Human Trafficking Law and Resources

By Kincaid C. Brown

The U.S. State Department estimates as many as 27 million men, women, and children are global human trafficking victims at any given time.1 In 2012, only 46,570 new victims were identified.2 Globally, there were only 7,705 prosecutions and 4,746 convictions for human trafficking crimes in 2012.3 In the United States, there were 2,515 suspected incidents of human trafficking investigated between January 2008 and June 2010.4 Of these, more than 80 percent of the victims of sex trafficking were U.S. citizens or nationals, and more than 90 percent of the victims of labor trafficking were undocumented or qualified aliens.5

International and Federal United States Law

In 2000, the United Nations drafted a protocol criminalizing trafficking in persons. The U.S. ratified the United National Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children6 on November 3, 2005. The United States Constitution’s Supremacy Clause7 mandates that treaties made under the authority of the U.S. are binding law. The UN Protocol recognizes trafficking in persons as including the transportation and harboring of persons; the use of fraud, abduction, and coercion; and the receipt of benefit from the criminal action.8 The UN Protocol also emphasizes the criminalization of the exploitation of victims in addition to the movement offenses.9

Federal trafficking law is based on the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000,10 which was last amended with the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008.11 The trafficking laws have been largely codified in three main sections of the United States Code:

- Title 18, Chapter 77:12 Definitions and penalties for trafficking crimes
- Title 22, Chapter 78:13 Monitoring, investigating, preventing, and combating trafficking into and within the United States
- Title 46, Chapter 136, Part O:14 Trafficking prevention in the United States

The 2000 act was the first federal law specifically recognizing trafficking in persons as a crime, adding such offenses as trafficking with respect to peonage, sex trafficking of children by force, trafficking to place individuals into involuntary servitude, or forced labor to the existing slavery crime framework.15 The 2005 act added trafficking-in-persons offenses committed outside the U.S. by federal contractors,16 while the 2008 act added fraud in forced labor contracting, benefitting financially from trafficking in persons, and conspiracy to traffic in persons.17

Michigan Law

In 2006, Michigan established criminal offenses for human trafficking. The legislature established felonies for human trafficking for forced labor, financially benefitting from human trafficking, and enhanced penalties for criminal sexual conduct, kidnapping, and injury or death of the victim.18 In 2010, Michigan added felonies for providing or obtaining labor by force, fraud, or coercion and trafficking for the purpose of debt bondage or involuntary servitude.19 That same year, the legislature also added human trafficking to the list of crimes subject to property forfeiture.20

Online Human Trafficking Research Resources

While first briefly touching on free primary federal and state sources for human trafficking law research, this article will focus on additional resources that may be helpful when researching this topic.


Treaty Information

A major free source of multilateral treaties is the United Nations Treaty Collection (http://treaties.un.org/). This site includes digitized UN treaty publications and treaties. The text, U.S. reservations, and other information regarding the UN Protocol can


The major source for free online U.S. treaty information is the Department of State Treaty Affairs website (http://www.state.gov/s/l/treaty/). On this site, you will find treaties in force, information on pending U.S. treaties, and treaty texts and background documents.

Because the Senate is constitutionally required to advise on and consent to all treaties negotiated by the president, Senate documents are another important source of treaty information. Two good sources of Senate documents, including treaty texts, and other legislative information about U.S. treaties are Thomas (http://thomas.loc.gov/home/treaties/treaties.html) and FDsys (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/).

Additional Sources of Human Trafficking Law and Information

The Human Trafficking Law Project at the University of Michigan Law School launched the Human Trafficking Database (http://www.law.umich.edu/clinical/HuTrafficCases/Pages/searchdatabase.aspx) in February 2011. This searchable database compiles data about civil and criminal human trafficking cases within the U.S. It provides information about the cases including the jurisdiction, relevant code sections, citations, and a summary of the facts.

Although not free, PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) (http://www.pacer.gov/) and the court docket and documents services in Bloomberg Law, Lexis, and Westlaw are important resources for information about human trafficking cases. Since so many human trafficking cases are settled, pled out, or not appealed, court filings allow researchers to locate case information outside of official court opinions.

The Center for Women Policy Studies provides a state-by-state listing of human trafficking laws (http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org/programs%5Ctrafficking%5Cmap/default_flash.asp). The list includes links to the full-text acts on the state legislature sites.

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center (http://www.polarisproject.org/state-map) includes a map of state laws, a listing of state code sections, and state-by-state statistics about calls to their human trafficking crisis center.


NATLEX (http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.home) is a database maintained by the International Labour Organization that includes national labor and human rights legislation. Researchers can use this database to find information regarding national human trafficking legislation with a focus on trafficking for forced labor.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime started a human trafficking caselaw database (http://www.unodc.org/cld/index.jsp). It includes a summary of the cases in English and often includes full-text decisions in the vernacular.

Finally, research guides may also be a good place to start, as they provide background information and possible sources. Many human trafficking research guides can be found through a Google keyword search.

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ENDNOTES

2. Id. at 46.
3. Id.
5. Id. at 6.
7. US Const, art VI, d 2.
8. UN Protocol n 6 supra at art 3(a).
9. Id.
12. 18 USC 1581 et seq.
13. 22 USC 7101 et seq.
14. 42 USC 14044 et seq.
15. See 22 USC 7101.
16. See 22 USC 7104.
17. See 42 USC 14044.
18. MCL 750.462a et seq.
19. MCL 750.462j.