

NHSMUN50

National High School Model United Nations



UNTOC

BACKGROUND GUIDE



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Dear Delegates,

My name is Adiva Ara Khan, and I am beyond excited to welcome you to the Convention Against Transnational Crime (UNTOC) for the 2024 National High School Model United Nations Conference! I am really looking forward to watching how each and every one of you approaches such intricate global challenges. I made an effort to choose topics based on the importance and relevance of contemporary concerns, and I hope you guys enjoy learning about and debating these issues.

Last year, I was an Assistant Administrative Director and worked behind the scenes to make the conference run smoothly. I had the best time while I was in this position, and I feel that I really understand the work that goes into the numerous aspects of this conference. I loved the experience, but I felt that I missed out on opportunities to interact and educate delegates which is why I moved over to the Substantive side. I have been attending NHSMUN conferences since I was a sophomore in high school, only then was I a delegate. This conference is truly special to me because it was such a transformative experience for me. My goal is to return the favor by relaying what I learned to a new class of delegates. Model UN has allowed me to find my voice, learn how to work with others and articulate my viewpoints. Through attending this conference, I was able to discover my strengths in communication and research and I hope everyone can have at least one takeaway from this conference.

Currently, I am a sophomore at Rutgers University in New Jersey. I am majoring in Political Science and double minoring in Economics and Critical Intelligence. I am also a part of Rutgers Model UN organization and Bengali Student Association where I am a part of their dance team. My favorite things include matcha, cooking, listening to music, and of course binge-watching *Suits*. So far, I have had so much fun preparing for this year's conference and I hope to make this experience memorable and meaningful.

In researching ideas for the committee, we picked issues that deserve more media and youth attention. Our two topics this year include "Preventing Global Fentanyl Production and Trafficking" and "Child Trafficking in East Asia." As a delegate, we hope you recognize how powerful trafficking networks are and understand the detrimental effects of current day operations. This may seem daunting at first, but with the help of this background guide I hope I have done a good job in navigating you through this topic. Please review this material prior to debate and feel free to email me with any questions or concerns. Good luck everyone, I cannot wait to see what you bring to the committee!

Sincerely,

Adiva Ara Khan
Director, UNTOC
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Terry Wang
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Dear Delegates,

It is an absolute honor and pleasure for me to welcome you to NHSMUN 2024, and most importantly to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) Committee! We are very excited to have you here and be a part of one of the world's greatest MUN conferences.

My name is Nicole Pilliod, I am a junior at Universidad Anáhuac Norte in Mexico City, where I'm majoring in nutrition sciences. Even though people say that has nothing to do with Model UN, I tend to disagree. NHSMUN has been a part of my life for six years now and I can say that it has truly shaped me into the person I am today; it has given me tools like public speaking, diplomacy, writing, and many valuable things that I can brag about in my resumé. Also, I have had the privilege to meet so many people from all over the world and create the most amazing friendships and connections.

This year's topics were carefully chosen for you, since we believe they are a huge part of the issues that the world is currently facing, and we fully trust your potential to come up with the best solutions to tackle them. Personally, these two topics resonate with me the most since I have seen them happening in my country. I believe they are close to me somehow, even though we have given them different areas of focus this time around for conference purposes.

Within these pages, you'll find valuable information that will help you during debate in committee, but hopefully, you will take on these challenges in your daily lives. Many of the statistics show the urgency to tackle these issues, and many of them are also heartbreaking. This is why we are really looking forward to seeing the solutions you will come up with—remember that the change we want to see in the world comes from our own actions.

Without further ado, please remember that your directors and our entire staff are available to answer any questions you may develop during this process, don't be afraid to reach out. I cannot wait to meet you all and make the NHSMUN experience for you as special as it has been for me.

See you in New York!

Nicole Pilliod
Under Secretary General
Session II



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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2024! We are Dennis Zhang and Christian Hernandez, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. This year is particularly special as NHSMUN celebrates its **50th Anniversary**, and we are thrilled to welcome you to our hometown, New York City, this March for this landmark year!

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout numerous aspects of the conference:

Realism and accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. Our delegates have the incredible opportunity to conduct first-hand research, asking thought-provoking questions to current UN representatives and experts in their respective fields of study. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational emphasis, even for awards: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility: With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

Extremely engaged staff: At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from

their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference, delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

Focused committee time: We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2024 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Dennis Zhang
Secretary-General

Christian Hernandez
Director-General

A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length.** The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via [myDais](#) on or before **February 23, 2024**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **February 2, 2024**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at info@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also known as the Palermo Protocol, was signed on November 15, 2000. It follows the adoption of Resolution 5/23 by the General Assembly and was entrusted to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).¹ The Convention officially opened during a conference in Palermo, Italy, in December of the same year, and it became widely used in 2003.² This landmark convention serves as the primary instrument in the global fight against transnational organized crime. The convention's design is centered on the commitment of signatory countries to deny safe havens to transnational organized criminals. This is achieved by prosecuting these criminals wherever their activities occur and by fostering international cooperation.³

The signing ceremony for UNTOC occurred in Palermo, Sicily, hometown of the renowned anti-mafia prosecutor, Giovanni Falcone. After Falcone fell victim to organized crime in May 1992, he along with counterparts in Italian and American law enforcement, laid the groundwork for international cooperation against organized crime, which paved the way for the Convention. Both countries involved have rich histories in combating organized crime. Italy actively promoted the concept, while the USA lent its support and helped shape the Convention. The adoption of a legally binding UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime was not always assured, as discussions on the need for such a convention began in international forums as late as 1975, until it was finally signed on November 15, 2000.

UNTOC is supplemented by three key protocols including human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and illicit firearms trafficking, in cooperation with local law enforcement. including human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and illicit firearms trafficking, in cooperation with local law enforcement. each released at different times:⁴ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), plays a crucial role in supporting UNTOC.² The UNODC's mission is to address the increasing global crime that poses risks to security, trade, and communication. It collaborates globally with various national and international bodies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), along with local law enforcement officials, and embassies globally.⁴

UNTOC established a legally binding framework for international cooperation among law enforcement and judicial authorities to share evidence and pursue international criminal actors.⁵ It encouraged countries to update their legislation to enhance their ability to investigate and prosecute these criminals. Key features of the Convention include standardizing terms, defining specific offenses, protecting victims and witnesses, forfeiture of crime proceeds, promoting international cooperation, providing for training and information-sharing, encouraging preventive policies, and containing technical provisions. Today, UNTOC boasts 190 parties, nearly universal ratification, with its supplementary protocols also garnering substantial participation: the Trafficking in Persons Protocol (178 parties), the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol (149 parties), and the Trafficking in Firearms Protocol (118 parties).⁵ This demonstrates its significance as a globally recognized legal instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime.

1 "United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime." 2021. United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>.

2 United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. "Signature/Ratification Status of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime," 2021. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/signatures.html>

3 United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. "About UNODC," 2021. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/index.html>.

4 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION against TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME and the PROTOCOLS THERETO," 2004. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>

5 Tennant, Ian. "Fulfilling the Promise of Palermo? A Political History of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime." *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 53–71. <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.90>.



UNTOC

NHSMUN 2024



TOPIC A: PREVENTING GLOBAL FENTANYL PRODUCTION AND TRAFFICKING

Photo Credit: United States Drug Enforcement Administration



Introduction

The line between medicine and illicit drugs is thin in some cases. The difference between legal and illegal use is often limited to the dosage. For example, methamphetamine is a stimulant often sold for illicit use, but in controlled doses, it can also be used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.¹ Similarly, a group of drugs known as opioids are used to lessen pain symptoms. Oxycodone (Oxycontin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and morphine are well-known legal opioids. However, like methamphetamine, there are also illegal opioids. The most well-known illegal opioid is heroin, which has been used for centuries. However, a newer opioid is called fentanyl. Fentanyl is between 50 and 100 times more powerful than heroin. It does have medicinal uses (just like morphine), but because of its potency, it is often stolen from pharmacies or created by drug cartels.²

Today, there is an international fentanyl epidemic, claiming hundreds of lives every day. Although most (but not all) users are in North America, fentanyl production relies on a global trade of drugs and drug precursors (chemicals used to create pharmaceutical drugs).³ The effects of this illicit trade are catastrophic. In March 2023, Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas of the US Department of Homeland Security called it “the single greatest challenge we face as a country.”⁴ The crisis has led to a 300 percent increase in the number of opioid overdose deaths per year, with over 80,000 deaths in 2021 alone.⁴ Australia, New Zealand, and European countries also struggle with opioids to a lesser extent. However, experts believe that overdose deaths are not accurately reported in much of the world, so the problem could be much more widespread than we know.⁵

The US blames China, India, and particularly Mexican drug cartels for supplying the drug to users. However, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico has claimed that the epidemic is due to a breakdown of family values and “a lack of hugs, of embraces.”⁶ In China, state-owned media companies have said that the crisis was driven by the demand from users, not by supply from countries like China.⁷ What

is undeniable is that the fentanyl crisis is driven by a global web of trade and production involving not just states but drug cartels as well. This places the issue well within the UNTOC’s interests and mandate. With innumerable lives being lost every year, swift and decisive action will be the only way to stop the further spread of these dangerous drugs.

History and Description of the Issue

History of Opioid and Fentanyl Abuse

Unfortunately, natural opioids like heroin have been abused for centuries. Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, was first discovered in the 1960s. Upon release, fentanyl did not immediately lead to a global health crisis. Because of its potency, it found use as an end-of-life painkiller for people suffering from cancer and other painful diseases.⁸ For many years, fentanyl was simply a rather uncommon pharmaceutical drug. The modern fentanyl crisis can actually be traced back to other opioids.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified three waves of the broader opioid epidemic. The first wave began with new developments in opioid

1 “Methamphetamine (Oral Route) Description and Brand Names - Mayo Clinic,” Mayo Clinic, accessed August 22, 2023, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/drugs-supplements/methamphetamine-oral-route/description/drg-20071824>.

2 “Heroin and Opioid Awareness | Opioid Facts,” U.S. Department of Justice, November 28, 2002, <https://www.justice.gov/opioidawareness/opioid-facts>.

3 “Fentanyl Flow to the United States” (U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, January 2020), https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/DEA_GOV_DIR-008-20%20Fentanyl%20Flow%20in%20the%20United%20States_0.pdf.

4 Claire Klobucista and Alejandra Martinez, “Fentanyl and the U.S. Opioid Epidemic,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 19, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/fentanyl-and-us-opioid-epidemic>.

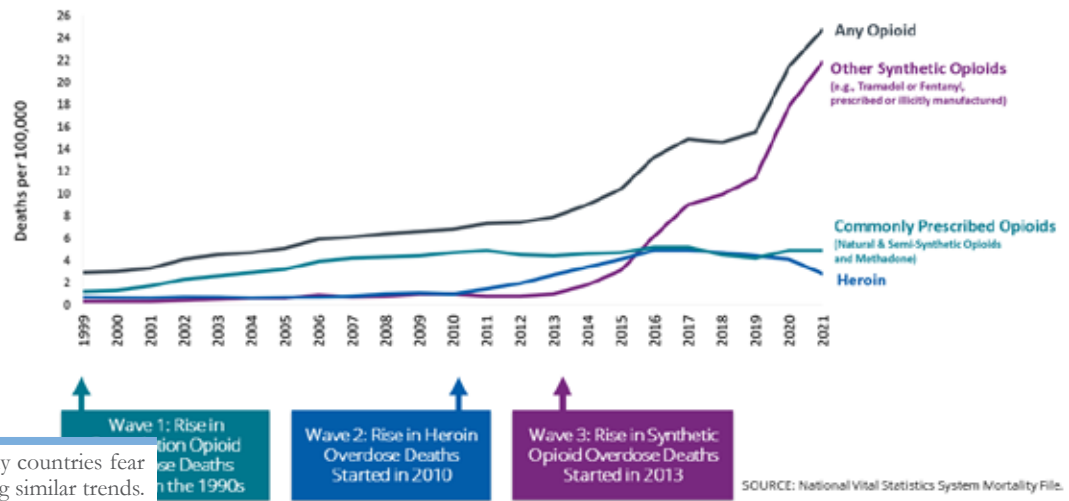
5 “Facts & Stats,” *International Overdose Awareness Day* (blog), accessed August 22, 2023, <https://www.overdoseday.com/facts-stats/>.

6 “Lack of Hugs Caused US Fentanyl Crisis, Mexico’s Leader Says | AP News,” *Associated Press*, March 17, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-lopez-obrador-fentanyl-united-states-drugs-3545ba238c3ea3aef4157de94b45705e>.

7 “Documentary: The Fight against Fentanyl - CGTN,” CGTN, June 8, 2023, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-06-08/Documentary-The-fight-against-fentanyl-1kct38aWRna/index.html>.

8 “Heroin and Opioid Awareness | Opioid Facts.”

Three Waves of Opioid Overdose Deaths



A timeline of the US opioid crisis. Many countries fear following similar trends.

Credit: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

delivery in the 1990s. New drugs like OxyContin, developed by Purdue Pharma L.P. (owned by the Sackler family), offered better results for people suffering from pain. To ensure that their new drug was widely adopted, Purdue Pharma launched a full-scale marketing and publicity campaign. Top physicians from the world's leading hospitals were paid large sums to promote OxyContin and start a medical revolution that encouraged the use of prescription painkillers.⁹ At the same time, OxyContin received expedited approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which approves all new pharmaceutical drugs. There were no studies done on the long-term or addictive effects of OxyContin before approval. Dr. David Kessler, the FDA Commissioner at the time, later said about the rushed approval, "No doubt it was a mistake. It was certainly one of the worst medical mistakes, a major mistake."¹⁰

Prescription opioid sales quadrupled between 1999–2010, bringing windfall profits to Purdue Pharma and other manufacturers. During the same period, the rate of opioid overdose deaths also doubled. Opioid abuse rose along with

the increased number of prescriptions.¹¹ This trend was mostly limited to the US and Canada, as European opioid prescription and overdose rates did not increase during this period (apart from the United Kingdom).¹² Purdue Pharma was sued by numerous patient groups for their role in the spread of this first wave of the opioid epidemic. Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy in 2019, and the Sackler family, which profited billions of dollars from the sale of opioids, is still involved in lawsuits today.¹³ Regardless of the legal fault for the epidemic, millions of Americans had become addicted or were vulnerable to addiction to opioids as a result of this first wave.

The second wave of the opioid epidemic saw an increase in the use of heroin from 2010 to 2016. Academics have suggested a direct relationship between the first and second waves, although this has not been conclusively proven. The evidence suggests that as doctors became more reluctant to prescribe opioids, addicted patients turned to other opioids to fuel their addiction. There is also evidence that as the medical supply of opioids dried up, Mexican drug cartels stepped in

9 Arthur Gale, "Sacklers Sacked But Purdue Still Caused Opioid Epidemic," *Missouri Medicine* 119, no. 2 (2022): 109.

10 Jerry Mitchell, "How the FDA Helped Pave the Way for an Opioid Epidemic," *The Clarion-Ledger*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2018/01/26/opioid-epidemic-how-fda-helped-pave-way/950561001/>.

11 Johnathan H. Duff et al., "The Opioid Crisis in the United States: A Brief History" (Congressional Research Service, November 30, 2022), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12260>.

12 Mimi Pierce et al., "Is Europe Facing an Opioid Crisis like the United States? An Analysis of Opioid Use and Related Adverse Effects in 19 European Countries between 2010 and 2018," *European Psychiatry* 64, no. 1 (June 21, 2021): e47, <https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2021.2219>.

13 Arthur Gale, "Sacklers Sacked But Purdue Still Caused Opioid Epidemic."

to fill the void. During the 2000s (before the second wave), US heroin largely came from either Colombia or Mexico. By 2016, however, Mexican drug cartels controlled 90% of the market. Mexican cartels even used some of this money to improve their product, learning how to create a highly refined and very pure heroin.¹⁴ As during the first wave, the second wave was largely limited to users in the US and Canada.

The third and current wave of the opioid epidemic is marked by the rise of fentanyl. The scope of the crisis during this third wave is far greater than in either of the previous waves. The chart above shows the meteoric rise in overdose deaths directly attributed to synthetic opioids, which is largely caused by fentanyl. There is still considerable debate about why the heroin trade was rapidly overcome by fentanyl. Early during the third wave, US officials blamed Chinese exporters directly for smuggling fentanyl. Because fentanyl was so powerful, amounts as small as one kilogram could be smuggled at a time.¹⁵ China increased its regulation of fentanyl in 2019, eliminating almost all direct exports of fentanyl, but the crisis only accelerated. Mexican cartels increasingly stepped up. It is believed that, thanks to their newfound expertise producing high-quality heroin, Mexican cartels developed the means to make fentanyl on their own. Cartels would import the precursors (ingredients) from places like China and India, manufacture fentanyl in Mexico, and then smuggle it into the US through the existing heroin channels. Again, the potency of fentanyl makes it easier to smuggle in small amounts or mixed with heroin or other drugs.¹⁶

Unlike the first and second waves, the third wave has not been limited to the United States. Australia has noted a sharp increase in the number of synthetic opioid overdoses, with the number of deaths increasing by 1,275 percent from 2006 to 2020. In Australia, the number of heroin-related deaths

has also increased over that time, suggesting that fentanyl does not always displace heroin.¹⁷ In Europe, there has not been a dramatic increase in the number of fentanyl-related deaths, but experts see reason to be worried. In Afghanistan, the Taliban banned poppy cultivation (the main precursor to heroin) starting in 2023. Many European countries have struggled with heroin use, so drug experts fear that if heroin supplies decrease, drug users may turn to fentanyl to feed their addiction, just as they did in the United States. Europol, the EU law-enforcement agency, has already found evidence that cartels in Mexico are working with European criminal organizations to smuggle methamphetamine and cocaine into Europe.¹⁸ In other parts of the world, experts suspect there may be an undiagnosed problem. Because many countries do not report statistics about drug-related deaths, some communities may be suffering from a drug epidemic without officials being aware.¹⁹

Global Trade of Fentanyl Precursors

Fentanyl and related synthetic opioids rely on a global trade of chemical precursors, so policymakers have taken a strong interest in restricting the trade of those precursors as much as the drug itself. Before 2019, Chinese producers exported manufactured fentanyl directly to the US, but export restrictions have all but cut off that trade. Now, many countries are involved in heated debates about the degree to which fentanyl precursors should be regulated as well.²⁰

The United States is largely seen as the leader in pushing for restrictions on fentanyl precursors, and its efforts have primarily been focused on China, India, and Mexico. Today, the US alleges that precursor chemicals from China and India are shipped to Mexico, where fentanyl is manufactured and smuggled into the US.²¹ To that end, it has engaged in extensive

14 Daniel Ciccarone, "The Triple Wave Epidemic: Supply and Demand Drivers of the US Opioid Overdose Crisis," *The International Journal on Drug Policy* 71 (September 2019): 183–88, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2019.01.010>.

15 "Combating the Opioid Crisis | ICE," U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, June 6, 2023, <https://www.ice.gov/features/opioid-crisis>.

16 Jennifer Doherty, "The China-Mexico Fentanyl Pipeline: Increasingly Sophisticated and Deadly," *The Guardian*, May 18, 2023, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/18/china-mexico-opioid-trafficking-us-sanctions>.

17 "Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2022" (Melbourne: Pennington Institute, August 2022), <https://www.penington.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Penington-Institute-AAOR-2022.pdf>.

18 Giulia Carbonaro, "Fentanyl Has Devastated America. Why Is Europe Being Spared?," *Euronews*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/18/fentanyl-has-killed-tens-of-thousands-of-americans-why-are-europeans-being-spared>.

19 "Facts & Stats."

20 Jennifer Doherty, "The China-Mexico Fentanyl Pipeline: Increasingly Sophisticated and Deadly."

21 "Countering Illicit Fentanyl Trafficking" (Washington, DC, February 15, 2023), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/>

lobbying efforts and negotiations to urge other countries to more carefully control the trade of these goods. Recently, the US has started exploring legal measures as well. In June 2023, the US filed criminal charges against four Chinese companies and eight Chinese nationals, accusing them of selling fentanyl precursors to the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico. Two of the eight accused individuals were arrested.²²

None of the countries supplying fentanyl precursors dispute the facts of these allegations. However, these chemical precursors are used not just to make fentanyl, but also to make legitimate pharmaceutical drugs. Therefore, restricting the trade of the precursors would hurt legitimate trade as well. Vanda Felbab-Brown, author of a Brookings Institute report studying the fentanyl trade, has said “Many of these chemicals have such wide use in legal industries and legal pharmaceutical companies that they will simply never be [regulated].”²³

China is the country most frequently discussed by the US, so it has come to represent the other side of this debate. The repeated allegations from the US have strained relations between the two countries, and China’s Foreign Ministry

has called upon the US “to stop dumping blame and to stop smear attacks on China.”²⁴ China has characterized the issue as being demand-driven, meaning that fentanyl is being made because drug users want them to be made. The opposite of demand-driven is supply-driven, in which case the supply of fentanyl creates new drug users. In the demand-driven case, China suggests that if countries were tougher on drug use, the problem would be addressed.²⁵ Therefore, China wants to see the countries suffering from the problem to be the ones to solve it in a way that does not impact its trade.

India is another major supplier of fentanyl precursors. The country’s chemical industry has previously been involved in the drug trade, supplying methamphetamine precursors to producers across Southeast Asia for years. The International Narcotics Control Board has noted that India’s chemical manufacturers are poorly regulated and monitored and “vulnerable to the diversion of products to illicit markets by criminal networks.”²⁶ However, the Indian government has been more amenable to new controls and regulations than China. The US and India have formed a Counter Narcotics

f4597c23-de04-fa71-e612-bcbc49b6826c/021523_Gupta_Testimony.pdf.

²² Sarah N. Lynch et al., “US Files First-Ever Charges against Chinese Fentanyl Manufacturers,” *Reuters*, June 24, 2023, sec. United States, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-files-first-ever-charges-against-chinese-fentanyl-manufacturers-2023-06-23/>.

²³ Rupert Stone, “India’s Role in Illicit Synthetic Drug Trade Draws Closer Scrutiny,” *Nikkei Asia*, April 17, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/India-s-role-in-illicit-synthetic-drug-trade-draws-closer-scrutiny>.

²⁴ Sarah N. Lynch et al., “US Files First-Ever Charges against Chinese Fentanyl Manufacturers.”

²⁵ “Documentary: The Fight against Fentanyl - CGTN.”

²⁶ Rupert Stone, “India’s Role in Illicit Synthetic Drug Trade Draws Closer Scrutiny.”

A lethal dose of heroin (30 mg) next to a lethal dose of fentanyl (3 mg)

Credit: NH Dept. of Safety, Division of State Police Forensic Laboratory



Working Group to collaborate on policies to combat drug use and production.²⁷ Some experts believe that India's desire to cooperate is driven by increasing opioid abuse within its own borders. While progress has been made, some fentanyl precursors remain poorly regulated.²⁸

Although China, India, and the US are often discussed as the major players, other countries play smaller roles as well. West Africa is particularly troubled by tramadol, another synthetic opioid that is less powerful than fentanyl but still quite dangerous. Nearly half of Sub-Saharan African countries seized illegal tramadol between 2015 and 2019, with Nigeria alone seizing 96 tons of tramadol in 2017. Tramadol is largely shipped to Africa from South Asia—primarily from India, but Pakistan is playing an increasingly large role.²⁹ Individuals from other countries are also stepping up to become brokers in the lucrative trade of precursor chemicals. Along with the eight Chinese nationals mentioned previously, the US also filed charges against Rubio Zea from Guatemala for allegedly brokering deals between Chinese manufacturers and Mexican cartels.³⁰

The UN has also become involved in restricting the trade of some precursors. In 2017 and 2022, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) approved measures to control the global trade of five different fentanyl precursors. Both times, this was done following proposals made by the United States. The CND's action requires signatories of major international drug treaties (including nearly every UN member state) to enact national laws that properly control the production and trade of these chemicals.³¹ Experts say that these steps are likely to make it harder for cartels to acquire precursors, but they also don't think this will end the problem. It is not overwhelmingly difficult for chemical manufacturers to tweak

molecules or invent new precursors that can create fentanyl through slightly different methods. The CND's decision is not a long-term strategy for defeating the illicit trade of fentanyl precursors.³²

The Role of Mexican Cartels

Restricting the flow of precursor chemicals is just one way to limit the production of fentanyl. Another strategy is to directly address the groups manufacturing fentanyl, which are largely Mexican cartels. Mexico has fought against the cartels for decades, but many trace the history of the Mexican Drug War to 2006, when President Felipe Calderon deployed the military against the cartels. Since then, there have been more than 360,000 homicides in Mexico, giving it one of the highest homicide rates in the world.³³ A full history of the Mexican Drug War is beyond the scope of this guide. However, this section will discuss how the cartels became involved in the fentanyl trade and their operations today.

Although the cartels are often described as a group, there are actually several cartels throughout Mexico, many of which are enemies of each other. These cartels have their own separate operations and areas of control, commonly called territories. Therefore, it is important not to treat all cartels as a cohesive organization. In the fentanyl trade, there are two major cartels: the Sinaloa Cartel and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG). The Sinaloa Cartel is spread across the country but is particularly strong along Mexico's northern Pacific coast (Sinaloa and Sonora provinces). CJNG, a Sinaloa Cartel offshoot, has a similarly broad footprint, but has many of its operations near Guadalajara and along the Gulf of Mexico coast.³⁴ Notably, Sinaloa and CJNG are rivals and have been known to become involved in skirmishes. These cartels acquire fentanyl from abroad, use precursors to make

27 "Countering Illicit Fentanyl Trafficking."

28 Rupert Stone, "India's Role in Illicit Synthetic Drug Trade Draws Closer Scrutiny."

29 UNODC, "World Drug Report 2023" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023), https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/WDR23_B3_CH1_Synthetic_drugs.pdf.

30 "U.S. Sanctions Suppliers of Precursor Chemicals for Fentanyl Production," U.S. Department of the Treasury, August 16, 2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1413>.

31 "At Urging of U.S., UN Commission Acts Against 'Precursor' Chemicals Used to Produce Illicit Fentanyl | ONDCP," The White House, March 16, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2022/03/16/at-urging-of-u-s-un-commission-acts-against-precursor-chemicals-used-to-produce-illicit-fentanyl/>.

32 Rupert Stone, "India's Role in Illicit Synthetic Drug Trade Draws Closer Scrutiny."

33 "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed August 23, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels>.

34 "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels."



Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, former leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, is currently imprisoned in the US serving a life sentence.

Credit: United States Department of Justice

their own fentanyl, and smuggle it into other countries.³⁵

However, the influence of the cartels goes far beyond fentanyl or drugs in general. Cartels operate relatively openly across their claimed territory, and their interests extend into many legal businesses such as logging and fishing. This broad control allows them to raise new revenue through extortion. It also allows them to control the flow of goods across entire regions, making it easier to smuggle goods as needed. Therefore, many drugs are smuggled out of Mexico through legal, regulated ports of trade rather than through secret tunnels or over remote parts of land borders. In fact, 90 percent of fentanyl seizures in the US happen in major ports and border crossings, hidden among legitimate goods.³⁶

Another way that cartels protect themselves is by hiring foreign nationals (particularly US citizens) to smuggle drugs rather than engaging in it directly. Citizens are less likely to be closely inspected and therefore more likely to be successful smuggling illicit drugs into the country. This also shields important cartel personnel from being imprisoned. In fact, in 2022, 88 percent of fentanyl trafficking convictions in the US were against US citizens. Some US politicians have blamed

illegal immigrants for the majority of US fentanyl trafficking, but according to the US Border Patrol, a mere 0.02 percent of detained illegal immigrants were carrying any amount of fentanyl.³⁷

Despite repeated requests, Mexico has been reluctant to engage in joint law-enforcement operations with the US. There have been formal agreements between the two countries, such as the U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities signed in 2021. This agreement creates a framework for law-enforcement cooperation, anti-money laundering operations, and public health initiatives. However, the US has alleged that the actual implementation of this agreement has been lacking. With law enforcement collaboration focused instead of migrants that are trying to cross the border from Mexico into the US, anti-narcotics operations are pushed aside.³⁸ Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has also suggested that most fentanyl production takes place in Asia, with Mexican cartels simply acting as distributors. “In Mexico, we don’t produce fentanyl,” he said in April 2023.³⁹ Inflammatory rhetoric from US politicians has done little to encourage collaboration. During

35 Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Addressing Mexico’s Role in the US Fentanyl Epidemic,” Brookings, July 19, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/addressing-mexicos-role-in-the-us-fentanyl-epidemic/>.

36 Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Addressing Mexico’s Role in the US Fentanyl Epidemic.”

37 Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Addressing Mexico’s Role in the US Fentanyl Epidemic.”

38 Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Addressing Mexico’s Role in the US Fentanyl Epidemic.”

39 Mary Beth Sheridan, “As Fentanyl Crisis Grows, U.S.-Mexico Divide Deepens,” *Washington Post*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2023/04/30/as-fentanyl-crisis-grows-u-s-mexico-divide-deepens/>.

an August 2023 presidential debate, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida said that if elected president, he would deploy the US military into Mexico “on day one.”⁴⁰

While the US is the main destination for fentanyl from Mexico, the cartels are truly global operations. In 2020, Italian police dismantled a Sinaloa drug trafficking operation that brought cocaine from Colombia to Italy via private jets. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain have reported similar operations led by Mexican cartels. The scope of these operations is small compared to smuggling operations into the US, but they show that the cartels have a consistent interest in European expansion. Europol, the EU law enforcement organization, attributes their limited success to corrupt Mexican and European officials. Some drugs are smuggled into Europe for transit to other parts of the world, particularly Asia, which also makes it harder to detect these operations. Europol has increasingly sought to collaborate with US law enforcement agencies to fight the narcotics trade together.⁴¹

[washingtonpost.com/world/2023/04/29/mexico-us-fentanyl/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/04/29/mexico-us-fentanyl/).

40 Olivier Knox, “Analysis | Invade Mexico and Five Other Takeaways from the GOP Debate,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/08/24/invade-mexico-six-other-takeaways-gop-debate/>.

41 “Complexities and Conveniences in the International Drug Trade: The Involvement of Mexican Criminal Actors in the EU Drug Market” (Europol-DEA, December 5, 2022), https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Europol_DEA_Joint_Report.pdf.

42 Om Prakash Singh, “Substance Use in India – Policy Implications,” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 62, no. 2 (2020): 111, https://doi.org/10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_207_20.

Current Status

Emerging Threats in Asia

In the United States and Canada, prescription drug abuse is very low thanks to increased regulations and restrictions on opioids. However, it is important to remember that the pervasive abuse that allowed the rise of cartel-driven fentanyl started with the abuse of legal, prescribed fentanyl. Many countries still do not have adequate regulations over how drugs are prescribed, so many countries, such as India, are still at risk of following the same path as the US and Canada.

In India, opioid abuse is a growing problem. About 2.1 percent of the country reports having used opioids, which is three times the global average. The most prevalent opioid is heroin, with 1.14 percent of the population having tried it.⁴² Recall that, in the US, the modern fentanyl epidemic was preceded by a wave of rising heroin abuse, which also allowed criminal organizations to infiltrate this lucrative trade. In India, heroin mostly comes from the “Golden Crescent” (Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran) and the “Golden Triangle” (Laos,



Equipment for producing sophisticated drugs that was captured in the record-breaking drug bust in Myanmar in 2020.

Credit: Myanmar Police/UNODC/via Reuters

Myanmar, and Thailand).⁴³ Another challenge facing India is poor data collection about fentanyl abuse. Often, victims of drug overdoses are not tested to determine which drug they died from, making it impossible to distinguish between fentanyl and other types of overdoses. Recall also that India is not just a consumer of fentanyl, but also a leading producer of fentanyl precursors and the similar chemical tramadol, a blight in West Africa.⁴⁴ Therefore, Indian agents both drive the global trade and suffer from it simultaneously.

Just like in the US, heroin suppliers to India are increasingly trafficking in fentanyl. Asia's largest-ever drug bust, which took place in Myanmar in 2020, included a major supply of fentanyl and advanced drug production equipment. Zaw Lin, head of Myanmar's counter-narcotic's industry, said, "Upon interrogation, the offenders revealed most of the drugs would be distributed inside Myanmar and distributed around neighbouring countries."⁴⁵ Following the 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar, the problem has only grown more difficult to control. The Philippines, another market for these same groups, recently reported an increase in fentanyl smuggling, including as a waypoint to Australia and New Zealand. The Director-General of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency has said, "We are closely coordinating with our foreign counterparts to help us with information gathering."⁴⁶

In the Republic of Korea, the government is taking proactive measures to prevent a fentanyl epidemic from even starting. Fentanyl abuse in the country has been minimal to date, but the government is already working to stem the threat. Bang Moon-kyu, Minister for Government Policy Coordination, told a meeting of ministers, "Korea now stands at a crossroads of becoming either a drug-contaminated country or reverting to a drug-free country."⁴⁷ The government's

response has been to prioritize prosecutions over treatment options. The most recent data shows a 25 percent spike in drug-related prosecutions between 2020 and 2021, mostly affecting younger Koreans. However, there are only six drug rehabilitation centers across the entire country. This focus on prosecution and punishment has drawn some criticism from experts who believe it will only make the drug abuse problem worse.⁴⁸

Growing Use of the Dark Web

As legal restrictions on fentanyl and fentanyl precursors grow, illicit suppliers have had to find new ways to sell and distribute their products. Online sales have been a valuable refuge for drug trafficking organizations. Although the dark web is a popular avenue for these sales, some of these smugglers hide in plain sight. One investigation by VOA found that suppliers listed their contact information on the audio streaming platform SoundCloud. This allowed them to avoid censors and investigators, since the audio contents of SoundCloud files aren't searchable. Through text messages, these manufacturers promised to send tightly regulated precursor chemicals by labelling them as cat food.⁴⁹

Most online sales take place through the dark web (or dark net), which describes the portions of the internet that are not accessible to standard search engines like Google. Most of this content is intentional and innocuous, as any website can request not to be indexed by search engines. This is particularly important for websites that may handle sensitive information such as medical records. However, even a chess website that does not want individual games searched by Google would be considered part of the dark web. In fact, experts estimate that the dark web makes up 96–99 percent of the internet, most of it entirely legitimate. However, the dark web is also

43 Saikiran Kannan, "How India Is Caught in Narcotics Web of Golden Crescent and Death Triangle," *India Today*, January 24, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/how-india-is-caught-in-narcotics-web-of-golden-crescent-and-death-triangle-2325808-2023-01-24>.

44 Chao Wang and Nicholas Lassi, "Combating Illicit Fentanyl: Will Increased Chinese Regulation Generate a Public Health Crisis in India?," *Frontiers in Public Health* 10 (2022), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.969395>.

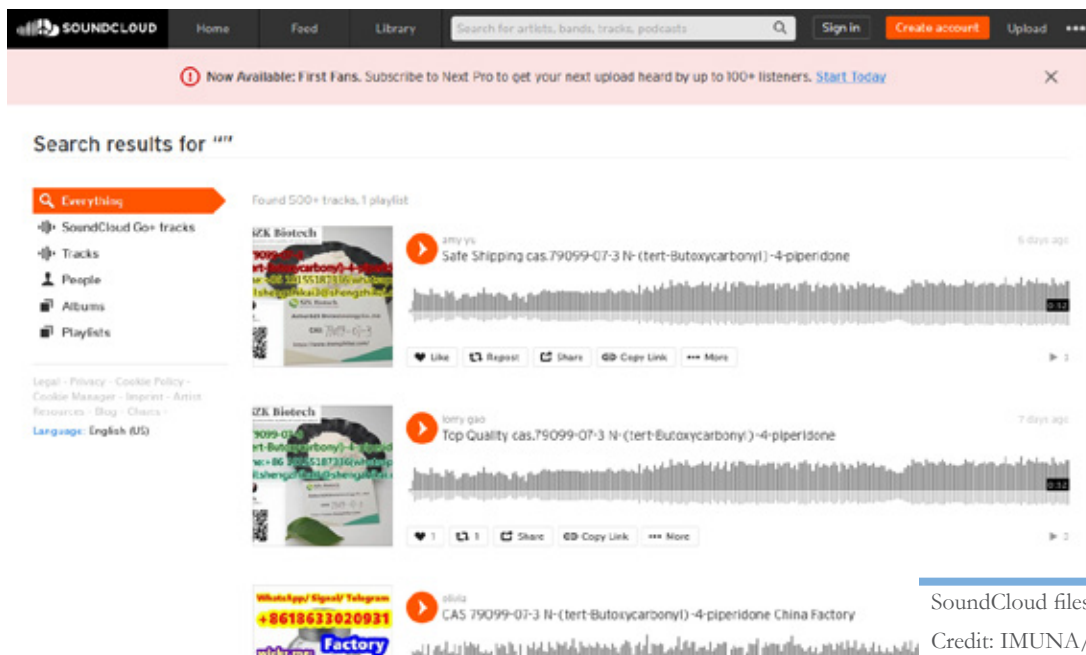
45 "Asia's Biggest Drug Bust: Fentanyl Seizure in Myanmar Shows Gangs Shifting to Opioids," *South China Morning Post*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3084878/asias-biggest-drug-bust-fentanyl-seizure-myanmar-reveals>.

46 "Philippines Raises Alarm over Illicit Fentanyl Imports from Laos, Myanmar and Thailand," *The Star*, July 8, 2023, <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2023/07/08/philippines-raises-alarm-over-illicit-fentanyl-imports-from-laos-myanmar-and-thailand>.

47 Jung Min-ho, "Korea Vows to Fight Spread of Fentanyl," *koreatimes*, June 2, 2023, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/08/251_352239.html.

48 Hyonhee Shin and Minwoo Park, "South Koreans Fighting Drug Addiction Find Few Rehab Options," *Reuters*, April 13, 2023, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreans-fighting-drug-addiction-find-few-rehab-options-2023-04-13/>.

49 *VOA Investigation: Sales of Fentanyl Precursors Still Thriving Online*, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/voa-investigation-sales-of-fentanyl-precursors-still-thriving-online/7136777.html>.



home to illicit activities, and drug organizations have found a welcoming environment in the more secluded parts of the internet.⁵⁰

It is difficult to estimate the amount of dark web sales of fentanyl and its precursors, but law enforcement activity on the dark web has stepped up dramatically in recent months. In May 2023, the US Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement team announced its largest-ever operation, arresting 288 people connected to a fentanyl trafficking scheme that spanned the Americas and Europe. US Attorney General Merrick Garland said that the operation “was a coordinated international law enforcement effort...and represents the most funds seized and the highest number of arrests in any coordinated international action led by the Justice Department against drug traffickers on the dark web.”⁵¹

Despite successes like this, the issue of dark web fentanyl sales persists thanks to multiple layers of anonymity offered by online channels. One of these layers is cryptocurrency—digital currencies that feature a public record of transactions, but it is

difficult to prove ownership of any individual digital “wallet.” Elliptic is a firm that investigates financial cryptocurrency crimes. In 2023, they published a comprehensive investigation of over 100 predominantly Chinese fentanyl precursor manufacturers. Elliptic representatives tried to purchase controlled precursors from each manufacturer and pay for the chemicals with cryptocurrency. 71 percent of the companies were willing to provide fentanyl precursors in exchange for cryptocurrency, and 14 percent were willing to provide fentanyl directly. More worrisome, the wallets that the companies requested payments into showed incomes of as much as USD 32 million, suggesting vibrant activity.⁵²

Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the most important policy priorities of the United Nations today. Developed in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, the 17 goals and their 169 targets represent meaningful, achievable development milestones that all countries, regardless of wealth or geography, should strive to achieve.⁵³ Unfortunately,

50 “What Is the Dark Web? How to Access It and What You’ll Find.” CSO Online, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://www.csoonline.com/article/564313/what-is-the-dark-web-how-to-access-it-and-what-youll-find.html>.
 51 “Office of Public Affairs | Largest International Operation Against Darknet Trafficking of Fentanyl and Opioids Results in Record Arrests and Seizures | United States Department of Justice,” U.S. Department of Justice, May 2, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/largest-international-operation-against-darknet-trafficking-fentanyl-and-opioids-results>.
 52 “Crypto and the Global Fentanyl Trade” (Elliptic, 2023), https://www.elliptic.co/hubfs/Elliptic_Report_Crypto%20and%20the%20Global%20Fentanyl%20Trade.pdf.
 53 “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

the world is well behind the needed pace to achieve these goals by 2030. In fact, not a single one of the 17 goals is on pace to be met at a global level.⁵⁴ The issue of the global fentanyl trade touches on many of these SDGs, but the three most important to the topic will be discussed here.

One of the primary goals of this committee is to bring international criminal organizations to justice. To that end, SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions is among the most important SDGs to this topic. In particular, Target 16.4 calls states to “significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime.”⁵⁵ The trade of fentanyl is so attractive to organized crime because it is so lucrative. Sometimes, this wealth just enriches individuals, but at other times, it can support organizations’ other illicit goals. Regardless of how the drug revenue is used, the strength of these groups invariably undermines the governance of legitimate states. To promote the rule of law and bring justice to the victims of these groups, their trade must be disrupted and their leadership dismantled.

One of the trickiest SDGs to navigate will be SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. Target 9.2 calls upon states to “Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization.”⁵⁶ As discussed previously, fentanyl precursors have legitimate uses besides the production of fentanyl. Countries like China are reluctant to apply regulations that would restrict the legitimate sale of these chemicals, as that would represent economic harm to its people. Determining which chemicals are being sold for illegal purposes is a challenging task, and it is argued that severely regulating these industries places too much of the burden on countries trying to grow their chemical manufacturing capabilities.⁵⁷ The committee must identify solutions that work to stem this global health crisis without

risking the legal and fair trade of growing economies.

The final vital SDG is SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being. The negative effects of fentanyl and opioid abuse are wide-reaching, touching on many of SDG 3’s targets. However, Target 3.5 explicitly demands that countries “Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, data collection is again a problem when assessing Target 3.5. The majority of countries do not (in many cases, can not) report information about narcotics abuse in their borders.⁵⁹ To better understand even whether the situation is improving or deteriorating, the committee should also prioritize improved data collection mechanisms.

Bloc Analysis

Issues surrounding fentanyl are unique because of the nature of the chemicals being produced. When dealing with other drugs, such as heroin and methamphetamine, the countries where the drugs are produced are often among the most zealous combatants against drug organizations. Fentanyl, however, is a legal drug with medicinal uses, and its precursors have a wide range of entirely legal applications. Therefore, discussions about fentanyl feature deeper disagreements than discussions about other drugs.

In this committee, we expect the debate to focus on how to best control not just fentanyl itself, but also its precursors. This will generate contentious discussions about global trade as well as the economic independence of developing countries. Therefore, we expect three blocs to emerge: countries suffering from fentanyl and similar drugs, countries with growing chemical industries, and countries with strong drug organizations. These blocs are not rigid. We have already

54 Melinda Walling, “World Well Short of Pace Needed to Meet UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,” *AP News*, June 20, 2023, sec. Climate, <https://apnews.com/article/un-sustainable-development-goals-progress-shortfalls-financing-0d21dc33fd65fb18c248c239db89db37>.

55 “Goal 16 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>.

56 “Goal 9 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal9>.

57 Tara John et al., “The US Sanctioned Chinese Companies to Fight Illicit Fentanyl. But the Drug’s Ingredients Keep Coming,” *CNN*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/30/americas/fentanyl-us-china-mexico-precursor-intl/index.html>.

58 “Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>.

59 “SDG Indicators Database,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database>.

examined the case of India, which both produces fentanyl precursors and is battling opioid abuse within its borders. Therefore, these blocs should be considered guidelines, not strict rules.

Countries Where Fentanyl and Other Drugs are Abused

So far, the United States and Canada have suffered the most from fentanyl abuse. However, fentanyl production is growing, and similar synthetic opioids are already affecting other countries. For example, tramadol has been seen throughout West Africa. Global measurements of fentanyl or synthetic opioid abuse are scarce because of poor reporting. However, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publishes statistics about drug use using the best available data.⁶⁰ Note that the UNODC classifies fentanyl as a “new psychoactive substance” (NPS) along with other drugs.⁶¹ Underreporting or a lack of reporting may be an issue for some countries, so delegates may also refer to the overall prevalence of drug use. Finally, this bloc also includes countries that may not have high rates of drug abuse, but government policies are set aggressively. South Korea, examined previously, is a good example of such a country.

Countries in this bloc will take the strongest stances against drug production. They will be the most willing to apply restrictions and limits on the global chemical trade to try to stop fentanyl production, and they are likely to engage in law enforcement action to stop the cartels. EU and US law enforcement agencies have collaborated repeatedly to stop drug traffickers and financiers. They are also increasingly concerned about the spread of Mexican cartels into Europe through European organized crime.⁶² Nigeria’s National Drug Law Enforcement Agency has worked with the UNODC to

address the tramadol crisis, and has even attributed the spread of the drug to terrorist organizations spread across the Sahel. However, regional law enforcement cooperation in West Africa is not nearly as extensive as between the US and EU.⁶³ Other countries facing growing threats from fentanyl include Australia, India, the Philippines, and New Zealand.

Countries with Growing Chemical Industries

The regulation of the global chemical trade is at the heart of this topic. China is the global leader in chemical manufacturing, accounting for 43 percent of global chemical sales across all industries (followed by the EU at 15 percent and the US at 11 percent). However, other countries that have seen significant growth include (but are not limited to) Brazil, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore.⁶⁴

Countries with large or growing chemical industries will most likely be inclined to protect those industries and block efforts to stunt their growth. How countries do this will differ. This guide has already examined the differences between China’s and India’s relationship to the US regarding fentanyl precursors, but both countries want to see their chemical industries continue to thrive. In March 2021, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand led a conference with the UNODC to determine the best ways to limit drug precursor smuggling. Thailand has seized growing number of smuggled drugs in its ports for years, so developing world-class control mechanisms is a top priority.⁶⁵ Japan, in particular, has passed strict controls on chemical exports and has strongly urged other Asian states to pass stronger control reforms.⁶⁶

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs regularly meets to review proposals to add chemicals to a list of precursors that should be regulated. By law, all members of the 1988 Convention

60 “Prevalence of Drug Use - New Psychoactive Substances (General Population),” dataUNODC, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-drug-use-prevalence-nps>.

61 “What Are NPS?,” UN Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/LSS/Page/NPS>.

62 “Complexities and Conveniences in the International Drug Trade: The Involvement of Mexican Criminal Actors in the EU Drug Market.”

63 Gernot Klantschnig and Ini Dele-Adedeji, “Opioid of the People: The Moral Economy of Tramadol in Lagos,” *Politique africaine* 163, no. 3 (2021): 85–105, <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.163.0085>.

64 “Facts & Figures 2022 - the Profile of the Industry,” The European Chemical Industry Council, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://cefic.org/a-pillar-of-the-european-economy/facts-and-figures-of-the-european-chemical-industry/profile/>.

65 “Thai Authorities and UNODC Hold High Level Talks on Precursor Chemical Trafficking,” UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, March 30, 2021, <https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/2021/03/high-level-precursor-chemical-trafficking/story.html>.

66 “Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 2021” (Vienna: International Narcotics Control Board, March 10, 2022), https://unis.unvienna.org/pdf/2022/INCB/INCB_2021_Precursors_E.pdf.

Against Illicit Traffic of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances should take swift steps to regulate these chemicals, but significant gaps remain.⁶⁷ As of November 2021, 68 of the 190 member states had failed to submit required reports within the last year.⁶⁸ Delegates in this bloc should review the state of their national regulations and determine why their government may have failed to regulate any of these chemicals.

Countries with Strong Drug Organizations

Mexico, home to several powerful drug cartels, is the quintessential example for this bloc. Mexico was examined in-depth in this guide, but other countries feature strong drug organizations as well. Although they are now smaller than Mexican cartels, Colombian drug organizations are still the world's leading producers of cocaine, and they are constantly looking for new markets.⁶⁹ In Asia, the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle are still leading drug manufacturing hubs. Although these drug organizations may not be as reliant on fentanyl as Mexican cartels, fentanyl has been discovered around the world in smaller amounts. Other countries in this bloc may not produce drugs, but drug cartels may be present there to traffic drugs across their borders. Countries in Central America, such as Guatemala, are often victimized by the drug trade.⁷⁰

None of the countries in this bloc openly embrace drug trafficking organizations, but their enforcement against these organizations varies. Some countries, like Myanmar, are strongly opposed to the drug trade, but lack the resources and international support to fight it due to the 2021 military coup. In Myanmar, rebel groups have even tried to build support for their cause by taking independent action against drug producers.⁷¹ Note that as of August 2023, Myanmar is still represented in the UN by the pre-coup government-in-

exile. Other countries, like Panama, oppose the drug trade, but corrupt officials impede anti-drug efforts. The Panama Canal is an important drug smuggling route, especially for Colombian producers. Often, local civilians will even help smugglers as a way to escape poverty.⁷² As discussed previously, Mexico is a unique case for intentionally scaling back its anti-drug efforts due to the severe effect of cartel violence.

Committee Mission

Although the drug trade and its health effects are not the primary charge of the UNTOC, organized crime groups have an undeniable reliance on the drug trade globally to finance their operations. Global sales of fentanyl have allowed criminal enterprises to flourish all over the world, and their reach is increasingly including once legitimate businesses. To stem this growing risk and prevent a global resurgence in organized crime, decisive action must be taken.

This committee should be focused primarily on the significant role that organized crime plays in this trade. However, these drug cartels cannot be fought in a vacuum. Delegates will find success by being mindful of the many forces supporting the fentanyl trade around the world and the history behind people's growing addition to synthetic opioids. By taking a holistic, multi-pronged approach to undermining the operations and structure of transnational organized crime groups, delegates will be able to bring peace and security to several countries and restore the rule of law where it is needed most.

67 Renyang Gao, "International Drug Control Regime and Reforms," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.jtl.columbia.edu/bulletin-blog/international-drug-control-regime-and-reforms>.

68 "Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 2021."

69 Patrick J. McDonnell, "Colombia, the World's Largest Cocaine Producer, Faces a Change in Drug Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2022, sec. World & Nation, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-10-23/colombia-the-worlds-largest-cocaine-producer-grapples-with-drug-policy>.

70 "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Guatemala Summary," *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-international-narcotics-and-law-enforcement-affairs-work-by-country/guatemala-summary/>.

71 RFA Burmese, "Drug Trade Thrives in Lawless Post-Coup Myanmar," *Radio Free Asia*, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/drugs-06262023174441.html>.

72 Raquel Balletin, "Panama Became Logistics Hub for Drug Trafficking 'Super Cartel,'" *InSight Crime* (blog), December 9, 2022, <https://insightcrime.org/news/panama-logistics-hub-drug-trafficking-super-cartel/>.



UNTOC

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TOPIC B: CHILD TRAFFICKING IN EAST ASIA

Photo Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

Introduction

Approximately 152 million children are trafficked globally.¹ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), human trafficking is the “recruitment and transportation of people by force to exploit them for profit.”² Human trafficking is a vile crime that feeds on inequalities, instability, and conflict. It violates many human rights in many ways and will change a victim’s life forever.

Human trafficking is known as the “modern slavery” crisis.³ Many victims are typically forced into sexual or labor exploitation.⁴ Unfortunately, 27 percent of these victims are children. Two out of three of them are young girls.⁵ According to some estimates, human trafficking has generated more than USD 150 billion a year from 2015.⁶

41 million victims are from East Asia between 5–14 years old.⁷ Asian countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Laos), and China hold some of the highest rates of child trafficking cases.⁸ Reasons for this pattern tie back to poverty, lack of opportunity, and migration.⁹ The children who are trafficked face many dangers including working in unsafe and unsustainable conditions.¹⁰ Many of them are from distant and impoverished areas and are taken to industrial zones in other countries such as Korea and Japan.¹¹ Lack of opportunity sets the stage for criminals seeking economic gain and leaves residents of impoverished areas susceptible to the risk of trafficking. Moreover, many traffickers target communities that have been impacted by natural disasters or armed conflicts.¹² Natural disasters such as typhoons are becoming increasingly common in East Asia

because of climate change, which has the potential to leave communities vulnerable to cases of human trafficking.¹³

Human trafficking is a serious crime that has devastating effects on victims, communities, and countries. Victims can have their childhood lost, their families disrupted, and severe mental health consequences. These include anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse.¹⁴ Human traffickers are also stealing from domestic and international economies. They exploit low and ineffective infrastructures, unemployed populations, and vulnerable legal and policing systems.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the low risk of punishment compared to an extremely high profit gain, and the increasing global demand for illegal labor and prostitution.¹⁵

This issue cannot go another year unresolved. As one of the worst crises to plague us in the twenty-first century, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) is tasked with looking at child trafficking in East Asia. This guide will look at common trafficking routes,

1 “Child Labour and Exploitation,” United Nations International Child Emergency Fund, Updated April 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/child-protection/child-labour-and-exploitation>
2 “Human-Trafficking,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Accessed September 15, 2023. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html>
3 UNODC, “Human-Trafficking.”
4 UNICEF, “Child Labour and Exploitation.”
5 “Child Trafficking: What You Need to Know,” Save the Children, Accessed September 9, 2023. <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-trafficking-awareness>.
6 United Nations, “Bankrupting the Business of Human Trafficking...” *UN Web TV*. Dec 1, 2020. [Video]. <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1s/k1sax7pkv>
7 UNICEF, “Child Labour and Exploitation.”
8 Anthony Mely, “A Hidden Scourge,” *International Monetary Fund*, September 2018. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2018/09/human-trafficking-in-southeast-asia-caballero>.
9 UNICEF, “Child Labour and Exploitation.”
10 “Child Trafficking,” Their World. August 4, 2022. <https://theirworld.org/resources/child-trafficking/>.
11 Ethan Yang, “Human Trafficking in South East Asia and Economic Empowerment,” *The First-Year Papers*. 2016. <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1068&context=fypapers>.
12 Mely, “A Hidden Scourge.”
13 Mely, “A Hidden Scourge.”
14 Amy Novotney, “7 in 10 Human Trafficking Victims Are Women and Girls. What Are the Psychological Effects?” *American Psychological Association*. August 18, 2017. <https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/trafficking-women-girls>.
15 “The Economic Impact of Human Trafficking,” The Dunken Law Firm. March 12, 2020, <https://www.thedunkenlawfirm.com/the-economic-impact-of-human-trafficking/>.

vulnerable groups and areas, online tools for trafficking, and the general impact of this issue. Delegates must seek solutions to these topics and take decisive action to address this pressing global crisis. The time to act is now, for the sake of the countless children being dragged away from their homes and forced into horrible situations.

History and Description of the Issue

Common Trafficking Areas

Child trafficking is not new in East Asia. These crimes committed have only increased since the pandemic.¹⁶ Increased social distancing made it harder for governments to detect cases. Further isolation has enabled child trafficking to flourish overseas. This is because it brought an increase in the use of sea routes to transport victims among countries.

East and Southeast Asia serve at the center of these crises.¹⁷ In these regions, some countries are the origin points of trafficking, and others are the destination points. Several factors contribute to this, such as significant cross-border migration and weak border security. Additionally, the limited

¹⁶ “Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons,” United Nations Publications. Accessed September 15, 2023. https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf

¹⁷ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020* No. E.20.IV.3, (Vienna: UNODC, 2020), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf.

job and educational opportunities, and the demand for child sex services in local communities add to the issue. This subtopic will explore these vulnerable borders that contribute to common trafficking routes.

The region has a higher prevalence of human trafficking. This is since Asia and the Pacific are home to 56 percent of the world’s population. From 2000–2020, the countries saw the biggest rise in foreign migration. The region has an estimated 15 million individuals in forced labor. This includes debt-bondage or hereditary labor. Debt-bondage is where individuals owe others large sums of money and need to work to pay it off. Hereditary labor is when this debt is passed down from generation to generation. Finally, it also includes state-imposed forced labor which refers to the work imposed by the government. The increase in these cases has created common routes where trafficking can happen easily and take place undetected.

In East Asia, a significant human trafficking network operates within the Mekong subregion. This subregion includes countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Child trafficking is a prevalent issue across these borders, and traffickers exploit weak border controls. Laos, in



Child maid in Nepal

Credit: solarshakti



Greater Mekong subregion

Credit: Shannon1

particular, faces a high risk of child trafficking due to having one of the youngest populations in Asia. Approximately 90 percent of victims in Laos are between 12–18 years old, and they are often sent to countries like Thailand to work.¹⁸ Notably, Thailand and Laos share a lengthy border, much of it along the Mekong River. Many Laotian parents cross these borders with their children in search of better opportunities abroad, believing in the promise of improved careers or education. Consequently, some victims of human trafficking migrate willingly, misled by false hopes. While crossing into Thailand and other neighboring nations is relatively easy through unguarded border areas, these migrants become vulnerable to human trafficking groups on the other side.

Similarly, Thailand’s young population is vulnerable. These activities are prevalent in many cities such as Phuket and Pattaya. These young individuals are forced to work as waiters, bartenders, or sex workers. Thailand is home to more than 123,530 sex workers, at least 40 percent of them are under the age of 18, as reported by various human rights groups.¹⁹ Agents who exploit children often target them at bus stops or travel to rural areas to recruit them. In particular, young boys find themselves trapped in bars due to debts owed to the bar

owners for things like clothes, and drugs, and need money delivered to support their families.²⁰ The lack of stable job opportunities and the high supply of low-cost labor create an environment that can motivate human trafficking in the region.

A significant part of the problem relates to unrestricted or open borders. Open borders within the region make it difficult for border patrol agents and immigration authorities to spot, recognize, and report cases of human trafficking. It is crucial to establish efficient and rapid information-sharing mechanisms between nations when instances of cross-border human trafficking are discovered. This way, victims can be rescued, and traffickers can be apprehended right away.

There are several challenges related to cross-border human trafficking in East Asia. This includes the vulnerability of individuals due to poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence. Furthermore, issues such as victims being re-trafficked, limited awareness about human trafficking at border crossings, and the absence of secure shelters at borders are noteworthy concerns. Moreover, addressing the repatriation of victims of cross-border human trafficking between Bangladesh, India, and Nepal poses a further challenge. The

¹⁸ “Human Trafficking in Laos,” Sengsavang, Accessed August 16, 2023. <https://sengsavang.org/en/human-trafficking-in-laos/>

¹⁹ Rina Chandran, “In Thai Tourist Spots, a Hidden World of Male Sex Slavery,” *Reuters*, June 13, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-trafficking-sexcrimes/in-thai-tourist-spots-a-hidden-world-of-male-sex-slavery-idUSL1N1TF17J>.

²⁰ Chandran, “In Thai Tourist Spots, a Hidden World of Male Sex Slavery.”

process of returning victims to their home country can be difficult due to long legal and administrative procedures. The rescue and return of weak women, children, and men who are trafficked across borders has proven to be a difficult task, and the three countries have emphasized a strong desire to strengthen regional and cross-border cooperation.²¹

Additional challenges can be attributed to increased cross-border trade and infrastructure. Specifically, the Lao-China Railway, a railroad that passes through Laos and connects China and Thailand is a severe threat to security. The lack of awareness among front-line police and the lack of border security measures make this railway a danger to the children of Laos. Long-distance trucking services across the Thai and Chinese borders with Laos are anticipated to experience an increase in demand as a result of the Lao-China Railway. Along this railway, protection for children is weak. Due to low socio-economic development and ineffective infrastructure, perpetrators can get away with their crimes and continue the behavior. The issues of poverty and lack of income opportunities limit children's options in work, and they are forced into these unwanted situations.

Since the 1980s, the trafficking of women and children in China has increased dramatically, posing a severe threat to the stability and progress of rural communities while causing immense suffering to individuals and families.²² In Yunnan, which is China's eighth-largest province and one of the regions hit hardest by trafficking, over 1,000 children and women are trafficked on average each year.²³ This province shares extensive, unguarded borders with Laos and Vietnam. Yunnan also has a predominantly rural population, many of whom speak distinct languages and are somewhat disconnected from mainstream Chinese culture. This isolation further hinders their awareness of the risks associated with urban life. The

primary force driving this migration is poverty. In rural areas like Menghai, the average annual income is less than 1,000 yuan (USD 120). As one survivor of trafficking, Yu Lian, puts it, "I hadn't even seen a 50-yuan banknote (USD 6) before I went to Thailand."²⁴ It's evident how girls growing up in these communities often lack exposure to the outside world, leaving them vulnerable and easily deceived. Tragically, this vulnerability often leads to them being exploited and taken to remote regions in neighboring countries.

Furthermore, human trafficking is often facilitated by corruption in both the governmental and commercial sectors. Law enforcement agents, immigration officers, labor inspectors, border guards, and prosecutors, among others, are just a few examples of public authorities who may be involved as enablers of these criminal activities.²⁵ In Cambodia, the sex tourism sector has continued to develop due to corruption in the police and judicial systems. The past few years have seen the emergence of criminal organizations operating cryptocurrency, investment, and gaming frauds in casinos, dorm buildings, hotels, and outlying office complexes around Cambodia. These are allegedly connected to prominent political leaders. Survivors and family members claim that inmates who contact the authorities frequently go missing or face retaliation, while some who manage to flee and call the police are handed back over to their captors. Cross-regional corruption occurs as both nations seek to profit from the current trafficking rings. Many of the Chinese who control human trafficking and fraud networks in Cambodia have considerable power. The gangs are alerted if the local Cambodian authorities learn anything about a raid from their Thai counterparts, and they then transfer the victims and take their phones.²⁶ The prevalence of corruption in Cambodia aids in the growth of these networks. Vietnamese women are

21 UNODC, *Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants*. (Vienna: UNODC, 2009), <https://www.unodc.org/southasia/en/topics/frontpage/2009/trafficking-in-persons-and-smuggling-of-migrants.html>.

22 Yunnan Province Women's Federation, "Situation of trafficking in children and women: A rapid assessment." *International Labor Organization*. August 2022. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_12_en.pdf.

23 Yunnan Province Women's Federation, "Situation of trafficking in children and women: A rapid assessment."

24 "Calls to Curb Cross-Border Human Trafficking," *China Daily*, December 16, 2003. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/16/content_290868.htm

25 UNODC, *Corruption as a Facilitator of Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons in the Bali Process Region with a Focus on Southeast Asia*, (Vienna: UNODC, March 2021), https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/archive/documents/Publications/2021/Corruption_of_SoM_and_TiP_with_focus_on_Southeast_Asia_Mar2021.pdf

26 Lindsey Kennedy, Paul Nathan Southern, and Huang Yan, "Cambodia's Modern Slavery Nightmare: The Human Trafficking Crisis Overlooked by Authorities," *The Guardian*, (November 2022). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/03/cambodias-modern-slavery-nightmare-the-human-trafficking-crisis-overlooked-by-authorities>.

transported to Thailand and Malaysia by a select group of diplomats and police officers from Cambodia.²⁷ Authorities from Cambodia have been known to participate in crimes and since many of them are working on the wrong side of the law, governments like these make it that much harder to prevent these crimes from worsening let alone making progress.

Overall, a network of common trafficking routes across the Asian continent operates to and from East Asia. Key areas and regions where these issues are multiplied and complex due to varying socio-economic factors. It is thus imperative for delegates in this committee to shift the conversations towards addressing these issues and taking immediate action to secure the lives of these children.

Migrants and Child Trafficking

Since the 1980s, the East Asia region has seen high levels of migration. Economic growth in some countries and other factors have led to labor migration from neighboring underdeveloped nations. As discussed previously, migration is a leading cause of vulnerability to trafficking. It is interesting to analyze the pipeline of migrant workers moving from their origin to their destination.

According to the UN, human smuggling organizations are taking advantage of the expanding migrant population in Asia and putting them at risk of being trafficked and mistreated. Migration inside Asia is anticipated to increase at previously unheard-of rates because of new infrastructure and the opening of borders, making it more challenging to distinguish smuggled migrants from the growing number of regular migrants. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that smuggled immigrants are at risk of being abused, trafficked, and exploited because they are living and working illegally in another country.²⁸ Asia is home to two out of every five international child migrants, more than any other area on the planet. While migration might assist

children and their families, it can also put them in danger. When children leave outside of safe and legal pathways, their rights are violated, are more prone to getting taken advantage of by traffickers and get denied access to basic services and legal recognition.²⁹

At the start of the pipeline, we have the initial stage of trafficking. This is due to migration, poverty, and other socio-economic impacts. In Asia, migrant traffickers use corrupt authorities to cross borders and get fake documents. Of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, and Vietnam are the major source countries for labor migrants. In this context, countries like Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Thailand often serve as destinations for trafficking. Most trafficking cases occur during migration when victims start their journey with the help of a facilitator or by themselves. It's only when they reach their destination that they realize they have been deceived and are being subjected to abuse. The area is vulnerable to illegal migration because of its long borders and government pressure to maintain strict controls. As a result, between 30 and 40 percent of all migrations in the region happen illicitly. Malaysia and Thailand serve as the principal locations for about three million undocumented migrants.³⁰

The majority of illegal immigrants from Asia are unskilled or low-skilled laborers looking for work in construction, agriculture, and manufacturing. While young men make up the majority, there is also a great number of young women and kids who are being trafficked. More women are using smugglers to cross borders in search of work, primarily in the hospitality, domestic service, and sex trade, according to the UNODC. This is due to a lack of economic and educational prospects and limited legal migration options. Since 2002, women and young girls have made up more than 85 percent of the trafficking victims from the Philippines, Laos, and Indonesia.³¹ There is a risk of systemic exploitation and abuse

27 Y Charpenel, "Cambodia." Ed. *Economica*. 2016. https://www.fondationscelles.org/pdf/RM4/Cambodia_eng.pdf

28 "Asia's People Smugglers Exploit Rising Migration, Raise Trafficking Fears: U.N." *Reuters*. Last modified April 28, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asia-migrants-smuggling/asias-people-smugglers-exploit-rising-migration-raise-trafficking-fears-u-n-idUSKBN0N1RP20150428>.

29 "Migration," UNICEF, Accessed August 18, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/eap/what-we-do/migration>.

30 Joudo Jacqueline, "Migration and People Trafficking in Southeast Asia," *Australian Institute of Criminology*. November 2010. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi401>.

31 "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia," Migration Data Portal, February 15, 2022. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/south-eastern-asia>.

because there are numerous migrants exploited for their labor frequently in low-paying positions with no job security. This involves social isolation and discrimination, lengthy workdays, and intense exercise. Furthermore, we see a lack of or restricted access to necessities and public services, such as education, healthcare, sanitation, shelter, drinking water, and food. In the Thai fishing industry, an evaluation revealed not just fraudulent and coercive labor tactics but also that 17 percent of the assessed workers were working against their choice and unable to leave.³²

is more prevalent in industries that attract a significant number of labor migrants from East Asia. These poorly regulated sectors provide fertile ground for the growth of human trafficking. Migrants in the region, particularly low-skilled and domestic workers, are often denied basic rights. This further increases the risks they face. Thailand, in particular, has greatly benefited from labor migration as East Asia has developed. With an aging population, rapid economic growth, and a demand for low-skilled workers in key industries, Thailand's development model relies heavily on labor migration. Consequently, over the past two decades, there has been a significant influx of labor migrants into the country, particularly from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. While this migration has positive effects, labor migrants are exposed to the risks of human trafficking and labor exploitation. Many labor migrants find themselves working in low-paying jobs while enduring exploitation. Especially in less visible industries, migrant workers may suffer physical threats, as well as sexual and physical abuse. Children and women are particularly vulnerable. Employers may also seize workers' migration-related documents to control their mobility, adding to their stress and anxiety. When migrants lose their documentation, they also risk losing access to social benefits, showing the consequences of lacking proper paperwork.³³

Debt is another way that migrants are lured and exploited in

East Asia. To pay back their debts, they typically would fall into being trafficked or forced labor to return what they owe. Each year, about 150,000 Vietnamese seek employment in higher-income nations, primarily Taiwan and Japan. The majority of employees take on significant debt to pay their fees, which keeps them subject to the whims and exploitation of their employers while they pay it off.³⁴ 500 Vietnamese construction workers were discovered in 2021 performing forced labor, having their passports seized, and living in inhumane conditions at the Linglong International automobile tire factory in Serbia. Smuggling gangs are increasingly using Serbia and Romania as entry points into Europe, using the guest worker visa schemes to bring a lot of Vietnamese laborers into Eastern Europe. Some of these journeys in search of better lives and earnings tragically end in wrongful death. Furthermore, the effects of debt bondage do not just affect the workers. Families in Vietnam that depend on contributions from loved ones working overseas experience hardship as well. Workers who are held captive by debt struggle to make enough money to send any home regularly, adding to the financial burden on their family and impeding their capacity to break free from poverty.³⁵

Finally, last in the pipeline is working conditions. Labor migrants in East Asia are subjected to a wide variety of kinds of exploitation, which calls for more varied attempts at prevention and intervention. Given the extent of exploitation and the dominant political economy in the region, punishment alone is arguably an unsuitable solution to a problem that is extremely complex. There is a need for a larger range of solutions that better take into account the many forms of exploitation that labor migrants face.³⁶ Other areas of focus include law enforcement agencies, and supporting victims by addressing the push and pull factors that drive irregular migration. The growing and aging economies in East Asia provide increasing demand for migrant labor. But as more

³² Migration Data Portal, "Migration Data in South-Eastern Asia."

³³ Pilar Domingo and Siripatthanakosol Kuanruthai, "Labour Migrants' Vulnerability to Human Trafficking and Labour Exploitation in Southeast Asia: An Analysis of Thailand Labour Migration and Trafficking in Persons: A Political Economy Analysis Country Study Series." *Office of Overseas Development*. July 2023. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Thailand_Country_Study_for_the_website_2Fompsf.pdf.

³⁴ Peter Bengtsen, "Migrant Workers Squeezed in Taiwan," *Le Monde Diplomatique*. February 13, 2023. <https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/migrant-workers-taiwan>.

³⁵ Statt Consulting, "Forced Labour & Vietnamese Debt Bondage," *Statt Consulting*, Accessed August 18, 2023. <https://statt.net/insights/forced-labour-and-vietnamese-debt-bondage/>

³⁶ Lisa Denney, "Beyond a Criminal Justice Response to Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia," *Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre*. February 19, 2023. <https://devpolicy.org/beyond-criminal-justice-response-to-human-trafficking-in-se-asia-20230220/>.

migrants seize this opportunity to improve their lives, women in particular can find themselves at increased risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking. Currently, there are around ten million migrant workers in the ten countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), nearly half of them are women, and numbers are rising. Once victims are trafficked, they are transported and exploited for profit by traffickers. This exploitation and Thailand will have significant shortfalls of working-age adults estimated at 10 - 30 percent, while Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar will have excesses.

The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 estimates that the majority of IOM-assisted victims of trafficking originating from Asia-Pacific had been exploited in the region. Forced labor also featured heavily as one of the most prevalent forms of exploitation amongst migrants assisted in the region. To address some of the identified vulnerabilities, the Protection Division at the IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) contributes to the protection of migrants in vulnerable situations, including victims of human trafficking, exploitation and abuse, unaccompanied and separated migrant children, stranded migrants and migrants in detention, and children in the context of migration. Interventions across the region include direct assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability, training, and capacity building of government and civil society. Further guidance on migrant vulnerability issues including identification, assistance and referral, advocacy, and communications on safe and regular migration pathways are provided. These groups also work to facilitate global communication and improve administrative data on trafficking and irregular migrants.³⁷

Governments and state-sponsored labor migration systems in East Asia should strengthen their asylum protection and labor migration laws. This will stop criminal gangs or unethical recruiters from taking advantage of migrants and refugees. Currently, the immigration policies of China, Hong Kong,

Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and others in the region increase the risks of people being trafficked. Therefore, genuine efforts to prevent human trafficking can show these governments' commitment to addressing exploitation and victimization in the migratory sectors.³⁸

Child Trafficking in Different Industries

The sex and age distributions of those who have been identified as trafficking victims are related to the industries in which the victims are most likely to be exploited. There are many economic sectors where workers have been exploited according to reports. These include the domestic sector, construction work, fishing, agriculture, street trading, and garment work, among others. Trafficking patterns recorded in these industries illustrate the wide range of qualities that have been linked to forced labor or sex trafficking.

Many businesses that use child labor are looking for the most affordable means of production. This implies that they will not bother making improvements to the settings of the mines, lands, and factories where these kids work. Collectively, 2.7 million healthy lives are lost because of child labor. This happens since their bodies are smaller and fragile, but they also have to deal with heavy gear use, chemical exposures such as pesticides, and unclean conditions in buildings with no restrooms. 22,000 of these child workers pass away in the workplace each year. Lead poisoning, radiation exposure, accidents involving big loads, and drowning when deep diving in the fishing sector are the leading causes of mortality in children.³⁹ India has the highest prevalence of child labor in South Asia, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) with 5.8 million children aged 5-17 working in unsafe workplaces. While forced child labor is most prevalent in the agriculture sector, other industries like the textile industry are increasingly attracting more child laborers as they grow. According to a study by the ILO and the Asia Foundation, compared to 8.4 percent in other sectors, children in such industries reported workplace injuries at a rate of 19.4

37 "Migrant Protection and Assistance," International Organization for Migration Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. December 18, 2020. <https://www.iom.int/migrant-protection-and-assistance>

38 Bonney Ling and Isabelle Cheng, "Combating Human Trafficking in East Asia and beyond," *International Institute for Asian Studies*. 2020. <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/combating-human-trafficking-east-asia-and-beyond>

39 Julian Wootton, "Child Labor: An Issue Plaguing South-East Asia," *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, December 9, 2020, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0b595720bfff24091ab255e12e6efcee3>.



Thai fishing boat
Credit: Kritzolina

percent.⁴⁰ Civil society organizations have emphasized that forced labor using trafficked children happens throughout all supply chains, including cotton fields, mills, factories, and home-based businesses. For example, more than 100,000 children are to be employed in illegal sweatshops in and around Asia for more than 14 hours each day, according to the Global March Against Child Labor reports.⁴¹

A warming industry is fishing. Children are compelled to work on board ships under intimidation or through debt bondage by brokers and recruitment firms. A local broker typically approaches a group of young men to persuade them to travel to Thailand through ties in a commune or village. Most of the time, this broker will not inform the children that they must work on a fishing boat while doing so. Instead, they are lured into Thailand by promises of work in construction or on land. Some of them are then transported to a port for fishing, where they are kept in lodgings until they are eventually sold to fishing boat captains. In some of these events, the victims

say they are assaulted and drugged to keep them awake while getting two to three hours of sleep each night.⁴²

Victims describe being vulnerable while onboard ships in remote parts of the sea for extended periods while suffering from diseases, bodily harm, and psychological and sexual abuse. Fishers are required to work extremely hard, dangerous, and lengthy hours for very little money.⁴³ Over the past ten years, an increasing number of reports have revealed abuses of Thai fishing vessel crew members, including the use of excessive violence and bonded, forced, and slave labor to crew their ships and drive down expenses.⁴⁴ Fish stocks and marine biodiversity in Thailand are in danger. Overfishing and poor management of the fisheries have caused the Thai fishing industry to decline over the last several years. A lack of proper fisheries management, effective enforcement, and widespread corruption have made overfishing in Thailand possible. This has led to economic pressures that support the continuous use of slave labor. These violations of human rights are the direct

40 “Thailand’s fishing industry ‘puts children at risk,’ report says,” *BBC News*, September 14, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34242102>

41 Geeta Sekhon, “Forced Labor and Child Trafficking in India’s Garment Sector,” *The Asia Foundation*, September 20, 2017. <https://asiafoundation.org/2017/09/20/forced-labor-child-trafficking-indias-garment-sector/>

42 Robert Carmichael, “Human Traffickers Target Young Cambodian Men for Fishing Industry,” *VOA*, May 25, 2010. <https://www.voanews.com/a/traffickers-target-young-cambodian-men--94910439/118310.html>

43 “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific (IPEC),” International Labor Organization, 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/ipcc/Regionsandcountries/Asia/lang--en/index.htm>

44 “Thailand’s Seafood Slaves,” Environmental Justice Foundation, Accessed September 15, 2023. <https://ejfoundation.org/reports/thailands-seafood-slaves>

cause of this industry's ability to continue offering low-cost goods to Western customers.⁴⁵ Children working in Thailand's seafood processing industry are twice as likely to suffer an injury and are more exposed to job dangers. Compared to other industries, there were more youngsters employed in the seafood industry who worked with fire, gas, or flames.⁴⁶

The worst type of child labor in East Asia continues to be the exploitation of children in the commercial sex trade. Approximately one million kids are drawn or coerced into the sex trade in Asia each year, according to UNICEF estimates. What becomes more troubling is the fact that friends or family members recruited into the workforce many of these kids⁴⁷. With an estimated 60,000 child prostitutes in the Philippines, 400,000 in India, and 800,000 in Thailand, Asia is the continent with the highest rates of child prostitution. The majority of sex workers are female and under the age of 16, while other regions of the world offer nearly entirely young male prostitutes. Most of the 20,000–30,000 child prostitutes in Sri Lanka are boys. The vast majority of kids who engage in prostitution do so out of financial need, especially in the setting of prevalent rural poverty. Some kids leave home on their own in quest of opportunity, while others are abducted or sold as slaves or are ejected from their households.⁴⁸ Children are particularly vulnerable to being forced into the sex industry because they cannot support their families financially. Seven out of 110 children in Surakarta, Indonesia, who were exploited in the commercial sex industry and questioned for research, said they engaged in prostitution to assist their families. According to certain studies, families may rationalize the situation where they must sacrifice one or more children to the commercial sex trade as their only hope of survival. According to one study, a relative who needed the money sold eight out of ten Vietnamese girls trafficked into prostitution in Cambodia.⁴⁹ The cycle of child trafficking

continues and the more financially unstable a family is, the more vulnerable their children are. In this region of the world, a child's virginity is one of the most valuable assets. Intense poverty drives parents into the hands of traffickers who make their livelihoods preying on children.⁵⁰

Moreover, armed groups enlist children as flexible human resources or to increase military capability. Families or communities may provide their boys to armed groups that have ties to their racial, religious, or geographical identity in the name of recruitment. They might act in this way out of a sense of duty to the organization, which might be viewed as the institution in charge of ensuring community safety. The pressure that armed groups put on local populations to enlist youngsters in the military in reaction to possible external threats is demonstrated by certain case material from international tribunals. Other times, kids join armed groups because they have no other choice, since they want to exact revenge on the people who killed their families or because they want to protect their community.⁵¹ Children may not be allowed to leave the groups once they have been registered. Armed groups used violence, threats, and punishments to prevent children from leaving. Being forced to commit suicide bombings is another aspect of being trafficked into armed conflict. Armed organizations use adults and children as human shields in regions where there is ongoing conflict to transport heavy weapons. This type of trafficking is reliant on the armed groups' military operations. Operations that require more labor resources are more complex. On the other hand, using porters is an integrated method of movement for armed organizations.⁵² This practice happens routinely. For instance, armed organizations in South-East Asia force youngsters or adults from certain ethnic minorities to carry heavy loads and military gear up mountainsides and through forests. In one instance, victims claimed that they were treated like slaves and

45 Environmental Justice Foundation, "Thailand's Seafood Slaves."

46 BBC News, "Thailand's fishing industry 'puts children at risk,' report says."

47 Silan Edelweiss, "Child Labor in Asia: A Review," *Hurights*, 2018, <https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section2/2001/09/child-labor-in-asia-a-review.html>.

48 A. Sachs, "The Last Commodity: Child Prostitution in the Developing World," *World Watch*, 24–30. 1994. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12288929/>

49 Deanna Davy, "Design By: Suriyong Khamla-Iad Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia," ECPAT, September 2017, https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Regional-Overview_Southeast-Asia.pdf.

50 Phnom Penh, "The Women Who Sold Their Daughters into Sex Slavery," *CNN*, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2013/12/world/cambodia-child-sex-trade/>

51 "Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific (IPEC)," International Labor Organization, 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Regionsandcountries/Asia/lang--en/index.htm>.

52 ILO, "Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific (IPEC)."

that the circumstances were so difficult that some of them passed away from exhaustion while the armed organizations had killed others on purpose.

Child trafficking is a deeply troubling reality across various industries. It reveals significant societal flaws, causing immense suffering for children, as well as harming communities and global ethics. To combat this issue, governments, law enforcement, civil society, corporations, and individuals must collaborate to eradicate child trafficking.

Online Tools for Trafficking

The rise of technology and social media has led to a significant increase in children and young adults being exposed to online exploitation. False job postings have been made on social media sites like Facebook, common to many adolescents. These posts offer work abroad in places like Thailand and Europe tempting young adults with the false employment and financial opportunities they offer. However, these kids can only recognize they were misled once it is too late. Furthermore, communication in social media can increase the risk of child trafficking. Children can accept a friend request from an unidentified person, exchange information with them, and even meet in person. This unidentified person could be a human trafficker. A quarter of Indonesia's reported missing children are believed to have met their kidnappers on Facebook or other social media sites.⁵³ Moreover, as more children enrolled in online classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their exposure to online risks increased. It allowed for cybercriminals to seduce, trick, and exploit victims without actually meeting them.⁵⁴ According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the COVID-19 lockdowns affected up to 1.6 billion children as a result of school closures. In 25 countries, 80 percent of children reported how they felt threatened by online

contacts.⁵⁵ Many previously non-targeted countries had their children being taken advantage of online, and the rescue of victims became even more complicated. According to a recent assessment from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the pandemic has made it harder to locate and safeguard victims of human trafficking.⁵⁶ This is because of various factors: First, as a result of shifting priorities due to the pandemic, support services for victims of human trafficking have declined. Second, it has significantly decreased the possibility that victims will be found and freed from their abusive circumstances as a result of limits on personal mobility that have been implemented as part of the national lockdown. And last, a significant increase in unemployment and income declines has made a large number of people who were already vulnerable to human trafficking much more vulnerable.⁵⁷ Criminals, including traffickers, use technology to assist, organize, and escape law enforcement quicker, cheaper, and with more anonymity. Recruiters for human trafficking spread misleading information via social media. Police in the Greater Mekong region have rescued people from casinos that had been targeted via social media sites like Facebook, Zalo, and Telegram and trafficked in from neighboring nations. International transactions are increasingly using cryptocurrencies and unofficial payment methods, making it challenging to identify and look into illegal businesses. For traffickers today, the internet is a "gold mine."⁵⁸ They may easily advertise and connect with kids and young people looking for new job prospects through social media and chat rooms.

One of the more repugnant crimes of online exploitation is grooming. Online grooming for sex, often referred to as cyber enticement or online solicitation, is the process through which child sex offenders use the internet. Sex offenders communicate with their children daily. This is to progressively

53 Cook, Alistair DB, and Cairiona Heint. "Human Trafficking in Asia Going Online." *East Asia Forum*. May 3, 2014. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/05/03/human-trafficking-in-asia-going-online/>.

54 INTERPOL. "Cybercrime: COVID-19 Impact". INTERPOL. August 2020. [PDF].

55 "The Use and Abuse of Technology in Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia." *ASEAN–Australia Counter Trafficking*. July 30, 2022. <https://www.aseanact.org/story/use-and-abuse-of-technology-in-human-trafficking-southeast-asia/>.

56 Rehazi, Yasser. "COVID-19 and Crime: The Impact of the Pandemic on Human Trafficking". *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*. July 8, 2021. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2021/July/covid-19-and-crime_the-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-human-trafficking.html

57 UNODC. "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons". *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*. Accessed September 12, 2023. https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf

58 ECPAT. "Trafficking in Thailand: The Demand Fuels Child Trafficking for Sexual Purposes." *ECPAT*. 2023. <https://ecpat.org/story/trafficking-in-thailand-the-demand-fuels-child-trafficking-for-sexual-purposes/>

win the child’s confidence and trust to eventually get the child to consent to sexual contact. In East Asia, reports of sex offenders grooming minors through chat rooms and social networking platforms are on the rise. In particular, Cambodia, Japan, and Vietnam have been identified as having a practice of grooming minors for future sexual exploitation.⁵⁹

The Philippines has emerged as the world’s hub for the live-stream sexual abuse industry. A police raid on a child sexual exploitation organization in the slums of Manila has shown the difficulties the nation has in defending children and holding those responsible accountable.⁶⁰ Police discovered an unprecedented amount of computer hardware the night of the investigation, including laptops, webcams, and a Wi-Fi router. They discovered groups of children in uncomfortable and undignified situations. Furthermore, even parents were known to bring their children to these show houses just for little pay to make ends meet at the cost of their children’s dignity, health, and innocence. The Philippines currently earns up to one billion US dollars annually from the production of online child sex content.⁶¹ International action is necessary to address the transnational issue of child pornography. Harmonizing national and international legal standards is crucial. Inconsistent policies undermine attempts at prosecution and prevention and give child predators the freedom to target nations where they can best take advantage of children.

Internet-based trafficking is now more diverse than ever before. It ranges from basic setups of victims being advertised online to traffickers using communications platforms to broadcast exploitation abroad or money transfers. In one instance of a court case, a group of traffickers successfully recruited individuals to force them to conduct data fraud and identity theft. The victims were imprisoned in an abandoned structure and made to endure cruel treatment. They were given false identities to use on websites to fraudulently use digital signatures to file tax returns and purchase goods from

businesses. Compared to criminals acting alone or in pairs, organized crime criminal networks can traffic more victims per case. This has been confirmed as well in situations of human trafficking when online activity has been mentioned. Traffickers that use standalone websites, whether they work in groups or not, are often able to traffic more victims per case. However, the number of victims per case for social media-based trafficking remains high. Social media has been used by traffickers more frequently as technology-based trafficking has become more prevalent, making this type of trafficking an emerging hazard, particularly for young people.⁶²

On an encouraging note, the member states of ASEAN have acknowledged the urgent need for coordinated action. They have strengthened national and regional legislation to prevent and respond to online exploitation and abuse. At the same time, they are ensuring that children aren’t stopped from taking advantage of online opportunities. With the adoption of the Declaration on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in November 2019, the ASEAN Heads of State made a significant advancement. A Regional Plan of Action for the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Abuse and Exploitation was developed by the Member States, under the direction of the Royal Government of Thailand, with assistance from UNICEF’s East Asia and Pacific Regional Office. This declaration provides a detailed framework with clear and measurable results and offers a vital and thorough structure. This approach acknowledges the significance of governments using a cooperative strategy that includes the sectors of global communications, justice, social welfare, and education. Additionally, it emphasizes how crucial it is for NGOs, the media, and the corporate sector to collaborate with governments.⁶³

In conclusion, the rise of technology and the widespread use of social media have opened new avenues for exploitation, particularly for children and young adults. It is important to highlight that involving parents in this fight will be helpful and

59 Deanna Davy, “Design By: Suriyong Khamla-Iad Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia.”

60 “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia Is an Increasing Concern,” *ECPAT*, February 28, 2018. <https://ecpat.org/sexual-exploitation-children-increasing-concern-across-southeast-asia-new-report/>.

61 ECPAT, “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia Is an Increasing Concern.”

62 “Chapter V: Traffickers use of the Internet,” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2020. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Chapter5.pdf

63 “ASEAN Member States Join Forces to Tackle Online Exploitation and Abuse of Children End Violence,” *End Violence against Children*, March 2, 2022. <https://www.end-violence.org/articles/asean-member-states-join-forces-tackle-online-exploitation-and-abuse-children>

necessary when trying to find solutions. Parents sometimes have little to no knowledge of what takes place online. There are many instances of children being trafficked without their parent's knowledge, but there are also instances where parents or friends actively push their children to work in exploitative conditions.⁶⁴

As we delve deeper into this complex and evolving issue, it becomes evident that comprehensive policies, legal harmonization, and increased awareness are essential to protect vulnerable individuals from falling victim to online exploitation. Delegates must prioritize addressing these pressing challenges to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people worldwide, especially amidst the fourth industrial revolution and the rise of social media.

Holding Organized Crime Groups Accountable

One significant factor why child trafficking flourishes in East Asia is because of the organized crime groups that work within these networks. These criminals collaborate with bodyguards, police officers, and even government officials to facilitate their illicit activities.⁶⁵ These organized groups profit at various stages of the child trafficking process and have taken advantage of regional economic integration.⁶⁶ Due to this, both organized crime and illegal cross-border trafficking are growing and developing in the region.

According to the Taiwanese police, more than 40 local organized crime groups are involved in human trafficking operations throughout South East Asia.⁶⁷ Recently, hundreds of Taiwanese were trafficked into Cambodia and held captive by telecom scam gangs.⁶⁸ Police in Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Vietnam have conducted major operations to

save their citizens and break these trafficking rings. Numerous people had been deceived into traveling by advertisements promising simple jobs and rich rewards. Once there, they were imprisoned and forced to work in fraudulent labor.⁶⁹ Traffickers force thousands of individuals from all across Asia to work in internet scam centers. According to VOD and Al Jazeera, many victims are imprisoned in old, deserted casinos that are guarded and managed by crime syndicates with connections to the Cambodian elite.⁷⁰

In August 2022, more than 40 Vietnamese prisoners who were being held in a casino in Cambodia dove into a river to swim across the border. A 16-year-old lost his life after being carried away by the currents. According to sources, most of these centers appear to be owned by or connected to Chinese organizations.⁷¹ Many of them are highly complex, with distinct departments for areas including IT, finance, and money laundering. The larger ones can resemble a company environment, complete with sales targets, progress reports, quotas, and training on how to commit fraud. As the syndicates frequently work with local gangs to run their scam centers or conduct recruitment, they are also transnational organizations.

Corruption is increasingly recognized as a major factor in the continuation of trafficking and the reason traffickers today remain free. Corruption further aids trafficking and feeds child migration. This undermines the nations and the lack of strength of a country's rule of law. The joint efforts by corrupt government officials and trafficking rings further continue the cycle of trafficking. Trafficking depends on bribes to police, judges, and ministers at all levels to operate. To put an end to these collusion attempts, it is necessary to understand the connection between border control, political

64 "Trafficking in Thailand: The Demand Fuels Child Trafficking for Sexual Purposes," ECPAT, 2023, <https://ecpat.org/story/trafficking-in-thailand-the-demand-fuels-child-trafficking-for-sexual-purposes/>

65 Zafirah Zein, "The Hidden Scourge of Sex Trafficking in Asia," *Kontinentalist*, August 20, 2020. <https://kontinentalist.com/stories/how-does-sex-trafficking-happen-to-women-and-girls-in-southeast-asia>.

66 UNODC, *Drivers of Illicit Trafficking in Border Communities in Southeast Asia*, (Vienna: UNODC, 2023). https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2023/Trafficking_in_Border_Communities_SEA.pdf.

67 Tessa Wong, Thu Bui, and Lok Lee, "Cambodia Scams: Lured and Trapped into Slavery in South East Asia," *BBC News*, September 21, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62792875>

68 Helen Davidson and Chi Hui Lin, "Hundreds of Taiwanese Trafficked to Cambodia and Held Captive by Telecom Scam Gangs," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/23/hundreds-of-taiwanese-trafficked-to-cambodia-and-held-captive-by-telecom-scam-gangs>.

69 Wong, Bui, and Lee, "Cambodia Scams: Lured and Trapped into Slavery in South East Asia."

70 Cait Kelly, "I Couldn't Escape": The People Trafficked into Call Centres and Forced to Scam Australians," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/apr/02/i-couldnt-escape-the-people-trafficked-into-call-centres-and-forced-to-scam-australians>.

71 Wong, Bui, and Lee, "Cambodia Scams: Lured and Trapped into Slavery in South East Asia," *BBC News*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62792875>

corruption, and child trafficking. Because of corruption, the abuse of innocent children is made easier by the trafficking procedures and immunity that comes from prosecution. When trafficking is identified, corruption leads to disregard for the law and the judicial system. Institutional safeguards that are based on fundamental human rights and other international conventions are overturned. Corruption also aids in the concealment of the proceeds from human trafficking by criminals and their allies. The networks used in human trafficking frequently cross paths with international and regional gangs that are in charge of the trade in other illegal goods, such as drugs and weapons. In the Philippines, three recruitment organizations and government officials have all been accused of trafficking close to 100 Filipino laborers.⁷² Allegedly, government officials and employees in the Philippines accepted payments for ignoring the activities of the accused agencies and their expired operating licenses. It is most profitable and probable for corrupt officials to partake in the transportation phase of child trafficking. Border patrol agents hold a position of extraordinary influence and can obstruct or end the trafficking chain. However, if they are dishonest, they might use their position to the victim's disadvantage and the trafficker's advantage. Taking bribes from human traffickers is one form of corruption, and occasionally it may involve officials working directly with the criminals or running the trafficking activities. Bribes make it more likely that the correct paperwork will not be required or that cars or vehicles carrying trafficked people will pass inspection. When it comes to sexual exploitation, traffickers frequently rely on networks of dependable hotel owners or other individuals who are willing to rent them places to stay. These people frequently offer bribes or accept them to allow the trafficking network to establish its activities and receive a cut of the proceeds from the victim.

Addressing this complex issue requires a set of essential policy actions. Governments and societies must collaborate

in the fight against organized crime groups involved in human trafficking. This involves holding traffickers accountable, targeting trafficking rings, addressing corruption, and tackling organized crime groups. Effective combat against human trafficking necessitates cooperation among the international community, governments, and civil society. Vital organizations like the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons play a pivotal role in enhancing coordination among various international bodies. This forum, approved by the UN General Assembly, aims to foster a comprehensive and holistic approach to preventing and combating human trafficking, involving UN agencies and relevant international organizations.⁷³

Moreover, legal gaps in many Asian and Pacific nations must be addressed. This is to ensure that they are not prosecuted as criminals for the actions they were forced to do while under the control of traffickers. Nineteen nations in the region considered those who had survived modern slavery as criminals.⁷⁴ For example, issues occur in Vietnam, specifically concerning the enforcement of anti-human trafficking laws. Gaps exist in the investigation, prosecution, and sentencing of labor trafficking. Due to the Old Penal Code's lack of a law against forced labor, the majority of traffickers were found guilty in situations involving sexual exploitation rather than labor trafficking. Due to the absence of prohibitions in the Old Penal Code, labor traffickers were prosecuted and found guilty of different, less guilty crimes, such as illegal imprisonment and hiring children as laborers. However, recently, the Penal Code was revised to specifically criminalize forced labor trafficking and treat it in the same manner as trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁷⁵ This action can be seen as a response to the numerous concerns of the international community. Additionally, anti-corruption measures should be enforced to hold officials accountable for their involvement in child trafficking-related activities. In India, officials are accused of accepting payments from traffickers for immunity

⁷² "The Role of Recruitment Fees and Abusive and Fraudulent Recruitment Practices of Recruitment Agencies in Trafficking in Persons," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015. https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2015/Recruitment_Fees_Report-Final-22_June_2015_AG_Final.pdf.

⁷³ "About Us the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons." The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, Accessed September 15, 2023, <https://icat.un.org/about>

⁷⁴ "Asia and the Pacific," *Walk Free*, May 2023. <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/05/24145725/GSI-2023-Asia-Pacific-Regional-Report.pdf>

⁷⁵ Artana Kotecha and Duncan Jepson, "Legal Gap Analysis of Anti-trafficking legislation in Vietnam," *Liberty Asia*, 2018. http://freedom.collaborative.prod.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/GapAnalysis_Vietnam_20180531.pdf.

from prosecution. Particularly, in the state of Tamil Nadu, local politicians are accused of profiting from forced begging rings and commercial sexual abuse of children.⁷⁶ However, victims will continue to go unnoticed until governments start to enforce current anti-trafficking laws efficiently and methodically.⁷⁷

It is feasible to take a victim-focused approach to law enforcement. In Cambodia, the International Justice Mission (IJM) has worked with law enforcement to fight labor trafficking, especially concerning Cambodians who are transported to Thailand to work in the fishing business. As evidenced by the more than thirty convictions handed down in the first three years of IJM's work with the government, traffickers are now frequently prosecuted in Cambodian courts. The cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand has resulted in the conviction of global criminal organizations on both sides of the border. Both nations are funding long-term capacity-building initiatives for justice officials, and they have agreed on Standard Operating Procedures for cross-border cooperation.⁷⁸ Investment in victim identification, release, and legal accountability for traffickers and others who profit from the crime has not come close to being adequate to tackle this prevalent global crime. When given the necessary resources and support, the prosecution and justice for traffickers can succeed. The decline in the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation in Southeast Asia is evidence of the effectiveness of criminal dissuasion. To locate and remove children who were being victimized by traffickers, pimps, brothel owners, and clients, IJM worked with the Philippine authorities. The three biggest red-light districts in the nation—Angeles City, Manila, and Cebu—had between 72 and 86 percent fewer children available for exploitation.⁷⁹

In Bangkok in 2019, a court issued a ruling about the appeals of Thailand's largest-ever human trafficking trial. By convicting

numerous human traffickers who were involved in horrifying crimes against Rohingya refugees, the lower court established a significant precedent in Thailand and the surrounding area. These earlier convictions showed an evident commitment to prevent trafficking. The court and the government now have the chance to reaffirm that human trafficking has serious repercussions and that survivors will be protected and compensated.⁸⁰ Bangkok sentenced 62 offenders involved in human trafficking, international organized crime, and other major criminal acts, targeting primarily Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi people to prison terms ranging from four to 94 years. The human trafficking court ordered payment of 4,400,250 Thai Baht (USD 146,675) to the survivors of atrocities committed by the human trafficking network engaged in the court case as compensation. The prosecution and co-plaintiff also requested more money for the survivors in their appeal. The lower court awarded selected survivors compensation for the loss of livelihood as well as damages for the mental and physical harm brought on by torture and lack of liberty.⁸¹ Government authorities must work to bring charges against offenders and bring justice to victims.

Trials for traffickers can help mitigate this issue, as they send a clear message that child trafficking will not be tolerated and can result in severe penalties. Law enforcement can gather important information about the operations and accomplices of these criminal organizations and use it to make more arrests and interrupt their activities by researching the cases and punishing the offenders.⁸² Moreover, Trials may be a chance to locate and save child trafficking victims. Victims may come forward during the legal process, and authorities can offer them the necessary assistance, rehabilitation, and protection. High-profile cases can raise public awareness, leading to increased support for anti-trafficking initiatives. This could also lead to a strengthening of legislation and

76 Walk Free. "Asia and the Pacific."

77 Reanna Smith, "Trafficking under the Radar," *Global Initiative*, April 1, 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/trafficking-under-the-radar/>.

78 Peter Williams and Philip Langford, "The Case for Perpetrator Accountability to Combat Human Trafficking," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/case-perpetrator-accountability-combat-human-trafficking>.

79 Williams and Langford, "The Case for Perpetrator Accountability to Combat Human Trafficking."

80 "Thailand: Ensure Accountability for Mass Trafficking of Rohingya, Provide Compensation for Survivors," Fortify Rights, October 30, 2019, <https://www.fortifyrights.org/tha-inv-2019-10-30/>.

81 Fortify Rights, "Thailand: Ensure Accountability for Mass Trafficking of Rohingya, Provide Compensation for Survivors."

82 Anne T Gallagher and Nicole Karlebach, "Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons Cases: Integrating a Human Rights-based approach in the Administration of Criminal Justice," OHCHR, Accessed September 12, 2023. https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/trafficking/docs/BP_GallagherAndKarlebach.pdf

victim protection systems. Furthermore, conducting more trials can increase the expertise of prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement agencies in handling child trafficking cases. In addition, trials can foster cooperation between law enforcement and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which can potentially improve victim assistance programs and the overall response to human trafficking.

A wide-ranging approach is needed to combat child trafficking, including strict law enforcement, international collaboration, victim care programs, public awareness campaigns, and addressing the underlying issues that put children at risk. To make progress in ending this crime and making the world a safer and more equitable place for all children, governments, organizations, and private citizens must collaborate.

The Consequences of Child Trafficking

Child abuse includes modern-day slavery and child trafficking. Children who have been trafficked frequently suffer from abuse and neglect. Traffickers use physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as control. In addition to being sexually exploited, children and teenagers are also susceptible to being neglected emotionally and physically. Trafficking can have both short and long-term effects on victims that can last a lifetime. Frequently, when children are trafficked, they are not aware that what is happening to them is abuse and that it is wrong. They can also think they're dating their abuser and not realize they're being taken advantage of. Children may also feel extremely guilty or ashamed about the abuse they've experienced because they believe they were involved in it or that they broke the law.⁸³ Due to terrible living conditions, poor sanitation, inadequate nutrition, poor personal hygiene, attacks by traffickers, hazardous working conditions, and occupational risks, trafficking victims may have a variety of physical and psychological health problems. Preventive healthcare is nonexistent for victims of trafficking. Health problems are frequently not treated in the early stages and instead fester until they pose a serious threat to life. Many times, the trafficker hires an unqualified person with little to

no regard for the well-being of their "patients" and even less concern for illness, infection, or contamination management to give healthcare, at least initially. Other issues include pregnancy because of prostitution, and infertility brought on by persistent failed or unsafe abortions. The daily mental abuse and torture these children face can cause them to endure psychological trauma. This can include having depression, panic attacks, stress-related disorders, disorientation, and confusion. Furthermore, children can also have substance abuse problems or addictions. This can be either from being coerced into drug use by their traffickers or by turning to substance abuse to help cope with or mentally escape their desperate situations. Many children also show signs of bruising or scars, especially sex-industry victims who are often beaten in areas that won't damage their outward appearance, like their lower back.⁸⁴

Moreover, the social growth and interpersonal relationships of a child might be significantly impacted by their experiences with sex trafficking. They may lose faith in other people and have a hard time understanding healthy relationships free from exploitation and compulsion. Experiences with human trafficking can also have a significant impact on a young individual's spiritual health, including their sense of community, place in the world, faith in a higher spirit, and sense of purpose or meaning in life. It might be challenging to keep a balanced view of humanity, optimism for the future, and faith in the goodness of people because trafficking is an act of exploitation, harm, and exposure to depravity.⁸⁵

Furthermore, child labor could endanger children's safety, health, or well-being. This could involve working in a mine where children run the risk of being killed or hurt by rock falls, tunnel collapses, or unintentional explosions. Burns and other severe injuries are frequent in industries where children may be exposed to hazardous chemicals and substances. Additionally, they might be exposed to harmful compounds like mercury and lead, which increases their risk of developing long-term illnesses like silicosis, a lung disease. Children should not perform any physically demanding work, especially

⁸³ "Child Trafficking," *NSPCC*, 2016, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>.

⁸⁴ "Resources: Common Health Issues Seen in Victims of Human Trafficking," Department of Health and Human Services, Accessed September 15, 2023, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/orr/health_problems_seen_in_traffick_victims.pdf.

⁸⁵ "Effects," The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, March 1, 2021, <https://www.nctsn.org/what-child-trauma/trauma-types/sex-trafficking/effects>.

for lengthy periods. Children may have to crawl through tight places or sit hunched over in one position by carrying too much weight, for instance, which can result in spinal injuries, deformity, and difficulties walking straight. This could involve labor such as sewing footballs or clothing, breaking rocks and bricks for the construction of roads, producing matchsticks, climbing through mines, and or creating bricks. In addition, child laborers perform dangerous work since they are subjected to a variety of weather conditions (such as extreme heat or intense rain) and may not be wearing appropriate footwear or clothing. They are susceptible to coughs, pneumonia, and other ailments. When the workplace is unhygienic, dimly lit, and poorly air-conditioned, children are also exposed to hazardous employment. This is also true when there is a lack of access to safe drinking water, medical care, and educational facilities, particularly in more rural locations. Children are more likely to contract diseases and illnesses under these circumstances.⁸⁶ Recent data showing higher levels of HIV infection among trafficking victims when compared to their non-trafficked counterparts, show the high prevalence of HIV among sex trafficking victims. Given that younger children have developed reproductive systems, there is an increased risk of contracting an STI or HIV from sex trafficking. There is a restricted ability of victims of trafficking to negotiate condom use or refuse unprotected sex. There is also limited access to preventative health services, such as information on STI/HIV prevention. Those who are trafficked at a young age tend to have poor awareness about STI/HIV transmission and prevention, and they are frequently the victims of physical and sexual assault.⁸⁷ Youth who have been trafficked may have exceptionally high rates of HIV infection in regions of the world with high HIV prevalence. In a survey of Nepalese women and girls, the youngest group, those under 15, had a rate of 60.6 percent, which was 3.70 times higher than that of those who were 18 years or older. HIV infection was also linked to being trafficked in Mumbai and working in brothels

for a longer time.⁸⁸

A significant side effect of child trafficking is the development of illegal drugs and narcotics, which has led to an increase in using these substances by children and teenagers. In Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, it is common to find compounds similar to amphetamines. These tablets are produced by companies along the border between Myanmar and Thailand in millions. Heroin and other opium-based drugs are also offered and consumed, and there are well-established drug trafficking networks in the area and beyond. Production of high-quality marijuana is also rising, particularly in Cambodia. Both within and between nations, drugs are transported through children. The use of drugs can be an appealing form of recreation and/or an effective means of escaping from hunger and the psychosocial challenges that come with the life of trafficking. These issues are associated with street life in addition to children's drug dependence and the risk of HIV infection from shared needles or other injectables. Due to their relative helplessness (both physically and socially) and the need for money, kids are more open to pressure, force, and exploitation by adults or older children. Children living on the streets frequently use glue, gasoline, or other easily accessible chemicals to temporarily escape their surroundings.⁸⁹ Human trafficking and drug trafficking frequently coexist. Criminal groups and transnational drug cartels frequently collaborate to boost earnings and gain market dominance. This entails employing drug, labor, prostitution, and violent trafficking channels. Traffickers don't care what is being sold as long as money is generated because the industries of selling drugs and sex are both lucrative. Drug gangs frequently smuggle drugs across the border by using trafficked women and children, which doubles their profit. These violent criminals don't distinguish between assaulting a woman's body by making her consume bags of narcotics or by making her engage in sexual activity with a large number of men.⁹⁰

86 "The worst forms of child labour," International Labour Organization, Accessed September 12, 2023, <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Campaignandadvocacy/Youthinaction/C182-Youth-orientated/worstforms/lang--en/index.htm>

87 UNDP, *A Regional Assessment of Sex Trafficking and STI/HIV in Southeast Asia: Connections between Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Sexual Risk*, (Bangkok: UNDP Asia and the Pacific, 2015), <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/regional-assessment-sex-trafficking-and-sti/hiv-southeast-asia-connections-between-sexual-exploitation-violence-and-sexual>

88 J Greenbaum, "A Public Health Approach to Global Child Sex Trafficking," *Annual Review of Public Health*, Vol. 20. April 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040119-094335>

89 Altun et al, "Mental Health and Human Trafficking: Responding to Survivors' Needs," *BJPsych International*, 2017, 21–23. doi:10.1192/S205647400000163X

90 Jarod Forget, "Violent drug organizations use human trafficking to expand profits," *Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)*, January 28,

According to studies from many nations, survivors of human trafficking frequently experience depression, anxiety, PTSD, self-harm, and attempts at suicide. According to a study of trafficked individuals in the Greater Mekong sub-region, 61 percent of men, 67 percent of women, and 57 percent of children reported having probable depression, while 46 percent of men, 44 percent of women, and 27 percent of children reported having probable PTSD.⁹¹ Survivors frequently struggle in a variety of essential areas of development and functioning as a result of early chronic trauma exposure and trauma sustained while being trafficked. Significant emotional and behavioral dysregulation, attachment and relational issues, difficulties with learning and planning, and self-concept distortions are a few of these difficulties. Interventions that are comprehensive and well-targeted are required for trafficked adolescents. Child welfare, police enforcement, juvenile justice for homeless and runaway children, refugee and immigrant services, educational opportunities, and medical care are a few examples. It is crucial to provide trauma-informed care and trauma-focused therapies that are tailored to the particular requirements of trafficking survivors.⁹²

Current Status

Rohingya Refugee Case Study

Refugees are more vulnerable to the risk of being trafficked. Refugee children who are migrating or residing in temporary shelters or refugee camps are even more likely to be preyed on by strangers. The lack of housing stability and job opportunities makes child refugees more prone to being trafficked on their migration journey. Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar is home to one of the largest refugee camps and shelters more than one million undocumented Rohingya Muslims and communities near the Burmese border.⁹³ The Rohingya are a Muslim-

majority migrant group from Buddhist Myanmar. These migrants have been escaping genocidal violence from decades of persecution and human rights abuses.⁹⁴ Victims must now deal with past traumas while living in vast refugee camps and settlements near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.⁹⁵ In Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps, young girls have been recognized as the principal victims of trafficking. A BBC News investigation discovered that girls in their teenage years are being trafficked into prostitution in these camps. Foreigners looking for sex can easily find access to children who have fled Myanmar's war and now face an additional threat.⁹⁶ One girl, Anwara, describes how she was 14 at the time of her fleeing Myanmar. During that time, her family was killed during the war. Anwara was 14, at the time of her fleeing Myanmar after her family was killed during the war. She searched for help on the road to Bangladesh, where she was approached by a woman in a van. Anwara was promised a safe and better life but was taken to the nearest city, Cox's Bazar. Anwara recalls that "not long after that they brought two boys to me. They showed me a knife and punched me in my tummy and beat me because I wasn't cooperating". The cycle of forced activity kept going.⁹⁷ The disorder of the camps provides several opportunities for children to enter the sex industry. Traffickers prey on desperate families and offer them a chance at a better life to lure them into their operations. Traffickers take Rohingya girls from Bangladesh to Chittagong and Dhaka as well as internationally, to Kolkata and Kathmandu to participate in the sex trade. Most human traffickers seek out Rohingya migrants in Bangladesh, promising them shelter and employment in Europe. Traffickers use fake employment or marriage proposals, kidnapping, and other forms of coercion to attract girls from refugee camps into sex trafficking. The Rohingya community's vulnerability to human trafficking is worsened by their stateless status and inability to pursue formal education or gain legal employment.

2021, <https://www.dea.gov/stories/2021/2021-01/2021-01-28/violent-drug-organizations-use-human-trafficking-expand-profits>

91 Altun et al. "Mental Health and Human Trafficking: Responding to Survivors' Needs."

92 "Understanding and Addressing Trauma and Child Sex Trafficking," The National Child Traumatic and Stress Network, July 2018, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/Understanding_and_Address_Trauma_and_Child_Trafficking.pdf

93 "Standard Operating Procedures," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, September 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/southasia/publications/SOPs-on-TIP-India-Nepal-Bangladesh/indo_nepal_20_March_18.pdf

94 Kathryn Reid, "Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," *World Vision*, March 25, 2023, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-facts>

95 Steve Sandford, "UN Gathers Horror Stories from Rohingya Women Fleeing Myanmar," *V/OA*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/united-nations-gathers-horror-stories-rohingya-women-fleeing-myanmar/4183387.html>

96 "The Rohingya Children Trafficked for Sex," *BBC News*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43469043>

97 BBC, "The Rohingya Children Trafficked for Sex."

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) counter-trafficking experts warn that more desperate families are sending their young daughters into risky work situations.⁹⁸ As of December 2019, law enforcement reported that over 4,400 trafficking cases were still pending investigation or prosecution. Around 15 percent of those involved were children. According to Interpol, for every case identified, ten others fall through the cracks.⁹⁹ Most households in the camps have no other way to make money. The number of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar soared to almost a million. There are relatively few employment opportunities in the camp, and there are nearly none for women. One young Rohingya lady revealed that she was compelled to work exceptionally long hours for very little money in the fish processing industry.¹⁰⁰ According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 2,300 Rohingya, many of them women and children, have embarked on journeys across the Bay of Bengal since January 2020. These individuals are in search of jobs, reunification with family members, or marriage. The vast majority of people have fled from camps around

Cox's Bazar.¹⁰¹ More than 3,600 Rohingya people set sail in 2022, with roughly 350 of them unable to complete their journey. This represents an almost 360 percent increase in the number of Rohingya attempting such an escape from 2021. Unseaworthy vessels and insufficient supplies, particularly a lack of water and sanitation facilities, have frequently led to the deaths of a large number of Rohingya. Traffickers, particularly those based in Bangladesh, routinely kidnap Rohingya and demand extortion from their families in exchange for their release. At the same time, victims are subjected to terrible, violent imprisonment conditions on land and sea. These traffickers frequently sell Rohingya women and girls into marriage, including underage marriage, or force them into domestic service, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand. Sexual abuse against these women and those taken prisoner in human trafficking camps near the Malaysia-Thailand border is also common.¹⁰² Cox's Bazar borders Myanmar and empties into the Bay of Bengal. The position of the city is both a blessing and a curse for its people. Traffickers use the Bay of Bengal to transport vulnerable individuals to

98 "Girls Sold into Forced Labour Largest Group of Trafficking Victims Identified by IOM in Bangladesh Refugee Camps," International Organization for Migration, September 16, 2018, <https://www.iom.int/news/girls-sold-forced-labour-largest-group-trafficking-victims-identified-iom-bangladesh-refugee-camps>.

99 "Bangladesh," United States Department of State, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/>.

100 I.O., "Girls Sold into Forced Labour Largest Group of Trafficking Victims Identified by IOM in Bangladesh Refugee Camps."

101 Nazmun Shishir, "Human Traffickers Prey on Rohingya Refugees," *The Third Pole*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.thirdpole.net/en/livelihoods/human-traffickers-prey-on-rohingya-refugees>

102 "Taiwan Failing to Protect Vulnerable Migrant Workers," *FreedomUnited*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.freedomunited.org/news/taiwan-failing-to-protect-vulnerable-migrant-workers/>.



Rohingya refugees in camp in Bangladesh

Credit: CAPTAIN RAJU

other destinations, mainly Malaysia and Thailand, where they are trafficked and exploited.¹⁰³ During the journey, many of the Rohingya migrants experienced physical violence, sexual abuse, and threats. From here, the children can be trafficked to anywhere in East Asia. Thousands of Rohingyas have tried the hazardous travel across the Bay of Bengal to Malaysia. However, most of them are drawn by a sophisticated and ever-changing transnational network of human traffickers. There were 15,000 reported trafficking instances between March 2019 and March 2020 alone, with actual numbers likely to be far higher.¹⁰⁴

There has been some pushback to these organized crime efforts. According to Lieutenant Shah Zia, a staff officer at the Bangladesh Coast Guard, they “have increased [their] monitoring so that Rohingyas remain inside the camps.” He also said that “regardless of the season [officers] are on duty 24/7 to prevent trafficking”. The measures taken now include strict sea-route monitoring. Winter especially is a season of high alert. The calmer seas during this time make it easier for trafficking rings to sail and transport their victims across the world.¹⁰⁵ Attempts to catch the traffickers have resulted in violence. In March 2020, Bangladeshi security forces killed seven accused members of a Rohingya gang suspected of human trafficking in the area of a refugee camp near Teknaf. On the same day, another suspected trafficker was murdered in a confrontation with security authorities in Cox’s Bazar, and 35 illegal migrants were detained as they attempted to flee to Malaysia.¹⁰⁶ The Rapid Action Battalion, Bangladesh’s anti-crime police unit, busted a human trafficking gang rescuing three Rohingya refugees, one being a young girl. All three were from varying camps across the country. Company Commander Major Talukdar Nazmus Sakib stated that “the detained miscreants had been luring the Rohingyas from various refugee camps and luring them to Cumilla and other

districts of the country.” The migrants were convinced that they would be sent abroad but instead were trafficked to Malaysia and other countries using illegal Bangladeshi passports.¹⁰⁷

In Bangkok 2019, a court issued a ruling about the appeals of Thailand’s largest-ever human trafficking trial. By convicting many human traffickers who were involved in horrifying crimes against Rohingya refugees, the lower court established a significant precedent in Thailand and the surrounding area. These earlier convictions showed an evident commitment to prevent trafficking. The court and the government now have the chance to reaffirm that human trafficking has serious repercussions and that survivors will be protected and compensated.¹⁰⁸ Bangkok sentenced 62 offenders involved in human trafficking, international organized crime, and other major criminal acts targeting primarily Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi people to prison terms ranging from four to 94 years. The human trafficking court ordered payment of 4,400,250 Thai Baht (USD 146,675) to the survivors of atrocities committed by the human trafficking network engaged in the court case as compensation. The prosecution and co-plaintiff also requested more money for the survivors in their appeal. The lower court awarded selected survivors compensation for the loss of livelihood as well as damages for the mental and physical harm brought on by torture and lack of liberty.¹⁰⁹ Government authorities must work to bring charges against offenders and bring justice to victims.

Women and Girls at The Forefront of Abuse

According to new research from the UNODC, 71 percent of all human trafficking victims are women and girls, with one-third being children.¹¹⁰ Potential victims who are either socially or economically disadvantaged are frequently targeted

103 Jishu Barua, “Factors behind Human Trafficking in Host and Rohingya Communities in Cox’s Bazar : An Overview,” *YPSA*, Accessed August 18, 2023. <https://ypsa.org/ypsa/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Factors-behind-Human-Trafficking-in-Host-and.pdf>.

104 “Human Traffickers Prey on Rohingya Refugees,” *The Third Pole*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/livelihoods/human-traffickers-prey-on-rohingya-refugees/>

105 *The Third Pole*, “Human Traffickers Prey on Rohingya Refugees.”

106 “8 Suspected Rohingya Gangsters Shot Dead in Bangladesh,” *V/OA*, March 2, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_8-suspected-rohingya-gangsters-shot-dead-bangladesh/6185119.html.

107 *The Business Standard*, “Human Trafficking Gang Busted in Cumilla, 3 Rohingyas Rescued,” *The Business Standard*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/human-trafficking-gang-busted-cumilla-3-rohingyas-rescued-45417>.

108 “Thailand: Ensure Accountability for Mass Trafficking of Rohingya, Provide Compensation for Survivors.” *Fortify Rights*, October 30, 2019. <https://www.fortifyrights.org/tha-inv-2019-10-30/>.

109 *Fortify Rights*, “Thailand: Ensure Accountability for Mass Trafficking of Rohingya, Provide Compensation for Survivors.”

110 “Report: Majority of Trafficking Victims Are Women and Girls,” *United Nations Sustainable Development*, April 22, 2018, <https://www.>

by traffickers and/or pimps. Women and girls who are vulnerable to poverty, societal isolation, drug addiction, family violence, a history of child sexual abuse, family dysfunction, school failure, or a history of criminal activity are more prone to catch the eye of a trafficker. Orphans, women with physical limitations, and those who are illiterate and innumerable may also be targeted.¹¹¹ Women and girls may be ‘offered’ jobs as models or dancers, as well as opportunities to compete in beauty pageants ‘study abroad programs. Marriage companies, commonly known as “mail-order bride agencies,” offer to arrange a marriage abroad, and often are fronts for sex trafficking. Another method used by male traffickers is feigned romantic interest (the ‘lover-boy’ method) in which the trafficker enters into a romantic relationship with the victim. The girls’ trust is then taken advantage of and manipulated into forcing them into sex acts.¹¹² While boys and men are victims as well, women and girls make up most of those noticed as being trafficked. Five out of every ten victims are adult women and two are girls. Women who have been trafficked for sex are more afraid, more isolated, and have greater trauma and mental health needs than other victims of crime. Physical and sexual assault, memory loss, sexually transmitted infections, and traumatic brain damage are all results of women and girls being trafficked.¹¹³

Human trafficking is a multibillion-dollar global industry and a major human rights issue that disproportionately affects women and adolescents. Human trafficking is a widespread problem throughout South Asia, with common methods including exploiting women and children seeking to relocate to nearby countries in search of jobs. According to the UNODC, over 150,000 individuals are trafficked in South Asia each year, with women and girls accounting for

44 percent and 21 percent of trafficking victims, respectively. The most common kinds of trafficking in the region include forced labor, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.¹¹⁴ India is located in an area where human trafficking is still prevalent. In rural areas, sex traffickers buy girls as young as 12 years old, and in the worst cases, they make them serve up to 20 or 30 people a day. Other places where sex trafficking occurs include upper floors of hotels, secluded rooms down dark alleyways in large towns, and even private residences.¹¹⁵ Both the source and the destination countries for child sex trafficking are in Indonesia. Child sex workers have also been transported to Malaysia, Taiwan, the Middle East, and other places in addition to Indonesia’s urban areas. In Indonesia, female victims of child sex trafficking make up much to 30 percent of the commercial sex workforce.¹¹⁶ The majority of victims of child sex trafficking are young girls. Particularly in Batam and Jakarta, especially in locations like spas, hotels, bars, and karaoke joints, sex traffickers sometimes pressure and manipulate women and girls into commercial sex through debt or offers of employment in restaurants, industries, or domestic service.¹¹⁷ The female sex trade dominates all other forms of sex trafficking by producing the largest number of victims. Many of these women become involved in the worldwide sex traffic, typically by pressure, deception, or assault. One of the implications of human trafficking is that the vast majority of trafficked women are HIV/AIDS positive. Approximately five million people in South, East, and East Asia are infected with HIV.¹¹⁸ Because of their fragile developing bodies, children and young teens sold into prostitution are more likely to catch HIV. Children who have been forced into prostitution may have fewer opportunities to demand safer sex practices because they are less likely to have control over their actions. Worse, some men seek younger

un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/12/report-majority-of-trafficking-victims-are-women-and-girls-one-third-children/.

111 Neha A Deshpande and Nawal M Nour, “Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls.” *Reviews in Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3651545/>.

112 Sofija Voronova and Anja Radjenovic, “Briefing the Gender Dimension of Human Trafficking,” *European Parliament*. February 2016, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/577950/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)577950_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/577950/EPRS_BRI(2016)577950_EN.pdf).

113 Amy Novotney, “7 in 10 Human Trafficking Victims Are Women and Girls. What Are the Psychological Effects?,” *American Psychological Association*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/trafficking-women-girls>.

114 World Bank, “Towards Safer Migration: Countering Human Trafficking in an integrated South Asia,” *World Bank*. November 30, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2022/11/30/16>

115 Laura Parker, “Human Trafficking in India,” *The Exodus Road*, May 16, 2022, <https://theexodusroad.com/human-trafficking-in-india/>.

116 “10 Facts about Child Sex Trafficking in Indonesia,” *The Borgen Project*, May 13, 2021, <https://borgenproject.org/child-sex-trafficking-in-indonesia/>

117 “Indonesia,” *Unbound Now*, Accessed August 18, 2023, <https://unboundnow.org/indonesia/>

118 Yasoda Sharma and Chie Noyori-Corbett, “Transnational Human Trafficking and HIV/AIDS: Women in Asia.” *Social Development Issues*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3998/sdi.2816>.



Young girls carrying water in India

Credit: Tom Maisey

children for sex because they believe there is less chance of HIV transmission with a younger partner. As a result, younger children are being lured into prostitution, allowing them to become HIV-infected for a longer period.¹¹⁹

Child and forced marriage threaten the lives and futures of girls and women all over the world, robbing them of their ability to make life decisions, disrupting their education, making them more vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and abuse, and preventing them from fully participating in economic, political, and social spheres. Child marriage is also frequently associated with premature and frequent pregnancy and childbirth, leading to higher than usual maternal illness and death rates.¹²⁰ The pandemic caused an increase in child marriage rates as thousands of adolescent girls across south-east Asia and the Pacific were forced to leave school and get married instead. More than 1.2 million girls from pre-primary to upper secondary school dropped out as a result of the pandemic in East Asia and the Pacific, adding to the 15 million

girls who were not enrolled in school before the coronavirus. One in every five girls in East Asia and the Pacific, or 40 million, could not complete their education through remote learning¹²¹. Thousands of women from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, and Myanmar are transferred to China to marry. Particularly in rural areas are Chinese men fueled by a desire for a bride. While some people travel with the knowledge that they will be married, others are duped. Many have reported being subjected to violence, sexual abuse, and forced labor.¹²² There are an estimated 285 million child brides in South Asia. In Bangladesh, 59 percent of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18, compared to 40 percent in Nepal and 27 percent in India. In Southeast Asia, a region prone to natural calamities and rife with urgent and protracted conflicts, families may resort to child marriage during crises as the best way to give economic and physical protection.¹²³ South Asia has 2,000 child marriage-related deaths per year (or six per day), while East Asia and the

119 Amanda Kloer, "Sex Trafficking and HIV/AIDS: A Deadly Junction for Women and Girls," American Bar Association, April 1, 2010, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/human_rights_vol37_2010/spring2010/sex_trafficking_and_hiv_aids_a_deadly_junction_for_women_and_girls/.

120 "Our Voices, Our Future," Women's Refugee Commission, 2022, https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Child-marriage-Philippines_report.pdf

121 Helen Sullivan, "Pandemic Forcing Girls in South-East Asia and Pacific out of School and into Marriage – Study," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/16/pandemic-forcing-girls-in-south-east-asia-and-pacific-out-of-school-and-into-marriage-study>.

122 Vireak Chhun, Lucia Lugo, and Thi Hoang, "Cambodia's Trafficked Brides: The Escalating Phenomenon of Forced Marriage in China," *Global Initiative*, May 11, 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/cambodia-trafficked-brides-forced-marriage-in-china/>.

123 "Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia," Women's Refugee Commission, August 8, 2020, <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings-in-south-asia/>

Pacific have 650 (or two per day).¹²⁴ Ending child marriage involves tackling the many challenges that perpetuate this rights violation, such as gender inequality and discrimination, lack of education, and poverty. To end child marriages there must be support for the participation of young girls in school and society, the strengthening of legal systems to protect the rights of children, efficient policies and programs installed, and an increase of awareness of child traffickers and coerced marriages.¹²⁵

To reduce the greater vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, significant work needs to be done. To develop gender equality in all spheres of life, the public, private, civil society, and law enforcement must collaborate and take effective action. A few solutions include stronger laws and policies protecting women and girls from sexual harassment, domestic violence, and gender discrimination, and better working conditions for mothers. National governments must work to get more women serving on management and executive boards and national campaigns need to promote the equality of sons and daughters.¹²⁶ Trafficking is a worldwide issue that cuts across national boundaries and often is a crime that falls just outside the authority of local law enforcement. The only way to end the trafficking of women and girls is through prevention, which calls for a shift in societal beliefs and customs that objectify, degrade, and control women's and girls' bodies. We can learn from more general approaches to preventing violence against women in order to challenge damaging male identities and conceptions of male rights to women's bodies in order to reduce the desire for sexual exploitation.¹²⁷

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of

seventeen connected objectives designed to serve as a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.”¹²⁸ There are several SDGs that serve the purpose of promoting safe and regular migration, ending human trafficking, and fighting organized crime. SDGs 5, 8, 10, 16, and 17 all support anti trafficking efforts.¹²⁹ Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is critical to effective prevention of human trafficking, particularly of kids, according to a UN expert. The slowing and reversal of progress on more than half of the SDG targets have major global peace and security consequences. Failure to fulfill the sustainable development objectives has impacts for victims and survivors of human trafficking, including failure in prevention, protection, and accountability.¹³⁰ Human trafficking is specifically referenced in three targets under three goals in the 17 SDGs: 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Many other SDG targets and goals, however, are relevant to addressing human trafficking, which is deeply rooted in development issues such as poverty, education, child labor, abuse and exploitation, gender inequality and discrimination, migration, and the effects of climate change.

SDG 8 is the principal SDG linked to trafficking and focuses on promoting “inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all.” Target 8.7 specifically calls for the abolition of human trafficking and modern slavery.¹³¹ Targets under SDG 8 will also help to address many of the underlying problems that lead to instances of trafficking and forced labor. These aims are aimed at increasing access to decent work, lowering unemployment, improving labor rights, encouraging safe working conditions, as well as fostering economic growth, particularly in the least developed nations. This Goal has the potential to address one

124 “Child Marriage Kills More than 60 Girls a Day,” Save the Children, October 21, 2021, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us/media-and-news/2021-press-releases/child-marriage-kills-more-than-60-girls-a-day>.

125 “Preventing Child Marriage,” United Nations Children Fund, 2014, <https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/child-marriage>.

126 Mimi Vu, “Gender Discrimination in Vietnam Fuels Human Trafficking,” March 1, 2021, <https://news.trust.org/item/20210301101717-gtrmv/>.

127 Åsa Regnér, “Op-Ed: Trafficking in Women and Girls Is Moving Online due to COVID-19,” *UN Women*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/12/op-ed-trafficking-in-women-and-girls-is-moving-online-due-to-covid-19>.

128 “The 17 Sustainable Development Goals,” United Nations, 2015, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

129 “SDGs,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/sdgs.html>.

130 “Achieving SDGs and Climate Justice Essential to Prevention of Trafficking in Persons: UN Expert,” *The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights*, July 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/07/achieving-sdgs-and-climate-justice-essential-prevention-trafficking-persons-un>.

131 UNHCRH, “Achieving SDGs and Climate Justice Essential to Prevention of Trafficking in Persons: UN Expert.”

of the most significant, systemic problems that contribute to trafficking in the first place: a lack of access to sufficient jobs through traditional pathways.¹³² Target 5.2, which directly covers trafficking, calls on countries to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.” Trafficking and exploitation are viewed as a type of discrimination based on gender and violence against women in this manner. Many of the other goals under this target are related to trafficking, such as the end of harmful practices including child marriage, the promotion of domestic workers, and the development and implementation of laws to promote gender equality at all levels of society.¹³³ SDG 16 sets to target trafficking as it promotes ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. This goal promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for long-term development, ensures equal access to justice, and constructs effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. To access justice and basic services, all women must be able to rely on fair and functional institutions. Without these, fear and injustice expand, and discrimination continues. However, a variety of institutions continue to fail women and girls in both developing and wealthy countries, particularly through punishment for gender-based violence.¹³⁴ Goal 16’s aims to enhance the rule of law, decrease corruption, build effective and accountable institutions, and ensure a legal identity, including birth registration for all. These combined efforts will lead to further success in combating human trafficking. The absence of birth registration significantly increases an individual’s vulnerability to trafficking while also preventing them from accessing social and community assistance mechanisms. Almost all countries’ responses to human trafficking are driven by law enforcement, in collaboration with other state and non-state entities. Strengthening these institutions’ capacity to detect and combat trafficking, as well

as collaborate with other stakeholders, is critical to making an impact on the ground.¹³⁵

A global coordinated effort is required to effectively combat human trafficking and advance the SDGs. It calls for the reinforcement of national and international regulations, the promotion of international cooperation, and the development of public-private partnerships. Increased awareness and identification of human trafficking patterns, as well as extensive victim support services, are crucial. It is also critical to implement strong preventive measures and hold traffickers accountable. Human trafficking can be combated through a holistic approach, resulting in a more just world that accords with the SDGs’ goal.¹³⁶

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

The first universally accepted definition of “trafficking in persons” was provided by the adoption of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in 2000.¹³⁷ This convention outlines the framework for countries to adopt, in ways that they can strengthen their legal systems and policies to combat human trafficking. The signing of the UNTOC proved to be the first step the global community needed in establishing their hopes to ending this crime against humanity. However, ratifying the protocol is useless if countries do not adopt and implement the protocol’s messages into their own government policies. The ability for a country to handle their trafficking crimes is determined by each country’s legal systems and whether they have been able to include and apply the UNTOC protocols in their own

132 “The Role of the Sustainable Development Goals in Combating Trafficking in Persons,” The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, 2018, https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_issue_brief_sdgs_2018.pdf.

133 “The Sustainable Development Goals That Aim to End Human Trafficking,” UNICEF USA, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/sustainable-development-goals-aim-end-human-trafficking>.

134 “SDG 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels,” UN Women, accessed September 15, 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-16-peace-justice-strong-institutions>.

135 ICAT, “The Role of the Sustainable Development Goals in Combating Trafficking in Persons.”

136 “Human Trafficking,” Sustainable Development Goals, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://sdgresources.relx.com/tags/human-trafficking>.

137 “OHCHR about Trafficking in Persons and Human Rights,” The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/trafficking-in-persons/about-trafficking-persons-and-human-rights>.

nation. Multiple sources work together to come up with a set of standards to use as a basis for ranking how nations fight against trafficking. The United States state department uses the Trafficking Victims Persons Act (TVPA) to issue an annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report ranking other countries' anti-trafficking measures and efforts to eradicate the problem.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the UNODC trafficking in persons index collects and analyzes data about how well nations are doing in detecting victims, finding and punishing trafficking criminals, as well as how prevalent the crime is.¹³⁹ Lastly, the Global Organized Crime Index ranks countries based on their anti- trafficking efforts by reporting on nations' crime markets and how resilient they are in putting a stop to these crimes.¹⁴⁰ Using these collections of databases, allows for a thorough understanding of how nations across the globe are working to put measures in place to end human trafficking. There are three different categories of nations based on their way of response to trafficking crimes. Countries can either have strong legal systems to hold perpetrators accountable, can be halfway compliant with global anti- trafficking standards, or could be struggling to eliminate trafficking and protect victims. Depending on how these nations rank on varying databases gives an indication as to how strong their governments and legal systems are and how well the UNTOC protocols are implemented.

Countries with Strong Legal Systems to Hold Perpetrators Accountable

Countries with strong legal systems that hold perpetrators accountable can be used as a role model to guide countries struggling to tackle these issues. Countries in this category have not only ratified the UNTOC and its protocols but have made significant efforts to incorporate them into their own government policies. Although Taiwan is not a UN Member State and will not be represented in this committee, its government provides a strong example of how Member

States in this bloc behave. According to the US Department of State's annual TIP Report, the Taiwanese government is making serious attempts to address sex and labor trafficking offenses, placing it in Tier 1 for the past decade. Taiwan was on the brink of being dropped to the lowest rating in the TIP Report as recently as the early 2010s. As a result, the Taiwanese government acknowledged the dangers of this crime and its influence on people and society. Over the last decade, the Taiwanese government's response to trafficking has shifted from denial to becoming a regional leader in combating trafficking. Taiwan passed the Human Trafficking Prevention Act in 2016, which criminalizes all types of trafficking and imposes harsh punishments and penalties. Taiwanese authorities have used the law to prosecute traffickers and to encourage law enforcement and judicial members to use it as a new lens for identifying crime when it occurs. They have also created new tools for arresting, investigating, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators. Taiwan's attempts to prevent human trafficking have not been without flaws, but they highlight why the island is frequently referred to be a "beacon of democracy" in the Indo-Pacific region. In the last decade, there has been and continues to be a push and pull between government authorities and civil society groups in the fight against trafficking.¹⁴¹

Similarly, the judiciary in Finland is strong, unbiased, and trustworthy. Members and leaders of organized crime groups have repeatedly received sentences from Finnish courts. The police and legal system in Finland are often regarded as having some of the highest levels of public trust of any nation, and they frequently succeed in both preventing and eradicating organized crime. Numerous organizations and departments within the Finnish police force are dedicated to fighting organized crime, especially human trafficking¹⁴². The fight against human trafficking is coordinated at the ministerial level, particularly with regard to legislation and its application. One of the key duties of the anti-trafficking coordinator is

138 "All You Need to Know about the TIP Report," Agape International Missions, February 5, 2021, <https://aimfree.org/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

139 "Dp-Trafficking-Persons-Convicted Data UNODC," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-trafficking-persons-convicted>.

140 "Criminality in Libya - the Organized Crime Index," Global Organized Crime Index, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/country/libya>.

141 Zoe Weaver, "Taiwan's Continued Fight against Human Trafficking and next Steps," *Global Taiwan Institute*, November 2, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/11/taiwans-continued-fight-against-human-trafficking-and-next-steps/>.

142 "Criminality in Finland," Global Organized Crime Index, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/country/finland>.

to make sure that information is shared easily and that the actions against human trafficking in various ministries assist one another. The coordinator is also in charge of creating Finland's anti-human trafficking action plan. The National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings collaborates with the coordinator to evaluate the effectiveness of the effort to combat human trafficking, as well as to determine whether the victims are reached and receive the support they require. The obstacles facing the fight against human trafficking have been underlined in the reports put up by the Rapporteur, and they also include suggestions for enhancing the efficacy of the initiatives¹⁴³. Countries such as the ones mentioned above recognize the urgency of human trafficking and constantly employ methods to fight against it. These countries put in the work and effort to make sure they are attending to their citizen's needs and actively try to make their policies better and more efficient.

Countries That Are Halfway Compliant with Global Anti-Trafficking Standards

There are a significant number of countries that have started the process for eliminating human trafficking. These countries recognize the urgency of the issue and attempt to make progress on combating it. However, these countries are not fully compliant with global standards and often do not fully implement the UNTOC protocols into their government, and if they do, progress is slow to carry them out. Bolivia's government does not entirely achieve the minimal standards for trafficking elimination, although it is making substantial efforts to do so. Given the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on its anti-trafficking capacity, the government demonstrated generally increased efforts compared to the previous reporting period. Increased trafficking investigations, more traffickers convicted, more victims identified, and increased training for law enforcement agents and prosecutors to combat human trafficking were among the measures. Authorities implemented a new victim identification methodology and

referral mechanism, and department staff were trained in its use. However, the government fell short of the minimum requirements in several crucial areas. Authorities convicted fewer traffickers, and attempts to fight forced labor were inadequate¹⁴⁴. To begin, despite the fact that the country has about two dozen laws in existence to combat various forms of trafficking, experts believe they are poorly executed and, in some cases, forgotten. Each of Bolivia's nine departments, for example, is expected to develop a human trafficking action plan. However, two locations do not. Meanwhile, other laws are written in such a way that they are difficult to enforce. Bolivia also provides little support to victims of human trafficking, making it easier for them to return to exploitative situations in the future¹⁴⁵. Another example of a country that is subpar in meeting global anti-trafficking standards is Fiji. Although it is a signatory to a number of international agreements and conventions relating to organized crime, Fiji is not a party to UNTOC and its protocols. The majority of Fiji's anti-organized crime laws are either out-of-date or nonexistent. Although the national legislative framework criminalizes criminal association and provides for each stage of the criminal justice process, it makes no specific mention of organized crime or organized crime organizations. Legislation addresses the two organized crime issues that are the most urgent for Fiji—drug and human trafficking—but more work is required to bring domestic laws into compliance with international norms.¹⁴⁶ Countries in this sect do not have the government protocols in place against trafficking that satisfy the standard internationally. However, these countries are making efforts to tackle the issue and employ whatever resources they can to address the crises.

Countries Struggling to Eliminate Trafficking or Protect Victims

Countries in this sector are struggling in many ways that only allow trafficking to flourish. Most of these countries have problems economically, socially, and politically leaving them

143 "Combating Human Trafficking in Finland," Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://syrjinta.fi/en/combating-human-trafficking-in-finland>.

144 "Bolivia," United States Department of State, accessed August 19, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/bolivia/>

145 Max Radwin, "Bolivia Struggles to Help Its Human Trafficking Victims," *InSight Crime*, February 26, 2020, <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/bolivia-struggles-human-trafficking-victims/>.

146 "Criminality in Fiji," The Organized Crime Index, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/country/fiji>.

with minimal resources and effective means of combating human trafficking. The legal systems in these countries that are fragmented make the trafficking crimes worse. The Libyan legal system has been obstructed by militia organizations. Despite major warrants being obtained in recent years, there is no capacity to make these arrests and have them processed via fair trials. Both the Libyan government and militia organizations lack the resources necessary to help victims. Similarly, there are no policies, plans, programs, allocations of resources, or procedures in place by the Libyan government to stop organized crime¹⁴⁷. Trafficking can also stem from countries that are inefficiently run. One of the most remote and repressive countries in the world, Turkmenistan's president has complete control over and oversight of every aspect of public life. There are no independent anti-corruption agencies, the president has no plans to combat organized crime, and prior organizations have been utilized to extract money from powerful politicians. Since the unit created to fight organized crime has been eliminated, law enforcement is under the president's control and is typically used to suppress dissent and political opponents rather than punish and prevent it. There is no independent judicial oversight, and international organizations are unable to conduct thorough audits. Courts are unable to successfully convict people involved in organized crime or notorious criminals¹⁴⁸. The characteristics of these countries align with those represented in the third tier of the US TVPA. As a result, a deduction can be made that these countries and territories have governments that do not fully comply with the minimum standards against human trafficking and are not making significant efforts to do so.¹⁴⁹

Committee Mission

The United Nations Convention Against Transnational

Organized Crime (UNTOC), along with its three protocols on human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and arms-related cases, represent a significant contribution to international law, offering a crucial framework to combat transnational criminal activities.¹⁵⁰ UNTOC has nearly universal participation, with 191 state parties at the moment.¹⁵¹ Thus, this committee has the ability of developing comprehensive strategies and recommendations to combat child-trafficking on a global scale. Our mission is to protect children from all forms of trafficking and exploitation, and to hold the involved organized criminal groups accountable.

It is crucial to develop a worldwide reaction against child trafficking. This committee should consider improving the human rights framework and apply the principles of State responsibility to transnational crime.¹⁵² The time for action is now. Child trafficking is a crime that has no borders, and preys on the most vulnerable among us. It is imperative to develop possible solutions to this global threat against our future, against children.

147 "Criminality in Libya," Global Organized Crime Index, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/country/libya>.

148 "Criminality in Turkmenistan," Global Organized Crime Index, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://ocindex.net/country/turkmenistan>.

149 United States Department of State, *Report to Congress on 2023 Trafficking in Persons Interim Assessment pursuant to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act*, (Washington: USDS, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/report-to-congress-on-2023-trafficking-in-persons-interim-assessment-pursuant-to-the-trafficking-victims-protection-act/>

150 Cecily Rose, "The Creation of a Review Mechanism for the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Its Protocols," *American Journal of International Law*, January 17, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ajil.2019.71>.

151 "United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto," United Nations, 2000. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>

152 Varun VM, "Human Rights-Based Approach to Combat Transnational Crime," *EUCRIM*, February 2020, <https://doi.org/10.30709/eucrim-2020-012>

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. How much of your country's population is directly affected by the opioid crisis, specifically illegal use of fentanyl?
2. How does your country handle and prosecute individuals involved with drug trafficking, creation, and use?
3. How much of your country's economy relies on drug trafficking/ production?
4. What proportion of your country's population is impacted by any part of the global drug trade?
5. What type of trade regulations and monitoring happen within your country in relation to opioid exports and imports?
6. To what extent does your country offer support and services to victims of opioid addiction? How does your healthcare system provide needle and exchange protections? How is this a reflection of your country's view towards the drug trade?
7. How has your country worked with the international community to suppress and dismantle current drug trades?

Topic B

1. How prominent is child trafficking in your country and what has your country done specifically to combat this?
2. Is your country a destination/ transit spot for human trafficking? How prevalent are trafficking rings in your nation?
3. What industries predominantly employ children in your country? Consequently, is child trafficking globally connected to these industries?
4. To what extent does your country punish traffickers, hold them accountable, and what legislation exists to protect and prevent trafficking?
5. How has your country been affected by the trafficking black market? If so, how prevalent are different aspects of the market, such as forced labor and forced marriage, if at all?
6. If trafficking is not prevalent in your nation, how have they contributed to providing aid, funding, and relief to victims in East Asian countries?
7. Does your country have a large migrant population and if so, what protections are offered in preventing trafficking? What are current immigration policies in your country?

Important Documents

Topic A

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- Department of Health and Human Services. “Resources: Common Health Issues Seen in Victims of Human Trafficking.” https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/orr/health_problems_seen_in_traffick_victims.pdf. ECPAT. “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Southeast Asia Is an Increasing Concern.” February 28, 2018. <https://ecpat.org/sexual-exploitation-children-increasing-concern-across-southeast-asia-new-report/>
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