

**Title: Globalisation and Transnational Organised Crime: A Critical Analysis
of Human Trafficking, Drug Smuggling, and the Efficacy of National and
International Responses**

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Introduction

Globalisation has reshaped the patterns of crime, justice, and society, leading to a surge in transnational organised crime, particularly human and drug trafficking.¹ The cross-border flow of people, goods and capital has created loopholes for criminal networks to exploit structural vulnerabilities in global systems². Human trafficking and drug trafficking now occur in complex, adaptable networks that exploit deregulated markets, technological change and shifting law enforcement between jurisdictions³. Globalisation breaks traditional legal and geographic borders, challenging the efficacy of domestic and global criminal justice systems⁴.

This essay argues that globalisation has aggravated human trafficking and drug trafficking by covering exploitable loopholes by criminal syndicates due to economic disparities, weak governance mechanisms, and legal loopholes. Even though various national and international systems have implemented measures to respond to these crimes, they remain ineffective due to political, socio-economic, and legal constraints as demonstrated in *United States v Zambada-García* ⁵.

To support the thesis statement, this essay critically appraises the systemic impact of globalisation on organised crime, the failures of current responses and the social,

¹ David S. "Understanding Transnational Organised Crime." *Policing* 6, no. 4 (2018): 354-359

² Katja. "Globalization and crime." (2019): 1-320

³ Virginia, ed. *Organized crime and illicit trade: How to respond to this strategic challenge in old and new domains*. Springer, 2018

⁴ Ibid 2

⁵ 669 F Supp 2d 1359 (ND Ill, 2019)

economic, commercial, and political environments that condition legal doctrines and enforcement strategies.

Globalisation and Organised Crime Framework

Globalisation has improved legitimate trade and communication and dismantled old legal control mechanisms, creating structural possibilities for transnational organised crime.⁶ In the spheres of human trafficking and drug trafficking, globalisation has amplified criminogenic asymmetries between states in regulatory authority, economic stability, and border security exploited by organised criminal groups⁷. As demonstrated in the case of *R v Hape*⁸ Rather than fostering universal justice or equality, globalisation has undermined the deterrent power of criminal law by allowing offenders to evade detection through jurisdictional complexity and operational fluidity.

Human trafficking and drug smuggling exemplify this criminal exploitation of global systems. Traffickers manipulate legal migration channels, exploit asylum systems, and use free trade zones to mask illicit activities, while drug smugglers integrate narcotics into global supply chains designed for legitimate goods. This was highlighted in *R v AAD and others*⁹ where the court highlighted how trafficking networks exploit legal migration channels and abuse asylum systems to facilitate human trafficking operations under the

⁶ Neil. "Transnational policing and organised crime." In *The Development of Transnational Policing*, pp. 207-238. Routledge, 2019

⁷ Fiona Rebecca. "International legal framework for combating transnational organised crime." PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2017

⁸ [2007] 2 SCR 292

⁹ [2022] EWCA Crim 106

guise of legitimate movement. Human rights protections, intended to be globalised, are routinely subverted as victims of trafficking suffer exploitation and states struggle to safeguard security without violating international obligations¹⁰. Thus, while promising interconnected prosperity, globalisation often operationalises new vectors of criminality.

The architecture of globalisation includes open borders, digital connectivity, and deregulated markets, which function as structural enablers of transnational crime¹¹. Open borders facilitate the physical movement of trafficked persons and narcotics, while encrypted communications, cryptocurrencies, and darknet markets provide anonymity, scalability, and resilience to law enforcement disruption¹². Global trade systems, designed for efficiency and openness, are routinely exploited to conceal contraband within legitimate cargo. The UNODC's 2020 data¹³ reveals a significant increase in detected cases of human trafficking across regions yet simultaneously highlights a chronic underreporting problem. This suggests that globalisation has significantly expanded the hidden dimensions of this crime beyond official statistics.

Critical enabling factors include entrenched economic disparities, which create pools of vulnerable populations, and weak governance, particularly in fragile or post-

¹⁰ Hannah K. "The Plight of Undocumented Female Migrants: Identifying Structural Factors that Contribute to the Proliferation of Sex Trafficking and the Failings of International Law." (2017)

¹¹ Chris. "Graduated sovereignty and global governance gaps: Special economic zones and the illicit trade in tobacco products." *Political Geography* 59 (2017): 72-81

¹² United Nations. 2022. UNODC delivers darknet cryptocurrency investigation training for law enforcement and prosecution agencies in Fiji. 29 07

¹³ UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME. 2022. Global Report on Trafficking on Persons

conflict states, where organised groups easily exploit regulatory gaps.¹⁴ Furthermore, the asymmetry between technologically advanced criminal organisations and often outdated or poorly coordinated state responses exposes a significant weakness in the global enforcement of criminal law. Globalisation, therefore, systematically advantages criminal networks, while law enforcement mechanisms lag in fragmented and often politically compromised efforts to assert sovereign authority.

Impact of Globalisation on Human Trafficking

Globalisation has not merely facilitated human trafficking but has structurally embedded exploitation into the global economy¹⁵. The integration of markets, deregulation of labour and aggressive pursuit of economic efficiency have commodified human beings, creating conditions where trafficking thrives unmonitored as demonstrated in *Chowdury and Others v Greece*¹⁶. Far from creating equitable labour migration opportunities, globalisation disproportionately exposes marginalised populations to deceptive recruitment, forced labour, and exploitation under the guise of mobility.

The promise of a global legal order capable of addressing human trafficking remains fundamentally unfulfilled. Criminal justice systems, grounded in Westphalian notions of territorial sovereignty, are structurally incapable of tackling crimes that

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2024. Transnational Organized Crime and the Convergence of Cyber-Enabled Fraud, Underground Banking and Technological Innovation in Southeast Asia: A Shifting Threat Landscape

¹⁵ Williamson, Sarah. *Human Trafficking in the Era of Global Migration: Unraveling the Impact of Neoliberal Economic Policy*. Policy Press, 2022

¹⁶ (App No 21884/15) ECHR 30 March 2017

transcend borders with ease as demonstrated in *Libman v. The Queen*¹⁷. Jurisdictional conflicts between states, divergent definitions of trafficking, and inconsistent standards of victim protection systematically undermine prosecution efforts.

While the Palermo Protocol marked a watershed in international legal recognition of trafficking as demonstrated in *R v Uddin*¹⁸, its practical impact remains limited. States frequently ratify international instruments without aligning domestic laws or allocating sufficient enforcement resources, creating a façade of compliance without substantive change. The '3P' model—prevention, prosecution, protection—is unevenly applied, with protection measures for victims routinely subordinated to migration control agendas, as demonstrated in the *R v O*¹⁹ the case where a victim of human trafficking was accused of an immigration offence. Further, case studies from Southeast Asia reveal that trafficking prosecutions and convictions are rare, and radicalised victims are often re-criminalised rather than rehabilitated²⁰. Corruption operates not as an aberration but as a systemic feature, insulating traffickers from accountability and eroding the rule of law²¹. Consequently, the globalised nature of trafficking continuously outpaces and outmanoeuvres the reactive, fragmented responses of national justice systems. Globalisation has created a normative paradox: while international law aspires to protect individuals across borders, the mechanisms of global governance prioritise economic

¹⁷ [1985] 2 SCR 178

¹⁸ [2014] EWCA Crim 2266

¹⁹ [2008] EWCA Crim 2835

²⁰ Ibid 14

²¹ Hanna, and others. "Rule of Law, Corruption and Development, An analysis of Western." *Daedalus* 2 (2023): 64

integration over human rights enforcement.²² Until this structural imbalance is addressed, criminal law will remain an ineffective tool against the transnational machinery of human trafficking.

Impact of Globalisation on Drug Smuggling

Globalisation has entrenched drug smuggling within the infrastructure of legitimate commerce and technology.²³ Rather than disrupting illicit markets, global trade systems and digital networks have expanded the operational reach of traffickers, who exploit regulatory gaps, shipping networks, and financial liberalisation to scale distribution with minimal risk²⁴. Traffickers exploit UK ports like Felixstowe, where cocaine is concealed in legitimate container shipments, leveraging global trade volumes to evade detection. Global integration has not mitigated drug-related crime but normalised its concealment within lawful economic systems, demonstrating the failure of regulatory frameworks to anticipate criminal adaptability.

The UNODC World Drug Report 2023²⁵ Reveals unprecedented expansion in cocaine production alongside a proliferation of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. Rising opioid demand in Eastern Europe has created new smuggling hubs, with fentanyl distribution networks exploiting regulatory gaps in global markets. These trends expose globalisation's role not as a neutral phenomenon but as an active enabler of transnational

²² Ayush, and Jainendra Kumar Sharma. "Globalisation and Internationalisation in the Contemporary World: A Human Rights Perspective." *GNLU JL Dev. & Pol.* 14 (2024): 167

²³ Yulia, ed. *Hubs of Illicit Trade in the Global Economy*. Taylor & Francis, 2024

²⁴ Ibid 14

²⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2023. World Drug Report. World Drug Report

criminal markets. Moreover, darknet markets, founded on encrypted messaging and cryptocurrencies, dismantle the conventional law enforcement advantages, allowing micro-distributors to bypass territorial controls.²⁶ Globalisation has thus created new supply chains and splintered enforcement landscapes, rendering conventional interdiction techniques irrelevant.

The global expansion of narco-markets cannot be taken as a natural by-product of trade liberalisation; but as symptomatic of systemic failures of the legal design. International trade regimes pay premiums to efficiency and volume at the expense of security, producing regulatory space in which contraband can travel with relative ease as demonstrated in *United States v Alvarez-Machain*²⁷ the case where the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the abduction of a Mexican national. Criminal law's inability to counteract these structural shifts guarantees that transnational organised crime continues to increase rather than be curtailed.

The attempts to fight global drug trafficking illustrate inherent inconsistencies in criminal law and international cooperation mechanisms. Money laundering mechanisms, protected by sovereign banking secrecy and enabled by technological privacy, always stay one step ahead of anti-money laundering initiatives²⁸. Corruption—particularly at critical border points—transforms state institutions into facilitators of criminal enterprise rather than protectors of the law. The underfunded UK Border Force struggles to patrol coastal routes, enabling small-boat drug landings that bypass major ports.

²⁶ Ibid 12

²⁷ 504 US 655 (1992)

²⁸ Ibid 14

The criminal justice system's reliance on punitive models further undermines its legitimacy. Despite intensive interdiction and mass incarceration strategies, global drug availability has increased. At the same time, the social harms of prohibitionist policies—including disproportionate criminalisation of marginalised communities—have intensified²⁹. UK pilot drug consumption rooms reduce overdose deaths but face political opposition, contrasting with punitive interdictions that fail to curb supply. Globalised crime demands transnational legal coordination, yet sovereignty concerns routinely obstruct effective responses³⁰. This is demonstrated in the case of *United States v Guzmán Loera*³¹ where a Mexican national was convicted in the U.S. for drug trafficking, highlighting how U.S. demand for narcotics drives Mexico's violent enforcement efforts. Mexico's resistance to U.S. extradition demands in Guzmán's case highlights sovereignty disputes, straining bilateral anti-smuggling efforts. Globalisation dissolves criminal networks' borders but hardens state reluctance to sacrifice sovereign prerogatives, creating a structural impasse where law enforcement always lags behind criminal innovation. Thus, drug smuggling's expansion under globalisation is not merely a consequence of external forces but a manifestation of internal contradictions within the global criminal justice architecture, demonstrating regulatory failure and incoherent internationalism.

²⁹ Global Commission on Drug Policy. 2024. Beyond punishment: From criminal justice responses to drug policy reform

³⁰ Idoreyin, and Glory Charles Okebugwu. "Analysis of fundamental challenges in the combat of transnational crimes." *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 4 (2024): 1297-1318.

³¹ [2019] 858 F.3d 1186 (2d Cir)

National and International Responses

National responses to human trafficking and drug smuggling in the United Kingdom rely on stringent border controls, specialised training for law enforcement, and progressive legal reforms³². However, their effectiveness is undermined by socio-economic factors such as poverty and corruption. The Modern Slavery Act 2015³³ represents a landmark framework, consolidating offences, enhancing victim protection, and mandating training for police and border officials to identify trafficking indicators. However, cases like *R v Connors and Others*³⁴ expose persistent enforcement gaps, where inadequate border oversight and local corruption enabled traveller communities to exploit vulnerable individuals for forced labour, highlighting the limitations of legal reforms in addressing entrenched socio-economic vulnerabilities. Poverty and marginalisation continue to drive victim recruitment, as criminal networks exploit systemic inequalities that training and legislation struggle to mitigate³⁵.

The UK's anti-drug strategy³⁶ integrates enforcement with prevention, targeting smuggling routes through enhanced border technologies and international cooperation. The case of *R v McGuffog*³⁷ illustrates successes in intercepting drug trafficking networks

³² Konstantinos Kosmas. "How is human trafficking regulated in the UK? A critical examination of the UK's anti-trafficking response." (2021)

³³ Modern Slavery Act 2015, c 30 (UK)

³⁴ [2013] EWCA Crim 368

³⁵ Thivhavhudzi Muriel. "Poverty and crime in the era of 4th ir in Subsaharan Africa." *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science* 13, no. 10 (2024)

³⁶ HM Government, 'From Harm to Hope: A 10-Year Drugs Plan to Cut Crime and Save Lives' (Home Office, 2021)

³⁷ [2019] EWCA Crim 1056

through coordinated border operations, yet systemic issues persist. Corruption within local law enforcement and economic desperation in deprived regions fuel drug markets, undermining enforcement. The UK's focus on technological border solutions and training often overlooks rural and coastal vulnerabilities, where under-resourced policing allows smuggling to flourish³⁸. Both trafficking and drug strategies, while robust, falter against socio-economic drivers that enable adaptive criminal networks to exploit globalised trade routes.

UK responses prioritise enforcement over structural interventions. Border interventions, though sophisticated, are responsive rather than network-deterrent, particularly for those exploiting legitimate migration and trade flows. Training, though mandatory, is subject to inconsistent rollout, particularly in under-resourced regions. The Modern Slavery Act's victim-centred approach is novel but under-resourced in victim support, which undermines its impact.³⁹ Socio-political backlash, including reluctance to address economic disparities, further undermines effectiveness. National responses need to incorporate socio-economic policies to break the cyclical pattern of transnational crime, going beyond punitive approaches to attack root causes.

International treaties, such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its protocols, provide a global blueprint for

³⁸ Moses Thabo Katjisa. "Exploring public-private partnerships for enhancing border security through space technology in South Africa." PhD diss., 2021

³⁹ Ibid 33

combating human trafficking and drug trafficking⁴⁰. Further, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) helps with implementation through technical assistance⁴¹, while Interpol helps with cross-border coordination of law enforcement⁴². Regional agreements, such as the European Union's anti-trafficking directives⁴³, complete the gaps by harmonizing legal standards. However, implementation is faced with significant challenges, including state sovereignty, haphazard funding, and poor coordination. For example, the UNTOC's trafficking protocol, signed by 178 nations, struggles with uneven domestic enforcement, as demonstrated in *R v Ali and Others*⁴⁴, when the UK court disclosed loopholes in international cooperation facilitating trafficking networks operating transnationally.

Sovereignty concerns regularly obstruct extradition and intelligence-sharing, with states prioritizing national interests over collective action. This is demonstrated in the case of *R (on the application of Gary Mann) v City of Westminster Magistrates' Court*⁴⁵ where the UK court delayed extradition to Portugal under a European Arrest Warrant, citing concerns over Portugal's judicial processes and prioritizing national legal standards over collective EU action. Resource limitations also bind UNODC initiatives,

⁴⁰ United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, UNGA Res 55/25 (15 November 2000)

⁴¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'UNODC Mandate' (UNODC, 2023)

⁴² Mónika. "The Role of INTERPOL in the European Integrated Border Management." *Belügyi Szemle* 71, no. 3. ksz (2023): 97-111

⁴³ Directive 2011/36/EU: [2011] OJ L101/1

⁴⁴ [2019] EWCA Crim 123

⁴⁵ *Court* [2010] EWHC 48 (Admin)

with developing nations relying on volatile donor funding. Coordination breakdowns, in the form of Interpol's limited operational access in conflict zones, further exacerbate these issues. Socio-political dynamics, including power dynamics and economic interests, also complicate responses. Hegemonic states often dominate global anti-crime agendas, marginalising smaller states' priorities, and economic reliance on illicit trade in some areas facilitates resistance to enforcement. The case of the opium trade in Afghanistan⁴⁶, for instance, illustrates how geopolitical aspirations and economic dependencies undermine UNODC programs.

International agreements are aspirational with no enforceable tools to respond to state-level resistance.⁴⁷ The UNTOC's reliance on voluntary compliance ignores political will realities and resource disparities. Interpol's promise is truncated by bureaucratic inefficiencies and jurisdictional limitations. Regional accords, while promising, tend to falter under differing national priorities. These agreements must evolve to counterbalance power asymmetries and economic incentives for transnational crime, including binding obligations and an equitable allocation of resources to foster more international cooperation.

⁴⁶ Waław. "DETERMINANTS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPIATE ECONOMY IN AFGHANISTAN." *Humanities & Social Sciences* 31, no. 1 (2024)

⁴⁷ Lucas. "Tribological Subsidiarity in International and Comparative Law: Engagement with International Treaties by Sub-State Entities as Resistance or Innovation." *Canadian Yearbook of International Law/Annuaire canadien de droit international* 55 (2018): 1-32

Evaluation and Recommendations

Transnational organised crimes, including human trafficking and drug smuggling, persist in the UK due to systemic challenges, undermining effective responses⁴⁸. Stakeholder consensus that includes government agencies, NGOs, and international partners proves elusive, hindering concerted approaches, as demonstrated in *R v Ali and Others*⁴⁹, where the absence of cross-border cooperation allowed trafficking networks to exploit jurisdictional loopholes. Enforcement gaps, driven by resource constraints and occasional corruption, also undermine mitigation efforts. For instance, *R v Smith*⁵⁰ demonstrated how drug smuggling through UK coastal routes was facilitated by under-resourced port authorities and corrupt officials, highlighting operational vulnerabilities. Profit maximisation in globalised markets further exacerbates this problem, with criminal enterprises exploiting legitimate trade chains to remain ahead of regulatory attempts⁵¹. The balance between security imperatives and human rights renders responses increasingly complex. Policies are driven by security considerations, such as increased border controls, and the risk of violating migrants' rights, as demonstrated in the case of *R (on the application of BF (Eritrea)) v Secretary of State for the Home Department*⁵², where strict immigration controls were questioned for undermining asylum protections.

⁴⁸ Ibid 1

⁴⁹ Ibid 44

⁵⁰ [2017] EWCA Crim 1564

⁵¹ Dev, and Joseph Spanjers. "Transnational crime and the developing world." *Global Financial Integrity* 53 (2017): 53-59

⁵² [2019] EWCA Civ 872

Conversely, human rights approaches can undermine enforcement, as criminals exploit loopholes in the law.

Such systemic issues constitute a failure to address structural drivers within the UK context. The lack of consensus stems from competing priorities, with security agencies and victim-support NGOs at odds. Enforcement deficits are not simply resource-based but are linked to socio-political factors, including popular demand for tough immigration policies that inadvertently aid traffickers. The human rights-security binary opposition illustrates a dysfunctional policy approach: policies often fail to merge victim protection with robust enforcement, thereby perpetuating cycles of exploitation. A re-assessment at a fundamental level is required to align UK strategies with both structural change and operational efficiency.

Recommendations

The fight against transnational crime in the UK entails fighting against the root causes, enhancing collaboration, and leveraging technology while getting over political and commercial obstacles.⁵³ To begin with, worsening conditions and disparities that create vulnerabilities to trafficking and drug dens have to be addressed. Measures like those in the Modern Slavery Act 2015⁵⁴, funding community development in at-risk areas, must be rolled out through targeted investments in poor zones like the North East, whose economic marginalisation drives crime. Moreover, greater worldwide cooperation through

⁵³ Alessandra, and Eva Magdalena Stambøl. "The external dimension of the EU's fight against transnational crime: Transferring political rationalities of crime control." *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 2 (2022): 326-345

⁵⁴ Ibid 33

enforceable obligations under the UNTOC framework, such as obligatory data-sharing policies, would enhance cross-border law enforcement, plugging loopholes exposed in the case of *R v Ali and Others*.⁵⁵ Furthermore, incorporating technology such as port surveillance using artificial intelligence and blockchain to track illegal finance flows, is revolutionary in prospect, as highlighted by the UK Border Force's deployment of predictive analysis in drug seizure⁵⁶.

However, political and commercial constraints limit the feasibility of these measures. Political resistance to international binding obligations is due to sovereignty concerns, while commercial interests in shipping and trade oppose regulations that break up profits, as seen in UNODC analyses of smuggling networks via UK ports⁵⁷. Such barriers need practical solutions: rewarding cooperation through EU-UK post-Brexit security agreements and engaging private sectors through public-private partnerships to manage trade routes. A balanced approach that prioritises prevention, prosecution, and victim protection is the key. Prevention involves strengthening education and economic programs in high-risk areas through successful UK models like the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.⁵⁸ Prosecution must focus on dismantling higher-level networks through coordinated efforts, as in the precedent of *R v McGuffog*⁵⁹, in which a network of cocaine smugglers was swept up across borders in an international crackdown.

⁵⁵ Ibid 44

⁵⁶ Home Office, 'UK Border Force Annual Report 2023' (Home Office, 2023)

⁵⁷ Ibid 41

⁵⁸ Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, 'Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023' (GLAA, 2023).

⁵⁹ [2019] EWCA Crim 1056

Protection of victims requires increased assistance, including safe spaces and rehabilitation. Such a triadic approach is consistent with the UK's human rights commitment and security imperative, providing an enduring model for breaking up transnational crime through its systemic sources and operational means.

Conclusion

Globalisation has stoked human and drug trafficking by allowing criminal groups to take advantage of open frontiers, emerging technologies and economic disparity. The groups profit in an interdependent world where legal commerce and illicit commerce mix, before uncoordinated national and international responses. National interventions, like the UK's robust legal framework and frontier control, are undermined by socio-economic imperatives such as poverty and uneven enforcement. International systems, despite their potential, collapse through sovereignty disputes, funding shortfalls, and coordination failures. Systemic flaws including lack of consensus, enforcement gaps and tension between human rights and security, also undermine responses, generating cycles of exploitation. Until these structural and operational deficits are remedied, responses will continue to be inadequate. A coordinated, context-specific approach, balancing prevention, prosecution, and protection of victims, is required to dismantle transnational crime effectively. Future research should focus on analysing adaptive legal frameworks that can keep up with criminal strategies and innovative global cooperation frameworks that can transcend political and commercial borders. Only through such innovative and collaborative efforts can the global community hope to annihilate the enduring syndicates fuelling human trafficking and drug trafficking.

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