

UDC 343.85 + 325.25 (474 + 477)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2312-1815/2025-20-34>

Julia Kobets

ORCID: 0000-0001-9492-6119

Marcin Oskierko

ORCID: 0000-0003-3450-6037

Slawomir Żurawski

ORCID: 0000-0001-9527-3391

THE IMPACT OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY – CHALLENGES AND COUNTERACTING ON THE EXAMPLE OF POLISH AND UKRAINE

The aim of the article is to examine the impact of trafficking in human beings on international security on the example of Polish and Ukraine and to indicate effective preventive and counteracting measures. The first part presents the definition and forms of trafficking in human beings and presents Poland and Ukraine as key countries in the system of movement of victims of this phenomenon, taking into account the impact of the war in Ukraine and links with organized crime. It then analysed the destabilising effects of trafficking in human beings, such as the impact on local communities, threats to border security and global effects, including corruption and money laundering. Next, national, regional and international activities in the fight against human trafficking were presented, emphasizing the importance of Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, the involvement of international organizations and education. The research problem was formulated: How does human trafficking affect international security and what actions can be taken to effectively counteract this phenomenon in Poland and Ukraine? In order to answer the research question, research methods such as the analysis of the literature on the subject, review of legal acts and reports of international organizations were used.

Key words: international security, human trafficking, war in Ukraine, organized crime, cross-border threats.

Introduction. Trafficking in human beings is one of the most serious threats to the modern world, affecting international security, destabilizing communities and violating fundamental human rights. This phenomenon, which is a modern form of slavery, includes activities such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, and forced begging. The global nature of trafficking in human beings, linked to transnational organised crime, poses a challenge for countries that have to deal with its political, social and economic consequences.

Poland and Ukraine, due to their geopolitical location and specific social and economic conditions, play a key role in the analysis of this problem. Both countries appear both as places of origin of the victims, as well as transit and destination countries. The impact of the war in Ukraine, which has triggered mass migrations and increased the risk of abuses against refugees and displaced persons, has been of particular importance in recent years. As a result, human trafficking has become a major challenge to regional stability and international security.

The aim of this analysis is to present the scale and characteristics of the problem of trafficking in human beings on the example of Polish and Ukraine, taking into account its impact on international security and the actions taken to counteract this phenomenon. In particular, the links between trafficking in human beings and organised crime, the effects of social and economic destabilisation, threats to border security, as well as the role of international cooperation in reducing this problem will be discussed.

The introduction of innovative technological solutions, strengthening cross-border cooperation and strengthening prevention and educational mechanisms are just some of the recommendations that can contribute to more effective prevention of human trafficking in the region and in the world.

Characteristics and scale of the phenomenon. Human trafficking is a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of the so-called international public opinion in recent years. Although it might seem that slavery and practices similar to slavery are a thing of the past, it turns out that this phenomenon is still present in social life and takes various forms, such as forced prostitution, forced labour, child pornography or trafficking in human organs [6, p. 31].

Trafficking in human beings is a crime involving the illegal movement of people for the purpose of being used for forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced begging or other forms of exploitation. According to the definition of the United Nations (UN), human trafficking is “the act of recruiting, transporting, harboring, or taking away people by force, fraud, coercion, or manipulation for the purpose of exploiting them” [12]. Forms of human trafficking include, m. in:

- forced labour – the employment of people in slave conditions, without pay or for minimum wages, often in sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic servants;
- sexual exploitation – forcing people into prostitution, pornography or other forms of sexual exploitation;
- organ trafficking – illegal harvesting of organs for transplantation;
- begging – using people to collect money on the streets or in other public places, often through violence or manipulation.

There is no doubt that human trafficking is a transnational phenomenon affecting the international community. The intensification of trafficking in human beings is the result of many factors, more or less related to the diverse regions of the world and the status of the people living in them [5, p. 163]. The literature emphasizes that the price of globalization and regional integration is the rapid growth of this phenomenon [8, p. 131].

Poland and Ukraine play a vital role as source, transit and destination countries in international human trafficking. Ukraine, as a country located on the border of Eastern Europe, has a problem with a high number of people who are exploited in this practice, especially as a result of socio-economic crises and a lack of prospects for young people. Factors that encourage trafficking in human beings:

- poverty – the high rate of unemployment and poverty in Ukraine increases vulnerability to victims, who can be easily manipulated by traffickers;
- migration – migration processes, both economic and refugee, increase the number of people who are easy targets for criminals;
- war in Ukraine – as a result of the armed conflict in Ukraine, millions of people have been forced to flee, and some of them have become victims of human trafficking. After the war, there is more migration, and criminals are taking advantage of this situation to spread illegal activities.

The following is the number of detected victims of trafficking by gender and age in 2019–2023 in Ukraine.

The visible downward trend may be the result of improved mechanisms to prevent trafficking in human beings, such as better border security, greater public awareness and more effective actions of services. However, as a result of the war in Ukraine and the related migration phenomena, the problem of human trafficking has intensified. Many people fleeing the war, especially women and children, have been targeted by criminals. As the borders from Poland and other countries are more open to refugees, human traffickers are exploiting these gaps in the protection system to take control of those in need. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine may have caused an increase in the number of children in 2023. The increase may be related to the migration of refugees from Ukraine, which promotes increased vulnerability of children to human trafficking, e.g. as part of “humanitarian aid” fraud. According to the OSCE, about 90% of people fleeing the war are women and children, i.e. groups particularly vulnerable to human trafficking [14].

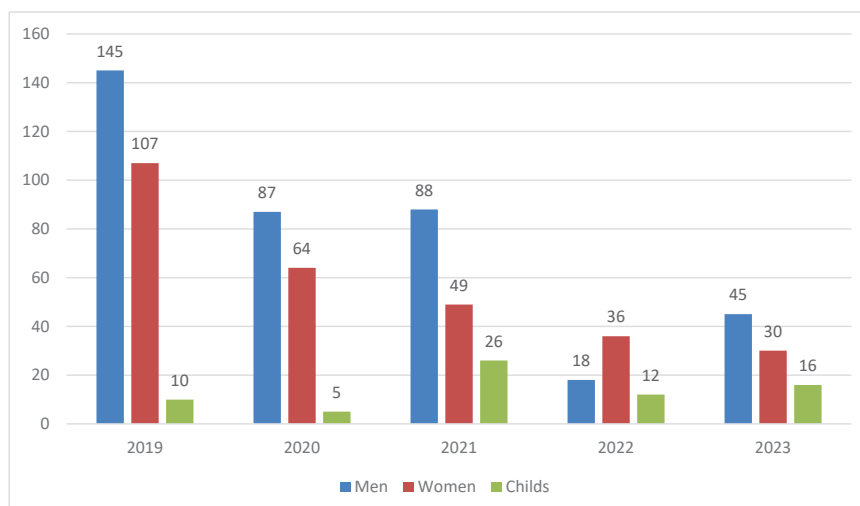


Chart 1. Number of trafficking victims detected by gender and age in 2019–2023

Source: Prosecutor General/State Statistical Office of Ukraine

The war in Ukraine is leading to mass displacement and population movements. This is a situation that may lead to a significant increase in the number of cases of human trafficking [2]. According to UNHCR data (2023), more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees were registered in Europe, a significant part of which stayed in Poland. This situation poses enormous challenges for border authorities and victim support organisations. This also applies to Polish. The chart below shows the number of potential victims of trafficking in human beings identified in 2021–2023 in Poland.

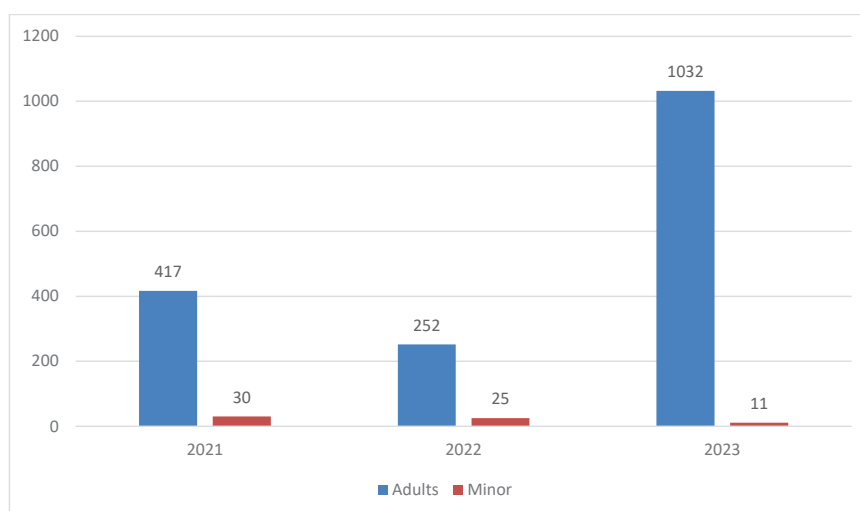


Chart 2. Number of detected victims of human trafficking by gender and age, 2021–2023 in Poland

Source: Eurostat

Human trafficking is often part of the activities of international criminal organizations that operate on a large scale in the Eastern European region and is inextricably linked to human migration [15, p. 261]. It is controlled by organized crime, which in the 21st century has taken the form of transnational organized crime, compared to a giant industrial consortium [10, p. 23]. Organized crime groups control various stages of this procedure – from recruitment, through transport, to exploitation. These groups operate not only in Europe, but also in Asia and Africa, and people from different parts of the world are used by them. For the purposes of carrying out the crime of trafficking in human beings, legally operating companies (e.g. travel agencies, transport companies, shipowners,

employment agencies, employers) are also used, which knowingly or unknowingly cooperate with criminals [1, p. 63]. Trafficking in human beings is often linked to other criminal activities, such as money laundering, drug smuggling, and arms trafficking. Criminal groups that organise trafficking in human beings use similar transport routes and structures as other forms of crime.

Human trafficking is a serious threat to international security, and Poland and Ukraine, due to their location and current geopolitical events, play a key role in this problem. The increase in migration caused by the war in Ukraine has further exacerbated the threat. With proper coordination of international action, it is possible to reduce the scale of this problem and ensure greater cross-border security.

The impact of human trafficking on international security. Human trafficking is one of the most serious threats to the modern world. This global phenomenon leads to numerous effects that affect both individuals and entire communities, contributing to social and economic destabilization, as well as threats to border security. In addition, the global effects of human trafficking include money laundering, an increase in illegal migration, and threats to the stability of state institutions. An important factor that perpetuates this phenomenon is corruption and inefficiency of the judiciary. This paper will examine the different aspects of this problem in the context of their impact on international security.

Trafficking in human beings has serious consequences for local and regional communities. First of all, this phenomenon results in the loss of human potential. Victims of human trafficking, often uprooted from their communities, experience long-term trauma, which weakens the family and social structure. Their lack in local communities leads to deepening economic and demographic problems. According to a report by the International Labor Organization (ILO), billions of dollars in profits from human trafficking go uninvested in local economies each year, further exacerbating the economic situation of the affected regions.

This phenomenon also contributes to the increase in social tensions. In communities where human trafficking is widespread, inequalities and mistrust between residents are increasing. Trafficking crime often supports the activities of organised groups, which further destabilise local structures. An example is the regions of Eastern Europe, where victims are often recruited into slave labour, which leads to the undermining of the authority of local institutions. According to a study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking in conflict-affected regions leads to the further marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

One of the most important aspects of trafficking in human beings is its impact on border security. People of the early 21st century, especially in times of danger to life, regardless of the region in which they live or from which they are trying to get out – especially from areas affected by conflicts such as Ukraine [17]. The Polish-Ukrainian border, as one of the main places of smuggling people to Western Europe, is a particular problem. Smugglers exploit loopholes in the border control system, which makes it difficult to monitor the movement of people and poses a challenge for border authorities.

Cases of illegal human smuggling often take place with the complicity of corrupt officials, which further complicates the situation. For example, reports by the Polish Border Guard indicate a significant increase in the number of apprehensions of people involved in people smuggling at the border between 2020 and 2023. The following is the number of human trafficking crimes in 2019–2023 in Poland and Ukraine.

Detecting such cases requires advanced technologies and close international cooperation, but shortages in financial and organisational resources often hinder effective countermeasures.

At the global level, human trafficking leads to numerous negative effects, such as money laundering, an increase in illegal migration, and the weakening of state institutions. Profits from human trafficking often enter financial systems through money laundering mechanisms, which undermines the stability of national economies. In 2021, Global Financial Integrity estimated that global human trafficking generates profits of \$150 billion per year, a significant part of which comes from the exploitation of people in forced labor and prostitution.

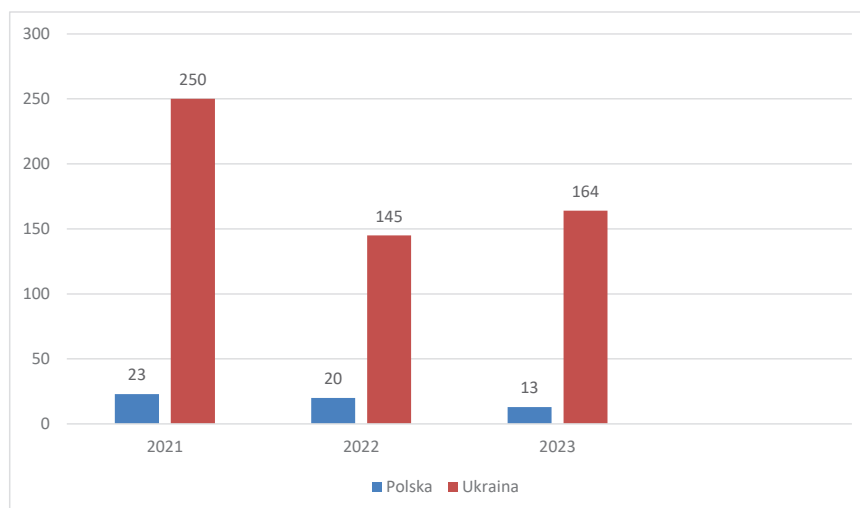


Chart 4. Number of human trafficking crimes in 2021–2023 in Poland and Ukraine

Źródło: Global Report on Trafficking in persons in 2024, UNODC

In addition, illegal migration, which is often a direct result of human trafficking, puts a strain on the asylum and migration systems of many countries. Increased migration flows they increase political tensions between countries, especially in Europe. Reports by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) have pointed to an ever-increasing number of cases of human smuggling across the Mediterranean, which poses a serious challenge to the European Union's migration policy. But new preliminary Frontex data shows a significant 38% drop in irregular border crossings from the EU in 2024, reaching the lowest level since 2021, but not all routes followed the same trends as patterns changed across the continent. According to the data, there was a threefold increase in border crossings along the eastern borders, mainly along the borders with Ukraine and Belarus [7].

Corruption and the inefficiency of the justice system are factors that significantly perpetuate the phenomenon of human trafficking. Many countries with widespread prosecution are struggling with a lack of adequate resources to prosecute criminals and with deficiencies in their legal systems.

According to a report by Transparency International, high levels of corruption among public officials often prevent effective action against traffickers. An example is the situation in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where weak state institutions are not able to effectively counteract this practice. The lack of efficiency of the justice system also leads to low levels of reporting by victims. Many fear reprisals from criminals or do not trust that the perpetrators will be punished. This further deepens the sense of impunity among human traffickers, which leads to further development of this practice.

Human trafficking poses a serious threat to international security, destabilizing local communities, weakening economies, threatening the integrity of borders, and undermining trust in state institutions. Comprehensive action, including strengthening international cooperation, improving justice systems and combating corruption, is needed to effectively combat corruption. Only through the integrated efforts of the international community is it possible to reduce the negative impact of human trafficking on global order and security.

Counteracting and international cooperation. Combating trafficking in human beings at the national and regional level involves a complex set of legal, operational and social activities. In Poland and Ukraine, numerous legislative initiatives have been introduced to criminalize this practice and protect victims. For example, the amended provisions in the Polish Criminal Code provide for severe sanctions for crimes related to human trafficking, while guaranteeing legal and psychological protection for victims. Uniformed services, such as the police, the Border Guard

and special units, regularly carry out operations aimed at identifying criminal groups and freeing victims. Victim support programmes also play an important role, providing psychological, medical and legal assistance to enable their social and professional reintegration.

Close cooperation between Poland and Ukraine in the area of counteracting trafficking in human beings is a model example of international partnership. A key element of this cooperation is the exchange of information between the relevant authorities of both countries, which allows for more effective monitoring of human smuggling routes and identification of threats. Joint police operations are regularly organised to focus on dismantling criminal groups operating across borders.

International and non-governmental organizations play a key role in countering human trafficking, both at the strategic and operational levels. The United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) support Member States in developing policies to combat trafficking in human beings through initiatives such as the Additional Protocols to the Convention on Cross-border Organised Crime and the Victim Protection Funds. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is actively working to identify victims and repatriate them, while offering support for reintegration. NGOs such as La Strada and Caritas run social campaigns, offer legal and psychological assistance, and are involved in building awareness of the problem at the local level.

Education and prevention are the foundation of an effective fight against human trafficking. Social campaigns aimed at both refugees and local people are aimed at raising awareness of the risks and how to avoid them. In particular, they focus on informing about the methods of operation of criminals, such as employment fraud or false offers of help. Schools, universities and integration centres for migrants organise workshops and lectures to help identify potential risks and teach how to counteract them. In 2023, the activities of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration, other ministries, state institutions and non-governmental organizations were largely shaped by the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In response to this situation, a number of coordinated initiatives aimed at different groups of recipients were implemented. They included both war refugees from Ukraine, as well as people from South America and the general Polish society. Particular attention is paid to social and professional groups that are more exposed to the risk of trafficking in human beings [13, p. 24].

In order to combat human trafficking more effectively, it is necessary to invest in the development of modern monitoring technologies, such as data analysis systems or biometric solutions at borders. Strengthening border law and policy, through better training for law enforcement agencies and improving international cooperation, is key to reducing the flow of criminals and their victims. At the same time, it is important to build trust between countries, which can translate into more effective exchange of information and the implementation of joint preventive and operational actions. These actions, implemented in an integrated manner, can make a significant contribution to reducing the problem of trafficking in human beings and protecting those at risk of trafficking.

Conclusions and discussion. Human trafficking remains one of the most serious challenges to international security, having a devastating impact on societies, economies and the stability of states. Poland and Ukraine, as key countries in the system of movement of victims of human trafficking, face challenges resulting from their geopolitical location, socio-economic problems and intensification of migration, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine. This phenomenon is deeply linked to the activities of international criminal groups, which makes it even more difficult to counteract effectively. The conclusions of the analysis indicate that:

1. The impact of geopolitics and the war in Ukraine has significantly increased the threat of human trafficking, especially with regard to refugees and displaced persons.
2. Organised crime remains a key driver of organised crime, and its activities undermine the stability of state institutions and border security.

3. Deficiencies in legal systems and the justice system, including corruption, perpetuate the phenomenon of human trafficking, undermining social trust and the effectiveness of countermeasures.

4. Education and prevention are areas that need to be stepped up to better protect potential victims, both in source, transit and destination countries.

Given the dynamic nature of trafficking in human beings and its multidimensional impact on international security, further research and analysis of this phenomenon is necessary. It is particularly important to understand the new forms and methods of perpetrators' operation, which increasingly involve the use of digital technologies and social media to recruit victims. It is also important to look at the effectiveness of existing international initiatives, such as cooperation between states and international organisations, in combating trafficking in human beings.

Another important area is the analysis of the long-term social and economic effects of this practice on local communities, especially in the context of migration and armed conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine. The role of technology in countering trafficking in human beings requires in-depth research, especially in the field of monitoring population flows, identifying victims and tracking criminal networks.

Improving knowledge in these areas will allow for a better understanding of the nature of the problem and the development of more effective counteracting strategies. In addition, strengthening Polish-Ukrainian cooperation, both in the legal and operational areas, can be an important step in reducing human trafficking in the region and at the international level.

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Юлія Кобець, Марцін Оскерко, Славомір Журавські. Вплив торгівлі людьми на міжнародну безпеку – виклики та протидія на прикладі Польщі й України

Метою статті є дослідження впливу торгівлі людьми на міжнародну безпеку на прикладі Польщі й України, а також визначення ефективних заходів запобігання та протидії цьому явищу. У дослідженні подано визначення та форми торгівлі людьми, а також охарактеризовано Польщу й Україну як ключові країни в системі переміщення жертв цього явища, з урахуванням впливу війни в Україні та зв'язків з організованою злочинністю. Проаналізовано дестабілізуючі наслідки торгівлі людьми, зокрема: вплив на місцеві громади, загрози для безпеки кордонів і глобальні наслідки, як-от корупція та відмивання грошей. Представлено національні, регіональні та міжнародні заходи боротьби з торгівлею людьми, з акцентом на значенні польсько-української співпраці, залученні міжнародних організацій і важливості освіти. Основною дослідницькою проблемою є питання: Як торгівля людьми впливає на міжнародну безпеку та яких заходів можна вжити для ефективної протидії цьому явищу в Польщі й Україні?

Ключові слова: міжнародна безпека, торгівля людьми, війна в Україні, організована злочинність, транскордонні загрози.

Information about the authors:

Kobets Yuliia – Candidate of Political Science,
Associate Professor at the Department of Political Institutes and Processes,
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University.

Oskierko Marcin – Doctor of Social Sciences in the discipline of security sciences,
Assistant Professor at the Department of Security Sciences,
State Academy of Applied Sciences in Chełm.

Żurawski Sławomir – Doctor of Social Sciences in the discipline of security sciences,
Assistant Professor at the Department of Security Sciences,
State Academy of Applied Sciences in Chełm.