



U N H R C

Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the simulation of the United Nations Human Rights Council at this conference. We are honoured to serve as your Executive Board for this committee and to guide you through a discussion on the agenda **“Combating Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery.”**

This agenda addresses one of the gravest human rights challenges of our time. Human trafficking and modern slavery continue to affect millions of people across the world, depriving them of liberty, dignity, and security. The issue is complex, involving legal, social, economic, and political dimensions, and demands thoughtful, well-researched, and constructive debate.

This Background Guide has been prepared to provide you with a strong foundation for your research and deliberations. However, it is intended only as a starting point. Delegates are encouraged to go beyond this material, consult credible sources, and develop a nuanced understanding of the issue before entering committee.

As members of the Human Rights Council, your responsibility is not only to debate but also to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality, and justice. We encourage you to approach the agenda with seriousness, empathy, and a collaborative spirit, keeping in mind both the urgency of the issue and the importance of practical, rights-based solutions.

Should you have any questions regarding procedure, research, or the agenda itself, please do not hesitate to approach the Executive Board. We look forward to constructive debate, strong diplomacy, and meaningful engagement throughout the committee.

We wish you the very best in your preparation and look forward to an excellent committee session.

Regards,

The Executive Board

United Nations Human Rights Council

Table of Contents

Introduction

Committee Overview

Historical Context

Present Situation of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

UN Response and Previous Measures

Major Concerns and Divisions

Broader Social and Regional Factors

Questions for Delegates to Consider

Introduction

Human trafficking and modern slavery remain among the most severe violations of human rights in the contemporary world. They affect millions of people across regions, economies, and social groups, taking forms such as forced labour, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, debt bondage, child exploitation, and servitude.

Although slavery has been formally abolished in almost every legal system, exploitative practices continue to persist through weak enforcement, conflict, poverty, discrimination, migration pressures, corruption, and organized criminal networks. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an appropriate forum for addressing these issues because trafficking and modern slavery are fundamentally questions of dignity, freedom, equality, and protection from abuse.

Committee Overview

The United Nations Human Rights Council is the principal UN body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. It addresses grave violations, reviews patterns of abuse, appoints special procedures, and encourages states to strengthen respect for international human rights law.

In the context of human trafficking and modern slavery, the UNHRC examines both the immediate harm suffered by victims and the broader structural causes that allow exploitation to continue. This includes legal gaps, poor implementation, gender inequality, unsafe migration pathways, conflict conditions, and the involvement of transnational criminal actors.^{ohchr+1}

Historical Background

Human trafficking and modern slavery are not new phenomena, but the international response to them has evolved significantly over time. Earlier anti-slavery efforts focused on abolishing legal ownership of persons, while later international instruments began to address debt bondage, forced labour, child exploitation, and trafficking across borders.

A major development was the growth of modern international human rights law and criminal law frameworks that recognized trafficking not only as a criminal act, but also as a serious human rights violation. Over time, the international community increasingly understood that exploitation often occurs through coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability, and control rather than only through direct physical restraint.

The issue gained stronger international attention in the 21st century as studies and global estimates showed that modern slavery remained widespread despite legal prohibitions. According to recent UN-linked reporting, tens of millions of people

worldwide are still trapped in forced labour or forced marriage, showing that the problem is systemic rather than isolated.

Current Situation in Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery

The current situation shows that human trafficking continues to affect every region of the world and occurs in both developed and developing contexts. Victims are exploited for forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced criminality, forced marriage, organ removal, and other abusive practices.

Recent UN reporting has highlighted that around 50 million people are living in modern slavery globally, including forced labour and forced marriage, with women and children disproportionately affected. Trafficking patterns have also changed with technology, as traffickers increasingly use digital platforms, online recruitment and cross-border networks to target vulnerable individuals.

The problem is intensified by conflict, displacement, climate-related vulnerability, and economic insecurity. People fleeing war or crisis often face greater risks of exploitation, especially when legal protections, documentation, and safe migration routes are weak.

UN Involvement and Past Actions

The United Nations has addressed trafficking and slavery through multiple institutions, including the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Labour Organization, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking in persons.

Important international instruments include the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and various human rights principles and guidelines developed by OHCHR. These frameworks establish trafficking as a serious crime involving recruitment, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons through force, coercion, fraud, deception or abuse of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation.

The Human Rights Council has also continued to expand its engagement through special rapporteur mandates and thematic resolutions on contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking. This reflects the view that anti-trafficking policy must combine criminal accountability with victim protection, prevention and long-term structural reform.

Core Issues and Fault Lines

Several core issues shape debate on this agenda:

Prevention and enforcement: laws may exist on paper, but weak enforcement, corruption and under-resourced institutions often prevent effective protection.

Victim identification and support: many victims remain hidden, undocumented, or afraid to report abuse because of threats, stigma, or deportation concerns.

Gender and age vulnerability: women, girls and children are disproportionately affected, especially in sexual exploitation and forced marriage.

Labour exploitation: forced labour remains widespread in both formal and informal economies, including sectors with complex supply chains.

Transnational crime and migration: trafficking often crosses borders, making cooperation among states essential.

Fault lines often arise between states prioritizing law enforcement and states emphasizing human rights protection, as well as between those focused on border control and those focused on safe migration and survivor-centered support. There is also debate over the role of corporations and supply chains in preventing forced labour.

Regional and Structural Dynamics

Human trafficking and modern slavery are shaped by broader structural conditions rather than one single cause. Poverty, inequality, discrimination, conflict, displacement, climate stress, weak rule of law, and lack of education all increase vulnerability to exploitation.

Regional patterns vary, but trafficking is often linked to labour migration corridors, conflict zones, informal economies, and areas where oversight is weak. In many cases, victims are recruited by deceptive promises of work, education, or mobility, only to be subjected to coercion or abuse once they move.

Modern slavery also survives because it is profitable. Criminal networks and exploitative employers often benefit from low-risk, high-gain systems in which victims can be hidden, controlled, and replaced easily. This makes trafficking not only

a human rights issue, but also an issue of governance, accountability and economic justice.

Guiding Questions for Delegates

Delegates may use the following questions to guide speeches, debate and draft resolutions:

How can states strengthen prevention mechanisms so that vulnerable individuals are less likely to be trafficked or forced into slavery-like conditions?

What measures can improve victim identification, protection and rehabilitation without re-traumatizing survivors?

How can international cooperation be improved to dismantle trafficking networks that operate across borders?

What role should labour inspection, corporate accountability and supply chain transparency play in preventing forced labour?

How can the UNHRC promote gender-sensitive and child-sensitive responses to trafficking and modern slavery?

What should be done to address the links between conflict, displacement, migration and exploitation?

How can states balance criminal justice approaches with a human-rights-based and survivor-centered framework?

What monitoring, reporting and implementation mechanisms can ensure that anti-trafficking commitments are actually enforced?

Table of Contents