

adequate funding for law enforcement agencies and their technical re-equipment.

The digitalization of the criminal process plays a special role. The use of electronic registers, video recording systems and remote procedural actions will significantly increase the efficiency of the investigation even in conditions of limited access to territories. In addition, it is necessary to develop international cooperation, in particular in the field of documenting war crimes. An important direction is the improvement of the skills of investigators and prosecutors. Conducting specialized training on the investigation of war crimes, cybercrime and economic offenses will contribute to improving the quality of pre-trial investigation.

Therefore, ensuring the effectiveness of pre-trial investigation in martial law and the post-war period is a difficult but necessary task. Its solution requires a comprehensive approach, including improving legislation, technical support, developing human resources and international cooperation. Only if these measures are implemented can it ensure the proper level of justice and restore law and order in Ukraine.

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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking appears to be as one of the most severe violations of human rights in the modern world, often described as a form of contemporary slavery that thrives on globalization and inequality. It involves the exploitation of vulnerable people through force, fraud, or coercion for sexual, labor, or other purposes. Prominent scholar Louise Shelley, in her

comprehensive analysis, argues that economic disparities between rich and poor nations, combined with conflicts and easier cross-border movement, have accelerated this crime over the past decades. She emphasizes that trafficking is not just a criminal issue but a transnational business model fueled by demand in developed countries. This makes international collaboration not optional, but essential for any effective response. [1]

The legal foundation for global action came with the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, known as the Palermo Protocol. Signed in 2000 under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, it offers the first universally accepted definition of trafficking: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or abuse of vulnerability for exploitation. The countries that ratify it — now over 180 ones — must criminalize the offense, protect victims with respect for their rights, and foster cross-border cooperation. This framework shifted the focus from mere border control to a balanced approach of prevention, prosecution, and victim support. [2]

Monitoring the real-world impact of such agreements falls largely to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime through its periodic Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. The 2024 edition reveals 25 percent rise in detected victims globally in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019, with women and girls making up 61 percent of cases and child victims — especially girls — surging by over a third in many regions. While sexual exploitation remains dominant, forced labor detections are growing faster in areas like Europe and North America. The report highlights how organized networks now exploit more victims for longer periods, but it also notes progress in data sharing and regional strategies that have helped some countries improve convictions after the COVID-19 slowdown. [3]

A practical example of how countries apply these international standards comes from the annual Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the United States Department of State. The 2025 edition records the highest numbers ever for victim identifications worldwide and a peak in labor trafficking convictions. It ranks governments on their compliance with the Palermo Protocol and uses diplomacy plus funding to push for stronger laws and coordination. Through partnerships with UN agencies and regional bodies, the report shows how bilateral training and information exchange have boosted prosecutions in dozens of countries, though challenges like corruption and resource shortages persist in lower-tier nations. [4]

Yet even with these tools in place, experts warn that trafficking continues to evolve faster than responses. Shelley draws on the work of Kevin Bales to illustrate how small-scale entrepreneurs and corrupt officials in source countries enable the trade, treating it as ordinary business rather than

crime. Conflicts, climate change, and supply-chain vulnerabilities create new risks, while many victims still face re-trafficking because protection programs lack long-term support like job placement or compensation. International experience proves that laws alone are insufficient without tackling root causes such as poverty and inequality.

International experience accumulated over the past 25 years demonstrates several clear lessons:

- Legal harmonization and ratification alone are insufficient without robust national implementation, cross-border judicial and law-enforcement cooperation, and consistent victim identification and support.
- Prevention requires addressing root causes (poverty, gender inequality, lack of legal pathways) rather than focusing narrowly on border security.
- Demand reduction — targeting consumers of cheap labour and sexual services — remains the most underdeveloped pillar of the 3P paradigm.
- Emerging challenges (online recruitment, climate mobility, conflict zones, post-pandemic recovery) demand continuous adaptation, data-sharing, and survivor-informed policies.

Ultimately, combating human trafficking is not a task that any single country or organization can accomplish alone. It requires sustained political will, adequate resources, genuine international solidarity, and, crucially — the courage to confront uncomfortable realities about global inequalities and complicit demand in “destination” societies. Only through strengthened global partnerships, smarter use of technology for both prevention and detection, and a genuine shift toward protection-centred, rights-based approaches can the international community begin to shrink the space in which traffickers operate and restore dignity to those whose freedom has been stolen. The progress made since Palermo is real, but the widening gap between ambition and reality reminds us that ending this crime against humanity remains one of the defining moral and security challenges of our time.

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