cases may be investigated within the specialized system for combating organized crime. The French Ministry of Justice indicates that the Juridictions interrégionales spécialisées (JIRS) have jurisdiction over complex cases of organized crime, including human trafficking. Their competence encompasses investigation, instruction judiciaire, prosecution, and adjudication of such cases. Where the statutory requirements are met, special investigative techniques may be used, including interception of communications, undercover operations, and the acquisition of computer data.

French law-enforcement practice also demonstrates that investigations combine traditional investigative measures with digital investigative methods. Specialized units conduct surveillance and physical observation, interview victims and witnesses, arrest suspects, carry out searches, consult law-enforcement information systems, use open-source intelligence (OSINT), work with informants, and analyse data obtained from digital devices. In cases involving organized criminal networks, special investigative techniques may be employed, including interception of communications, undercover operations, and the covert collection and recording of computer data.

This aspect has become particularly significant in the context of the digitalization of human trafficking. The French Ministry of the Interior notes that recruitment and the organization of exploitation increasingly take place through social networks and digital platforms, requiring law-enforcement authorities to analyse online advertisements, telephone communications, digital communications, and the movements of victims.

The analysis of the historical development, international legal evolution, and contemporary state of the framework governing criminal liability for human trafficking leads to the conclusion that further improvement of the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan should focus not so much on expanding the range of already criminalised conduct as on enhancing the legal certainty, systemic coherence, and internal consistency of the existing criminal-law framework.

First, it appears necessary to establish more clearly in criminal legislation the functional relationship between the conduct, the means employed to exert control over the victim, and the purpose of exploitation. The existing criminal-law framework identifies recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and receipt of a person as distinct forms of the objective elements of the offence. At the same time, contemporary human trafficking frequently involves not an isolated act, but the successive development of a single criminal process in which the initial recruitment of a person through deception, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability is directly connected with the subsequent establishment and

maintenance of control over the victim for the purpose of exploitation. Accordingly, for the purposes of criminal-law classification, it is of fundamental importance not only to establish that one of the acts specified in Article 135 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan has been committed, but also to identify its functional relationship with the means employed and the ultimate purpose of exploitation. Such an approach would make it possible to assess individual acts not in isolation, but within the framework of the broader mechanism of human trafficking, thereby contributing to a more precise distinction between human trafficking and related offences and promoting greater consistency in law enforcement practice.

In this regard, it appears appropriate to supplement the legislative framework with a provision directing law-enforcement authorities to establish the existence of a single criminal intent aimed at placing a person in a situation of exploitation, where recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt constitute successive or functionally interconnected elements of a unified mechanism for carrying out the criminal intent.

Second, there is a need for further substantive clarification of such concepts as vulnerability, dependency, and other means of establishing de facto control over the victim. Existing legislation and judicial interpretation already recognise material and other forms of dependency as legally relevant circumstances. In particular, the Plenum of the Supreme Court regards as material dependency situations in which the victim is financially supported by the offender, a debtor is dependent on a creditor, and other analogous circumstances, whereas other forms of dependency may arise from family, employment-related, or other relationships of subordination. At the same time, contemporary forms of human trafficking demonstrate that de facto control over a victim may arise even in the absence of traditional financial dependency or a formally established relationship of subordination.

Such control may be exercised through the confiscation or retention of identity documents, the creation of debt bondage, threats to disclose compromising or otherwise sensitive information, restriction of access to financial resources, the creation of artificial dependency on an employer or intermediary, exploitation of a person's immigration status, psychological pressure, digital surveillance or control, and other interconnected circumstances. In this regard, it appears appropriate for criminal legislation and judicial interpretation to adopt a more substantive and contextual approach to assessing the victim's vulnerability and the existence of de facto control, whereby law-enforcement authorities would consider not merely an individual formal characteristic of the person's situation, but the totality of specific economic, social, migration-related, family, psychological, and other circumstances that objectively restrict the victim's ability to resist the influence exerted by the offender. Such an approach would enable the law to better reflect contemporary mechanisms of control and would facilitate a more effective distinction between genuinely voluntary conduct and situations in which the victim's apparent consent does not in fact reflect genuine freedom of choice.

Third, it is necessary to adapt the criminal-law and law-enforcement framework to contemporary forms of exploitation, including digital recruitment and latent forms of labour exploitation. The analysis demonstrates that contemporary human trafficking increasingly begins not with the physical movement of a person, but with the identification, initial contact, and subsequent recruitment of an individual into exploitative arrangements through social networks, messaging applications, employment websites, and other digital platforms. At the same time, subsequent exploitation may occur without the crossing of an international border and even without the initial use of physical violence, which considerably complicates the timely detection of the offence and its proper criminal-law classification.

In this regard, it appears necessary to further develop legal and methodological mechanisms capable of recognising digital recruitment methods not merely as means of committing the offence, but also as an independent source of evidentiary information. During an investigation, electronic correspondence, employment advertisements, user accounts and profiles, records of electronic payments, call histories, geolocation data where permitted by law, digital devices, and other electronic traces should be systematically examined in order to establish the recruitment mechanism, the nature of the relationships between the parties, and the subsequent establishment of control over the victim. At the same time, digital evidence should be assessed in conjunction with other evidence, since its probative value derives not from the mere existence of digital communication, but from its capacity to substantiate the circumstances of the offence.

At the same time, the legal assessment of latent forms of labour exploitation should be further developed. In such

cases, the outward appearance of voluntary employment may be preserved, while the victim's actual freedom is substantially restricted through debt dependency, the withholding of identity documents, systematic non-payment or unjustified withholding of wages, threats, restrictions on freedom of movement, abuse of immigration status, or other forms of control. In such circumstances, a person's formal consent to employment should not be regarded as conclusive evidence of the voluntary nature of their participation in the employment relationship. Rather, the legal assessment should be based on the actual conditions in which the person was placed, the nature of the influence exerted upon them, and their genuine ability to terminate the relationship without facing a threat to their safety, liberty, or other legally protected interests.

Thus, human trafficking constitutes a complex criminal phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to the sale or purchase of a person, the movement of a person, or the restriction of their liberty. Its essential characteristic lies in the interrelationship between the acts committed by the offender, the means used to establish control over the victim, and the purpose of exploitation.

The analysis demonstrates that the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan has, in general, established the necessary legal framework for combating human trafficking. At the same time, further improvements in law enforcement require a more precise definition of the indicators of a victim's vulnerability, the circumstances constituting de facto control over the victim, and the specific features of recruitment carried out through digital technologies.

Accordingly, an effective response to human trafficking should be based not only on improving criminal-law provisions, but also on ensuring their consistent interpretation and adapting their application to contemporary forms of exploitation. Such an approach would contribute to more effective detection, investigation, and prevention of human trafficking offences.

References

1. Gallagher A.T. The International Law of Human Trafficking. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. – P. 25–29, 34–38.
2. Allain J. Genealogies of Human Trafficking and Slavery // Routledge Handbook of Human Trafficking / ed. by R. Piotrowicz, C. Rijken, B. H. Uhl. London: Routledge, 2018. P. 3–12.
3. Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan «On Combating Trafficking in Persons» https://lex.uz/docs/4953319
4. Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan https://lex.uz/docs/111457#1393836
5. Hamidov, N. O. «Trafficking in Persons as a Form of Transnational Organized Crime: Concept, Social Danger and Criminal-Law Aspects of Counteraction». Journal of Legal Studies, 2026,
6. Rustamboyev, M. H. «Foreign Experience in Combating Human Trafficking». Criminology and Criminal Justice, 2021, No. 1–2, pp. 13–23.
7. United Kingdom. Modern Slavery Act 2015, c. 30 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/2
8. United Nations. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. New York, 15 November 2000.
9. https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/Convention/English/ENG_Protocol_to_Prevent_Suppress_and_Punish_Trafficking_in_Persons_Especially_Women_and_Children_UNTOC.pdf
10. Council of Europe. Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Warsaw, 16 May 2005. https://book.coe.int/en/council-of-europe-treaties-and-explanatory-reports/9899-pdf-council-of-europe-convention-on-action-against-trafficking-in-human-beings-and-explanatory-report-warsaw-poland-16v2005-cets-no-197.html
11. Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Resolution «On Judicial Practice in Cases of Human Trafficking»
12. Home Office. Modern Slavery: Statutory Guidance for England and Wales and Non-Statutory Guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland. February 2026.
13. Federal Ministry of Justice and Federal Office of Justice. German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch — StGB) https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/__232.html
14. French Criminal Code (Code pénal) https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000027811040/2026-03-04