LAW ENFORCEMENT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING CRIMES (STUDY AT ASAHAN POLICE)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes human trafficking (TPPO) in Asahan Regency during the period 2018–2023, focusing on modus operandi, criminal policies, and enforcement obstacles. The study employs a normative legal research method, using library research and analysis of legislation, official police documents, annual reports, and scholarly literature related to TPPO. The results indicate that TPPO modus operandi has evolved from traditional methods to modern forms that utilize technology, social media, and cross-regional networks. Perpetrators carry out various actions, including recruiting migrant workers without authorization, document forgery, domestic exploitation, and child exploitation in the plantation sector. These crimes emphasize economic and sexual exploitation of vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, and exploit victims' lack of knowledge regarding legal procedures and legal migration. TPPO handling in Asahan Regency is conducted through a combination of penal and non-penal strategies. The penal approach emphasizes firm law enforcement oriented toward victims, through enhanced investigator capacity, establishment of special units, actions against organized networks, and optimization of asset seizure. The non-penal approach focuses on prevention through public education, awareness campaigns on illegal recruitment methods, strengthening community networks, monitoring high-risk areas, and providing integrated services for victims. However, law enforcement faces various structural, procedural, social, and institutional obstacles, including limited resources, low public legal awareness, victim trauma, and the complexity of transnational and covert modus operandi. To enhance the effectiveness of TPPO enforcement, a comprehensive strategy is required, including strengthening law enforcement capacity, providing adequate victim protection systems, implementing preventive policies based on education and community empowerment, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and conducting continuous monitoring and evaluation of emerging forms of TPPO.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Indonesia is a country that is prone to human trafficking. In 2023, based on data from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), in Indonesia in just one year, the number of corpses returned home due to

trafficking reached more than 1,900 people. Trafficking victims are sent abroad and usually become slaves. Usually, victims of trafficking are persecuted or involved in crimes. Not only do they cause victims of trafficking to die, but not a few Indonesian citizens are also victims of trafficking who are disabled, depressed, and have lost their memory. Previously, the Head of BP2MI Benny Rhamdani revealed that around 94 thousand Indonesian citizens were deported from the Middle East and Asia. Of that number, as many as 90% are residents who used to depart unofficially or unprocedurally. There were 1,900 bodies repatriated to Indonesia, the majority of whom were Indonesian citizens who used to go abroad illegally. This means that every day there are two coffins that come to the country. This number does not include Indonesian citizens who have disabilities and memory loss. The number is not small. "As many as 3,600 Indonesian citizens are depressed, memory lost, and even physically disabled.   (Susanti et al., 2022)

One of the regions in Indonesia that is vulnerable to human trafficking is North Sumatra. The vast area of North Sumatra Province, with the sea directly bordering other countries such as Malaysia, makes North Sumatra vulnerable to human trafficking crimes. The area in North Sumatra Province that is always used as the entrance and exit of the crime of trafficking in persons is the Asahan Regency area. Asahan has a long coastline in the eastern region of North Sumatra.

Since 2017, Asahan Regency has become an area that has become the center of human trafficking from Indonesia to Malaysia with labor mode11. In 2017, the North Sumatra Police secured 16 human traffickers from two locations, namely Bagan Asahan Village, Tanjung Balai District, and Sei Pasir Village, East Sei Kepayang District, Asahan Regency, with the promised mode of becoming migrant workers in Malaysia. In the raid in Bagan Asahan, the police got 42 people who will be departed to Malaysia using a tonggkang boat. In the arrest in Sei Kepayang, 25 prospective migrant workers were secured who would be illegally departed to Malaysia. The 25 migrant workers came from North Sumatra (19 people), West Java (two people), West Sumatra (three people), and Aceh (one person). This proves that Asahan is a transit area for human trafficking to Malaysia.   (Nola, 2024; Primary, 2023)

In 2022, based on information data quoted from the statement of the Secretary General of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI), Bobi Anwar Maari, with the condition of the Asahan Regency Beach facing directly to the Strait of Malacca, it is an opportunity as well as a threat of smuggling and human trafficking abroad, especially to Malaysia. Based on the records of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI), in 2022 as many as 215 people were victims of human smuggling under the guise of distributing migrant workers in the North Sumatra region. The occurrence of cases of human trafficking is based on the main factor due to economic problems. In addition, the existence of globalization affects the crime of trafficking in persons to occur. Human trafficking is carried out with networks at home and abroad, so it can be said that human trafficking is a criminal act, including international networks, which is very difficult to prosecute. Of course, not only to eradicate the existing mafia, but also to overcome trafficking crimes.

Empirical reality shows that there is a significant development of human trafficking in Indonesia, especially in the Asahan Regency area, North Sumatra. With the condition of Asahan which has an area of coastal area that directly borders Malaysia, the Asahan area is an area prone to human trafficking.

Asahan Regency has the character and target as a Regional Government that runs clean government and good governance in an effort to realize a civil society, of course, faced with complex conditions, for example, the rapid outflow of people and goods from the port in Asahan, to the increase in modus operandi in terms of the quality and strength of organized crime (the organized crimes) as well as crimes that cross national borders (the transnational crimes), including human trafficking.   (Amin, 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2023)

Based on the above circumstances, the role of the Asahan Regional Resort Police institution is needed to optimize the function of prevention and enforcement of cases of human trafficking that occur in Asahan. Currently, the role and function of the Asahan Regency Resort Police (Polres) is still weak, which is marked by the lack of human

trafficking cases handled by the Asahan Police. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the law enforcement function of the Asahan Police both penal and non-penal.

Based on the above background, this research is entitled Law Enforcement Against the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (Study at the Asahan Police). The main problem in this study departs from the complexity of the crime of trafficking in persons that still occurs in Asahan Regency and demands comprehensive legal handling. This research focuses on three main aspects, namely the form and pattern of modus operandi used by traffickers, criminal policies implemented by the Asahan Police in handling these criminal acts, and various obstacles faced in the law enforcement process. The formulation of this problem is designed to uncover not only the factual dimensions of trafficking crimes, but also the structural and institutional dimensions that affect the effectiveness of its countermeasures. Thus, the research does not stop at the identification of symptoms, but rather explores the relationship between criminal practices, the response of law enforcement officials, and the systemic constraints that accompany them.

In line with the formulation of the problem, the purpose of this research is directed to gain a deep understanding of the characteristics of the crime mode of trafficking in persons that develops in Asahan Regency, including recruitment patterns, forms of exploitation, and power relations between perpetrators and victims. In addition, this study aims to analyze the criminal policy of the Asahan Police as a representation of penal and non-penal policies in handling trafficking cases, both at the stage of prevention, investigation, investigation, and cross-sector coordination. Another objective is to identify and analyze law enforcement barriers, which include normative, institutional, human resources, and social and cultural factors that affect the disclosure and handling of cases.

The analysis of the formulation of this problem is based on empirical and critical research findings. The research is expected to be able to show that the mode of trafficking in persons in Asahan Regency is not single, but adaptive to local socio-economic conditions and gaps in legal supervision. The findings of the study are also directed to reveal the extent to which the criminal policy of the Asahan Police has been effective or faces limitations in its implementation. Furthermore, this study is expected to produce findings on law enforcement obstacles that are not only technical, but also structural, thus providing an argumentative basis for the formulation of policy recommendations that are more responsive, contextual, and oriented towards victim protection and sustainable prevention of trafficking crimes.

METHOD

The research entitled Law Enforcement against the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (Study at the Asahan Police) uses a type of normative juridical research, namely legal research that focuses on the assessment of positive legal norms and their application in law enforcement practices. This approach places law as a written norm that is systematically analyzed through relevant laws and regulations, legal principles, and legal doctrines. The nature of this research is descriptive analytical, which aims to describe in detail as well as analyze the legal provisions and law enforcement policies for the crime of trafficking in persons in the jurisdiction of the Asahan Police, so as to be able to provide a complete understanding of the normative and implementive framework of law enforcement.   (Rachman et al., 2024; Yanova et al., 2023)

The data sources used in this study are secondary data consisting of primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials include laws and regulations that have binding force and are relevant to the object of research, including the Criminal Code, the Law on the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, as well as implementing regulations under laws such as the National Police Chief's Regulation, the Supreme Court Regulation, the Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, and regional regulations related to the protection of trafficking victims. Secondary legal materials include legal literature in the form of textbooks, scientific journals, expert opinions, jurisprudence, and other scientific works that discuss law enforcement and criminal policies related to the crime of trafficking in persons. The tertiary legal materials are used as supporting materials in the form of legal dictionaries, language dictionaries, articles, mass media, and relevant internet sources.

The data collection technique in this study is carried out through library research, which is by studying and studying in depth various legal materials related to the research topic. All data obtained are then analyzed qualitatively using an analytical descriptive method, which is to systematically and logically decipher the data to explain the relationship between legal norms, law enforcement policies, and problems that arise in practice. The analysis process is carried out through the stages of selection, grouping, and interpretation of data, so that the results of the research are not only descriptive, but also able to provide legal arguments and conceptual solutions to the problem of law enforcement of human trafficking crimes in the jurisdiction of the Asahan Police.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Criminal Policy as an Integral Part of Criminal Law Enforcement in Trafficking Cases

Criminal policy plays a vital role in the Indonesian criminal law system because it functions as a means to tackle and control crimes systematically. According to Barda Nawawi Arief, criminal policy is a rational step from the community or state to deal with crime by means of criminal law (penal) or by means outside the criminal law (non-penal). In a broader perspective, this policy is seen not only as a punitive instrument, but also as a social mechanism aimed at protecting society and restoring the balance that has been disturbed by criminal acts.

In the view of modern criminal law, criminal policy is a dynamic social means and responsive to change. Therefore, criminal law is required to adapt to social developments, human values, and the challenges of the times in order to remain relevant and effective. Thus, the discussion of criminal policy cannot be separated from the national criminal law system which includes the law enforcement structure, the substance of the rules, and the legal culture that develops in society.   (Damayanti & Paramudhita, 2024; Mubaraq et al., 2025)

The concept of progressive law initiated by Satjipto Rahardjo provides a new direction in understanding criminal policy in Indonesia. According to him, the law should not be rigid and tied to the text of the law, but must live and function according to the needs of the community. Thus, criminal policy must always be imbued with human values and substantive justice, not just enforcing formal norms.

Progressive criminal policies emphasize the reduction of human suffering through more empathetic mechanisms, such as the decriminalization of minor offenses, the expansion of non-prison penal alternatives, and the involvement of the community in crime prevention. This approach places criminal law as a means of social renewal that is adaptive to the dynamics of society.

Criminal policy in the Indonesian criminal law system is an important element that cannot be separated from national law development efforts. The renewal of the National Criminal Code shows a paradigm shift towards a criminal law system that is more humane, fair, and contextual to the social values of the Indonesian nation. However, the success of criminal policy does not only depend on regulations, but also on the seriousness of the government, the consistency of law enforcement officials, and public participation in supporting the creation of a fair and effective legal system. With synergy between the state and society, criminal policy in Indonesia will be able to answer the challenges of modern crime without abandoning human values.   (Maramis & Rondonuwu, 2022; Yanggolo et al., 2024)

Asahan Police Criminal Policy in Handling Human Trafficking Cases in Asahan

The crime of trafficking in persons (TPPO) is a serious crime that requires comprehensive handling, especially in the North Sumatra region which is one of the vulnerable areas. Asahan Regency is one of the areas prone to human trafficking crimes. Based on data obtained from the Asahan Police, the victims of human trafficking crimes that occurred in Asahan Regency generally came from migrant workers abroad with high salary modes.

The Asahan Police in an effort to anticipate and overcome the crime of trafficking in persons in Asahan Regency has implemented an integrated strategy through penal and non-penal approaches. Non-penal strategies are

realized through education and prevention programs targeting vulnerable communities, especially border areas and areas with high migration rates. Counseling activities are carried out directly by involving relevant government agencies, such as the Social Service and the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Office, and supported by civil society organizations. This approach shows that the prevention of trafficking cannot rely only on criminal law instruments, but requires increasing public legal awareness to be able to recognize patterns of illegal recruitment and exploitation risks early on.   (Mulyawan & Myharto, 2022; Vitasari et al., 2020)

In addition to education, the Asahan Police also built a community-based information network as an early detection system against the potential for human trafficking. This network serves as a means of community participation in reporting the initial indications of trafficking, especially before potential victims are dispatched outside the region or abroad. This strategy reflects the application of the community policing approach, where the community is placed as an active partner of the police in maintaining security and preventing crime. Analytically, this mechanism strengthens the preventive aspect of law enforcement because it allows intervention to be carried out at an early stage, so that the risk of exploitation can be minimized.

In the penal aspect, the Asahan Police relies on special units such as intelligence and criminal investigation units to handle trafficking cases professionally and focusedly. The investigation and investigation process is carried out with an approach oriented towards victim protection, in line with the principles stipulated in Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons. The use of digital technology, including tracking social media activities and communication applications, is an important instrument in uncovering illegal networks and recruitment modes. The main obstacles faced in the law enforcement process are the limitations of evidence and the victim's fear of giving information. This condition demands the application of victim-friendly examination methods and guarantees identity confidentiality, so that victims feel safe and willing to cooperate in the legal process.   (Efritadewi et al., 2023; Kurniawan et al., 2024)

The anti-trafficking strategy is strengthened through regional policy support with the establishment of the North Sumatra Province Trafficking Prevention and Handling Task Force. This task force functions as a cross-sectoral coordination forum involving the police, local governments, and social institutions in handling trafficking comprehensively. Based on the applicable regional policies, the task force has a role in victim rehabilitation, skills training, and social reintegration. The active involvement of the Asahan Police in the task force includes case reporting, legal action, and supervision of the victim recovery process. Analytically, this collaboration shows that the handling of trafficking in Asahan has moved towards an integrated and sustainable law enforcement model, although its effectiveness still depends heavily on the consistency of inter-agency coordination and the availability of supporting resources.   (Esther et al., 2021)

Influential Factors in Law Enforcement of Trafficking in Persons

In the digital era, human trafficking has undergone a very significant shift and transformation. If previously this crime was more commonly carried out through direct recruitment in the field, now perpetrators take advantage of technological developments to expand networks, speed up operations, and disguise their activities. The advancement of the internet, the use of social media, instant messaging applications, and other online platforms present new challenges that are increasingly complex for law enforcement and victim protection.

Human trafficking in the digital era is experiencing increasingly complex developments with the widespread use of the internet and communication technology. Crimes that were previously committed conventionally are now transformed through digital media that allows perpetrators to reach victims without territorial boundaries. Digitalization opens up new spaces for perpetrators to recruit, spread false information, and online transactions more quickly and secretly. This technological advancement makes it easier for organized crime perpetrators to expand their

networks, including transnational crimes regulated in Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning Criminal Offenses. (Ardin & Harefa, 2021; Suriani et al., 2025)

Social media is the main means used by perpetrators to profile potential victims and recruit subtly. By looking at the victim's personal information on social media, the perpetrator can determine the target who is considered vulnerable. This is in line with the findings of the UNODC which recorded a significant increase in online recruitment since 2018100. Europol also found that the internet, including the dark web, has become a space for illegal transactions such as human trafficking and online sexual exploitation. The perpetrators take advantage of technological loopholes and anonymity, including the use of cryptocurrencies to obscure the flow of funds from crimes. This mode is referred to as a new form of transnational organized crime that Gallagher analyzes as an ever-evolving phenomenon of international law.

By 2025, the National Police Trafficking Directorate noted that it has handled a total of 36,148 cases of gender-based violence and vulnerable groups including trafficking even though the case resolution rate is reported to be only 12.8%. From this data, it is clear that trafficking cases in Indonesia are on an increasing trend, both in terms of the number of cases, victims, and the network of perpetrators.

Table. 3 Data on Trafficking Cases in 2020-2025

Year	Notes / Estimates of Trafficking Cases
2020	383 cases were reported — as part of an upward trend since 2019.
2021	624 cases were reported.
2022	Data for partial periods: 348 cases from January–October 2022.
2023	982 cases of trafficking — a significant jump compared to 2022.
2024	Although the full number of the year has not always been published, reports show at least 698 victims during 2024 (as of July).
2025	Until early 2025, there are reports of handling 609 cases of trafficking with 1,503 victims

Source: quoted from various newspapers

Law Enforcement Obstacles to Trafficking Cases at the Asahan Police Station

The Asahan Police is a resort police institution responsible for law enforcement, maintenance of public security and order (kamtibmas), as well as public services throughout the administrative area of Asahan Regency, North Sumatra Province with a center in the district capital, Kisaran. The Asahan Police also oversees various functional units (such as the Criminal Investigation Unit, Narcotics Unit, Traffic Unit, Sat Samapta, SPKT services) which are tasked with handling crime, traffic, patrols, community services, and other routine police functions. This structure allows the Asahan Police to carry out a wide range of tasks from the prosecution of general and special crimes, preventive patrols, to community administrative services (for example, the issuance of SKCK).

The jurisdiction of the Asahan Police covers the entire area of Asahan Regency. Asahan Regency stretches across North Sumatra Province and consists of a number of sub-districts and administrative villages/sub-districts. Thus, all criminal incidents, violations of the law, community police services, and kamtibmas duties in Asahan Regency are under the supervision and authority of the Asahan Police. Based on the list of administrative areas of the

Asahan Regency Regional Government, there are 25 sub-districts that are also included in the supervision and jurisdiction of the Asahan Police: (Nissa & Nasution, 2025; Pinem et al., 2025)

Table. 4. Districts in the Asahan Regency Region

No	Districts	Area (km²)
1	Bandar Pasir Mandoge	713,63
2	Island Town	268,41
3	Aek Songsongan	282,21
4	Rahuning	195,80
5	People's Island	213,65
6	Aek Kuasan	143,13
7	Aek Ledong	85,12
8	Sei Kepayang	370,69
9	Sei Kepayang Barat	49,19
10	East Sei Kepayang	100.65
11	Tanjung Balai (sub-district)	88.68
12	Simpang Empat	135.77
13	Inner Bay	117.01
14	Water Rock	117.15
15	Sei Dadap	82.78
16	Dead End Pane	153.40
17	King Height	107.90
18	Setia Janji	63.37
19	Meranti	45.33
20	Pulo Bandring	86.99
21	Rawang Panca Arga	67.37
22	Air Joman	98.09
23	Silau Laut	84.68
24	West Range (West Range City)	32.81
25	East Range (East Range City)	30.17

In order to abolish human trafficking in Asahan Regency, as a follow-up to Law No. 21 of 2007 concerning the crime of human trafficking, the Asahan Regency government issued several regional regulations and policies in order to prevent and handle human trafficking crimes in the Asahan area.

Table. 5. Asahan Regency Regional Regulation Related to Trafficking in Persons

Name / Regional Regulation Number / Perbup / Regulation Regions	Contents / Scope	Relevance to Prevention or Treatment Trafficking / Victim Protection
Regional Regulations Asahan Regency Number 4 of 2022 concerning "Implementation of Child-Friendly Regency (KLA)"	Regulating children's rights, institutions, KLA indicators, and child protection policies in Asahan Regency.	By guaranteeing the protection of children's rights, this regulation provides a basis for local law to protect children from exploitation and potential child trafficking as part of trafficking.
Asahan Regent Regulation Number 72 of 2022 concerning the establishment of the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children (UPTD-PPA) in Asahan	Establish regional institutions for the protection of women and children	These institutions can play a role in the detection, handling and rehabilitation of victims — important in the prevention and management of trafficking cases.
Asahan Regency Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2022 concerning "Prevention and Quality Improvement of Slum Housing and Slum Settlements"	Regulating the improvement of settlements and slum housing conditions in Asahan	Although not explicitly about trafficking — improving local socio-economic conditions and housing could reduce social vulnerability, which in criminological theory contributes to reduced risk exploitation/trafficking of persons.

This regional regulation regulates the enforcement and handling of victims of human trafficking, substantially focusing on prevention efforts rather than repressive efforts against these non-criminal perpetrators. This is intended so that there is no intercession of the implementation of authority between levels of government, but it is expected to develop synergy between various sectors and lines of government, with the hope that if prevention can be carried out optimally, then in line with that it will also be able to minimize victims of human trafficking in Asahan Regency. (Meliala, 2025; Stuttgart, 2025; Wahyuni & Suparmin, 2025)

The countering/enforcement of human *trafficking* in Asahan Regency, referring to Law No. 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, is the only comprehensive and integral legislation in Indonesia that regulates Human *Trafficking* and related laws

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the crime of trafficking in persons in Asahan Regency during the 2018–2023 period shows the development of an increasingly complex modus operandi. The practice of trafficking is no longer carried out conventionally, but has transformed into a modern pattern that utilizes digital technology, social media, and cross-regional networks. Forms of crime include the recruitment of migrant workers without official procedures, document forgery, domestic exploitation, sexual exploitation, and child exploitation in the plantation sector. Vulnerable groups, especially women and children, are the main targets by taking advantage of victims' limited knowledge of the law and safe migration. These findings confirm that trafficking in

Asahan is not solely triggered by economic factors, but also by the low legal and digital literacy of the community and the weak labor and migration supervision system, so that it requires integrated and layered handling.

This research also shows that the criminal policy of the Asahan Police in dealing with trafficking has been directed to a comprehensive approach through a combination of penal and non-penal strategies. The penal approach is realized through victim-oriented law enforcement, capacity building of investigators, the use of special units, cracking down on organized networks, and strengthening cross-agency coordination. The non-penal approach is focused on prevention efforts through public education, counseling on illegal recruitment modes, strengthening community networks, monitoring vulnerable areas, and providing integrated services for victims. The integration of these two approaches places the protection of victims' rights as a priority and confirms that countering trafficking cannot rely on repressive instruments alone, but requires sustained preventive and humanist efforts.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of anti-trafficking law enforcement in Asahan Regency still faces various structural, procedural, social, and institutional obstacles. Limited human resources, infrastructure, and capacity of the apparatus affect the ability to detect early detection and handle cases, especially in areas with high population mobility. Procedural barriers can be seen in the difficulty of proof, low victim participation due to trauma and fear, and an imbalance between normative criminal threats and criminal practices in court. Socio-cultural factors, such as low legal awareness, stigma towards victims, and social acceptance of illegal migration, have also weakened prevention efforts. These findings emphasize the need for a more comprehensive strategy to combat trafficking through strengthening the capacity of the authorities, an effective victim protection system, preventive policies based on education and community empowerment, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that are adaptive to the development of trafficking modes.

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