

# **The Exploitation of Refugee Camps and Migrant Populations by State, Armed groups, and Transnational criminal networks**

**Committee:** United Nations Security Council (SC)

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**Chair:** TBD

**Co-Chair:** TBD

## **Committee Overview**

The United Nations Security Council (SC) is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It has the authority to establish peacekeeping missions, impose sanctions, and authorize the use of force. The Council plays a critical role in addressing humanitarian crises, including those involving refugees and migrants.

In recent years, the UNSC has increasingly recognized the connection between armed conflict, forced displacement, and transnational crime. Refugee camps and migration routes have become vulnerable spaces where exploitation occurs, often involving armed groups, state actors, and organized criminal networks.

This committee will examine how these actors exploit displaced populations and will explore international strategies to prevent abuse, protect vulnerable individuals, and hold perpetrators accountable.

## **Introduction**

The global refugee crisis has reached unprecedented levels, with over 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. Refugees and migrants often flee violence, persecution, and economic instability, only to face new dangers during displacement.

Refugee camps, intended to provide safety and humanitarian aid, are increasingly sites of exploitation. Migrants traveling across borders are also vulnerable to abuse by smugglers and traffickers. These abuses include forced labor, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and recruitment into armed groups.

Reports from international organizations highlight the severity of the issue. Refugees and migrants frequently face “extreme violence, exploitation, and life-threatening conditions” during

their journeys and in camps. Criminal networks and armed groups take advantage of weak governance, lack of oversight, and the desperation of displaced populations.

The exploitation of these populations is not only a humanitarian issue but also a security concern. It fuels organized crime, destabilizes regions, and prolongs conflicts. As a result, the UNSC must consider comprehensive solutions that address both protection and enforcement.

## **Topic Background**

- **Vulnerability of Refugees and Migrants:** Refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable due to their lack of legal protection, limited resources, and dependence on aid systems. Many lack documentation, making them easy targets for exploitation. Women and children are especially at risk. Children may be trafficked, recruited as child soldiers, or forced into labor. According to reports on children and armed conflict, trafficking is often directly linked to conflict zones where governance is weak. Additionally, migrants traveling irregularly often rely on smugglers, which increases their exposure to abuse and exploitation.
- **Role of Transnational Criminal Networks:** Transnational organized crime plays a major role in exploiting displaced populations. These networks operate across borders and engage in activities such as: Human trafficking, Migrant smuggling, Forced labor, Sexual exploitation. Migrant smuggling, while sometimes voluntary, often leads to exploitation. Smugglers may subject migrants to dangerous conditions, extortion, or violence. In many cases, smuggling transitions into trafficking when coercion or force is involved. These criminal organizations are highly adaptable and profit-driven. They exploit gaps in international coordination and weak law enforcement systems.
- **Involvement of Armed Groups and State Actors:** Armed groups frequently exploit refugee populations for recruitment, labor, and financial gain. In conflict zones, camps may be infiltrated or controlled by militias. Some state actors have also been accused of complicity, either through corruption or failure to prevent exploitation. In certain cases, detention centers and border enforcement systems have been linked to abuse and exploitation of migrants. This complicates the issue, as responses must balance sovereignty with accountability.
- **Conditions in Refugee Camps:** Refugee camps are often overcrowded and under-resourced. Limited access to food, healthcare, and security creates an environment where exploitation can thrive. In some camps, criminal networks operate openly, targeting vulnerable individuals. Lack of policing and weak oversight allow these activities to continue. Additionally, refugees may be forced into exploitative labor or survival-based activities due to lack of economic opportunities.

## Past International Action

The United Nations has taken multiple steps to address exploitation:

- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) provides protection and assistance to refugees.
- UNICEF focuses on protecting children from trafficking and exploitation.
- UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) works to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

These organizations collaborate to provide humanitarian aid, strengthen legal frameworks, and support victim protection.

## Security Council Actions

The UNSC has addressed related issues through:

- Resolutions on human trafficking in conflict zones
- Sanctions against groups involved in trafficking
- Peacekeeping missions with mandates to protect civilians

However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and challenges persist in coordinating international responses.

## International Agreements

Several global frameworks address these issues:

- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol)
- Global Compact on Refugees
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

These agreements aim to improve cooperation, strengthen protections, and address root causes of displacement.

## Case Studies

1. **Trafficking in Conflict Zones:** In regions affected by armed conflict, trafficking is often used as a tool of war. Armed groups exploit displaced populations for labor, recruitment,

and sexual violence. Children are particularly affected, with many being forced into armed groups or trafficked across borders.

2. **Migrant Smuggling Networks:** Smuggling routes across regions such as North Africa and Central America have become highly dangerous. Migrants face extortion, violence, and life-threatening journeys. Many are held for ransom or forced into labor to repay smuggling debts.
3. **Exploitation in Refugee Camps:** Reports from humanitarian organizations highlight exploitation within camps, including forced labor and sexual abuse. In some cases, aid systems themselves are manipulated, with individuals forced to exchange labor or services for basic necessities.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Delegates should consider the following strategies when drafting resolutions:

- **Strengthening Protection Mechanism**
  - Improve security and oversight in refugee camps
  - Increase monitoring by international organizations
  - Expand access to legal documentation and asylum processes
- **Combating Transnational Crime**
  - Enhance international cooperation between law enforcement agencies
  - Strengthen border security while ensuring human rights protections
  - Target financial networks of criminal organizations
- **Supporting Victims**
  - Provide rehabilitation and reintegration programs
  - Ensure access to healthcare, education, and legal support
  - Prioritize protection for women and children
- **Addressing Root Causes**
  - Promote conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts
  - Support economic development in vulnerable regions
  - Address climate and political factors contributing to displacement
  - Holding Actors Accountable

## **Questions to Consider**

- How can the UNSC balance state sovereignty with the need to protect vulnerable populations?
- What measures can effectively disrupt transnational criminal networks?
- How can refugee camps be made safer without limiting access to aid?
- What role should peacekeeping missions play in preventing exploitation?
- How can international cooperation be improved to address this issue comprehensively?