

Law Enforcement Against Trafficking in Persons: A Case Study of the Banda Aceh Class I Immigration Office

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of law enforcement against human trafficking by the Banda Aceh Class I Immigration Office through a multidimensional preventive approach. Using a qualitative method with a normative-empirical approach, this study found that suspected TPPO cases in Aceh increased from 3 cases in 2023 to 10 cases by August 2025, driven by factors such as poverty, low migration literacy, and promises of high wages via social media. Key law enforcement strategies implemented include strict verification of travel documents, which successfully prevented the issuance of 473 passports linked to potential human trafficking throughout 2025, as well as the establishment of 21 Immigration-Assisted Villages and PORA Teams to monitor foreign nationals. Although protective measures have been provided through restitution and rehabilitation in accordance with human rights standards, their implementation remains hampered by a lack of interagency coordination, passport bribery practices, and technological limitations in remote areas. This study recommends the need for a transformation in working methods toward early prediction by integrating biometric facial and fingerprint recognition technology, strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, and implementing comprehensive policies to address the root causes of poverty in rural Aceh in order to protect prospective migrant workers sustainably.

Keywords: Law Enforcement, Human Trafficking, Special Criminal Cases

Introduction

Human trafficking constitutes an extraordinary crime involving extensive and often transnational criminal networks. Based on the territorial scope of its operation, trafficking in persons can be classified into internal trafficking, which occurs within a country's borders, and international trafficking, which involves cross-border exploitation. Human trafficking refers to an organized criminal activity carried out by interconnected individuals or groups with the primary objective of exploiting victims for the perpetrators' financial or material gain (Kamal, 2019, p. 53). Victims of trafficking encompass individuals of all genders, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Gischa, 2022). In many cases, victims originate from remote or economically disadvantaged areas and are transported to major urban centers or abroad, where they are ultimately subjected to various forms of exploitation (Kulsum, 2021). The consequences of trafficking are severe and often have long-term physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts on victims' lives.

Advancements in information technology, particularly the widespread use of social media, have significantly transformed the recruitment methods employed by traffickers. Perpetrators advertise overseas employment opportunities through online platforms and social networking sites, promising attractive positions such as customer service representatives, telemarketers, factory workers, or operators with lucrative salaries. Prospective workers are frequently offered employment in countries such as South Korea and the United Kingdom (Oktavian, 2023). These recruitment schemes typically involve online job advertisements for foreign digital companies, accompanied by minimal application requirements, promises of high wages, and assurances that all travel expenses will be covered. Such offers effectively attract many job seekers. In reality, however, the promised employment rarely exists. Instead, victims are subjected to exploitation and coerced into working for online gambling operations or pornography-related platforms.

Indonesia's principal legal framework for combating trafficking in persons is Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons. Article 1(1) defines trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, harboring, transfer, or receipt of a person through threats or use of force, abduction, confinement, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, debt bondage, or the provision of payments or benefits to obtain the consent of a person having control over another, whether conducted domestically or across national borders, for the purpose of exploitation or resulting in exploitation (Law No. 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons).

Within this legal framework, the Directorate General of Immigration plays a pivotal role in preventing trafficking in persons. Law Number 6 of 2011 concerning Immigration serves as the principal legal basis governing Indonesia's immigration system (Law No. 6 of 2011 concerning Immigration). The law authorizes immigration officers to examine travel documents, deny an individual's departure or entry into Indonesian territory, and impose administrative sanctions for immigration-related violations (Law No. 6 of 2011, Articles 55–68). In the context of trafficking in persons, the Immigration Law enables the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections to conduct early detection of potential trafficking cases, particularly involving Indonesian citizens attempting to travel abroad through irregular or non-procedural migration channels (Law No. 6 of 2011, Article 72). Consequently, preventing illegal departures has become a primary focus of immigration control at international border crossings, including those located in Aceh (Directorate General of Immigration Annual Report, 2025).

Despite strengthened immigration oversight through the establishment of Civil Servant Investigators (*Penyidik Pegawai Negeri Sipil*—PPNS) and the introduction of more stringent criminal sanctions (Nurhaliza, 2020), trafficking cases involving Indonesian citizens have continued to increase in recent years, revealing persistent

shortcomings in policy implementation. Available evidence indicates a growing number of Indonesian trafficking victims, particularly through unofficial border crossings and the misuse of work visas facilitated by transnational criminal syndicates (Pratiwi, 2022). These challenges are exacerbated by corruption among officials, limited monitoring capacity at remote immigration checkpoints, and insufficient coordination between immigration authorities and other relevant agencies, including the National Police and the Ministry of Manpower. Such institutional weaknesses underscore the urgent need to strengthen both the regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms through the adoption of biometric identification technologies, including fingerprint and facial recognition systems, as well as intelligent risk-detection systems capable of preventing the overseas exploitation of Indonesian migrant workers.

The situation is particularly alarming in Aceh, where trafficking cases continue to rise. According to the Public Relations Office of the Aceh Center for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BP3MI), there were 20 reported cases in 2023, three of which were identified as trafficking in persons. In 2024, the number increased to 29 cases, including seven trafficking cases. By August 2025, authorities had recorded 32 cases, ten of which were identified as trafficking in persons (Kasus TPPO di Aceh Naik Drastis, n.d.). These figures indicate an escalating trend that demands more effective preventive measures and stronger inter-agency collaboration.

From a human rights perspective, the state bears the primary responsibility for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling fundamental human rights. This responsibility derives from the state's legitimate authority to regulate public affairs and ensure justice within society. Accordingly, the concept of the state extends beyond the executive branch to encompass the legislative and judicial institutions, as well as all public officials and law enforcement agencies responsible for safeguarding human rights (Sujatmoko, 2016, p. 59). The state is therefore obligated to ensure that every individual effectively enjoys the right to be free from exploitation, violence, and all forms of inhuman treatment.

Law enforcement is intrinsically linked to the fundamental functions of law in regulating social order and protecting public interests. In this regard, legal protection for workers is particularly crucial, as workers often occupy vulnerable positions characterized by unequal bargaining power. Such legal protection seeks to guarantee the fulfillment of workers' fundamental rights while ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment without discrimination, thereby promoting their overall welfare (Triningsih, 2020, pp. 135–147).

The legal basis for prosecuting trafficking in persons is explicitly provided under Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons, particularly Articles 4 and 6 (Syamsudin, 2016, pp. 59–60). Article 4 stipulates that any person who transports an Indonesian citizen outside the

territory of the Republic of Indonesia for the purpose of exploitation abroad shall be subject to imprisonment ranging from three to fifteen years, along with a fine of IDR 120 million to IDR 600 million. Meanwhile, Article 6 provides that any person who sends a child either within or outside Indonesia by any means that results in the child's exploitation shall be liable to the same range of imprisonment and monetary penalties. These provisions demonstrate Indonesia's commitment to imposing severe criminal sanctions on perpetrators while strengthening legal protection for victims of trafficking in persons.

Research Method

This study employed a normative-empirical legal research approach, which examines both legal norms and their implementation in practice within society (Muhaimin, 2020). The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through fieldwork, specifically by conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants from the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections in Aceh. These interviews served as the principal source of empirical data, enabling an in-depth examination of the implementation of legal provisions and the key factors contributing to trafficking in persons (TIP) cases handled by the Class I Immigration Office of Banda Aceh Immigration Checkpoint (TPI).

Secondary data were obtained through an extensive review of the relevant literature, including statutory regulations, scholarly publications, official reports, and other documentary sources related to trafficking in persons and immigration law.

This research adopted a qualitative research design, which seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena as experienced by research participants, including their behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study emphasizes the interpretation of narrative data within its natural and contextual setting, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the implementation of legal norms in addressing trafficking in persons (Nasution, 2023, p. 34).

Result and Discussion

Key Factors Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Among the Acehnese Community

Economic hardship remains the primary factor contributing to the vulnerability of Acehnese citizens to trafficking in persons abroad. Persistent poverty, particularly in rural areas of Aceh, compels many individuals—especially young adults and family breadwinners with significant financial responsibilities—to seek employment overseas, primarily in Malaysia and other neighboring countries, in pursuit of better economic opportunities. The limited availability of local employment makes many individuals susceptible to fraudulent recruitment schemes that promise high salaries despite the substantial risks involved.

Nevertheless, economic hardship is not the sole determinant of trafficking victimization. Social influence from close friends, relatives, and neighbors who have previously worked abroad also plays a significant role. Many victims are persuaded by testimonials and apparent financial success stories shared by returning migrant workers, leading them to believe that overseas employment offers a reliable pathway to economic improvement. Combined with financial pressures, these social influences often encourage individuals to accept employment offers without adequately assessing their legitimacy.

Recruitment by trafficking agents constitutes another major contributing factor. Perpetrators commonly approach prospective victims through social media platforms or personal networks within local communities, offering simplified migration procedures, low recruitment costs, and promises of attractive employment abroad. Individuals experiencing economic distress frequently place their trust in these promises without verifying their authenticity, ultimately becoming victims of illegal migration and labor exploitation.

The broader social environment in Aceh further exacerbates this vulnerability. Peer influence, family migration traditions, and relatively weak community supervision—partly attributable to the province's history of armed conflict and natural disasters—have fostered a culture in which overseas migration is perceived as a primary means of improving household welfare. In addition, limited educational attainment and low levels of migration literacy reduce public awareness of migrant workers' rights and common trafficking methods. The lack of systematic public education regarding safe migration procedures in schools and local communities further increases the risk of trafficking.

Field interviews also revealed that some prospective migrant workers deliberately circumvent legal migration procedures by submitting false information or forged documents during the passport application process. According to officials from the Class I Immigration Office of Banda Aceh Immigration Checkpoint (TPI), every Indonesian citizen intending to travel abroad must comply with established immigration regulations rather than departing through irregular channels (T. Ferdian, 2026).

Immigration authorities further explained that passport issuance for individuals intending to work abroad is temporarily suspended until the applicant's employment information has been comprehensively verified. Such verification includes confirmation of the prospective employer, the nature of the employment, the employer's identity, and other supporting documentation demonstrating the legitimacy of the overseas job offer (T. Ferdian, 2026).

Accordingly, migration for overseas employment as an Indonesian Migrant Worker (PMI) must comply with all legal requirements to minimize the risk of fraud and trafficking. Prospective migrant workers are required to satisfy several eligibility

criteria, including being at least 18 years of age, physically and mentally fit, possessing the necessary occupational competencies, being registered with the national employment social security system (BPJS Ketenagakerjaan), and providing complete documentation, including a national identity card, family registration card, passport, work visa, medical certificate, competency certificate, employment contract, and family consent.

Law Enforcement Efforts Against Trafficking in Persons by the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections in Banda Aceh

Law enforcement constitutes a systematic and comprehensive process undertaken by institutions such as the police, prosecution service, and judiciary to ensure the effective and equitable implementation of legal norms. Its primary objectives include maintaining public order, protecting citizens' rights, preventing criminal offenses, and ensuring both restorative and retributive justice. This process encompasses criminal investigation, prosecution, judicial proceedings based on the presumption of innocence, and the execution of criminal or administrative sanctions (Susilo, 2013).

Effective law enforcement is particularly essential in addressing trafficking in persons, given that virtually any individual or social group may become a victim. Comprehensive legal protection is therefore necessary to safeguard victims' rights while ensuring access to justice, rehabilitation, and appropriate remedies (Adudu, 2022).

The Ministry of Immigration and Corrections exercises a strategic role in safeguarding national sovereignty through immigration control, intelligence gathering, and the investigation of immigration-related offenses. These responsibilities are implemented under Indonesia's selective immigration policy, whereby only foreign nationals deemed beneficial to the national interest are permitted entry, while immigration violators are subject to administrative sanctions, including deportation. Within the correctional system, the Ministry also performs adjudicative and post-adjudicative functions through inmate rehabilitation and correctional institution management aimed at maintaining public security (Syahrin, 2018).

The Class I Immigration Office of Banda Aceh Immigration Checkpoint (TPI) has strengthened its anti-trafficking efforts through rigorous verification of travel documents submitted by prospective Indonesian migrant workers. According to an in-depth interview with the Head of the Traffic and Immigration Status Division (Kasi Lantaskim), T. Ferdian, conducted on 13 January 2026, immigration officers verify employment contracts with the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP3MI), conduct interviews concerning applicants' family backgrounds, and cross-check visa information through the National Immigration Management Information System (SIMKIM). As a result of these measures, 473 passport applications with

potential links to trafficking in persons were rejected during 2025, particularly those involving intended destinations such as Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand (Kantor Imigrasi Aceh, 2025, pp. 14–17).

These preventive measures are consistent with Becker's deterrence theory, which argues that increased compliance costs and stricter administrative controls discourage criminal behavior. In this context, longer processing periods and additional verification procedures serve as deterrents against organized trafficking networks as defined under Article 1(1) of Law No. 21 of 2007 (Panjaitan, 2025). Field evidence further indicates that these measures have contributed to a decline in irregular migration departures from North Aceh and Pidie Jaya compared to 2024 (Directorate General of Immigration, 2026, p. 28).

These initiatives have been complemented by the establishment of 21 Immigration Fostered Villages (Desa Binaan Imigrasi) since November 2024 in migration-prone districts throughout Aceh, including Pidie, Aceh Singkil, Aceh Barat, Gayo Lues, and North Aceh (Imigrasi Bentuk 21 Desa Binaan Cegah TPPO, 2025). Immigration Community Officers (*Pimpasa*) conduct regular awareness campaigns for rural residents regarding the recruitment methods employed by illegal agents through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, where victims are promised monthly salaries of approximately IDR 20 million for positions described as "customer service operators" in Cambodia. These community-based initiatives have significantly reduced the number of prospective trafficking victims within participating villages.

The program reflects the principles of community policing proposed by Trojanowicz (1983), emphasizing close cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities. Each *Pimpasa* officer provides educational outreach across numerous villages, generating a multiplier effect through widespread dissemination of information among local households (Farhansyah, 2023, pp. 67–72).

Another significant initiative is the establishment of the Foreigners Supervision Team (Tim PORA), responsible for monitoring the activities of foreign nationals within the Banda Aceh International Border Terminal. During 2025, the team supervised 2,847 foreign nationals and contributed to the dismantling of a trafficking syndicate involving Rohingya migrants in Ulee Ateng, Aceh Timur. Law enforcement authorities successfully investigated 20 trafficking cases, arrested 47 suspects, and rescued 183 victims, with trafficking fees reportedly reaching IDR 20 million per victim (Farhansyah, 2023, pp. 78–82).

A comparable case occurred on 15 July 2025, when the Immigration Fostered Village in Jambo Keurape, Pidie, prevented 12 residents from Aceh Singkil from being trafficked to Cambodia through fraudulent work visas issued for Thailand. Victims had been promised salaries of approximately IDR 18 million per month (BP3MI Aceh, 2025).

Despite these achievements, significant structural challenges remain. These include inadequate inter-agency coordination between immigration authorities and the Indonesian National Police, as well as corruption involving bribery during passport processing, as identified through internal investigations (Lemhannas RI, 2025, pp. 33–35). Furthermore, although community-based surveillance has contributed to reducing Rohingya trafficking cases, law enforcement agencies continue to require advanced biometric technologies, including facial recognition systems, which have only recently been introduced on a pilot basis at the Banda Aceh Immigration Checkpoint since December 2025 (Farhansyah, 2023, pp. 89–92).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Ministry of Immigration and Corrections, particularly the Class I Immigration Office of Banda Aceh Immigration Checkpoint (TPI), has implemented an increasingly effective multidimensional strategy to combat trafficking in persons through preventive law enforcement. Rigorous verification of travel documents, including employment contract validation with BP3MI, family background interviews, and visa verification through the National Immigration Management Information System (SIMKIM), resulted in the rejection of 473 passport applications associated with potential trafficking cases during 2025, primarily involving intended destinations such as Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand. Furthermore, the establishment of 21 Immigration Fostered Villages since November 2024 has significantly reduced irregular migration from high-risk districts in Aceh. The creation of the Foreigners Supervision Team (Tim PORA) has also strengthened border surveillance and contributed to the successful dismantling of major trafficking syndicates, including the Rohingya trafficking network in Ulee Ateng.

Despite these institutional achievements, the continued increase in trafficking cases in Aceh reflects persistent structural challenges. Economic hardship, poverty, peer influence, fraudulent recruitment through social media, limited migration literacy, and the willingness of some individuals to use falsified documents remain the principal factors driving vulnerability to trafficking. Although Law Number 21 of 2007 concerning the Eradication of the Criminal Act of Trafficking in Persons and Law Number 6 of 2011 concerning Immigration provide a robust legal framework for early detection and prevention, their implementation continues to be constrained by weak inter-agency coordination, corruption in passport processing, and limited institutional capacity at remote immigration checkpoints.

Accordingly, strengthening law enforcement against trafficking in persons requires a shift from a predominantly reactive approach toward a comprehensive preventive strategy. This should include the wider adoption of biometric technologies, such as facial recognition and fingerprint identification systems, alongside integrated socioeconomic policies aimed at reducing rural poverty in Aceh. Equally important

are enhanced coordination among relevant government agencies, increased budgetary support for legal migration verification, and continuous public education regarding safe migration procedures for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), including minimum age requirements and complete documentation. Collectively, these measures will strengthen the protection of prospective migrant workers' human rights while reinforcing Indonesia's long-term commitment to combating trafficking in persons as an extraordinary transnational crime.

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