The Priority Of Human Dignity As An Effective Legal And Social Mechanism For Preventing Human Trafficking And Forced Labour

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Abstract
This thesis examines the priority of human dignity as a core legal and social mechanism for preventing human trafficking and forced labour. It outlines the root causes of these crimes and their damage to the individual, society and the state. Drawing on the instruments of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO), it compares Uzbekistan's recent reforms with international practice. The thesis concludes with proposals on raising legal literacy, promoting safe labour migration, using digital tools for prevention and strengthening cooperation between state bodies and civil society.
Keywords: human dignity, human trafficking, forced labour, labour migration, prevention, legal culture, Palermo Protocol, ILO, civil society, Uzbekistan.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking and forced labour remain among the gravest violations of human rights in the twenty-first century. They treat a person not as an end in himself but as a commodity that can be bought, sold and exploited for profit. For this reason, the fight against these crimes cannot be reduced to criminal prosecution alone. It must begin with the recognition of human dignity as the highest value of the legal order.

According to the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery published by the ILO, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2022, about 50 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021. Of these, roughly 28 million were in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriage. The number had grown by about 10 million compared with the 2016 estimates. These figures show that the problem is not shrinking on its own and demands systematic, preventive action.

For Uzbekistan, the issue has a special significance. In recent years the country has made the principle "human dignity above all" a guiding idea of state policy. The renewed Constitution, adopted by referendum on 30 April 2023, proclaims the human being, his life, freedom, honour and dignity as the supreme value. At the same time, several million Uzbek citizens work abroad, which makes labour migrants and young people a group at particular risk of exploitation.

The aim of this thesis is to show that the priority of human dignity is not only a moral principle but also an effective legal and social mechanism. When it is built into legislation, institutions and everyday practice, it reduces the conditions in which trafficking and forced labour can arise.

2. Causes and Consequences of Human Trafficking and Forced Labour

Research shows that trafficking and forced labour grow out of a combination of economic, social, legal and psychological factors. The main causes can be grouped as follows:

1. **Economic vulnerability** — poverty, unemployment and low wages push people to accept risky job offers, especially abroad.
2. **Low legal awareness** — many victims do not know their rights, the rules of legal employment or where to seek help.
3. **Irregular labour migration** — travelling without a contract, work permit or registration leaves migrants dependent on intermediaries and employers.

4. **Deception through recruitment** — fake employment agencies and, increasingly, social media and messengers are used to lure victims with promises of high income.
5. **Social factors** — family breakdown, domestic violence, gender inequality and lack of education increase the vulnerability of women, children and young people.
6. **Demand for cheap labour** — sectors such as construction, agriculture, domestic work and the sex industry create a market for exploited labour.

The consequences of these crimes are felt at three levels. **For the individual**, they mean loss of freedom, physical and psychological trauma, damage to health and, often, long-term social exclusion. **For society**, they erode trust, weaken family institutions and feed organised crime and corruption. **For the state**, they damage international reputation, distort the labour market, reduce tax revenues and slow down sustainable development. In short, wherever human dignity is ignored, the entire chain of social development is weakened.

3. International Legal Framework

The international community has built a comprehensive legal basis for combating trafficking and forced labour, and human dignity lies at its centre. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 opens with the statement that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 4 of the Declaration prohibits slavery and servitude in all their forms. The key instruments in this field are summarised below.

Instrument	Year	Main contribution
ILO Forced Labour Convention (No. 29)	1930	Defines forced labour as work exacted under the menace of a penalty and not offered voluntarily
ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105)	1957	Prohibits forced labour as a means of political coercion, economic development or labour discipline
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1966	Article 8 bans slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1989	Protects children from economic exploitation and trafficking
UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Palermo Protocol on trafficking in persons	2000	Provides the first internationally agreed definition of trafficking and the "3P" approach: prevention, protection, prosecution
Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention	2014	Obliges states to take preventive measures, protect victims and guarantee access to remedies
UN Sustainable Development Goals, Target 8.7	2015	Calls for ending forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking

International practice confirms that the most successful national models combine strict criminal liability with a strong preventive and victim-centred approach. The "3P" model has since been widened to "4P" by adding **partnership** between the state, business, international organisations and civil society. Countries that apply this model treat victims not as offenders or illegal migrants but as persons whose dignity must be restored.

4. Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan

Over the past decade Uzbekistan has moved from denial of the problem to an open and systemic policy against trafficking and forced labour. The main directions of these reforms are the following.

Legislative reforms. In 2020 the Law "On Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labour" was adopted in a new edition, replacing the 2008 law. It extended state policy explicitly to forced labour, defined the rights of victims and set out the duties of state bodies in prevention

and rehabilitation. Criminal and administrative liability for the use of forced labour has also been strengthened.

Institutional reforms. A National Commission on Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labour coordinates the work of ministries, local authorities and public organisations, with territorial commissions in the regions. A national rehabilitation centre provides shelter, medical, psychological and legal assistance to victims, and dedicated hotlines allow citizens to report violations.

Elimination of forced labour in the cotton sector. For many years the mobilisation of students, teachers, doctors and other public sector workers for the cotton harvest was a source of international criticism. The government abolished this practice and cooperated with the ILO on third-party monitoring of the harvest. Following the ILO's finding that systemic forced and child labour had ended, the international Cotton Campaign lifted its boycott of Uzbek cotton in March 2022. This is one of the clearest examples of how putting human dignity first can change an entire economic sector.

Safe labour migration. The state has expanded organised recruitment for work abroad, signed bilateral agreements with destination countries, and offers pre-departure training, language courses and vocational certification. Information on legal employment and support for migrants abroad is provided through specialised state agencies and representative offices.

Youth policy. Young people are among the most targeted groups, especially through online job offers. The Youth Affairs Agency and its territorial bodies conduct awareness-raising events in educational institutions, mahallas and online, helping young people recognise signs of deceptive recruitment and know where to turn for help.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Recruitment through social networks is growing, many migrants still travel irregularly, and victims are often reluctant to report crimes for fear of stigma. Further improvement of prevention therefore remains a priority.

5. Scientific and Practical Proposals

Based on the analysis, the following measures are proposed to make the priority of human dignity a working mechanism of prevention:

1. **Raising the legal culture of citizens.** Introduce short modules on human rights, safe employment and trafficking risks into the curricula of schools, colleges and universities. Hold regular awareness campaigns in mahallas with the participation of lawyers, psychologists and former migrants.
2. **Developing safe labour migration.** Expand organised recruitment channels, simplify access to legal work abroad and create a unified register of licensed private employment agencies. Strengthen consular and legal support for citizens working abroad.
3. **Using digital technologies for prevention.** Create a single online platform and mobile application where citizens can check whether a foreign employer or agency is legitimate, receive information in Uzbek and other languages, and report suspicious offers. Monitor social networks for fraudulent job advertisements in cooperation with platform operators.
4. **Targeted work with young people.** Train youth leaders and volunteers as "peer educators" who can explain risks in a language young people trust. Combine prevention with real alternatives: vocational training, entrepreneurship support and local employment programmes.
5. **Strengthening partnership between the state and civil society.** Involve non-governmental organisations, trade unions, employers and the media in planning and monitoring prevention measures. Support NGOs that provide shelter and reintegration services through state social procurement.
6. **A victim-centred approach.** Ensure that identified victims are not prosecuted for offences committed under coercion. Guarantee free legal aid, confidentiality and long-term reintegration, including employment and housing support.
7. **Responsible business practices.** Encourage companies, especially exporters, to conduct due diligence on forced labour risks in their supply chains and to publish annual reports on it.

6. Conclusion

Human trafficking and forced labour are not merely criminal offences; they are a direct denial of human dignity. Experience shows that punishment after the fact cannot solve the problem without strong prevention. The most effective response is one that places the human being, his rights and his dignity at the centre of law, public institutions and social life.

Uzbekistan's reforms, including the new edition of the anti-trafficking law, the end of systemic forced labour in the cotton sector and the development of safe labour migration, confirm that this approach produces real results. Further progress depends on raising citizens' legal culture, wider use of digital tools, targeted work with young people and closer cooperation between the state and civil society. The priority of human dignity is thus the most effective legal and social mechanism for preventing human trafficking and forced labour in a modern society.

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