



## Operandi Human Tafficking Indonesia, Thailand as a Transit Country

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### ABSTRACT

Human trafficking remains a significant issue in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia as a primary source country and Thailand as a major transit hub. Despite existing regulations, weak law enforcement, involvement of authorities, and lax immigration policies continue to enable trafficking syndicates to operate. This study analyzes the factors contributing to Thailand's role as a transit hub, the trafficking routes, and the operational methods used by these syndicates. The findings indicate that improving cross-border cooperation, strengthening border surveillance, and reforming immigration and legal policies are essential steps to combat human trafficking effectively. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between Southeast Asian countries to close legal loopholes and improve victim protection mechanisms.

## INTRODUCTION

In modern times human trafficking is known as TPPO (Trafficking in Persons), replacing the term 'slavery' that was once used to describe this practice, as it better reflects the complexity and diversity of the forms of exploitation that occur today (Fadillah et al., 2022). Although there are various international organisations, governments and NGOs working together to combat TPPO, it remains a serious global problem. In 2022, the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons stated that 51,675 cases of trafficking occurred worldwide (Kompas.id, 2023). TPPO is a complex transnational crime that has a significant impact on victims and the countries involved, including countries of origin, transit and destination.

**Table.1 Data on the Increase in Victims of Human Trafficking**

Years	Victims
2024	1.794
2023	3.363
2022	752
2021	683
2020	442
2019	226

*Source: Ministry of Women and Child Protection*

Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) shows an alarming increase in the number of victims of TPPO from 2019 to 2024. In 2019, 226 cases of TPPO were recorded. This number increased to 442 cases in 2020, and continued to rise to 683 cases in 2021. In 2022, there was a significant spike to 752 cases. The sharpest increase occurred in 2023, with 3,363 cases recorded. This represents a 447.2 per cent increase over the previous year. In 2024, up to a certain month, 1,794 cases were recorded. This increasing trend indicates that TPPO is an urgent problem that requires serious attention from various parties.

The factor behind the increase in TPPO in Indonesia is the desire of the Indonesian people to work abroad. This occurs due to limited employment opportunities and coupled with the covid-19 pandemic which has weakened the economy, which makes it increasingly difficult for Indonesians to find work. In addition to this, the perpetrators generally provide offers to work abroad at affordable costs and high salaries. This then opens a gap for TPPO perpetrators to find victims, so that TPPO cases in Indonesia increase (Midho, 2022).

The process of travelling from the country of origin to the destination country is not an easy matter, considering that each country has immigration standards to accept and release Indonesian citizens or foreigners, including the process of Indonesian victims of TPPO who can reach the final destination countries such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. When carrying out the internship process at the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok, the author found that Thailand became a transit country. The reason for making Thailand a transit country is because Thailand has a strategic position in Southeast Asia, bordering several countries that are often the final destination of TPPO. Good transport

connectivity and relatively lax visa policies make it an ideal transit point for trafficking syndicates.

There have been many studies on human trafficking offences (TPPO). Dian Sukma Purwanegara (2023) in her research entitled 'Investigation of Trafficking Offences through Social Media' examines how social media becomes a means for TPPO perpetrators to recruit victims. This research highlights the various modus operandi used, such as online prostitution, illegal labour recruitment, and illegal adoption. Meanwhile, Indarto Indarto (2023) in his research entitled 'The Role of the International Organization For Migration (IOM) Thailand in Handling Cases of Trafficking in Persons at the Thailand-Myanmar Border in 2022' analysed the role of IOM Thailand in handling cases of TPPO in the Thailand-Myanmar border area. This research examines the various programmes and initiatives undertaken by IOM Thailand, such as the PROMISE II programme, in protecting migrant workers and preventing TPPO.

Both studies provide valuable insights into various aspects of TPPO, from the modus operandi to the efforts to tackle it. However, this research has not specifically addressed the reasons why Thailand has become a transit country for TPPO victims from Indonesia. This research aims to fill this gap by analysing the factors that cause Thailand to become a transit country in TPPO networks involving Indonesian citizens. Thus, this research is expected to provide a new contribution and complement previous studies in understanding the TPPO phenomenon, especially in the context of Thailand's role as a transit country.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Transnational Crime

Generally speaking, transnational crime is a type of structured and organised crime that crosses national borders. These crimes often generate significant financial benefits for the perpetrators and have a detrimental impact on the security, stability and development of the state (Tabiu et al., 2023). In an era of globalisation, with the movement of people, goods and information, transnational crime has also increased (Cawthra G & Cleary S, 2006). These crimes, which cross national borders and involve organised criminal networks, pose a serious threat to global security, stability and development (Dugis, V, 2018). A clear example of transnational crime is TPPO. Millions of people around the world are victims of TPPO every year, exploited for forced labour, prostitution and modern slavery (Cameron, 2007).

In developing countries, victims engage in transnational crime as a means of earning a living. To facilitate the identification of transnational crime, here are 5 main characteristics of transnational crime (Reichel, 2004):

1. Profit motive: These crimes are committed in order to gain financial benefits for the perpetrator.
2. Organised: these crimes are committed by structured and planned groups.
3. Involving secrecy and corruption: These crimes may involve government officials and professionals.
4. Involving copyright and intellectual property offences: these crimes may involve the theft of artistic, cultural and intellectual property works.

5. Involving illicit trafficking: These crimes may involve TPPO, drugs, weapons and other illegal goods.

Transnational crime is a serious threat to human security. One example is THB, where people are exploited for financial gain and forced to work in inhumane conditions. TPPO is often linked to illegal migration, where people are manipulated into entering another country. Transnational crime theory views TPPO as organised crime that crosses national borders, driven by financial gain and reinforced by globalisation. In this context, the hypothesis is that high economic inequality, weak law enforcement, and strategic geographical position make a country an attractive transit point for TPPO perpetrators.

### **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking or TPPO has become a serious global issue and is raised in various international forums. This phenomenon takes away human rights both physically and mentally. The roots of TPPO stem from the need for cheap or unpaid labour known as slavery (Barrick, 2021). In the era of globalisation, non-state actors take on a greater role in addressing the issue of human trafficking, as non-state actors can move more flexibly in their actions unlike state actors who are full of interests.

Human trafficking does not only affect a region, but more broadly this phenomenon can threaten a country or even international security as a whole. For this reason, the United Nations (UN) passed the Palermo Protocol in 2000 to prevent and combat TPPO, especially of women and children (ohchr.org, 2000). The Protocol attaches importance to a comprehensive international approach to combating TPPO. According to the Palermo Protocol, TPPO is the transmission, transmission, concealment, or receipt of a person using threats, violence, deception, or other forms of coercion, with the aim of exploiting the victim (Zhang, 2022).

There are three ways to analyse TPPO, namely (Touzenis, 2010): The first is to identify the perpetrator's actions, such as how the perpetrator recruits, convinces the victim, sends the victim to a certain location and hides the victim. The second is to identify the perpetrator's strategy, for example by threat, coercion, deception, or abuse of power. And finally analyse the perpetrator's objectives, such as to exploit the victim through forced labour, prostitution, preservation, or organ harvesting. Traffickers use various means to subdue victims, such as threatening victims or their families. They also manipulate and coerce victims to achieve their goals, including kidnapping, transferring, and using violence.

Human trafficking theory (Palermo Protocol) defines TPPO as the recruitment, transportation, or receipt of a person by force or fraud for the purpose of exploitation. From this perspective, the hypothesis is that lax immigration policies, weak border controls, lack of protection for migrant workers, and demand for cheap labour or sexual exploitation increase the risk of TPPO in a country.

In this research, the author will look for data on the number of TPPO victims in Indonesia in 2019-2024. Then the author will look for how the TPPO process reaches the destination country and the factors that make Thailand a TPPO transit country for Indonesian citizens. If the data has been fulfilled, the author will conduct an analysis using the theory of transnational crime and the theory of human trafficking and then make a conclusion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Type of Research**

This research uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand the phenomenon under study, as well as its impact on various parties. The qualitative approach is carried out by collecting data which is then interpreted to answer the problem of the phenomenon that occurs (Sugiyono, 2013). The qualitative approach focuses on interpretation, discovery, and a richer depiction of meaning than the quantitative approach. This allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of research subjects.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, in which the analysed data is described through narratives to explain Indonesia's TPPO Opernadi, Thailand as a Transit country. The data used in this research comes from various official sources, such as statements of the head of state, official state websites, journals, notes, memos and interviews at the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok. Although numerical data can be used in qualitative research, numerical data in this research only serves as a complement to strengthen the analysis and not as the main focus (Suyitno, 2021). The descriptive qualitative approach is expected to provide a clear and detailed picture of Indonesia's strategy in combating TPPO in the research report.

### **Data Sources**

Data sources are library materials that contain information collected by researchers to analyse research problems (Santosa et al., 2015). This research uses two types of data sources, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from interviews at the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok and also the websites of relevant state agencies, namely the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI.go.id), the Ministry of Women and Children Protection, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Political, Legal and Security Affairs. Secondary data comes from various sources such as journals, articles, documents, magazines, and news related to the research topic.

### **Object of Research**

The object of research is the element that becomes the focus of research, where the researcher wants to understand and analyse it to reach a conclusion (Supardi, 2006). This object is the Indonesian TPPO Operandi, Thailand as a transit country. By determining and analysing the object of research, researchers are expected to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study and produce useful conclusions. The object of this research is the Trafficking in Persons (TPPO) factor why Thailand is a transit country. So that researchers will observe and analyse the policies and strategies of the Indonesian government in preventing TPPO.

### **Data Collection Technique**

This research uses literature study techniques to collect data. This technique includes searching, collecting, observing and analysing documents, records, books, and literature relevant to the research problem (Alaslan, 2022). Data collected through literature study can be in the form of information from various sources, such as news, writings, articles, and journals. This data is then used to complement and enrich the research data. In addition, the data collection method used in this research is the triangulation technique. this technique combines or matches data from various sources. Triangulation aims to enrich information, increase reliability, and produce more valid conclusions (Adlini et al., 2022).

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### **Human Trafficking in Indonesia**

Indonesia, with a population reaching 281.6 million as of June 2024, faces significant challenges in employment and equal access to education. These imbalances have created vulnerable conditions for society, especially groups with low education levels and limited work skills, driving them to seek jobs abroad through unofficial channels or become victims of exploitation domestically. One of the consequences of this situation is the prevalence of human trafficking crimes (TPPO) conducted by organized criminal networks using various methods (Pratama & Basyarudin, 2025).

According to a report from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), human trafficking in Indonesia often targets women, children, and migrant workers who are deceived through job fraud, labor exploitation, sex trafficking, as well as child and domestic worker exploitation (KemenPPPA, 2024).

The majority of human trafficking victims in Indonesia are women and children. Data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Indonesia in 2021 showed that out of 70 TPPO victims assisted, 38 were women and 32 were men. These findings align with reports from KemenPPPA, which indicated that 96% of total TPPO victims from 2020 to 2022 were women and children. This situation is influenced by several fundamental factors, such as limited access to education and decent job opportunities for women, particularly in rural areas, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Additionally, the high demand for female workers in jobs such as domestic helpers, factory workers,

and the entertainment sector has fueled human trafficking practices (KemenPPPA, 2023).

Based on data collected by the author from the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok, the number of Indonesian TPPO victims identified in Thailand is as follows:

**Table.2 Indonesian TPPO Victims Identified in Thailand**

Year	TPPO Scamming Victims	Irregular Migrant Worker Scamming Cases
2022	73 people	17 people
2023	71 people	192 people
2024	34 people	162 people
2025 (as of Feb 14)	46 people	41 people

From the data above, it can be seen that cases of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) departing through irregular means sharply increased in 2023, with 192 cases compared to 17 cases in 2022. Meanwhile, the number of TPPO victims due to scamming fraud fluctuated, with the highest figure occurring in 2022 at 73 victims. The decrease in cases in 2024 and early 2025 may be attributed to increased government oversight of illegal labor agencies and international cooperation in combating TPPO. However, these figures may only reflect the number of identified victims, while the actual number could be much higher due to underreporting by victims who fear repercussions or lack access to report.

### **Thailand's Geographical Location and Its Role in TPPO**

Thailand holds a strategic position in Southeast Asia, bordering Malaysia to the south, Myanmar to the west and north, Laos to the northeast, and Cambodia to the east. Additionally, Thailand has an extensive coastline along the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand often utilized as transit routes by human traffickers.

#### **1. Land Borders:**

##### **a. Mae Sai (Thailand)-Tachileik (Myanmar):**

This route serves as the primary entry point for migrant workers and TPPO victims from Myanmar seeking to enter Thailand or continue their journey to other countries.

##### **b. Aranyaprathet (Thailand)-Poipet (Cambodia):**

This border is frequently used for smuggling TPPO victims from Cambodia to Thailand due to high mobility in the area.

##### **c. Mukdahan (Thailand)-Savannakhet (Laos):**

Located along the Mekong River, this route is a key channel for human trafficking from Laos to Thailand via river transport.

## 2. Maritime Borders:

### a. Southern Thailand Ports (Songkhla, Pattani, and Narathiwat):

These ports are used to smuggle TPPO victims to Malaysia and other Asian countries. Additionally, this area is known as a departure point for illegal migrant workers.

### b. Samut Sakhon and Rayong:

As major ports in Thailand's fishing industry, these areas are frequent sites of illegal migrant labor exploitation. Many migrant workers are subjected to inhumane conditions, including modern slavery (Martin, 2020).

## 3. Air Routes:

Some victims enter Thailand using tourist or migrant worker visas before being illegally transferred to other destination countries through land or sea routes. Due to these routes, Thailand has become a key hub for human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Many TPPO syndicates use Thailand as a transit point before victims are sold to destination countries under various forms of exploitation, such as forced labor, modern slavery, and sexual exploitation (Indarto, 2022).

## Thailand's Weak Political and Regulatory Framework in Combating Human Trafficking

Thailand has adopted various laws and regulations to address and combat human trafficking (TPPO). One of the primary regulations is the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2008, which prohibits all forms of human trafficking and imposes severe penalties on perpetrators. This law was amended in 2015 and 2017 to clarify sanctions against offenders and other parties involved in trafficking (Jurmafis Untan). Additionally, the 2015 Amendment to the Anti-Money Laundering Act allows the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) to freeze the assets of TPPO perpetrators during investigations and allocate a portion of the seized assets to compensate victims (Feigenblatt, 2021).

Although Thailand has laws related to TPPO, their implementation faces various challenges, particularly in law enforcement and victim protection policies. Several key factors contribute to the weakness of Thailand's regulatory framework:

### 1. Weak Law Enforcement

#### a. High Involvement of Officials in Human Trafficking Networks:

Some Thai government officials and law enforcement personnel are suspected of being involved in human trafficking syndicates, either as protectors or active participants. This corruption leads to many TPPO cases not being seriously pursued.

#### b. Penalties that Fail to Deter Perpetrators:

Although Thailand has legal provisions against human trafficking, many offenders receive only light sentences or are even released after paying fines or bribes. This allows TPPO syndicates to continue operating without fear of legal consequences.

c. **Lack of Coordination Between Agencies:**

The lack of coordination between the police, immigration authorities, and victim protection agencies results in slow and ineffective handling of TPPO cases.

**Weak Immigration Policies**

a. **Ease of Entry in to Thailand:**

Thailand has relatively lenient visa policies, allowing foreign nationals to enter easily. Traffickers often exploit this by bringing victims into Thailand before transferring them to their final destinations.

b. **Weak Border Surveillance:**

Numerous illegal entry points along Thailand's borders with Myanmar, Laos, and Malaysia are difficult for security forces to monitor. Traffickers frequently use these porous borders to smuggle victims undetected.

c. **Misuse of Tourist and Migrant Worker Visas:**

Many TPPO victims enter Thailand using tourist or migrant worker visas, which traffickers then exploit. Victims often do not realize that they will be subjected to exploitation after arriving in Thailand.

**DISCUSSION**

This As the largest country in Southeast Asia with the highest population in the region, Indonesia faces many challenges, one of which is human trafficking (TPPO). According to a report from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), several provinces in Indonesia have recorded higher numbers of TPPO victims than others. West Java is among the provinces with the highest number of TPPO victims due to its large population and high labor migration, particularly in the domestic and manufacturing sectors. West Kalimantan is also highly vulnerable to TPPO because it directly borders Malaysia, making it a primary route for undocumented migrant workers.

In other regions, East Java and Central Java have also recorded significant TPPO cases, mainly due to the high number of migrant workers departing from these areas through both legal and illegal channels. North Sumatra, as one of Indonesia's economic hubs, serves as both an origin and transit area for TPPO victims, who are often subjected to labor exploitation and sex trafficking. Meanwhile, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is known for its high number of migrant workers traveling abroad, especially to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, making it particularly susceptible to human trafficking. Several factors, such as economic conditions, limited access to education, and weak oversight of labor recruitment processes, exacerbate the TPPO issue in these regions.

### **Human Trafficking Routes from Indonesia**

Victims are transported from various regions in Indonesia to key border points, such as Batam, Riau, and North Sumatra, before being smuggled via small boats across the sea into Malaysia. From there, traffickers take victims overland into Thailand, particularly through Songkhla and Narathiwat provinces. By sea, victims are transported using small or fast boats, which are difficult for authorities to detect. These boats land along Thailand's coastal areas, including Satun, Songkhla, Samut Sakhon, Pattani, and Narathiwat. By air, TPPO victims enter Thailand using passports and tourist visas before continuing their journey overland to their final destinations, such as Myanmar, Laos, or Cambodia.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite Thailand's existing anti-human trafficking laws, weak law enforcement, corruption, and inadequate victim protection make the country a major transit hub for TPPO. Indonesia as a primary source country faces challenges due to economic vulnerabilities, weak labor oversight, and porous borders, enabling traffickers to exploit victims through both legal and illegal routes. To combat TPPO, stronger enforcement, anti-corruption measures, and better coordination between authorities are crucial. Both Indonesia and Thailand should enhance border security, improve victim support services, and strengthen international cooperation to dismantle trafficking networks effectively.

### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

This study highlights key challenges in combating TPPO in Indonesia and Thailand, but further research is needed to analyze the effectiveness of existing policies and enforcement mechanisms. Future studies could focus on the role of digital platforms in human trafficking, the impact of socio-economic factors on victim vulnerability, and cross-border cooperation strategies to combat trafficking more effectively.

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