
EDITORIAL**HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND URBAN SAFETY: EXPLORING PATHWAYS TO PREVENTION, PROTECTION, PARTNERSHIP, AND BEYOND**John Winterdyk¹ and Christina Zarafonitou²

Even though human trafficking is ultimately a humanitarian (i.e., human rights) issue,³ it has become a highly politicized topic worldwide (Cha, 2018; Jahic & Finkenauer, 2005). Ochab (2018) describes human trafficking as a “pandemic of the 21st century.” To this point, Millar et al. (2017) opinion that these claims—that sex trafficking are a prolific and growing problem -- are linked to transnational organized crime (see Lee, 2010) and domestic criminal gangs (see Carpenter & Gates, 2016). Millar et al. also note that certain groups (i.e., Asian women, Indigenous women, and youth) are at significant risk— are repeated by government representatives, advocates, and even some academics despite a lack of empirical evidence to substantiate the claims” (p. 8). Urban settings constitute the context in which HT is completed since there are many paths leading to them. Anyway, this is the evidence from Balkans and from Greece also. However, Cole and Sprang (2015) point out that while risk factors between rural and urban areas are similar, each setting presents different challenges when preventing or intervening. Although there is a lack of empirical evidence (see Abedi, 2019) on the actual extent of HT of human trafficking remains an elusive number (e.g., Callahan, 2019). Human trafficking is a clandestine crime that does not help our efforts to determine how many people are trafficking despite a lack of empirical analyses of intervention outcomes (Crawford & Kaufman, 2008; Tsutsumi et al., 2008).

Moreover, traffickers exploit social inequalities and people’s vulnerable economic and social situations. This situation has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and facilitated traffickers in finding victims. The pandemic also blocked victims’ access to justice, assistance and support.⁴

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³ Former (from January 1997 to December 2006) Secretary-General of the United Nations. Kofi Annan commented in 2013 that: “Slavery was, in a very real sense, the first international human rights issue to come to the fore. It led to the adoption of the first human rights laws and to the creation of the first human rights non-governmental organization. And yet despite the efforts of the international community to combat this abhorrent practice, it is still widely prevalent in all its insidious forms, old and new.”

⁴ European Commission, *Commission from the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-*

Traffickers have moved to a new online recruitment model and exploitation of victims, making it more difficult for law enforcement and the judiciary to respond. The fact is that traffickers like to work ‘underground’ where they are not easily detected.⁵ And when it is detected, prosecution remains a challenge, for example, in the high-profile case of multi-millionaire Jeffrey Epstein who in 2019 was charged with the abuse of trafficking of young women and girls for decades⁶. Despite the compelling evidence over 10-years, Epstein was never brought to justice before he committed suicide while awaiting trial in prison. Part of the difficulty of bringing Epstein to trial, not unlike many such cases, was getting enough evidence, the difficulty in getting victims to provide evidence – let alone know they were victims, the cost of the investigation, etc. Many of Epstein’s incidents took place in urban environments, although his private island was also alleged to be one of the locations where he exploited some of his victims. Therefore, urban settings can be fertile terrain for conducting their enterprise.

Human trafficking (HT) is increasingly being conflated with the global immigration quandary. Despite greater awareness and efforts to combat human trafficking, the evidence suggests that human trafficking is growing at an alarming rate (Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, 2020). Ironically, despite increased awareness and attention, the definition of human trafficking has no universal definition (Winterdyk, 2020, 2020b). In Canada, for example, most regional, provincial, and national governments and agencies use the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (U.N. Protocol), which defines human trafficking in the following way:

Trafficking in Persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, utilizing the use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, or fraud, of deceptions, of the abuse of power of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over other persons, for the purpose of exploitation.

The UN Protocol has internationally recognized a commonly accepted definition of human trafficking.⁷ In European Union according to Directive 2011/36/EU⁸ human trafficking means “*the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.*” This definition is quite similar to

2025, Brussels 2021, p. 3. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files_en?file=2021-04/14042021_eu_strategy_on_combatting_trafficking_in_human_beings_2021-2025_com-2021-171-1_en.pdf

⁵ European Commission, *Commission from the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025*, Brussels 2021, p. 3. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files_en?file=2021-04/14042021_eu_strategy_on_combatting_trafficking_in_human_beings_2021-2025_com-2021-171-1_en.pdf

⁶ See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-48913377>

⁷ See: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/protocol.html>

⁸ See: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/trafficking-explained_en and https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-anti-trafficking-directive-201136eu_en

UN Protocols definition. In Greece, the Law 3875/2010 transposed into national law the UN Protocol (Palermo Protocol) and the Directive 2011/36/ EU has been implemented by the law 4198/2013.⁹

As most readers know, HT is a ‘hot topic’ with no shortage of scholarly work and resources directed towards combatting HT. Twenty years ago, for example, there were no dedicated academic journals about HT. Today, there are at least three journals whose focus is solely dedicated to addressing the issue of human trafficking from a wide range of perspectives. They include the *Journal of Human Trafficking*,¹⁰ *Anti-Trafficking Review*,¹¹ and the *Journal of Trafficking and Human Exploitation*.¹² Then there are particular issues such as this one, among several others, that publish journal theme-specific issues.¹³

The number of scholarly and non-scholarly books has also increased since around 2010. A literature survey will reveal many academic books and novels (i.e., true-life stories). Furthermore, within the past couple of years, there have also been several dedicated Handbooks on human trafficking, most notably the *Routledge Handbook of Human Trafficking* edited by Piotrowicz, Rijken, and Uhl (2019). Another, more recent Handbook is a two-volume edition, with over 100 full-length entries, titled *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*. It is edited by Winterdyk and Jones (2020). Finally, the *Routledge International Handbook of Human Trafficking: A Multi-Disciplinary and Applied Approach* is also edited by Dalla and Sabella (2020). The later Handbook includes 14 chapters entries.

Hence, there is no shortage of interest, vested research, or scholarly discourse regarding HT and how we might best respond to HT. In fact, since the early 2000s, human trafficking has garnered a lot of attention as a growing number of organizations have joined the campaign to combat trafficking through a variety of efforts and means. Although not an exhaustive or ‘biased’ list, some examples include “Save our Children” (started up in 1977 by the American singer Anita Bryant), the UK-based program “Hope for Justice”(started in 2008 and whose response model focuses on prevention, rescuing, restoring, & reforming), and “La Strada International” (started in 1994 the organization is a European NGO Platform against human trafficking, that works from a human rights perspective in support of trafficked persons)have become major NGOs. Similarly, the UN ‘Blue Heart’ campaign (established in 1997 but not launched until 2009) and the NGO “Stop the Traffik” (founded in 2006), have also emerged as major programs designed to combat HT. The fact is that, as is increasingly being documented, some of the information these organizations use has been misleading or distorted, and none make a distinction between rural and urban settings. This unintentional distortion of ‘facts’ and purpose can, and often do, compromise our efforts to combat the issue effectively (see, for example, Wiener & Hala, 2008,

⁹ See: <https://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy/global-issues/human-trafficking.html>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/uhmt20/current>

¹¹ See: <https://www.antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atrjournal>

¹² See: <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/plp/jthe>

¹³ A sample of special issues on trafficking in non-trafficking specific journals include: *European J of Criminology*, 2019, 7(1); *International Migration*, 2010, 35(3); *Social Science*, 2021; & *Violence & Victims*, 2020, 35(3).

and the American-based National Human Trafficking Hotline website (<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/what-human-trafficking/myths-misconceptions>).

In addition to the efforts of a wide range of interest groups, most countries have also introduced specific legislation to address and combat HT. Many of these countries base their legislation around the 4 Ps (i.e., prosecution, protection, prevention, & partnership) as defined by the United Nations Protocol. However, although beyond the scope of an Introduction, each jurisdiction tends to focus differently on the “Ps.” Specifically, it is recommended that the government make amendments to their domestic laws, ratify international treaties, and cooperate with regional anti-trafficking initiatives (see Tucker, Kammel, Lehman, & Ward, 2010). By contrast, in Canada, the emphasis is primarily on protection and prosecution (see Winterdyk, 2019); however, the ‘National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking’ offers a detailed approach that includes elements of all the four Ps (i.e., prevention, protection, prosecution, & partnership). According to data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU,¹⁴ between 2017 and 2018, more than 14,000 registered victims were recorded within the European Union. Efforts to combat human trafficking are compounded by several factors such as a lack of political will, and the national strategy to combat this crime is conflated with questionable institutional infrastructure (i.e., dissolving inter-ministerial teams), insufficient financial resources, and a general lack of commitment by law enforcement agencies to combatting HT (Poverty Watch, 2020).

Despite the discourse around HT, there has not been (to the best of our knowledge) any concerted effort to discuss the issues within the context of where most trafficking tends to occur – that is, in urban areas. Urban environments represent unique opportunities for trafficking to occur – be it sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, or other forms of trafficking. The opportunity for increased anonymity, a rich market for prospective victims, and a host of other socio-economic factors provide a host of risk factors that make specific individuals prime targets for trafficking people. For example, traffickers can find (small) cities and towns attractive places to operate, given that residents and even local enforcement may tend to underestimate the threat of trafficking (Occhiboi, 2015). However, as Burbano (2021) observes, some urban settings are comparatively safe. Therefore, the importance of looking at the impact, effects, and response that can be associated with urban environments is further compounded by the fact that over 56 percent of the world’s population now lives in an urban area compared to slightly over 41 percent of the world’s population in 1950 (Buchholz, 2021).

Hence, as much as a special issue on human trafficking and urban safety is justifiably needed, by prescription, we cannot offer an exhaustive overview and review of the problems. However, we have endeavoured to provide a cross-section of some of the main issues and international representation. To achieve this objective, we conducted the usual ‘call for submissions/abstracts’ and targeted those we felt might be interested in contributing to this special issue. After the closing date, we used a set of criteria to determine if the proposed article would align with the objective of this issue. Since we had more submissions than we could accommodate – in fact, because of the number of articles that met the threshold, we expanded the number of entries.

¹⁴ See: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5b93c49f-12a0-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1>

Once the completed articles were submitted, they were subjected to blind peer reviews. The articles cover a range of topics. In whole or part, they address pathways to prevention, protection, partnership, and beyond regarding HT. This special issue includes contributions from several European countries, the United States, and Canada.

Whether you read only one, a couple, or the entire issue, including the Briefs, we encourage you to reflect on the broader underlying theme of this issue. Can any concerns or issues be identified as they might pertain to prevention, protection, partnership, or any other critical issues as they relate to combatting human trafficking? What insights might have been gained, and what questions remain to be answered in our effort to combat human trafficking in urban settings.

We never thought we would answer any of the vital questions or concerns, but we hope that this modest collection of articles sheds some light on the importance of focusing on human trafficking within urban settings. However, several points for possible consideration as you read any or all of the articles: to what extent might/does the form of trafficking urban settings differ from rural settings; how well do the current prevention, protection, prosecution, and or partnership initiatives to combat HT work in urban settings; how might the response mechanisms to combat HT differ across urban centres; and what lessons, if any might be garnered by reading the articles included in this issue? Finally, are there any gaps in the discourse presented in this issue that deserve further inquiry?

We will consider this special issue a success if the reader is inspired to build on any of the queries that might arise from the articles or commentaries. In the end, it is not sufficient to read others' research but to take it and build on the knowledge.

Finally, although we applied a rigorous selection and review process to this issue, any limitations lie not with the contributors but our limitations in further revitalizing the articles and commentaries.

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Links:

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