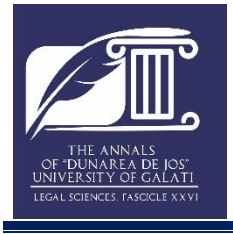

The Global Dimension of Human Trafficking: Causes, Forms and Consequences

Loredana TEREC-VLAD[1]

Abstract: *Human trafficking is one of the most serious international crimes, affecting millions of individuals annually and representing a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights. Legally defined by the Palermo Protocol (2000), this phenomenon involves the recruitment, transportation and exploitation of individuals by means of coercion, fraud or abuse of power, for the purpose of illicit profit. From an academic perspective, the causes of trafficking are multiple and interconnected: systemic poverty, economic inequalities, political instability, gender discrimination and limited access to education. Against the backdrop of globalization and irregular migration, vulnerable people – especially women, children and refugees – become targets of transnational criminal networks. The phenomenon manifests itself in various forms: sexual exploitation (the most prevalent), forced labor, organ trafficking and child exploitation. These forms of exploitation are systematically hidden in informal economies or conflict zones, making it difficult to identify and punish the perpetrators. The consequences are profound and multidimensional. At the individual level, victims suffer severe psychological trauma, and at the societal level, trafficking in human beings undermines social cohesion, fueling corruption and instability. From a legal perspective, this scourge undermines the rule of law and requires a firm and coordinated response. The international response includes instruments such as the UN Convention against Transnational Crime and Directive 2011/36/EU, which impose clear legal obligations on states to prevent trafficking, protect victims and punish traffickers. In Romania, Law no. 678/2001 constitutes the domestic legal foundation, complemented by institutional structures such as ANITP. In conclusion, human trafficking is a phenomenon with complex roots and systemic consequences, which requires a rigorous legal approach, international coordination and victim-centered public policies.*

Keywords: *Trafficking; person; victim; crime; human*

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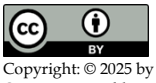

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1. Introduction

Human trafficking constitutes one of the most serious crimes against human dignity (Corsei, 2022, pp. 160-172, Airapetean, Corsei, 2022, pp. 143-152, Corsei, Zisu, 2024, pp. 349-363), being the expression of a modern form of slavery and a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights. In international law and in the national legal order, this phenomenon is treated not only as a serious crime, but also as a complex problem that requires legislative, institutional and international cooperation measures. From a legal perspective, human trafficking is regulated by the Palermo Protocol (2000) - a fundamental instrument annexed to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime - which defines the phenomenon and establishes clear legal obligations for the States Parties.

The transnational nature of trafficking, the involvement of organized crime networks and the multiple nature of the illicit acts involved (recruitment, transportation, harbouring, exploitation) determine a unitary, coherent and adapted legal response to new forms of crime. National legislation, such as Law no. 678/2001 on preventing and combating human trafficking, harmonized with Directive 2011/36/EU, reflects this effort to integrate international norms into domestic law and to strengthen the system of victim protection.

The legal approach to this phenomenon cannot ignore the complex causality that fuels it: socio-economic factors (poverty, lack of education), political (instability, corruption), but also legal (lack of effective prevention and law enforcement mechanisms). From a criminal point of view, human trafficking requires not only the clear criminalization of the acts and the establishment of proportionate penalties, but also the guarantee of fair judicial procedures and reparative measures for victims.

This paper aims to provide an interdisciplinary analysis, with a focus on the legal dimension of human trafficking, by examining the causes that favor the phenomenon, its forms of manifestation (sexual exploitation, forced labor, organ trafficking, etc.), as well as the legal consequences on victims and the rule of law. It also highlights the existing gaps in the application of the norms and the need for more effective international cooperation in the fight against this scourge.

2. Theoretical and Legal Framework of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is one of the most serious and complex forms of contemporary crime, directly affecting fundamental human rights and human dignity. This transnational phenomenon, which manifests itself both regionally and globally, reflects the dynamics of new forms of modern slavery, in which the human being is reduced to the status of an object subject to exploitation.

In the context of the intensification of the migration phenomenon, globalization and heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities, human trafficking has become not only a criminal law issue, but also a major challenge for international and national legal systems, for public policies and for judicial cooperation mechanisms.

The legal notion of human trafficking has undergone a gradual doctrinal and legislative crystallization, mainly outlined by public international law, in particular by the Palermo Protocol (2000), which established a standard definition accepted at a global level. This definition was subsequently taken over and adapted by European Union law, through Directive 2011/36/EU, as well as by national legislation, including Romanian law, through the provisions of the Criminal Code and special legislation.

In addition to the normative framework, the doctrinal analysis provides a deeper understanding of the concepts, the conditions of criminalization, as well as the problems of interpretation and application of the law. At the same time, the jurisprudence - both national and international - reflects the way in which the notion of human trafficking is applied in practice, contributing to the development of a unified practice and the effective protection of victims.

3. Causes of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is one of the most serious forms of transnational crime and a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights (Corsei, Ţoncu, Talpă, 2023, pp. 52-60). In order to effectively combat this phenomenon, a thorough understanding of its causes is essential. These are multiple, interconnected and manifest at both the individual and systemic levels. This analysis explores the causes of human trafficking from an academic and legal perspective, focusing on the Romanian context and the international commitments assumed by the state.

a) Socio-economic causes: one of the most obvious causes of human trafficking is poverty. The lack of economic opportunities, high unemployment and limited access to education lead individuals to accept dubious job offers or to migrate in unsafe conditions, thus becoming vulnerable to exploitation. According to the International Labor Organization, over 40 million people are victims of modern slavery, the

majority of whom come from regions affected by deep poverty (International Labour Organization, "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery", Geneva, 2022).

b) Political and institutional factors: political instability, corruption and lack of institutional efficiency are factors that contribute to human trafficking. In many countries, authorities are either overwhelmed by the scale of the phenomenon or complicit in its perpetuation. In Romania, although there is a well-defined legislative framework (Law no. 678/2001), effective enforcement of the law is often deficient due to a lack of specialized personnel, insufficient training and corruption in the judicial and police systems (European Centre for the Rights of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, 2021 Report on the application of legislation in Romania). The lack of inter-institutional and international cooperation also hinders the identification and investigation of cross-border networks. Analysis of reports by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that many victims are not recognized as such due to prejudice or inadequate identification procedures (FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Protecting victims of trafficking in human beings – particularly women and children", 2019).

c) Demand for services and products of exploitation: a fundamental, but often ignored, cause is the continued demand for services and products resulting from exploitation. Sexual exploitation, forced labour or organ trafficking are fuelled by markets that profit from human vulnerability. From a legal point of view, this dimension is recognised in Directive 2011/36/EU, which obliges Member States to take measures to discourage the demand that favours trafficking in human beings (Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims). In the doctrine, it is emphasized that approaching the phenomenon exclusively from the perspective of the providers (traffickers and victims) is insufficient and that it is necessary to incriminate the clients or end users of the services resulting from exploitation (Gallagher, 2010, p. 175). This approach is still timid in national legislation, but is taking shape through recent legislative proposals.

d) Lack of education and awareness: poor education and lack of access to information mean that potential victims do not recognize the dangers associated with certain offers or relationships. Also, in the absence of a minimum legal education, many victims do not know their rights or the available protection mechanisms. Awareness campaigns are still sporadic and fail to reach the most vulnerable groups. From a legal point of view, the state has a positive obligation, according to the case law of the ECHR (Rantsev vs. Cyprus and Russia case), to inform and protect citizens against trafficking, including through proactive educational measures (ECHR, case Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia, application no. 25965/04, judgment of 7 January 2010).

In conclusion, the causes of human trafficking are complex and interdependent, requiring a systemic and multisectoral approach. Academic and legal perspectives converge in identifying legislative, institutional and social measures aimed not only at repressing criminals, but also at preventing structural vulnerabilities. Effectively combating trafficking essentially requires the effective protection of human dignity and the strengthening of the rule of law.

4. Forms and Modalities of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking, in its current meaning, is a multi-phase and transnational crime, which involves a variety of forms of manifestation, depending on the type of exploitation pursued, the means used to capture and dominate the victim, as well as the organization of the criminal networks involved. The complexity of the phenomenon requires a rigorous analysis of the forms and modalities through which trafficking occurs, as these directly influence both the legal qualification of the act and the criminal strategy for combating it.

a) Distinctions between forms and modalities: In the doctrine, a distinction is made between forms of human trafficking - as ends of exploitation - and modalities - as means of commission. Forms reflect the objective of the crime (e.g. sexual exploitation, forced labor, etc.), and modalities express the criminal techniques (e.g. fraud, abuse of vulnerability, kidnapping). According to art. 210 para. (1) of the Criminal Code, the circumstantial element of trafficking is "committing acts for the purpose of exploitation" (ECHR, case Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia, application no. 25965/04, judgment of 7 January 2010) which essentially determines the identification of the form of trafficking. At the same time, the constitutive elements include the means by which exploitation is achieved – aspects related to the methods of commission.

b) Forms of trafficking in persons

1. **Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation:** Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is one of the most widespread and profitable forms of human trafficking. According to art. 3 letter a of the Palermo Protocol, sexual exploitation includes "exploitation of the prostitution of another or other forms of sexual exploitation" (ECHR, case Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia, application no. 25965/04, judgment of 7 January 2010). In Romanian criminal law, this form is regulated by art. 210 para. (1) and (2) of the Criminal Code, and in the transnational context - by Law no. 678/2001 on the prevention and combating of trafficking in persons. Sexual exploitation involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons – especially women and minors – by means of coercion, violence, fraud or abuse of authority, for the purpose of using them for acts

of a sexual nature in favour of a third party (Criminal Code of Romania, Law no. 286/2009, art. 210 para. (1), published in the Official Gazette no. 510 of 24 July 2009). This form of trafficking is prevalent in international statistics. According to UNODC, approximately 50-60% of identified victims of human trafficking globally are sexually exploited (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2022). Romania is considered a country of origin, but also of transit and destination for victims, especially within international networks operating in the European Union. The phenomenon is favored by multiple factors: poverty, lack of access to education, family vulnerability, economic instability, as well as the growing demand for sexual services in the context of sex tourism or the illegal pornography industry (European Commission, Progress Report on the fight against trafficking in human beings, 2021). The crime of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is severely punished in Romanian criminal law. According to art. 210 par. (1) and (2) of the Criminal Code, the act is punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 10 years and the prohibition of certain rights. If the victim is a minor, the act constitutes trafficking in minors and is sanctioned separately, with increased penalties. The constitutive elements of the crime include: the existence of an act of trafficking (recruitment, transport, etc.); the use of illegal means (violence, fraud, abuse); the purpose of sexually exploiting the victim. Legal difficulties often arise in proving the victim's consent. According to international law, the victim's consent is not relevant when it was obtained through illicit means. In the case of minors, consent is, in any circumstances, legally irrelevant. In the case of L.E. v. Greece (ECHR, 2016), the Court sanctioned the Greek authorities for their lack of diligence in investigating a case of sex trafficking, underlining the obligation of states to ensure effective protection of victims through prompt investigations and support measures (ECHR, L.E. v. Greece, application no. 71545/12, judgment of 21 January 2016). Also, in the practice of the High Court of Cassation and Justice, there have been cases in which sex trafficking has been disguised as pimping relationships or "collaborations" in the erotic industry. For example, in a 2019 decision, the supreme court held that recruiting a young woman under the promise of a job abroad, followed by coercing her into prostitution, constitutes human trafficking, even if the victim was not subjected to physical violence (High Court of Cassation and Justice, Criminal Decision No. 2543/2019, Criminal Section.). Victims of sex trafficking are often re-victimized by the judicial system: either through a lack of psychological and legal support, or through excessive exposure during trials. Romania, under Law no. 678/2001 and Directive 2012/29/EU on victims' rights, is obliged to provide: safe shelters; psychological counselling; free legal aid; protection of identity during the trial. However, the implementation of these measures is often inconsistent and depends on the resources and training of the staff involved (National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP), Annual Report 2023). Therefore, trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a crime

with profound legal, social and moral implications. From a legal perspective, its regulation is clear both nationally and internationally. However, the effective application of the rules depends on an integrated approach, which combines sanctioning the acts with the protection of victims and combating demand. Only in this way can the effectiveness of criminal law be guaranteed in the face of one of the most dangerous forms of modern crime.

2. Trafficking in persons for the purpose of forced or compulsory labour: Forced or compulsory labour is recognised as a form of exploitation within the framework of trafficking in persons. According to the Palermo Protocol (2000), trafficking in persons involves "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of coercion (...), for the purpose of exploitation", and exploitation includes "forced labour or services" (Additional Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, art. 3 letter a, Palermo, 2000). In the doctrine of international labor law, forced labor is defined by ILO Convention No. 29/1930 as "any work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily" (International Labour Organization (ILO), Forced Labour Convention No. 29, Geneva, 1930, art. 2 para. (1). This definition is also established by the jurisprudence of international courts. Forced labor frequently occurs in sectors such as construction, agriculture, the textile industry, housekeeping and care services, and is characterized by the following features: limitation of the victim's freedom of movement (through the confiscation of documents), economic coercion (unpaid wages, indebtedness, threats), psychological control (manipulation, isolation, exploitation of vulnerabilities), degrading working conditions, often without legal contracts or access to complaints (UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2022). This form of trafficking is often invisible and difficult to detect, as it can be disguised under the appearance of a legal employment contract, especially in the case of migrant workers. A landmark case is Siliadin v. France (ECHR, 2005), where the European Court of Human Rights found that a young Togolese woman was forced to work unpaid, under constant supervision, in the home of a French family. The Court concluded that the French state had failed to protect her rights under Article 4 of the ECHR, which prohibits slavery and forced labour (ECHR, case Siliadin v. France, Judgment of 26 July 2005, application no. 73316/01). In Romania, files investigated by DIICOT and DNA revealed cases in which people, especially from rural areas or with disabilities, were recruited with the promise of a job and subsequently forced to work without pay in households or farms, in conditions of modern slavery (DIICOT, Press release, "Criminal group specialized in forced labor dismantled in Argeş County", 2022). The courts have recognized that the mere lack of payment of wages is not enough to deter trafficking, but when the lack of payment is coupled with constraints or isolation, the crime takes shape (High Court of

Cassation and Justice, Criminal Decision No. 1020/2018). Trafficking in persons for the purpose of forced labour is therefore a serious and often hidden manifestation of organised crime. Beyond criminal sanctions, an integrated approach is needed, combining criminal law, labour law and fundamental human rights. Effective prevention depends on political will, law enforcement and the active involvement of civil society.

3. **Trafficking for the purpose of begging or committing crimes:** Trafficking in persons for the purpose of begging or forcing to commit crimes is an increasingly visible form of contemporary organised crime. Although often ignored in relation to trafficking for the purpose of sex or forced labour, this form of exploitation involves a serious violation of fundamental rights, affecting in particular minors and vulnerable persons (UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2022, p. 45). According to art. 210 of the Romanian Criminal Code, human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, according to art. 182 letters e and f of the Criminal Code, "inducing a person to engage in begging" and "obliging them to commit crimes" (Criminal Code of Romania, art. 182 letters e and f, republished in the Official Gazette no. 510/2009). At the international level, the Palermo Protocol (2000) does not expressly include begging or coercion to commit crimes in the definition of exploitation. However, they are recognised as emerging forms of exploitation in recent UNODC interpretations and in the practices of member states. The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (Warsaw, 2005) also has a broad definition of exploitation, leaving open the possibility of including these forms, depending on national legislation (Council of Europe, Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, Warsaw, 2005, art. 4 lit. a.). This form of trafficking involves forcing people – often minors, people with disabilities or from extremely poor backgrounds – to beg for the benefit of the exploiter. Exploitation through begging should not be confused with simple voluntary begging. The legal distinction is made based on: lack of real consent, existence of a benefit obtained by a third party, use of coercion or a situation of vulnerability. In Romanian jurisprudence, courts have held that trafficking exists when parents or guardians have forced minors to beg, sometimes by self-mutilation or accompanying them with babies, in order to increase the empathy of passers-by (Bucharest Court of Appeal, Criminal Decision no. 273/A of 15.03.2019). This form of trafficking involves forcing a person to commit criminal acts, often minor (pickpocketing, shoplifting, drug trafficking in small quantities), for the benefit of the organized crime network. Most often, the victims are minors or people with diminished discretion, who do not understand the legal consequences of the acts committed. Thus, crime networks use the mitigated nature of criminal liability to reduce legal risks and ensure their impunity. A relevant example is the case of

Romanian minors trafficked to the United Kingdom and forced to steal from shops and homes. In the case of R. v. L & Others (UK), the Court analyzed whether the victims acted under duress, establishing that human trafficking excludes criminal liability under certain conditions (R. v. L & Others, Court of Appeal, England and Wales, 2013). One of the major challenges is the confusion between perpetrator and victim. Exploited persons are often treated as perpetrators (beggars or thieves), and not as victims of trafficking. The lack of training of the authorities, prejudices and difficulties in obtaining evidence contribute to this legal misclassification. Furthermore, victims are afraid to testify or do not understand that they are being exploited, which makes criminal proceedings against traffickers difficult. In conclusion, trafficking in persons for the purpose of begging or forcing them to commit crimes is a serious reality that is often ignored. Its effective approach requires a clear recognition of the victim's status, adequate legal protection and international cooperation, especially in the context of migration and mobility of minors in the European space.

4. **Trafficking for the purpose of organ removal**: Trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal constitutes one of the most serious forms of human exploitation, involving not only a flagrant violation of the dignity and bodily integrity of the victim, but also a form of commercialization of the human body incompatible with the fundamental principles of human rights. Being a component of transnational organized crime, this type of trafficking raises complex problems from a legal, medical, ethical and criminal point of view. In Romanian law, trafficking in persons is regulated by art. 210 of the Criminal Code, which defines the act as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person, for the purpose of their exploitation. Among the forms of exploitation listed in art. 182 of the Criminal Code, the removal of organs, tissues or cells of human origin is explicitly included. At the international level, the Palermo Protocol of 2000, adopted under the auspices of the UN, establishes minimum standards for the criminalization of human trafficking, mentioning organ harvesting as a possible form of exploitation (Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), art. 3, letter a.). Within the European Union, Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings expressly provides in recital (11) that trafficking for the purpose of organ removal falls within the scope of the directive, even if its forms are less widespread than sexual exploitation or forced labour (Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011, Recital (11). Trafficking for the removal of organs meets all the conditions set out in the general criminalisation rule for human trafficking. Three fundamental elements can be distinguished (Udroiu, 2023, p. 622):

• Action: consists of one of the trafficking operations – recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, receipt;

• Means: in the case of adults, it must involve coercion, abduction, deception, abuse of authority or vulnerability or the offering of money or other benefits;

• Purpose: is represented by exploitation, in this case the illegal removal of organs.

It should be emphasized that, in the case of minors, the use of any means is not required by law, the performance of the action for the purpose of removing organs being sufficient. Legal removal of organs is strictly regulated by Law no. 95/2006 on the health reform, which provides clear conditions for informed consent, donor compatibility and authorization of the medical act. In the context of human trafficking, these requirements are circumvented, and victims are subjected to illegal interventions, without valid consent or under duress. It is important to note that victims can be recruited from vulnerable populations (poor, refugees, homeless people), who are offered small sums of money in exchange for an organ (often a kidney). In many cases, promises are not kept, and the medical act is performed in inappropriate conditions, without post-operative follow-up. From an ethical point of view, the international medical community strongly condemns this practice, emphasizing the principle of the unavailability of the human body and the prohibition of its commercialization. This type of trafficking is often coordinated by organized criminal groups operating across borders. Such networks identify victims in poor or transitional countries, transport them to other states, where they have connections to illegal or corrupt clinics, and then sell the organs on the black market for exorbitant amounts. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that approximately 10% of all transplants performed worldwide may have an illegal component (World Health Organization (WHO), Guiding Principles on Human Cell, Tissue and Organ Transplantation, Geneva, 2010). Although there are no precise data, the scale of the phenomenon is alarming, and the lack of a unified international database makes investigating the facts difficult. In Romania, cases of organ trafficking are extremely rare in jurisprudence, but there have been situations in which criminal prosecution bodies have investigated attempts or networks in their early stages. A major difficulty in identifying these facts lies in the apparent consent of the victim, who initially accepts the "donation", but without understanding the legal and medical implications. In a high-profile case, a network was dismantled in 2016, when it was found that several Romanian citizens were to be transported to India to sell their kidneys, under the coordination of a local intermediary (DIICOT – Press release, May 24, 2016, available on www.diicot.ro (accessed May 2025). The investigation was hampered by the lack of cooperation between states and the difficulty of obtaining medical evidence. Trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ harvesting is a particularly serious crime,

combining aspects of organized crime, medical corruption and deep exploitation of the human being. Although less frequent than other forms of trafficking, its social danger is increased by the difficulty of identifying and investigating the networks involved. An effective approach requires strengthened international cooperation, specialization of investigators, clear regulations in the field of transplantation and protection mechanisms for potential victims. Public education and medical vigilance are also essential for the prevention and sanctioning of this form of trafficking.

5. Digital Dimensions Of Human Trafficking

There are advantages to transitioning to remote work, as well as evident security implications (Timofte, Balan 2023). The increasingly widespread use of personally owned devices in public sector organizations, known as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), covers several aspects. While employees using personal devices to complete their work is one thing, accessing sensitive data on a personal laptop, phone, or tablet creates a situation in which tracking and securing that data becomes much more difficult, especially when institutional policy is unclear or absent.

To mitigate these risks, organizations must have a simple, strong, documented policy regarding the use of personal devices for work. Organizations should implement simple safeguards, such as device encryption, auto-updates for device software, strong passwords, two-factor authentication, and secure remote access via a VPN. They should also have reasonable ways to track and remotely erase organization-related information to prevent the compromise of organizational data or breaches of sensitive information through lost or compromised devices.

Equally important is employee awareness of best practices. They need to be educated about the possible risks and how to manage their personal data securely, whether they are working from home, in an office, or in a hybrid environment. They need to clearly understand which applications and platforms are allowed and which are not (e.g., personal email and unsecured cloud services) to prevent accidents.

In conclusion, remote work and BYOD can be done securely within the scope of public administration when these practices are governed by a strong organizational policy that balances flexibility and accountability.

To counter the digital evolution of trafficking, public authorities must:

- Update national legislation to reflect the digital aspects of recruitment, coercion, and exploitation;
- Train law enforcement and judiciary on cyber-investigations and handling of encrypted digital evidence;

- Enforce platform accountability through binding obligations to detect and remove trafficking-related content;
- Fund educational campaigns for digital literacy and online safety among youth and vulnerable groups;
- Foster collaboration between cybercrime units, anti-trafficking agencies, and data protection authorities.

In conclusion, the fight against human trafficking must extend beyond borders—and beyond physical spaces. Without targeted responses to digital exploitation mechanisms, legal protections remain incomplete, and traffickers will continue to operate with impunity in virtual environments.

6. Conclusion

Trafficking people is one of the most dangerous and persistent forms of transnational organized crime, affecting millions of people every year and causing serious harm not only to the direct victims, but also to societies as a whole. The analysis of the global dimension of this phenomenon reveals a complex picture, in which economic, political, social and cultural factors interact to create fertile ground for the exploitation of human beings.

The root causes of human trafficking are multiple and interdependent. Extreme poverty, lack of access to education and decent jobs, social and gender inequalities, armed conflicts, corruption and the weakness of the rule of law are just some of the essential elements that contribute to the vulnerability of people. At the same time, the constant demand for cheap labor, sexual services or illegal organ transplants fuels the chain of exploitation, generating huge profits for organized crime networks. Globalization and increased population mobility contribute to the expansion of trafficking networks, while digitalization and social networks have become new recruitment channels, which are more difficult to control and supervise.

Phenomenologically, human trafficking takes many forms, the most common of which are: sexual exploitation, forced labor, begging, exploitation of minors in criminal activities, trafficking for organ removal or forced marriage. These forms often overlap, and victims may be subjected to several types of exploitation simultaneously. Although women and girls remain the most affected categories in the case of sexual exploitation, men and boys are increasingly targeted for forced labor in agriculture, construction, fishing or industry. In addition, recent humanitarian crises, such as migration caused by conflicts in the Middle East or instability in sub-Saharan areas, have contributed to increasing the risk of trafficking for millions of vulnerable people. The consequences of human trafficking are

devastating, both individually and collectively. For victims, these include severe psychological trauma, destruction of physical and mental integrity, social stigmatization and marginalization, loss of autonomy and future prospects. At the societal level, trafficking undermines social cohesion, perpetuates inequalities, corrupts public institutions and weakens trust in authorities. From an economic perspective, the enormous profits generated by trafficking consolidate the power of criminal groups and encourage the maintenance of a parallel, illicit economy that is difficult to eradicate. At the international level, the perpetuation of this phenomenon reflects the inability of effective global cooperation to prevent and combat trafficking.

Despite the existence of a relatively robust international legal framework - such as the Palermo Protocol (2000), UN and Council of Europe Conventions, European Union Directives - and commendable national initiatives, the implementation and enforcement of laws remain uneven. Victims are often not correctly identified, do not receive adequate assistance or are treated as criminals. In addition, the lack of effective cooperation between states and institutional corruption hinder the dismantling of transnational networks.

Effectively combating trafficking in persons requires a multidimensional approach: prevention by reducing social and economic vulnerabilities; effective protection of victims, including through social reintegration measures; and severe punishment of traffickers, through transnational investigations and coordinated judicial measures. Education, public awareness and the involvement of civil society are essential for building a culture of zero tolerance towards human exploitation.

In conclusion, trafficking in persons is a global scourge that reflects not only the shortcomings of current legal and economic systems, but also the failure of the international community to protect the most vulnerable categories of people. The fight against this phenomenon must become a global priority, supported by international solidarity, national responsibility and collective action, in order to defend human dignity in its deepest sense.

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