**Brief 1: Transnational Organized Crime: Human Trafficking**

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*Abstract*

International organized crime continues to be a threat globally. International police efforts are examined in this article through the lens of cooperation and collaboration between different authorities. This brief examines policing efforts for preventing these groups from establishing secure bases of operations. The brief reviews the efforts via the lens of human trafficking and, to a lesser degree, financial crimes. Research revealed that a shift in attitudes towards victims by local authorities is necessary to suppress criminal efforts. The study also revealed that uniform laws, access to criminal databases, and technology are critical to fighting transnational organized crime. Wealthier nations need to increase funding to poorer nations to compete with criminal gangs effectively.

*Keywords* Human trafficking, transnational organized crime, prostitution, financial crimes, policing methodologies, joint investigation teams.

Over the last couple of decades, significant changes in international relationships have assisted in opportunities for criminal networks to establish secure bases of operations. The most significant development has been the increase in trade between nations. At the end of the Cold War during the early 1990s, trade increased significantly, opening borders. Criminal gangs have leveraged open borders to increase their networks. A consequence has been a substantial increase in crime, including the ability to conduct illicit financial dealings. The second factor that has enabled criminals to increase their international relationships and strengthen themselves has been economic interdependence between countries. These open economies have allowed criminal organizations to blur the lines between legitimate businesses and criminal enterprises. These criminal organizations can use legitimate businesses for disguising and hiding financial transactions, frauds, property piracy, and many other illicit activities. Criminal enterprises have taken advantage of the increase in international trade and have allowed them opportunities for smuggling across these international borders (*International crime threat assessment*, 2022).

In technological advances, criminal organizations have also taken advantage of the same state-of-the-art communications that legitimate businesses use to conduct their illicit activities—advancements in encrypted communications and cell phones have provided a way to hide their communications and expand their relationships. Organizations have created false streams that have misled law enforcement and circumvented banking security measures to counterintelligence. Modern banking systems have also supplied ways for criminal organizations to transfer large sums of money undetected. An additional factor that has assisted criminal organizations is legitimate businesses allowing access to seaports and airports for international trade. Furthermore, the ultrafast transit shipment of goods and advancements in international commercial and banking systems have also provided new means for criminal gangs to exploit. Additionally, there has been an increase in international travel, which allowed for easier immigration and relaxation of visa requirements between many countries, which opened up different opportunities for travel routes and business. All these opportunities were met to encourage international trade and ease of business; however, the same opportunities have provided access for transnational criminal organizations (*International crime threat assessment*, 2022).

A far more professional criminal organization has evolved. Criminal organizations can leverage the latest technological advancements to increase efficiency. Criminal gangs recruit and hire technologically savvy people to assist with the technical challenges. Adaptability has led to their ability to act quickly to changes in laws, police methodology, and financial opportunities. Technology is also allowed criminal gangs to network and cooperate more efficiently. More significant financial opportunities than they had experienced in the past have resulted (*International crime threat assessment*, 2022).

Many countries are not equipped to combat transnational organized crime. Laws have not been updated to handle the growth in high-tech crimes, corruption, or other high-level criminal activities. Many countries also limit extradition or are not aligned with US laws. These countries are havens for criminals wanted by the US judicial system. Additionally, many law enforcement agencies are not well-funded and therefore find themselves outmaneuvered by criminal organizations using state-of-the-art equipment. Another factor to an unlevel playing field is that law enforcement agencies must respect nations' sovereignty laws or international boundaries while criminals do not (*International crime threat assessment*, 2022).

According to the worldwide threat assessment of the US intelligence community, transnational criminal organizations will expand their power to continue profiting off human tracking disrupting economic activity, and threatening nations' critical infrastructure. Dangers are already evident by the approximately 70,000 American deaths recorded in 2017 due to drug overdose. The synthetic opiate fentanyl was responsible for most of these deaths. Deaths related to opiate abuse increased by 846% from 2010 to 2017. Criminal gangs will also continue to generate massive profits in the hundreds of billions of dollars generated from human trafficking (Coats, 2019).

Other areas of growth are the poaching and trafficking of wildlife. Moreover, illegal mining, drug cultivation, and lumber destruction damage the local ecology and food chain, impacting animal and human life. These changes may lead to food and security in these poverty-stricken countries (Coats, 2019).

These transnational organized criminals who commit high-tech crimes are deleveraging cryptocurrencies and property theft. Together these have contributed to more than $600 million in losses for 2017. These crimes impact the economy and drain intellectual capital (Coats, 2019).

Law enforcement has several tools and methodologies to disrupt transnational organized crime. Criminals in these organizations may range from drug and human traffickers to terrorists. Many different tools are used to leverage bilateral and international cooperation. The US government uses transparency and interagency collaboration within the President's Interagency Task Force. The primary mission of the Task Force is to fight human trafficking. Members of the Task Force are the State Department, the Treasury, Defense, Justice, the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, and Health and Human Services. It also includes the departments of Transportation, Education, and Homeland Security. The offices of Management and Budget, the Office of Trade Representative, and the Director of National Intelligence are also included. Furthermore, the FBI and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complete the task force members (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

In 2020 the Department of Justice, working with the department of homeland security and other federal agencies, created a phase 3 team. The primary purpose of this team was to dismantle transnational organized crime. Its specific focus was human trafficking rings. The United States worked with Mexico in a bilateral human trafficking enforcement initiative which assisted in investigations and prosecutions of criminal rings operating across the border. This allowed for the exchange of leads, evidence analytics, and other metrics (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

In the European Union, joint investigation teams are the primary method for collaboration by the police. These teams are a critical dimension of transnational policing regarding human trafficking. For teams to be successful, it is recommended that the police take risks for long-term investigative results to produce positive outcomes. It is also recognized that police officers in these teams sometimes experience frustrations as it is challenging to maneuver the politics of handling human trafficking cases. An example of this frustration is that the government did not take prostitution seriously in Norway until fears about migration and organized crime (Katona, 2020).

Furthermore, complicating the issues of human trafficking and prostitution in Europe is that there has been an increase in poverty and freedom of movement across borders in Europe with liberal prostitution policies that exist within these countries. Consequently, there has been an increase in prostitution and human trafficking by criminal organizations. For police to successfully combat human trafficking, police forces strive to have a more unified definition and understanding of human trafficking so that the laws and regulations are similar from country to country. This has been proven not easy to accomplish within the different political establishments. The human trafficking definition varies from one country to another, making prosecution difficult. Agencies that strive to facilitate communication and cooperation internationally amongst law enforcement are Europol and Eurojust. These agencies maintain criminal records and available data to all participating countries. These data are maintained and available in large databases and used for investigations on transnational crime. There have been some issues regarding national sovereignty. However, these two agencies have provided excellent data for transnational investigations and prosecutions (Katona, 2020).

Another roadblock for human trafficking is that the legal framework for prosecution varies between countries. Complaints by police are that the laws and attitudes towards the victims are not involved sufficiently in investigations and prosecutions. Prostitutes are still seen and handled as criminals in most procedures. Implementing all of these different measures causes an increase in the workload for the police and is therefore shunned. Currently, an effort focuses on eliminating the criminal groups behind human trafficking, with little attention paid to the victims (Katona, 2020). In the US. The Department of Justice has worked to combat human trafficking via the financial route.

The Department of Justice coordinated with the Mexican anti-money laundering authorities. These efforts resulted in the conviction of six criminals in 2020. Additionally, the Department of Justice had 475 convictions against human trafficking in 2019, with most of these being sex trafficking. Of other interest, the FBI successfully dismantled 33 criminal organizations that specialized in human trafficking because of collaboration with Mexican authorities (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

The Bureau of Diplomatic Security also conducted human trafficking investigation. Their area was searching for passport or visa fraud. Investigators and analysts relocated to different US embassies and consulates around the world. Several cases were investigated, and criminals were prosecuted because of these efforts (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

Another action that was taken was in the area of training. The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law enforcement affairs provided 95 foreign law enforcement officials training. This training was aimed at attacking human trafficking. The areas of concentration were Accra, Budapest, Bangkok, Gaborone, and San Salvador (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

Assisting other countries with the financial burden of law enforcement has also played a part in the US strategy to combat human trafficking. They were given grants but insisted that the judiciary, the governments, and other local organizations combat trafficking (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

The US has worked on enforcing the policy of preventing human slavery by limiting funds to countries that do not protect workers' rights. In 2019, trade preferences were used to punish Thailand for its failures. This was due to Thailand's continued use of child labor (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

Included in training, the US also provides workshops for foreign countries to recognize and understand when human trafficking is happening and how to combat it. These workshops have been successful in diminishing human trafficking. They also assist in efforts to recognize the financial methodologies used by traffickers. The Treasury Department has played a significant role in these bilateral anti-corruption initiatives. Its primary focus has been identifying and combating money laundering that supports transnational criminal organizations (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

The US continues to strengthen partnerships with foreign countries to establish collaboration for combating criminal organizations. In 2020 the US signed bilateral agreements with El Salvador based on a similar agreement with Honduras the previous year. The critical aspect of this agreement was the creation and maintenance of a monitoring program for foreign labor. Additionally, an agreement was signed with Guatemala to increase accountability and transparency for workers holding a temporary H2 visa. Since liberal recruitment practices can increase workers' vulnerability to exploitation with H2 programs, they require extensive transparency and accountability (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

In 2020 the Department of Justice awarded more than $100 million to combat human trafficking. Additionally, 37 different projects were funded worldwide. These funds impacted over 80 countries. The US commitment to combating transnational organized crime is apparent by the continuous funding via grants and other monetary means to foreign partners. Additionally, funds were allocated for data and research (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

Data collection and research are critical in the fight against transnational organized crime. Efforts are made to understand the scope and demographics to facilitate interagency discussions on the best way to handle these challenges. There is a collaborative effort using the counter-trafficking data used as a data hub to track human trafficking victims. As of 2020, there were over 91,000 cases that had been exploited in over 172 countries (*President's interagency task force*, 2020).

In Conclusion, there must be international collaboration and cooperation for police to combat national organized crime successfully. Countries must also agree on a standard definition of human trafficking and other crimes. It was also redefined their policies and governance towards the treatment and prosecution of victims. Change in attitudes towards criminal organizations and their crimes must also be reevaluated. Wealthier countries must also continue to support international efforts against transnational organized crime financially. Locally, governments must focus on bringing their citizens out of poverty to help remove the source of available young women for prostitution. Additionally, the continued strengthening of technology, including the sharing of technical, logical advances in computers, networking, and databases for data sharing purposes, must continue to be promoted.

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