



NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2027! We are Armen Bagdassarian and Sabeeh Mirza, and we are elated to serve as this year's Secretaries-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse high school Model United Nations conference. As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience.

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. We 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. 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: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN 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. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership and diplomacy that strive toward consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Research and a Dedicated Staff: Our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Our Directors spend over six months preparing Background Guides, in addition to Update Briefs written to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the topics to be discussed. Our staffers are trained rigorously to provide the best conference experience possible. Our daises provide thoughtful comments on submitted position papers. Our staff aims 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. This is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. Delegates spend countless hours researching topics critical to the UN and broader international sphere.

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,

Armen Bagdassarian
Secretary-General

Sabeeh Mirza
Secretary-General

Position Paper Requirements

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 the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging. To assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). 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. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the [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 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often 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 submitting position papers on or before **February 26, 2027**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, their position paper must be submitted on or before **February 5, 2027**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the committee dais and returned before February 26. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Submission instructions for 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 nhsmun@imuna.org.

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

Committee History

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), was set up in 1992 by ECOSOC.¹ The General Assembly had asked for it in Resolution 46/152.² The goal was to get the world working together to bring down crime and improve criminal justice. This happened right after the Cold War, a moment when countries finally started paying real attention to problems that crossed borders, like drug trafficking, human trafficking, environmental crime, and terrorism. Since then, the CCPCJ has passed resolution after resolution to protect people around the world. The committee itself has 40 member states. ECOSOC selects them through a voting process that tries to balance geography and different legal traditions, and each member serves a four-year term.

At its core, the CCPCJ is the UN's main policymaking body for crime prevention and criminal justice. Any resolution on this topic must pass through the CCPCJ and ECOSOC before receiving final approval from the General Assembly. The idea of a committee like this came from a simple fact: crime does not stop at a country's border. Organized crime groups were already working across borders, and no single country could fight that alone. The origins of the committee trace back to the Cold War, that decades-long standoff between the US-led Western Bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc, which shaped global politics from 1947 to 1991. For most of that period, security talks revolved around that one rivalry. Once the Cold War ended, a different set of threats came into focus. Organized crime, drug trafficking, money laundering, and terrorism all became harder to ignore, and it became clear these problems needed a shared global response, not individual countries acting alone.

Creating the CCPCJ gave the fight against corruption, terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking a real institutional home, and it also opened the door to work on prisoner treatment, juvenile justice, and support for victims. The committee's reach grew even further in 2006, when the General Assembly passed Resolution 61/252 and expanded its mandate.³

The committee's work breaks down into four areas. Crime prevention comes first, building strategies that actually stop crime before it happens. Next is criminal justice reform, which means protecting human rights while making justice systems and prisons work better. Third is emerging crime, newer problems like cybercrime and environmental crime that barely existed a few decades ago. Finally, the CCPCJ runs global conferences that bring together experts and government representatives to compare notes on what is working and what is not. Together, these four elements form the foundation of the committee's approach to policy that holds up across different countries and legal systems.

All of this connects directly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 16, which calls for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.⁴ The CCPCJ pushes toward that goal by helping build institutions that are effective, accountable, and open, while also working to strengthen crime prevention and fight corruption. It supports countries whose justice systems still need work, helping them build the public safety their citizens deserve. In short, the CCPCJ is one of the UN's most important tools for keeping the world safer.

¹ United Nations Economic and Social Council. Establishment of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. E/RES/1992/1. February 6, 1992. <https://undocs.org/en/E/RES/1992/1>.

² United Nations General Assembly. Creation of an Effective United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme. A/RES/46/152. December 18, 1991. https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/GA_Resolutions-46-152_E.pdf.

³ United Nations General Assembly. Questions Relating to the Programme Budget for the Biennium 2006–2007. A/RES/61/252. December 22, 2006. https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/General_Assembly/CCPCJ/GA-61-252.pdf.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A/RES/70/1. September 25, 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

TOPIC A

Creating Equal Access to Justice

CCPCJ | NHSMUN 2027



Introduction

Equal access to justice means that every person can seek and get a fair outcome from a legal system that treats them without bias. Without working courts and legal aid, basic human rights exist only on paper. The United Nations treats access to justice as a core part of the rule of law.¹ It links this idea directly to Sustainable Development Goal 16. When legal systems fail to give people timely help, public trust in the state begins to collapse. Courts can then shut people out based on money or social status instead of solving their problems. Fair legal procedures protect citizens from abuses of power. This is why equal access forms the base of a stable, peaceful, and fair society.

The lack of equal access hurts vulnerable and long-marginalized groups the most. Low-income people may struggle with legal fees they cannot afford and court processes that are too complex to handle alone. Women may face structural barriers, depend on others for money, and often meet gender bias when they seek protection from violence or try to settle property disputes. Indigenous communities may run into legal systems that ignore their native languages and their own traditional ways of solving disputes. In criminal justice, people who cannot pay for a lawyer often sit in crowded jails for months before their trial even starts.² These barriers repeat themselves over time. They keep poor and excluded communities locked in the same cycles of poverty and inequality in every region of the world.

Recent data show that major gaps in access to civil and criminal justice continue across regions. Economic shocks, new criminal laws, and growing court backlogs all played a part. In many countries, public defenders remain underfunded compared with prosecutors and other parts of the criminal justice system, limiting their ability to provide an effective defense.³ In 2023, the World Justice Project found that civil justice scores declined in 66 percent of countries studied, while criminal justice scores declined in 56 percent.⁴ Longer delays and weaker enforcement contributed to the decline in civil justice. These problems are especially serious for people who

cannot afford private lawyers or travel long distances to reach courts.

Closing this gap requires more than appointing lawyers. States must decide who qualifies for legal aid, which civil and criminal cases it covers, how providers are funded, and how services will reach rural and marginalized communities.⁵ As the main UN body responsible for criminal justice policy, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) guides member states as they reform these systems. It is crucial to evaluate legal aid frameworks, protect marginalized groups, and build justice systems that people can actually trust, in order to turn the promise of equal justice into a reality for everyone.

History and Description of the Issue

CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Access to justice is a basic principle of the rule of law. Without meaningful access to justice, people may be unable to exercise their rights, challenge discrimination, have their voices heard, or hold decision-makers accountable. The United Nations therefore encourages Member

States to establish fair, transparent, effective, nondiscriminatory, and accountable justice systems.⁶ These systems must also address the barriers that prevent vulnerable and marginalized groups from seeking legal remedies.

The movement for equal access to justice grew after the Second World War. The world had just witnessed terrible atrocities. For example, Nazi Germany manipulated domestic laws to persecute civilian populations. They routinely used local courts to eliminate political rivals.⁷ Before 1948, international law provided few general protections that individuals could invoke against their own governments. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).⁸ Article 8 recognizes the right to an effective remedy from national courts when a person's constitutional or legal rights are violated. Article 10 adds the right to a fair and public hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal.⁹

Unlike a treaty, the UDHR is not legally binding. The UN therefore continued developing human-rights protections through international agreements. In 1966, the General Assembly adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which creates legal obligations for the countries that become parties to it.¹⁰ Article 14 recognizes equality before courts, the presumption of innocence, and the right to a trial without undue delay.¹¹

Article 14 also strengthened protection for people accused of crimes.¹² When the interests of justice require legal representation, defendants who cannot afford counsel must receive it

without payment. This duty depends on factors such as the seriousness and complexity of the case. However, the Covenant does not establish the same general right to free representation in civil disputes. This distinction remains important because problems involving housing, employment, custody, and property can also seriously affect a person's life.

In 1974, legal scholar Marc Galanter examined why wealthy and experienced parties often have advantages in court.¹³ He distinguished between "one-shotters," who rarely enter the legal system, and "repeat players," who use it regularly.

One-shotters are people or organizations who rarely use the court system. A good example is a low-income tenant facing eviction. The tenant may be unfamiliar with court procedures and unable to afford prolonged litigation. On the other side are the "repeat players." These may include large entities like wealthy landlords, major corporations, or state governments. They use courts regularly, retain experienced lawyers, and can spread the cost of litigation across many cases.¹⁴

Although Galanter studied legal institutions rather than UN policymaking, his framework helps explain why formally equal procedures can still produce unequal results. A tenant and a large property company may follow the same court rules, but they do not enter the courtroom with the same money, experience, or ability to endure delays. Legal aid, simplified procedures, and community-based services can reduce some of these advantages.¹⁵

Legal rights do not erase differences in money, knowledge, or experience.

The United Nations also expanded its attention to victims of crime. In 1985, the General Assembly adopted the *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*.¹⁶ It calls for victims to receive information about their cases, present their views when their interests are affected, and receive protection from intimidation and unnecessary delays. It also identifies several forms of redress: restitution from offenders, state compensation in appropriate cases, and medical, psychological, and social assistance. Redress refers to measures intended to remedy or respond to the harm experienced by a victim.¹⁷ These measures can reduce secondary victimization caused by insensitive treatment or repeated questioning during legal proceedings.

In 1988, the General Assembly adopted the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment.¹⁸ The Principles recognize a detained person's right to legal assistance and communication with counsel. Early legal advice can help a detainee understand the charges, challenge unlawful detention, request bail, and avoid signing a coerced confession.¹⁹ The period immediately following an arrest is a critical time to protect an individual from state overreach and coercion, so access to justice must therefore begin at the police station.

In 2014, UNODC and UNDP published a handbook on providing legal aid during the early stages of criminal cases.²⁰ It explains how lawyers and trained legal-aid providers can assist people during questioning, challenge unlawful detention, request bail, and identify procedural violations. Early assistance may also reduce coerced confessions, unnecessary detention, wrongful convictions, prison overcrowding, and court delays.²¹ The handbook gives policymakers practical models for providing assistance at police stations and detention facilities.

STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC DEFENSE SYSTEMS AND LEGAL AID FRAMEWORKS

In 2012, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems, the first international instrument devoted entirely to legal aid.²² Although the document is not legally binding, it calls on states to create accessible, effective, sustainable, and independent legal-aid systems. Legal assistance should be available promptly throughout the criminal process, including during police questioning and detention. The Guidelines also recognize several possible providers, including public defenders, private lawyers, civil society organizations, university clinics, and trained paralegals. They include specific protections for women, children, victims, and witnesses.²³

In 2016, UNDP and UNODC published the Global Study on Legal Aid. It collected responses from governments and independent experts in 106 countries, representing 53 percent of UN Member States.²⁴ The study examined who qualified for assistance, which services were covered, how programs were funded, and whether legal aid reached people in detention and remote communities. Its broad geographic coverage also showed that legal aid cannot depend on one model: countries use public defenders, appointed private lawyers, civil society organizations, university clinics, and paralegals in different combinations.²⁵ The study demonstrated that adopting a right to legal aid is only the first step. Governments must also fund providers, establish clear eligibility rules, monitor service quality, and ensure that assistance reaches police stations, prisons, and rural communities. Without these systems, a legal guarantee may remain unavailable in practice.

UNDP has encouraged countries to consider services beyond traditional law offices, particularly in communities far from formal courts. These options can include mobile courts, legal clinics, and community paralegals.²⁶

Paralegals are trained to explain basic rights, help people complete documents, refer serious cases to lawyers, and sometimes assist with mediation. However, they cannot replace qualified lawyers in every type of case.

Community-based services can reach people who rarely use formal courts. In Kenya, for example, many people seek help from village chiefs, religious leaders, community paralegals, councils of elders, or civil society organizations.²⁷ These options may be closer, cheaper, and available in local languages. However, informal systems may also lack written records, independent decision-makers, or access to lawyers. States must therefore decide how to support accessible local justice while still protecting due process and equality.

Despite the benefits of public defense, governments have historically devoted limited funding to legal aid, especially in developing countries. In 2019, the World Bank published *A Tool for Justice: The Cost Benefit Analysis of Legal Aid*, which provides a framework for governments to compare the economic costs and benefits of legal aid.²⁸ Early legal representation can help defendants request release, challenge unnecessary detention, and

resolve cases more efficiently. By reducing avoidable days in pretrial detention, legal aid may lower government spending on prison staffing, food, healthcare, security, and administration.²⁹

For example, helping a detained person make a timely bail application may reduce unnecessary days in detention and the related costs of food, security, and healthcare. Avoiding unnecessary detention may also prevent families from losing income, housing, or childcare support when a detained person is a primary wage earner or caregiver. The report explains how governments can compare the cost of legal aid with possible savings elsewhere.³⁰ These savings may include fewer days in detention and lower spending on courts, prisons, shelters, healthcare, and social assistance. However, the financial return differs depending on country and type of case. Governments must collect local data rather than assume that every program will produce the same savings.

Legal-aid shortages also exist in wealthy countries.³¹ The Legal Services Corporation's 2022 *Justice Gap* report found that low-income Americans received no or inadequate legal help for 92 percent of the civil legal problems that substantially affected them.³² Among people who



Village chief in Kenya

Credit: Master Sgt. Eric Kreps

did not seek assistance, 46 percent identified cost as a reason. These cases involved housing, employment, personal safety, and child custody, showing that unmet civil legal needs can threaten a person's home, income, safety, or family stability.³³

In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the revised Nelson Mandela Rules, which establish minimum standards for prison management and the treatment of prisoners.³⁴ Rule 61 requires prisoners to receive adequate opportunities, time, and facilities to communicate with a legal adviser. These consultations must occur without delay or censorship and in full confidentiality, although prison staff may maintain visual supervision.³⁵ Confidential legal access allows prisoners to appeal convictions, challenge prison conditions, and report possible mistreatment. Access to justice therefore continues after conviction and imprisonment.

CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING EFFECTIVE LEGAL AID

Effective legal aid requires lawyers to have enough time to support each client. Individuals in need should each be given appropriate attention and consideration by legal counsel in a timely manner. In 2013, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers stated that, to provide effective legal counsel, "legal aid should be provided promptly and continuously at all stages,"³⁶ This includes time to access evidence and reports and prepare for a case.

Some countries have enacted policies to address certain challenges in providing legal aid. On January 1, 2023, an amendment to Mongolia's legal-aid law took effect that provided public defenders with a 300 percent pay raise. This brought their wages more in line with those of prosecutors.³⁷ The reform was passed to improve recruitment and retention of public defenders after low salaries had caused high turnover and few experienced lawyers.³⁸ However, equal salaries alone do not guarantee equal workloads,

staff, technology, or investigative resources. Public-defense offices also need enough lawyers and support staff. Frequently, public defenders may carry more cases than they can investigate and prepare effectively.³⁹

Even the most capable and qualified lawyers might not be able to defend clients effectively if they have too heavy a workload. Even in successful private firms, lawyers have reported burnouts and considered leaving their jobs because of long hours and demanding billing targets.⁴⁰ Excessive workloads stress even experienced legal staff. In 2023, a RAND study cited one city office where public defenders received an average of 2,225 misdemeanor cases each year.⁴¹ If lawyers spent every working moment on these cases, it would equate to only about 56 minutes for every step of each client's case. It is thus impossible for overloaded defenders to investigate cases fully or file all necessary motions. Certain cases are thus deprioritized because there is simply not enough time for them all.

Although overworked, some defenders might continue accepting cases if there is no one else. Smaller communities may not have other qualified lawyers available.⁴² Lawyers and legal-aid offices are often concentrated in cities. Therefore, rural citizens may face long travel distances and high transportation costs to access qualified lawyers. The UN Principles and Guidelines therefore call on states to ensure that people in rural and disadvantaged areas can obtain legal aid.⁴³ India provides one example of the shortage of lawyers. By 2026, the country's approximately 3,000 public defenders had handled more than one million criminal cases in a three-year period and lamented the heavy workloads, staff shortages, and job insecurity.⁴⁴ However, refusing cases would leave defendants in jail without legal help and delay their trials for longer.

Available public defenders also might not have trial resources such as investigators, interpreters, experts, or forensic technologies. Police and prosecutors often have much greater access to

technology and resources. For example, New York City's Legal Aid Society spent approximately USD 100,000 to establish a rare digital-forensics laboratory but the Manhattan district attorney's office built a USD 10 million laboratory.⁴⁵ This disparity results from decades of funding that is directed toward policing and prosecution, instead of public-defense offices.

Case law establishes that the prosecution and defense teams do not need identical resources, but each side should have a reasonable opportunity to present their case without a substantial disadvantage. This is referred to as "equality of arms."⁴⁶ International criminal tribunals have found that the same procedural rules should apply to both sides when obtaining and questioning witnesses. Courts should also provide reasonable assistance with access to evidence, but equality of arms does not guarantee identical budgets, staff, investigators, or forensic tools for both sides.⁴⁷

A comparative study of nine European legal systems found that defendants often received legal aid too late or could not use it fully.⁴⁸ In Belgium, payments to legal-aid lawyers could be delayed for up to 18 months. In Germany, legal aid often did not cover the cost of defense investigations. In Hungary, the government did not have to fund an interpreter for private meetings between a lawyer and client. Italy's low legal-aid payments caused some lawyers to refuse cases and left others unable to conduct even basic investigations.⁴⁹ Wealthier defendants can pay for timely lawyers, interpreters, and investigations, but poorer defendants often cannot. Legal professionals require time, funding,

and resources for each case in order to present an effective defense.

Legal aid that comes too late in a proceeding does not contribute to equal access to justice. The UNODC states that people should have access to lawyers during all stages of criminal proceedings.⁵⁰ The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers also state that people must be informed of their right to a lawyer immediately after arrest or detention.⁵¹ Once a lawyer is available, a client must have enough time and privacy to speak with them. If police questioning or other important procedures occur first, then later access to a lawyer may not undo the harm already caused.

Country-level projects show how effective legal aid can produce concrete results. In Southern Africa, UNODC supported legal-aid providers working with people in detention. According to UNODC, this assistance contributed to the release and community reintegration of more than 700 women after legal-aid providers identified human-rights violations in their cases.⁵² This example shows that legal aid requires more than appointing good lawyers. They must also be able to investigate cases, identify such violations, and continue supporting clients after their release.

Public defenders may be paid by governments, but they must remain independent enough to challenge government actions when necessary. Therefore, safeguards should prevent officials from improperly influencing how cases are assigned to ensure more equal outcomes. Another recommendation from the UN's Special

Policies which simply provide a lawyer do not guarantee an effective defense.

Rapporteur is that “State-run legal aid schemes... should be free from undue political or judicial interference and be independent of Government in decision-making related to legal aid.”⁵³ In simple terms, governments may fund legal aid, but they should not control how lawyers handle cases or pressure them to protect government interests. Ideally, legal-aid lawyers must be able to defend or support their clients even against the government.

Governments also need ways to measure whether reforms work. The World Bank’s JUPITER framework evaluates justice systems based on access, efficiency, and quality.⁵⁴ The International Legal Foundation offers more specific measures, including how quickly defendants receive lawyers, how long they remain in pretrial detention, whether lawyers can access case information, and whether trials occur without unreasonable delays.⁵⁵ Evaluators should also examine which populations remain underserved. The rights promised by law and policies should be compared with services people actually receive.

Effective legal aid should also support vulnerable groups like women, children, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and survivors of gender-based violence. For example, six regional legal-aid clinics in Uganda provide free legal assistance in both civil and criminal cases.⁵⁶ The services include courtroom representation, mediation, legal advice, and community education. These clinics assisted more than 10,000 people in 2022, including women, young people, Indigenous peoples, and rural residents. This helped marginalized clients obtain bail, settle family disputes, and protect their land. Services like those could be especially helpful throughout the world. In Viet Nam, the UNDP found that poor and vulnerable people often struggled to obtain legal assistance when they lacked information or could not afford a lawyer.⁵⁷ Passing legal protection is only the first step; governments must also ensure that protections are implemented. This may require general public education, local legal-aid centers,

and cooperation among governments, civil society, and community groups.

INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION AND HISTORICAL MARGINALIZATION WITHIN JUDICIARIES

Research shows that neutral laws can produce unequal results. For example, in the United States, racial disparities appear in pretrial detention, sentencing, probation, and parole. Some disparities result from racial bias, while others arise from overly punitive policies that affect Black Americans more heavily because they experience higher arrest rates.⁵⁸ This problem is global. The World Justice Project estimates that 5.1 billion people have at least one unmet justice need, as of 2019.⁵⁹ Some cannot resolve legal disputes, while others lack documents, property rights, or other legal protections, often due to an aspect of their identity. These barriers can become more severe when people experience several forms of disadvantage at once.

In 1989, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced “intersectionality” to explain how identities such as race, gender, and class can combine to create distinct forms of discrimination.⁶⁰ For access to justice, this means that removing one barrier may not be enough. A legal-aid office may provide free lawyers but remain inaccessible to a low-income Indigenous woman if it offers no interpreter, is located far from her community, or does not understand the type of discrimination she experienced. An intersectional approach therefore asks not only whether a service exists, but also which groups can actually use it.⁶¹

UN Women examined how these barriers specifically affect women in courts around the world. The group published an important report called *Progress of the World’s Women 2011–2012: In Pursuit of Justice*.⁶² The study showed that women face many barriers in the legal system. However, these barriers do not affect all women in the same way. Gender can overlap with

poverty, race, ethnicity, or rural location and make it even harder to seek justice. For example, a poor woman from an ethnic minority may face discrimination while also being unable to afford a lawyer or travel to court.⁶³ Unfair family laws, police corruption, and financial dependence create further barriers. Because government legal aid often focuses on criminal cases, many women cannot get help with inheritance, child custody, employment, or abuse. UN Women therefore called for justice systems that respond to women's different legal, social, and financial needs.⁶⁴

The General Assembly adopted the Bangkok Rules in 2010 to address the needs of women in prison and women facing non-custodial sanctions.⁶⁵ The Rules call for newly admitted women to receive information about legal assistance and arrangements for their children. They also encourage non-custodial sentences for pregnant women and women with dependent children when appropriate. These provisions show why legal systems may need gender-responsive services rather than treating every detained person's circumstances as identical.

Indigenous peoples may face several barriers at once, including poverty, distance from courts,

language differences, discrimination, and conflicts between state and customary law.⁶⁶ A legal-aid system may therefore need interpreters, culturally informed lawyers, community paralegals, and partnerships with Indigenous institutions. However, states must also ensure that customary processes protect due process and the rights of women, children, and other vulnerable community members.

Environmental harm can also create barriers to justice, especially when local communities must challenge companies with far greater financial and legal resources. In Guatemala, communities have opposed mining and agricultural projects that they believe threaten their land and water. According to the Guatemala Center of Legal, Environmental and Social Action (CALAS), police criminalized at least 125 environmental defenders who opposed the El Escobal mining project in Santa Rosa and Jalapa.⁶⁷ At least ten more activists were criminalized for opposing another mining project in La Puya.⁶⁸ The article also identifies more than fifty legal complaints against sugar and palm-oil companies accused of changing the course of rivers along Guatemala's Pacific coast.

Although Guatemalan law allows victims and



Protests against Escobal mine in front of Constitutional Court

Credit: EARTHWORKS

human-rights organizations to participate in criminal proceedings, CALAS reports that corporations have used their financial power to prolong cases and delay accountability.⁶⁹ CALAS therefore represents community leaders and environmental defenders and participates as a plaintiff in some proceedings. Legal aid may be needed not only by criminal defendants, but also by victims and community advocates pursuing cases involving pollution, violence, corruption, and environmental crime. However, states must decide whether these services should be funded through criminal legal-aid programs or separate environmental and civil legal networks.

These barriers may be especially severe for Indigenous communities. A 2013 UN study explained that Indigenous access to justice cannot be separated from structural discrimination, poverty, cultural rights, and rights to lands and natural resources.⁷⁰ It identified several barriers in environmental and land cases, including limited legal services, collaboration between governments and private companies, and the harassment or criminalization of Indigenous leaders who oppose commercial projects. The report also described the Maya Joint Programme in Guatemala, which trained Indigenous organizations to use litigation to defend their land, language, and cultural rights. This support contributed to a court decision restoring 4,185 hectares of ancestral land to the Kaqchikel Maya community of Chuarrancho.⁷¹ This case shows that culturally and linguistically appropriate legal assistance can help communities turn rights written in law into enforceable remedies.

Amnesty International's *Fair Trial Manual* brings together international standards concerning arrest, detention, legal representation, evidence, independent courts, and appeals.⁷² These standards establish a common baseline, but equal justice also depends on implementation. Member States must decide how to fund legal aid, control provider caseloads, protect institutional independence, supply interpreters, and measure whether marginalized groups can

actually use available services.

Current Status

CONTEMPORARY GAPS IN LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF POVERTY

Access to justice may appear protected on paper in most countries today. Most constitutions promise a fair trial and almost every state has signed a treaty that protects this right. Yet, access still depends on money. Poor people often face courts without a lawyer. This gap affects the very poor, working poor, migrants, and rural families. Many of these people earn just enough money to survive and not enough to pay a lawyer. Because of this, some individuals simply give up legal claims, even when the law is on their side.⁷³

As of 2026, roughly 11.7 million people sit in prisons worldwide, with serious prison overcrowding in more than 100 countries.⁷⁴ Overcrowding can worsen when courts process cases slowly, defendants cannot obtain legal assistance, and people remain detained before trial because they cannot afford bail. Nearly one third of the global prison population, about 3.5 million people, are held in pre-trial detention.⁷⁵ These individuals have not yet been convicted, although some may eventually be found guilty.

Migration adds another layer to this problem. By mid-2024, an estimated 304 million people globally lived outside their country of birth.⁷⁶ This number keeps climbing each year. Migrants face difficulty in foreign legal systems. They often do not speak the local language nor do they know their rights. Migrants may be excluded from some legal-aid programs or may not know that they qualify for assistance. This leaves migrants and refugees open to exploitation, wrongful detention, and unfair deportation.

A 2021 global study found that very few migrant workers recover stolen wages.⁷⁷ In 2024, Human

Rights Watch interviewed migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. Workers often paid much money in recruitment fees but then received less pay than promised or had limited access to embassies and support groups. However, since immigration status is often tied to an employer, reporting abuses or changing jobs could put people at risk.⁷⁸ Some countries have tried to counteract the barriers facing migrants. In the United Arab Emirates, mobile courts helped 53,000 workers recover more than USD 157 million in unpaid wages between January 2019 and June 2020; Israel allows workers facing deportation to testify before leaving so their lawyers can continue their cases; in France, authorities can help undocumented workers recover unpaid wages even after they leave the country.⁷⁹ Migrant workers may need interpreters, protection from deportation, mobile courts, and help across borders.

Legal aid programs often exist only in big cities. Rural communities, Indigenous groups, and women may therefore face additional barriers such as distance, cost, and a shortage of available lawyers.⁸⁰ This lack of representation can contribute to the criminalization of poverty. Without a lawyer, a person may be unable to challenge their legal issue. Additionally, the availability of free legal assistance differs greatly between countries. The 2026 Global Pro Bono Guide reviewed 103 jurisdictions but found that only eight required lawyers to complete pro bono work.⁸¹ Requirements also varied widely, as Viet Nam requires four hours each year, South Korea requires 30, and South Africa and Uganda require 40.⁸² Mandatory pro bono work cannot

replace properly funded legal aid as free legal support is dependent on where a person lives and whether volunteer lawyers are available.⁸³ Poor defendants are therefore the most likely to suffer when government legal-aid systems remain underfunded.

Technology could close part of this gap. New digital tools could lower the cost of basic legal help, especially for people who cannot afford a lawyer.⁸⁴ A 2026 study found that virtual courts, online dispute resolution, and digital legal services can reduce travel costs, delays, and other barriers to justice.⁸⁵ For example, Uganda uses virtual courts to connect prisons with courtrooms, while Rwanda allows people to file and manage cases through an online system. India has also developed software that translates court documents from English into nine local languages. Online forms, simple legal chatbots, and virtual consultations can reach people who live far from a law office.⁸⁶

However, technology can create new inequalities. The same study found that only 27 percent of people in the least developed countries have internet access, compared with 63 percent globally.⁸⁷ Rural communities may also lack reliable electricity, computers, and strong internet connections. Language barriers and limited digital skills can make online forms and legal websites difficult to use.⁸⁸ A website cannot replace a trained lawyer who understands local law and can speak for a client in court. Digital tools work well as one part of a bigger system, but not as a replacement for public defenders or legal aid lawyers.

Full access to justice requires full investment in infrastructure, platforms, and cybersecurity.

As courts and law firms rely more on machine intelligence to sort and manage cases, lawyers who serve poor clients risk falling further behind wealthier firms that can afford the newest tools. Well-funded law firms can now buy expensive software that finds case law in seconds and predicts how a judge might rule. Public-defender offices may have less funding for specialized technology than private firms and prosecution services.⁸⁹ This creates a widening resource gap between rich and poor litigants, even inside the same courtroom. Without real investment, poor individuals will stay at a disadvantage for being poor inside a courtroom. Delegates in CCPCJ must consider how new funding models, staffing standards, and technology guidelines can begin to close this persistent gap between the promise of legal aid and its reality.

CASE STUDY: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

For a long time, criminal courts treated crime mainly as an offense against the state. This creates an access-to-justice problem if victims cannot fully use the justice system when reporting a crime exposes them to danger,

confusion, or further trauma. Since the 1980s, the United Nations has pushed states to treat victims with dignity. The 1985 UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims encouraged states to provide support throughout legal processes.⁹⁰ This includes clear information about the case, protection from the accused, and access to restitution or compensation when possible. The UNODC *Handbook on Justice for Victims* also recommends services such as crisis counseling, safe waiting areas, transportation, childcare, and help preparing for court.⁹¹ These services can determine whether a victim is able to report a crime and continue participating in a case. However, many victims describe the process as a second wound, layered on top of the original harm. The handbook calls this “secondary victimization.” It can occur when officials blame or dismiss victims, require them to repeat painful details unnecessarily, fail to protect their privacy, or force them to encounter the accused without proper safeguards.

Gender-based violence provides a striking example of why justice systems must protect victims. In 2024, an estimated 83,000 women and girls were intentionally killed worldwide.⁹² About 50,000 of these deaths, or 60 percent,

Activism against Gender-Based Violence

Credit: AMISOM Public Information



were committed by an intimate partner or a family member. This equates to roughly 137 women and girls killed by an intimate partner or family member every single day, or one death about every ten minutes.⁹³ These killings are often the final act in a longer pattern of violence. In some documented cases, victims had previously reported abuse, so police, courts, health providers, and social services could have had opportunities to intervene earlier.⁹⁴ Access to justice requires reporting systems, legal assistance, protective orders, shelters, and risk assessments that can prevent further violence. These failures show the need for better risk assessments, stronger protection measures, and improved cooperation among services within the justice system.

For example, Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigations reported that 97 women were murdered between August and October 2024 in possible femicides.⁹⁵ Kenya has laws intended to protect women from domestic and sexual violence. However, women's-rights activists argued that political neglect and a weak, delayed criminal justice system prevented victims' families from obtaining justice. The uneven enforcement of laws and lengthy court delays often prevent protections from working effectively in practice.⁹⁶ This example shows that laws and specialized institutions cannot create equal access to justice unless cases are investigated effectively and resolved without excessive delays.

Health workers are often a survivor's first professional point of contact after experiencing violence. This is why the World Health Organization published clinical guidelines and

a practical handbook for doctors and nurses.⁹⁷ These materials help staff recognize possible abuse and respond with care. They teach health workers how to ask safe questions, document injuries properly, respect survivors' privacy and choices, and connect survivors with legal and social support. Medical records also may later become important evidence. Referrals can help survivors reach police, lawyers, shelters, or counseling services.

South Africa's Thuthuzela Care Centres provide medical care, counseling, police assistance, and prosecutorial support together in one location for survivors of sexual violence.⁹⁸ Survivors can receive medical attention, provide a statement to an investigating officer, access counseling, and prepare for court through the same coordinated system. This model aims to limit secondary victimization and strengthen cases for prosecution by reducing the number of separate institutions survivors must navigate. However, the availability of a center does not necessarily guarantee equal access, particularly if survivors live far from one or a center lacks sufficient staff and resources.

A 2025 global report confirms just how large this problem remains: roughly 840 million women alive today have experienced intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at some point in their lives.⁹⁹ After an assault, survivors may face police who question their story or courtrooms that force them to repeat painful details in front of strangers, including the accused. Long delays can also push survivors to drop their case, especially when a trial can take years to reach a verdict. These barriers do

Healthcare responses are closely connected to whether survivors can enter and use the justice system.

not affect everyone equally. Poor, rural, migrant, refugee, Indigenous, and disabled survivors may face additional costs, language barriers, physical inaccessibility, or discrimination. Thus, the same court system may be technically open to everyone while remaining far harder for some victims to use.

Further, many victims never learn about the support services available to them. Sometimes, free counseling or compensation is available but underutilized. Language barriers can also get in the way, especially for migrant and refugee survivors who may not speak the local language well. Legal forms are often written in dense, technical language that might confuse victims. A lack of trained staff also stops victims from using the formal system, since many police stations may lack officers trained in trauma-informed interviewing.¹⁰⁰ Fear of retaliation, financial dependence on an abuser, social stigma, distrust of police, and uncertainty about the legal process can also discourage reporting. Low reporting does not mean that little violence occurs; it may instead show that victims do not believe the formal system will protect them.

For example, an immigrant woman experiencing domestic violence may depend on her abuser for income, housing, or access to immigration documents.¹⁰¹ She may also face language and cultural barriers or lack information about the legal protections available to her. Reporting abuse could raise fears of homelessness, detention, or deportation. Her gender, income, and immigration status therefore interact to make safety and formal justice especially difficult to access.

New technology has changed this picture too, not always for the better. Since courts moved many hearings online during the COVID-19 pandemic, some courts have continued using video testimony and virtual hearings.¹⁰² These tools can protect victims from facing an accused person directly and can reduce the cost of traveling to court. However, victims with poor internet access may struggle to take part in their own

hearings. People with no private space at home struggle too, since a shared apartment offers little privacy for sensitive testimony. Some victims find it harder to explain sensitive details through a screen, especially without a trusted advocate sitting beside them. Courts must therefore ensure that technology does not create new barriers for people who lack internet access.

United Nations bodies have repeatedly warned that survivors may face weak investigations, where police fail to collect proper evidence or follow up on leads.¹⁰³ Victims can face biased judges, some of whom still hold outdated views about what a “true” victim should look or act like. There may also be a shortage of staff trained in gender issues, from police officers to prosecutors to court clerks. UN guidance supports measures such as specialized units within police departments, dedicated to gender-based violence cases, and staffed by officers who receive regular training. It also supports free legal aid for survivors of violence, including lawyers who understand the special safety, privacy, and evidentiary issues that these cases often involve.

Laws mean little if victims cannot safely use the justice system. Equal access to justice requires safe ways to report violence, clear information, legal help, protection, and compensation. Delegates should consider how Member States can turn these promises into real support, from a victim’s first request for help to the end of a case. Possible solutions include trained investigators, free legal aid, interpreters, private reporting systems, accessible courts, and funding for victim services.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, ALGORITHMIC BIAS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL DIVIDES IN MODERN COURTS

Courts around the world now use digital tools more than ever. Legal writers first noted that AI tools began drafting contracts within months of reaching the market.¹⁰⁴ These tools summarize

case law and answer client questions too. This shift changed daily work for thousands of lawyers, from small local firms to large international practices. According to the 2026 8am Legal Industry Report, 69 percent of surveyed legal professionals personally used generative AI for work, up from 31 percent in the 2025 report.¹⁰⁵ Respondents used these tools for tasks such as drafting correspondence, conducting research, brainstorming, and summarizing documents.

This shift can provide real benefits. Courts once buried key facts in paper files, stacked in storage rooms for years. Now records are searchable in seconds. The United Nations Development Programme studied these e-justice platforms and found that they help clear old backlogs, some of which have piled up for a decade or more. They also connect remote communities to courts they could not easily reach before, since a single online portal can serve an entire rural region.¹⁰⁶

One company shows just how fast this change has moved. Harvey, a legal AI startup founded in San Francisco in 2022, builds tools that help lawyers draft documents, review contracts, and research case law. By early 2026, Harvey was valued at roughly 11 billion dollars and was used by more than 100,000 lawyers across over 1,300 organizations in more than 60 countries, including most of the largest law firms in the world.¹⁰⁷ This growth shows how quickly a single AI tool can be adopted rapidly across the legal profession.

The rapid growth has also created oversight concerns. More than half of respondents said their firms had provided no training on responsible generative AI use and had no plans to do so.¹⁰⁸ This raises concerns about inaccurate information, confidentiality, and the protection of client data. Harvey and similar tools also serve mostly large law firms and corporate legal departments, the same “repeat players” who already hold an advantage in court. Public defender offices and small legal aid clinics, the lawyers who serve the poor, rarely have

the budget to buy tools like Harvey. If powerful new legal technology stays out of reach for the lawyers who serve the poorest clients, the gap between well-funded and under-funded legal representation could grow even wider than it is today.

AI systems bring on additional risks. Algorithms trained on old data can repeat patterns of historical bias. Some justice-sector algorithms are trained on historical arrest, detention, or sentencing data. If those records already reflect bias against certain communities, the algorithm will simply learn and repeat that same bias. A tool built to predict flight risk might unfairly flag poor defendants. It might flag minority defendants too. This happens simply because past arrest data already carried that same bias because human law enforcement surveilled and punished certain communities at higher rates. Once a judge sees a computer-generated risk score, it can be hard to look past that number, even when the underlying data is flawed. This is sometimes called automation bias, where people trust a machine’s output more than they should.

To manage this risk, the Council of Europe adopted an ethical charter in 2018 that still guides policy today. It set five core rules for using AI in courts.¹⁰⁹ These rules protect basic rights, since no algorithm should ever override a person’s fundamental legal protections. They protect against discrimination, requiring regular checks to ensure that a tool does not treat different groups unfairly. They give every person the right to challenge an automated decision, rather than simply accepting a computer’s output as final. The charter also demands transparency, meaning courts must be able to explain how a tool reached its conclusion. A tool that no one can explain, one whose reasoning stays hidden even from the people who use it, has no place making decisions about someone’s freedom. Since then, other groups have built on this work.

UNESCO released a global toolkit that remains a key reference for judges today. It helps judges and other legal professionals understand how

AI tools work and how courts may use them.¹¹⁰ The toolkit explains risks such as biased data, inaccurate results, weak privacy protections, and decisions that are difficult to explain. It uses examples from different countries to show how AI can affect judicial systems and human rights. The toolkit proposes that AI may assist judges, but it should not replace human judgment. Courts must keep meaningful human oversight over decisions that affect people's rights.

Legal groups have also stepped in to guide daily practice. The Law Society of England and Wales published guidance that law firms still rely on as generative AI use keeps growing. It warned lawyers that generative AI tools can sound confident but still be wrong.¹¹¹ This problem is sometimes called hallucination, when an AI tool invents facts, case names, or legal citations that do not actually exist. Lawyers who copy AI text without checking it risk misleading their own clients. They also risk misleading the court. Several lawyers around the world have already faced discipline for submitting AI-generated filings full of fake case citations, a problem that has only become more common as AI tools have spread. They also risk breaking confidentiality rules if they feed private client information into

a public AI tool without proper safeguards. The guidance urges lawyers to treat AI output the way they would treat a junior associate's first draft, useful but always in need of careful review.

The International Bar Association found that legal systems have not yet built clear rules for AI use. This leaves lawyers, judges, and everyday people to navigate new technology mostly on their own. The review surveyed legal professionals across many countries and found wide differences in how much guidance they had received from their own governments or bar associations. Some countries had detailed rules already in place. Many others had none at all. The review also raised concerns about job displacement, warning that routine legal tasks once done by junior lawyers and paralegals may shrink as AI tools take over more of that work.¹¹² This raises fairness questions of its own, since junior lawyers often use these early years to build skills that senior lawyers rely on later in their careers.

Meanwhile, the oldest problem in e-justice remains unsolved. Many people still lack reliable internet access, from those in rural communities to those who are elderly. People with low digital skills risk being left out as courts move further online. A justice system that only works for

Server racks in a data center

Credit: Derrick Coetzee



people with a smartphone is not truly fair. In some regions, an entire online filing system can become useless for a person who has never used a computer before and has no one nearby to help. Delegates in this committee must weigh the real benefits of digital courts, including powerful new tools like Harvey, against the real risks of bias, error, and exclusion. Balancing innovation with fairness, and speed with accountability, will remain one of the central challenges facing modern judicial systems as this technology keeps advancing toward 2027 and beyond.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

Most Member States agree that people should have equal access to justice. However, they disagree over who should provide legal assistance and how international standards should be applied. Some favor nationally designed, state-funded services. Others support greater international funding, monitoring, and technical assistance. A third approach gives local communities, civil society organizations, and traditional institutions a larger role. The challenge is improving access without weakening national sovereignty, judicial independence, or human rights.¹¹³

Funding creates another division. Some states argue that governments must fund their own legal-aid systems to make them stable and accountable. States with fewer resources may seek international funding, training, or technical assistance. Donor states may support such assistance but disagree over its cost, duration, and conditions. Delegates must therefore decide whether CCPCJ should encourage national funding, voluntary international support, or a combination of both.¹¹⁴

There is also a digital divide within this topic. Technology can make courts easier to reach. For example, hearings can be held online, making it

more accessible for those without transportation. Websites and mobile services can also provide legal information and forms. However, these tools may exclude people without internet access, digital skills, reliable electricity, or private space. Many states also lack clear rules on privacy, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and human oversight.¹¹⁵

These blocs represent broad policy approaches rather than fixed political alliances. Many Member States combine elements from more than one approach, but they differ over which method should receive the most funding and international support.

NATIONALLY FUNDED PROFESSIONAL LEGAL AID

Some states put their trust in formal, state-funded legal systems. They believe governments have a duty to fund legal assistance and make it available from the early stages of a criminal case. Many of these states build their legal aid programs directly around the UN Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid.¹¹⁶ They may establish public-defender offices, pay private lawyers to accept legal-aid cases, or combine both models.¹¹⁷ In this bloc's view, strong institutions do more than protect defendants. They also help lower prison numbers and ease overcrowding. These states trust that steady public budgets and independent legal-aid providers deliver the fairest justice.¹¹⁸ For this bloc, public responsibility and professional independence must work together.

The United Kingdom offers a clear example of this model. In England and Wales, the government funds legal advice and representation delivered by private law firms and nonprofit organizations under contracts with the Legal Aid Agency. However, a 2026 parliamentary report found that funding and eligibility rules have not kept pace with inflation and demand, showing potential system limits.¹¹⁹ South Africa tells a similar story through Legal Aid South Africa, an

independent public body that provides free legal advice and representation to people who cannot afford a lawyer. The program helps people understand their rights and participate more fairly in court proceedings.¹²⁰ Both examples show that governments can build national legal-aid systems, but these programs still require enough lawyers, funding, and investigative support to work effectively.

Western Europe follows a similar path, built around rules and central oversight. States in this region track judicial health through tools like the European Commission's Rule of Law Report.¹²¹ The Council of Europe carries out its own yearly review of member court systems through the CEPEJ evaluation process.¹²² Regional review systems can also measure whether these programs are working. The Council of Europe's CEPEJ process compares information about court budgets, delays, legal aid, and judicial performance across European states.

TECHNOLOGY-FOCUSED JUSTICE REFORM

A second bloc of states looks toward technology to fix problems that formal institutions have struggled to solve on their own. These states have built online platforms to handle everyday court work.¹²³ They use these platforms to clear old case backlogs and connect remote towns to courts in big cities.¹²⁴ More broadly, this bloc argues that machine intelligence is changing how courts run and making legal facts easier to find.¹²⁵ Even so, these states stay cautious. Many push for strict rules on new technology, worried that AI tools could carry hidden bias.¹²⁶ They also know that uneven internet access could deepen inequality instead of closing it. UNESCO's Global Toolkit on AI and the Rule of Law gives judges and other justice professionals guidance on these risks.¹²⁷ Groups such as the Law Society of England and Wales and the International Bar Association keep studying how these shifts affect fairness in court.¹²⁸ States associated with this approach may prioritize digital investment

while supporting safeguards for privacy, human oversight, and people who cannot use online services.

Estonia stands out as an early leader in digital law. Its e-File system, known locally as e-toimik, lets people submit documents and follow information about civil, administrative, and criminal proceedings online.¹²⁹ Estonian courts now use an automatic payment order process for simple, undisputed debt claims. Automation helps process these claims, but a person may challenge the result and bring the dispute before a court. For more contested cases, Estonian judges may hold hearings by video call. Singapore has also expanded electronic filing, digital case management, and technology training for legal professionals.¹³⁰

India faces a different kind of pressure. By 2025, more than 52 million cases were pending across the country. In response, the government launched the E-Courts Mission Mode Project, which supports electronic filing, virtual hearings, digital case information, and digital help centers that assist people using online court services. The project has made some court procedures faster, but it has not significantly reduced the overall backlog.¹³¹ The United States, meanwhile, relies heavily on private technology in its courts, including AI tools used to assess risk in criminal cases. Critics warn that these tools can carry their own biases and American lawmakers continue to debate how to regulate them in a way that keeps courts both fast and fair.

COMMUNITY-BASED ACCESS TO JUSTICE

A third bloc of states places greater trust in local and traditional systems of law. These states know that formal courts can feel distant, both physically and culturally, from the people they are meant to serve. Thus, this bloc works directly with local leaders or legally recognizes certain community-based dispute processes. This can allow disputes to be resolved more quickly and at a lower cost. However, traditional

systems may also exclude women, minorities, or other vulnerable groups. These countries must therefore decide how community authority should be balanced with national law and international human-rights standards.¹³² In practice, this bloc may favor plain language over legal jargon and send mobile clinics into communities that formal courts rarely reach. This reflects a core belief that real justice has to fit the rhythm of local life.

Kenya illustrates this approach well. Its Constitution encourages traditional ways of solving disputes, as long as they do not violate the Constitution, written law, or basic justice. In 2020, the country adopted a national Alternative Justice Systems policy to bring these methods into the mainstream.¹³³ Community leaders may help resolve local disputes, while paralegals can explain rights and connect people with formal courts when necessary. The state trains local people to act as paralegals, which takes pressure off formal courts and follows guidelines set by the African Union.¹³⁴

Bolivia constitutionally recognizes Indigenous jurisdiction alongside the ordinary court system. However, disputes remain over jurisdiction, coordination with state courts, and the protection of individual rights.¹³⁵ This dual system to some extent helps the communities that formal systems have left behind.

Bangladesh offers another example through its Shalish system. This is a long-standing village-level method of mediation. Traditionally, Shalish proceedings were often controlled by male community leaders and could reinforce discrimination against women. However, NGOs such as Nagorik Uddyog began reforming the system in the 1990s. According to a 2011 UN Women report, Nagorik Uddyog required women to make up at least one-third of its reformed shalish committees. It also trained committee members on human rights and national law and provided formal legal aid when mediation failed.¹³⁶ This offers a real model of how a traditional system can adapt without losing local trust.

Peru's Constitution also recognizes certain community justice functions exercised by peasant and Indigenous communities, with support from the *rondas campesinas*. They work alongside rural and Indigenous community leaders, as long as they respect basic human rights.¹³⁷ The continuing debate is how to respect these local institutions while ensuring that their decisions remain consistent with constitutional and human-rights protections.

Committee Mission

In 1991, General Assembly Resolution 46/152 approved a restructured United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme and called for a new commission. ECOSOC formally established the CCPCJ through Resolution 1992/1 in 1992.¹³⁸ Today, the Commission acts as the main UN body for shaping policy on crime prevention and prison reform.¹³⁹ It works as a functional commission under the Economic and Social Council. Its core job centers on legal reform, global standards, and cooperation between states.¹⁴⁰ This role connects directly to the challenge of building equal access to justice. Without working defense systems and fair court steps, legal rights on paper mean little to people left out of the system.¹⁴¹ The Commission gives Member States a global space to fix these failures inside their own courts.

The Commission shapes global criminal justice mainly through guidance, not binding law. It does not issue orders that states must follow. Instead, it builds practical plans and model laws. National governments can then adapt these into their own legal systems. A strong example is the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems.¹⁴² The Commission works alongside the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Together, they help Member States train judges, lawyers, and court staff. They also help states build stronger public defense networks.¹⁴³ These tools help governments turn human rights treaties into real

courtroom practice.

Delegates must also understand what the Commission cannot do. It has no power to enforce its rules under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It cannot send peacekeeping forces. It cannot impose economic sanctions on a state.¹⁴⁴ Out of respect for each country's independence, the Commission cannot step into an ongoing domestic trial. It cannot override a country's constitution either. It does not manage national justice budgets. It also cannot investigate local police forces directly. Instead, its power comes from something simpler. States choose to follow its guidance. States build political agreement together. States trust the expert advice it offers.

These limits still leave clear room for real committee action. Delegates can write resolutions that set global goals for public defense funding. They can also set fair limits on how many cases one lawyer should carry. They can expand training programs for community paralegals in poor rural areas.¹⁴⁵ The committee can also suggest ways to track and cut down excessive pretrial detention across regions. Delegates may also tackle newer problems. For example, they can set guidelines for digital justice tools, to help stop unfair bias in how these tools make decisions. Through these focused tools, the committee can help fix justice systems without stepping on any state's independence.

Equal access to justice remains a broken promise for millions of people caught up in criminal cases today. A right to a fair trial means nothing on paper if a suspect sits in jail with no lawyer by their side. Delegates must look past broad statements. They must face the money problems, structural gaps, and paperwork barriers that keep this unfairness alive. Discussion should center on national legal aid models, budget limits, and gaps in what states can actually deliver. The committee expects delegates to negotiate real, workable resolutions, ones that can turn global standards into real protections inside a courtroom.

TOPIC B

CCPCJ | NHSMUN 2027

Combating Wildlife Trafficking



Introduction

Wildlife trafficking is one of the biggest criminal problems facing the world today. It includes catching, trading, importing, and exporting wild plants and animals. Traffickers often transport and sell these plants and animals for profit, or turn them into products and goods such as fur coats or house decoration.¹⁴⁶ Wildlife trafficking raises serious ethical concerns. It also causes major political, environmental, and social harm. Each year, people sell about 350 million plants and animals around the world in illegal markets. Most of this wildlife comes from developing regions, such as Latin America and Africa.¹⁴⁷

When so many plants and animals are removed from their native homes, the environment suffers. Some are endangered and at risk of extinction, while others are keystone species that are essential to the functioning of their ecosystems. Removing these species can also disrupt the food chains in natural ecosystems, causing harm to other species that are not being trafficked but are dependent on the species that was trafficked.¹⁴⁸ Taking plant and animal species also risks the biodiversity of a region, which refers to the variety of species present in an area at a given time. When an area has more species, it is more balanced and stable. However, trafficking wildlife outside of natural environments can impact this diversity by removing these species and impacting the entire food chain in the ecosystem.¹⁴⁹

Additionally, trafficked animals are often then kept by humans, continuously sold and passed between locations, or killed for food, medicine, clothing, or other products. Wildlife trafficking operates across international borders, with animal and plant species moving through origin, transit, and destination countries around the world. Major demand markets include countries in Asia, Europe, and North America. More specifically, the United States and China have both been identified as common destinations for these wildlife products.¹⁵⁰ Governments attempt to discourage this crime every day, using border inspections, permits, quarantine requirements, and agreements between countries to monitor

the movement of wildlife.¹⁵¹ One major concern is the risk of bringing in an invasive species. If a trafficked species escapes or is released in a foreign environment, it may harm the local species. Invasive species can compete with local species for food, spread diseases, or disrupt the local ecosystem. Thus, wildlife trafficking can harm both the environment the species was taken from, and the new environment it then ends up in.¹⁵²

The harm from wildlife trafficking is not only environmental. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) has identified wildlife trafficking as a major area of activity for organized crime and terrorist groups. Wildlife is often linked to corruption, money laundering, and other forms of transnational crime across borders.¹⁵³ In areas with corrupt or weak law enforcement, it can become very difficult to find or stop these criminals. This allows these groups to increase their profit through wildlife trafficking while avoiding punishment.¹⁵⁴

Wildlife trafficking causes significant harm and loss of life to ecosystems around the world. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that seizures between 2015 and 2021 documented illegal wildlife trade involving almost 13 million plants and animals. These reports included species from over 162 countries and territories, and included a total of 4,000 different types of species.¹⁵⁵ However, wildlife trafficking is not simply an environmental conservation concern. This trafficking can weaken government

oversight, increase corruption, support criminal networks, and threaten national and international security. For this reason, addressing wildlife trafficking requires international cooperation that protects biodiversity and wildlife, but also considers organized crime and security threats that allow this trade to continue.

History and Description of the Issue

THE IMPACT OF WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

International cooperation against wildlife trafficking developed through both conservation and criminal-justice frameworks. CITES, agreed upon in 1973, regulates international trade in protected species through a system of permits and certificates. However, CITES provides an international framework rather than replacing domestic law. Each Party must adopt and enforce national legislation that puts the Convention's trade controls into practice.¹⁵⁶

The 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime provides another important framework for addressing organized crime across borders. It requires State Parties to criminalize participation in organized criminal groups, money laundering, corruption, and obstruction of justice.¹⁵⁷ It also supports extradition, shared investigations, mutual legal assistance, and cooperation between law-enforcement agencies. These provisions can apply to wildlife trafficking when the crime is transnational, involves an organized criminal group, and meets the Convention's definition of a serious offense.¹⁵⁸ Together, UNTOC and CITES connect wildlife protection with criminal investigation and international cooperation.

However, neither agreement creates one uniform global wildlife-trafficking penalty. National laws determine which acts are crimes, how

serious the penalties are, and which agencies investigate them. Thus, traffickers can exploit differences between countries, especially when one state has weaker penalties, limited border controls, or poor coordination between authorities. This makes wildlife trafficking directly relevant to CCPCJ, which can help Member States strengthen criminal laws, investigations, prosecutions, and international cooperation.

Illegal wildlife trafficking has led to the extinction of many different species of plants, such as succulents and flowers. Beyond killing off plant species, wildlife trafficking can disrupt the delicate balance of habitats and ecosystems.¹⁵⁹ This is especially relevant with animals whose behaviors can help mitigate the effects of climate change. African forest elephants, for example, change vegetation as they move and feed, helping shape forests that store carbon and support other species.¹⁶⁰ Their decline can therefore affect the wider ecosystem. The UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA) has estimated that roughly 4 to 12 million US dollars is generated every year in Central Africa from illegally collecting and selling elephant ivory. Elephants are commonly killed so traffickers can remove and sell their ivory tusks.¹⁶¹ Additionally, many communities in Central Africa depend on wildlife tourism for income. When elephant populations decrease, this creates income for traffickers but interrupts the income for local tourist economies that depend on this wildlife.¹⁶²

Similarly, sharks are increasingly being trafficked in many oceans for their fins, meat, or liver oil. These products are used for shark fin soup, dietary supplements, and medicines. Because sharks are major predators, sharp declines in their populations can change the number and behavior of other marine species. These changes may spread through the food chain and affect fisheries that provide communities with food and income.¹⁶³

Wildlife trafficking can also introduce invasive species. Without natural predators, these animals quickly dominate in their new environment.¹⁶⁴ An

example of this is the Burmese python snake, which has led to populations of native raccoons in Florida declining by 99 percent, opossums by 98 percent, and bobcats by 87 percent since 1997.¹⁶⁵ These snakes have no natural predators in this region, making it difficult to stop this invasive species.

Illegal trafficking of plants and animals also damages forests, wetlands, and oceans. When these environments degrade, they can no longer provide clean water, store carbon, or maintain healthy soil.¹⁶⁶ The dangers directly affect people's lives, including their access to clean water and other basic needs. Wildlife crime, which is any crime that breaks laws protecting wild plants and animals, threatens the economic benefits people receive from nature, such as income, food, and medicine.¹⁶⁷ For example, 30 to 50 percent of pharmaceuticals are derived from plants. About 75 to 95 percent of food hunted by remote and small communities is used directly to sustain the lives and communities in that area. Hence, in some regions, wildlife trafficking has been found to cause disruptions to communities amounting to 70 billion US dollars.¹⁶⁸

Wildlife trafficking is more than removing an animal from its home. Ecosystems provide

many services for human communities, and wildlife trafficking threatens the stability of these ecosystems. This also affects economic stability, climate change, food security, and clean water. However, CCPCJ approaches this issue primarily as a criminal-justice problem. Trafficking networks may include poachers, brokers, transporters, online sellers, corrupt officials, and financial actors operating in several countries.

LINKS TO ORGANIZED CRIME

Some organized criminal groups have expanded into wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes because these markets can provide additional sources of profit. They use modern technology like social media to advertise wildlife, contact buyers, and organize sales across borders.¹⁶⁹ Online marketplaces allow traffickers to contact buyers and arrange payments and international shipments without meeting in person. This makes online platforms an important source of evidence, but investigations may require cooperation among technology companies, financial institutions, customs agencies, and police in several countries.¹⁷⁰

Wildlife crime is often treated as a low-risk

African elephant

Credit: Sharp Photography



and profitable crime because penalties and enforcement may be weaker than those for drugs, weapons, or human trafficking. Demand exists across several regions, while the animals and plants may pass through multiple source, transit, and destination countries. Criminal networks may exploit the same trade routes, methods, and governance weaknesses used for many crimes.¹⁷¹ Environmental crimes, including illegal logging, mining, fishing, and wildlife trafficking, allow criminal groups to make about 91 billion to 259 billion US dollars a year. This makes the environmental-crime market the fourth largest criminal industry worldwide, after drugs, counterfeits, and human trafficking.¹⁷² To tackle this, financial investigations can help authorities identify organizers, trace payments, freeze assets, and confiscate the proceeds of crime rather than only arresting individual poachers or couriers.

Wildlife trafficking can depend on corruption at several points in the supply chain.¹⁷³ Many criminal groups exploit corruption to get through borders or bypass laws.¹⁷⁴ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has identified corruption as a key factor that enables wildlife trafficking. Officials may be bribed at airports, seaports, and land borders to ignore or allow illegal wildlife shipments to pass.¹⁷⁵ Corrupt actors may also provide false permits, reveal information about inspections, return seized products, or interfere with investigations and prosecutions. Wildlife trafficking therefore threatens not only ecosystems and the species trafficked, but also undermines the rule of law. Anti-corruption protections, independent

investigations, and penalties for complicit officials are therefore central to combating the trade.

Traffickers may use the same transportation routes, false documents, front companies, and corrupt officials used for other illegal goods.¹⁷⁶ However, finding wildlife and drugs in the same shipment does not always prove that the same criminal organization controls both markets. Investigators must examine financial records, communications, shipping documents, and links between suspects to determine how the crimes are connected.¹⁷⁷

The UNODC has suggested that international agencies and governments focus on increasing international collaboration, strengthening the capacity of national security mechanisms, and using behavioral interventions to reduce demand for illegally traded wildlife. International collaboration allows countries to share intelligence, coordinate investigations, and work together to identify and disrupt trafficking networks that operate across borders. National authorities also need trained wildlife investigators, customs officers, prosecutors, financial-intelligence units, and judges. These agencies can inspect high-risk shipments, verify permits, preserve digital evidence, investigate suspicious payments, and prosecute the organizers of trafficking networks. Oversight of customs officials can also reduce opportunities for corruption. Training and information-sharing can help these agencies connect individual seizures to larger criminal networks instead of treating every intercepted shipment as an isolated case. Finally, behavioral interventions can help reduce demand for wildlife products

Wildlife trafficking may overlap with other crimes, including drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, fraud, and money laundering.

or live animals. Researching reasons why consumers buy these products or creating campaigns to encourage consumers to purchase legal alternatives can help reduce the demand leading to wildlife trafficking.¹⁷⁸

Individual seizures will have limited effects unless authorities identify the organizers and financiers behind them. UNODC's *2024 World Wildlife Crime Report* therefore shows why Member States must connect national cases through international investigations, mutual legal assistance, extradition, and asset recovery.¹⁷⁹

LINKS TO ARMED GROUPS AND CONFLICT

Some armed groups operating in resource-rich conflict zones have exploited wildlife or other natural resources for income. However, the importance of wildlife trafficking differs between groups and should not be assumed to be a major source of terrorist financing in every conflict. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) provides one reported example. The armed group originated in Uganda and later operated in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.¹⁸⁰ Investigations have accused LRA members of poaching elephants and moving ivory through regional trafficking routes. The example shows how armed groups can exploit wildlife when governments have limited control over remote territory.¹⁸¹

Armed groups and organized criminal networks may have different goals, but their activities can overlap. Criminal networks usually seek profit, while armed groups may use illegal income to purchase supplies, pay members, or maintain control over territory. Armed groups may also tax poachers, protect trafficking routes, or sell wildlife products through existing criminal networks.¹⁸² Authorities must therefore investigate both the illegal trade and the relationships among poachers, transporters, traders, corrupt officials, and armed groups.

Conflict can weaken law enforcement, reduce government control over remote territory, and create opportunities for illegal wildlife trade. During Nepal's civil war from 1996 to 2006, conflict weakened government oversight of the valuable yarsagumba trade. Yarsagumba is sometimes called "Himalayan gold" because it is rare, difficult to collect, and highly valuable in traditional medicine markets.¹⁸³ In 2003, the Nepali Times reported that approximately 1,000 kilograms were illegally exported from Upper Dolpa to China.¹⁸⁴ Local residents also reported that Maoists traveled to the highlands to collect the fungus. Because the insurgency had confined police and military forces to the district headquarters, the northern border had no security personnel to stop the illegal trade. This example shows how conflict can remove law-enforcement protection from remote areas, allowing illegal wildlife trade to expand.¹⁸⁵

Revenue from illegally exploited natural resources may also help some armed groups continue operating.¹⁸⁶ However, estimates often combine wildlife with timber, charcoal, minerals, and oil. Governments must therefore identify the resources and networks involved in each conflict rather than assume that wildlife trafficking finances every armed group.

CCPCJ can help Member States investigate criminal links between wildlife traffickers and armed groups. States affected by conflict may need additional assistance to restore border monitoring, wildlife enforcement, and criminal investigations in territory where government control is limited.¹⁸⁷

FACTORS DRIVING DEMAND

Wildlife trafficking is not only an issue in the countries where animals and plants are taken from the wild. It is also driven by demand in the countries and communities where wildlife products ultimately end up. Several major reasons for demand exist, including exotic pets, food, traditional medicine, and luxury goods.

These markets can operate legally in some areas or with some species, but illegal trafficking occurs when wildlife is captured, transported, or sold in violation of national law or international trade controls.¹⁸⁸ For CCPCJ, reducing demand is a form of crime prevention because fewer buyers can mean fewer profits for the criminal networks supplying them.

The demand for exotic pets is one important driver for wildlife trafficking. People may purchase unusual or rare animals because of their uniqueness, appearance, or status as exotic pets. The international trade in live wildlife is particularly common for reptiles, birds, fish, and other smaller species that can easily be kept in homes. However, transporting live animals can be extremely harmful to their health and wellbeing. The UNODC reports that a significant portion of live wildlife shipments die because of cruel or badly managed capture, handling, and transportation methods.¹⁸⁹ These deaths further threaten species whose populations may already be declining. Public information can help potential buyers recognize protected species and avoid illegal sellers.

Wildlife trafficking is also driven by food market demand. Wild animals are often captured, killed,

and eaten because they are considered a luxury or part of a notable, cultural food. The UNODC reported that some consumers prefer wild animals for food because they believe that food that comes from the wild rather than farmed animals creates additional value.¹⁹⁰ Pangolins provide an example of how food demand can contribute to trafficking. Pangolins are widely considered one of the most trafficked wild mammals in the world. It is estimated that over 1 million were taken from the wild. Their meat is consumed as a luxury food in some markets, and their scales are also used in traditional medicine practices.¹⁹¹ Governments must therefore decide whether to emphasize criminal penalties for buyers and sellers, promote public education, increase cooperation with restaurants and markets, or implement a combination of these approaches.

Traditional medicine is another important market, and demand may be difficult to change when wildlife products are connected to long-standing beliefs and practices. For example, a rhino horn is sometimes believed to have medicinal uses. In Viet Nam, a survey found that 59 percent of traditional healers had suggested using illegal animal products from rhinos, tigers, and



Pangolin

Credit: Frendi Apen Irawan

pangolins for treatment. The same survey found that 68 percent of patients even said that they would use them again in the future if advised by a practitioner.¹⁹² UNODC notes that many claimed medical benefits lack scientific support, but trust in traditional practitioners may continue to sustain demand.¹⁹³ Governments can work with traditional-medicine practitioners, health authorities, and community leaders to identify lawful substitutes and explain which products are prohibited. At the same time, investigators can target businesses that knowingly sell protected species or use false claims to hide illegal products. The challenge is reducing criminal demand without treating entire cultural or medical traditions as illegal.

Luxury fashion also creates significant demand for wildlife trafficking. Animal skins, ivory, or rhino horn are commonly used for shoes, jewelry, decorative objects, and other wildlife products. They often represent symbols of wealth and status. The international python-skin trade demonstrates the scale of this market. In 2012, nearly 500,000 python skins were imported into the US from southeast Asia alone. This amounted to nearly 1 billion US dollars in sales. Most of the python skins were used for the fashion and leather industry.¹⁹⁴ Further, a shipment may appear lawful, yet contain animals captured beyond permitted quotas, have protected species listed under false names, or include fraudulent claims that skins came from captive-bred animals. CITES regulates international trade in protected species, but national authorities must verify permits and investigate fraud for these protections to work.¹⁹⁵ Synthetic alternatives can reduce the need for genuine wildlife products, but some consumers continue to value rarity and authenticity.¹⁹⁶ Governments may therefore combine consumer education with supply-chain monitoring and requirements that businesses document where wildlife products originated.

Rarity can itself increase demand when consumers associate scarce wildlife products with status or exclusivity. The UNODC describes this as the “anthropogenic Allee effect.” This is

when increasing rarity, or scarcity, of a wildlife product increases its perceived value and encourages further exploitation.¹⁹⁷ Trafficking can therefore create a dangerous cycle: declining populations increase prices, higher prices attract traffickers, and additional trafficking makes the species even rarer.

UNODC’s *2024 World Wildlife Crime Report* supports addressing both supply and demand. For CCPCJ, the central question is how enforcement and prevention should be balanced. Criminal investigations can disrupt existing networks, while education, lawful alternatives, and cooperation with businesses and community leaders can reduce the profits that sustain trafficking over time.¹⁹⁸

Current Status

CONFLICT ZONES AND ENFORCEMENT GAPS

The world is moving toward a more violent period. In 2025, the number of global armed conflicts in the world reached a historic high of 65 active conflicts involving at least one state.¹⁹⁹ With increases in armed conflict, this creates new challenges for governments trying to protect wildlife and uphold environmental laws. Armed conflict can easily spread through protected areas for wildlife due to their vast size and difficulty to monitor all the time. A recent study across African protected areas found that the frequency of armed conflict is one of the strongest predictors of wildlife population decline. Conflicts occurred in 71 percent of the protected areas, and wildlife populations declined in nearly all areas experiencing frequent conflict.²⁰⁰ The rise in violence creates conditions in which wildlife trafficking can become significantly easier to carry out.

War can both directly and indirectly harm wildlife. Animals can be directly targeted by armed groups and other people seeking food, money, or

materials. In many cases, trafficking helps pay for these wars. A UNEP and INTERPOL assessment found that nearly 90 percent of elephants killed in or near conflict zones were killed by non-state armed groups. The assessment estimated that ivory taken from elephants killed by these groups could be worth roughly 3.9 to 12.3 million US dollars every year.²⁰¹ This demonstrates how trafficking has become a significant part of the larger war economy. Armed groups may exploit wildlife alongside other natural resources in order to provide money and resources to sustain their efforts.

Wildlife may also be indirectly impacted because of the ways that war impacts the people responsible for protecting wildlife. The Virunga National Park in the DRC is one of Africa's most important protected areas. The park provides a habitat for mountain gorillas, elephants, chimpanzees, hippos, and many other wildlife. The ongoing conflict in the region involving the M23 armed group has made conservation extremely difficult. In areas occupied by M23, several guard patrol posts for the wildlife reserve have been abandoned, due to threats from the group. This has caused wildlife monitoring and protection to be interrupted, while the M23 group

has gained opportunities to exploit the park's resources.²⁰² Over 200 rangers tasked with protecting wildlife have been killed over the past several years. While some rangers continue to work and try to protect the species in the park, the ongoing conflict and militia activity continue to weaken these protections.²⁰³ Hence, while conflict can directly impact wildlife, these impacts can also indirectly spread to the people and systems responsible for upholding environmental protections. This creates an enforcement gap wide enough for illegal activity to continue or expand.

Conflict can also weaken national law enforcement systems, making it difficult for governments to investigate and prosecute wildlife trafficking when it occurs. Police, customs agencies, prosecutors, courts, and wildlife authorities may have limited resources during periods of conflict. In Nigeria, ongoing conflict has fed corruption and armed group activities.²⁰⁴ Nigeria has become an important country in international pangolin and ivory trafficking networks. Hence, the Nigeria Customs Service and organizations, such as the Wildlife Justice Commission, stepped in to try to fill enforcement gaps that were created by this crisis. They



Virunga National Park

Credit: Nina R

created a Special Wildlife Office dedicated to wildlife trafficking, and in 2025 they stopped more than 25 tons of pangolin scales. They also prosecuted the traffickers through 42 arrests and 12 convictions.²⁰⁵

The creation and expansion of specialized wildlife enforcement shows how governments can improve their monitoring and prosecution of wildlife trafficking, even when it involves international criminal markets. At the end of 2025, the Wildlife Justice Commission and Nigeria Customs Service stopped an illegal shipment of pangolins into Lagos, with the trafficker being convicted and sentenced to prison following the discovery.²⁰⁶

These examples show how conflict can weaken the institutions responsible for enforcing national and international protections. While many frameworks such as CITES provide ways to protect species, their implementation depends on national governments, customs agencies, police, courts, and conservation authorities.²⁰⁷ When governments lose control over territories, rangers cannot safely patrol protected areas. When officials and courts lack the resources to investigate cases, international protections become much harder to enforce. Conflict and wildlife trafficking can reinforce one another. Conflict weakens government institutions and removes wildlife protections, creating opportunities for poaching and trafficking. New laws and protections are not always the answer, as existing conservation protections and standards are not always upheld. Without the capacity to enforce the law, even the strongest national or international wildlife protections

cannot effectively protect animals in areas where armed groups and criminal networks control the territory.²⁰⁸ CCPCJ can therefore help Member States strengthen their criminal-justice institutions through training, technical assistance, information sharing, and support for cross-border investigations.

CLIMATE STRESS, LIVELIHOODS, AND WILDLIFE CRIME

Droughts, floods, wildfires, and changing rainfall can damage habitats, reduce community income, and increase competition between people and wildlife for food and water. The UNODC has recognized climate change, biodiversity loss, wildlife crime, and human livelihoods as interconnected problems that require a coordinated response.²⁰⁹ Additionally, the WWF found through a survey of communities living near ecosystems with high biodiversity that many believe human-wildlife conflict is influenced or worsened by climate change.²¹⁰ These pressures can make wildlife and nearby communities more vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks.

As temperatures and water availability change, animals may leave their normal habitats in search of food and water. This can increase encounters with people and expose wildlife to poaching.²¹¹ Declining populations may also raise the value of rare species, giving traffickers another financial incentive.²¹² Climate stress therefore changes the conditions in which wildlife crime occurs, even though it does not automatically produce trafficking.

Climate change is creating new pressures on wildlife and the communities that depend on natural resources.

Climate-related disruptions can reduce people's access to food and income and make communities more vulnerable. When they become more vulnerable, people affected by environmental and economic pressures may turn toward poaching and illegal activities to gain income and resources and restore stability.²¹³ For example, during the severe droughts in East Africa in 2021 and 2022, crops failed and livestock died across northern Kenya. This left many families without their usual sources of food and income. The African Wildlife Foundation reported a 300 percent increase in traps used for bushmeat poaching, which is illegal hunting of wild animals for sources of meat.²¹⁴

More recently, Zimbabwe had a severe drought that continued into 2024. Between August and December 2023, at least 160 elephants died in Hwange National Park as water and vegetation became scarce. Conservationists reported growing bushmeat poaching connected to economic hardship, while six elephants found outside the park had been killed and had their tusks removed.²¹⁵ People experiencing poverty or climate disasters do not automatically become poachers. However, criminal networks may exploit communities when food, income, and legal employment become less secure. Prevention can therefore include livelihood assistance alongside law enforcement.²¹⁶

The UNODC has noted that wildlife crime can cause species overexploitation, ecosystem damage, biodiversity loss, and climate impacts.²¹⁷ Climate pressures may make wildlife more vulnerable, while the removal of important species can make forests, wetlands, and other

ecosystems less able to recover from droughts, fires, and other environmental shocks.²¹⁸

Other environmental crimes, such as illegal logging, mining, and fishing, often occur alongside wildlife trafficking.²¹⁹ The Brazilian rainforest provides an example of how climate change and other environmental crimes are reinforcing wildlife trafficking. Increasingly severe droughts have lowered river levels, which has disrupted fish populations and caused their populations to decline. At the same time, illegal gold mining has destroyed parts of the forest and contaminated the waterways with heavy metals such as mercury. This has increased the strain on the aquatic ecosystems and nearby communities.

Many individuals have used trafficking to regain economic stability, illegally capturing turtles and their eggs, fish, and other species for sources of food or to be traded on international markets for profit. The same routes that were created to transport illegally mined gold are now also being used to move wildlife products.²²⁰ This allows criminal networks to profit from several environmental crimes at the same time, while further damaging ecosystems already under climate stress.

For CCPCJ, climate change is relevant because it can place new pressure on the communities, institutions, and ecosystems that trafficking networks exploit.²²¹ The Commission cannot create climate policy or manage wildlife habitats directly, but it can encourage Member States to include wildlife-crime prevention in disaster planning. Delegates could also support alternative livelihoods in vulnerable communities,

The UNODC has found that illegal exploitation of natural resources can contribute to deforestation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and rural poverty.

strengthen enforcement after climate emergencies, and improve cooperation among police, customs agencies, wildlife authorities, and local organizations.

INCREASING ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND POVERTY PRESSURES ON POACHING

Poverty and limited economic opportunities can contribute to wildlife crime.²²² Economic instability and poverty create strong incentives for poaching. This is especially true at the local level of the supply chain. Rural communities living near protected areas and wildlife corridors may have limited access to stable employment, education, markets, and other sources of income.²²³ The decision to participate in wildlife trafficking is influenced by government enforcement, access to legal employment, and the profits available in illegal markets.

A study examining rhino poaching around Kruger National Park in South Africa and along the border with Mozambique found that economic incentives strongly influenced participation in poaching. Poaching provides greater financial rewards than any available legal employment

in the surrounding communities.²²⁴ Thus, some individuals may choose to participate in illegal trafficking markets because it pays more than available legal employment. Efforts and policies that seek to reduce economic inequality but do not address differences in income between legal employment and poaching will not eliminate the incentive to poach completely. People above the poverty line may still choose to poach because the economic return is more profitable than legal options. At the same time, an approach that only focuses on making illegal trafficking more difficult without providing stable economic alternatives may also not be fully successful.

The international scale of the wildlife trade makes these local economic incentives even more significant. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) estimates that the illegal wildlife trade generates between 7 to 23 billion US dollars a year. It is one of the world's most profitable forms of transnational environmental crime.²²⁵

This market involves multiple networks and operations, as wildlife species and products are moved across source, transit, and destination countries. These networks recruit local people to track and capture wildlife while relying on others to transport, finance, cover up, or sell these

Snakeskin pumps

Credit: Thomas Quine



products internationally.²²⁶ Usually, the profit from these markets is not evenly distributed among participants. For example, in a UNODC case study of the ivory trafficking operation between Africa and Asia, there was a difference in the amount of income made by poachers compared to other participants in the supply chain. While the poachers received around 80 US dollars per kilogram of ivory, the collectors and transporters earned up to 240 US dollars per kilogram, even after all of their costs were deducted.²²⁷ Poachers, while they usually take the greatest physical and legal risk, often receive the smallest financial reward. Criminal networks often take advantage of these vulnerable communities experiencing economic hardship, while keeping a majority of the profits generated by international demand.

This unequal distribution of profit and roles in illegal wildlife trafficking can make it difficult for governments to track and discourage this practice. Punishing local poachers without addressing the larger trafficking networks can remove one participant without eliminating the market that created the incentive in the first place. This means enforcement needs to move beyond punishing the person physically killing or capturing the animal. Instead, the government must also investigate the people who finance trafficking, arrange transportation, bribe officials, hide profits, and connect suppliers to international buyers. Additionally, governments and international agencies must consider the unintended consequences of enforcement. Governments might respond to poaching by increasing arrests, fines, or imprisonment. However, without providing alternative forms of income instead of trafficking, the economic incentive will remain. Punishing and stopping wildlife trafficking must also use community-based approaches and alternative livelihoods in order to lead people away from wildlife crime.²²⁸

Economic instability makes wildlife trafficking easier to sustain because it provides criminal networks with people willing to accept the risks of poaching in exchange for faster or

higher income. Inequality, limited employment opportunities, high international demand, and differences in the supply chain all contribute to the issue. Effective policy must combine enforcement with economic development, alternative livelihoods, community participation, and efforts to dismantle criminal networks that capture most of the profits.²²⁹ For communities living in rural, less developed, or environmentally protected areas, their livelihoods naturally depend on the animals and ecosystems around them. However, other markets, such as tourism, sustainable agriculture, or conservation employment, provide alternatives to poaching while still allowing communities to benefit from these natural resources.²³⁰ Successful anti-poaching strategies therefore need to consider not only how wildlife is protected, but also who benefits financially from that protection.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

Wildlife trafficking affects countries differently depending on where they are located in the trafficking supply chain and how effectively their governments respond. Source countries are often responsible for protecting wildlife populations and stopping poaching, while transit countries must intercept wildlife as it moves across borders. Destination countries face the challenges of reducing consumer demand and preventing illegal products from entering their markets. However, countries can occupy several positions in the supply chain. A country can be a source, transit, and destination country all at the same time. Traffickers may also change routes when enforcement becomes stronger in one location or when national laws differ. The UNODC has found that traffickers exploit differences in national laws, enforcement capacity, and levels of corruption.²³¹ Therefore, the blocs below describe broad policy priorities rather than fixed groups.

The first major point of division is government capacity. Some countries have well-funded wildlife agencies, trained police and customs officials, and courts capable of prosecuting complex trafficking cases. Others have wildlife laws but lack the money, staff, equipment, or institutions needed to enforce them. UNODC specifically identifies inadequate funding, training, enforcement, prosecution, and judicial capacity as major barriers to fighting wildlife trafficking.²³² These differences may shape whether delegates prioritize stronger international standards or additional funding and technical assistance.

Another major point of division is political will. A government may have the ability to stop trafficking but may not make it a priority. Corruption can make this problem even worse when government officials accept bribes, provide fraudulent documents, or allow traffickers to move products through checkpoints. Other governments may support wildlife protection but give greater priority to conflict, poverty, public health, or other urgent national concerns.²³³ These differences can lead to disagreement over international monitoring, mandatory reporting, enforcement targets, and the amount of outside assistance countries should receive.

These divisions will shape debate over funding, technical assistance, intelligence sharing, financial investigations, international monitoring, and national sovereignty. A country may support stronger border cooperation while opposing mandatory international reporting, or request technical assistance while resisting outside investigations.

COUNTRIES SUPPORTING STRONGER ENFORCEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Countries in this bloc have relatively strong criminal justice systems and wildlife protection agencies. They have demonstrated a willingness to commit resources to combating wildlife trafficking. They are likely to support stronger international cooperation, information sharing,

financial investigations, border controls, and coordinated action against transnational criminal organizations. Because they generally have greater enforcement capacity, they may support common reporting requirements, stronger criminal penalties, and increased cooperation through UNODC, INTERPOL, CITES, and the World Customs Organization.

Over the past six years, Kenya has cut poaching of its most targeted species by roughly 90 percent through better surveillance, tougher penalties, and community engagement.²³⁴ Some of its most popular and successful conservation areas include Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Solio Game Reserve, which recorded zero rhino poaching incidents as far back as 2020.²³⁵ This progress reflects steady investment by the Kenyan government in technology, such as thermal cameras and AI monitoring, and in stronger ranger enforcement on the ground.²³⁶ However, Kenya continues to face trafficking risks and would still benefit from regional intelligence sharing and cross-border investigations. Another example is the United States, which passed the END Wildlife Trafficking Act in 2016. This national approach focuses on three areas: strengthening law enforcement, reducing demand, and increasing international cooperation.²³⁷

Other countries that may fit in this bloc include the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany, and France. These countries focus on criminal penalties, shared information and investigations, financial accountability, and targeting transnational criminal networks. The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), which brings together CITES, UNODC, INTERPOL, the World Bank, and the World Customs Organization, provides an existing precedent for this type of cooperation.²³⁸ While countries' exact policies may differ, they are generally more likely to support stronger international cooperation and criminal justice measures.

COUNTRIES SEEKING CAPACITY-BUILDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

This bloc includes countries that want to address wildlife trafficking but lack some of the resources, personnel, or institutional capacity required for consistent enforcement. Many of these states contain major biodiversity hotspots and face significant pressure from poaching. However, wildlife agencies may lack funds, vehicles, communication equipment, or staff to monitor large protected areas. Police and customs agencies may also have limited specialized experience investigating wildlife crime.²³⁹ Prosecutors and judges may receive few cases or lack training on wildlife laws, financial evidence, and transnational organized crime.

Nigeria is a useful case study for this bloc. Nigeria is both a source and transit country for wildlife products, including ivory and pangolin products, and serves as an important point in trafficking routes connecting African and Asian markets. In October 2025, Nigeria's Senate passed a new wildlife protection bill. The bill seeks to update penalties, expand investigative powers, permit asset recovery, and strengthen the ability of authorities to investigate financial flows.²⁴⁰ Its progress demonstrates that stronger protections on paper mean little without the money, coordination, and political backing to enforce them. Effective implementation would require coordination and training among customs officials, police, investigators, prosecutors, and judges.²⁴¹

Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are other examples of countries working to strengthen their capacity and prevention efforts. In 2024, UNODC delivered regional training involving officials from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka on techniques for investigating wildlife and forest crime, including its financial dimensions. These programs trained officials from agencies including customs, police, and forest departments. This cooperation shows the type of capacity-building that countries in this bloc may request from the international community.²⁴²

Other countries in this bloc may include Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Depending on their national policies, states facing similar capacity constraints may seek international funding, technical assistance, ranger and customs training, information sharing, and assistance developing national legislation. They may resist strict enforcement targets if those targets are not accompanied by adequate funding or technical support. This creates room for compromise with higher-capacity states: stronger cooperation and accountability measures could be paired with funding, training, technology, and long-term institutional support.²⁴³

COUNTRIES PRIORITIZING NATIONAL CONTROL OVER ENFORCEMENT

Some countries may support action against wildlife trafficking while remaining cautious about international monitoring, mandatory reporting, sanctions, or outside investigations. They may argue that domestic authorities should control enforcement and that international organizations should provide assistance only with government consent. Governance problems, corruption, or economic interests may nevertheless weaken implementation in some of these states. This does not mean that the governments openly support trafficking or that every official is involved.²⁴⁴

Laos has international obligations under CITES and has taken steps to address illegal wildlife trade. However, investigations have continued to document wildlife products being openly sold in the country. A 2025 investigation documented venues selling ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales, bear products, and tiger parts. Some venues catered to organized Chinese tour groups, displayed government symbols, or employed armed guards, creating the appearance of official protection. Together, stores and sellers generate over 400 million US dollars a year, roughly equal to Laos's official tourism revenue.²⁴⁵ The case raises questions about enforcement, corruption,

and national oversight, although it does not prove that every Lao authority supports the trade.

Corruption can occur at several stages of the trafficking chain. Officials may accept bribes, issue fraudulent permits, reveal information about investigations, return seized products, or allow shipments to cross borders. Wildlife products and trafficking profits may also be used in bribery or money laundering.²⁴⁶ UNODC's 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report therefore recommends greater attention to corruption offenses and financial investigations against people organizing and enabling trafficking rather than focusing only on individual poachers.²⁴⁷

Other countries in this bloc may include Cambodia and Cameroon. Countries should be placed in this bloc when their official statements show that they favor voluntary cooperation and strong national control over enforcement. Evidence of trafficking or corruption alone does not establish a country's negotiating position.

Committee Mission

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established by ECOSOC in 1992 following a request from the UN General Assembly. The CCPCJ serves as the principal policymaking body of the UN on crime prevention and criminal justice. Its mandate includes addressing national and transnational crime, organized crime, corruption, money laundering, and other emerging forms of crime. The CCPCJ works closely with governments, alongside regional groups, funding agencies, and non-governmental organizations.²⁴⁸ In 2006, the General Assembly further expanded the CCPCJ's responsibilities, allowing it to serve as a governing body of the UNODC and oversee the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Fund, which supports technical assistance for member states. CCPCJ also provides

participating countries with a forum to exchange information, share experiences, develop international strategies, and identify priorities for cooperation.²⁴⁹

Wildlife trafficking falls directly within this mandate because it is not only a conservation issue, but also a transnational criminal justice issue. Wildlife trafficking commonly involves organized crime networks, corruption, money laundering, smuggling, document fraud, and other forms of cross-border crime. In 2011, the Commission addressed the involvement of organized crime groups in the illegal trafficking of endangered species. Participating states gathered and called for stronger legislation, international cooperation, and more thorough investigations and prosecutions.²⁵⁰ The UN General Assembly has also emphasized the importance of using international frameworks, such as CITES, to combat wildlife trafficking.²⁵¹ Moving forward, participating countries continue to explore where existing standards and efforts are failing and how criminal justice cooperation can fill those gaps.

While CCPCJ and ECOSOC have passed many resolutions on wildlife trafficking, the profits made by criminal organizations and issues created from wildlife trafficking continue.²⁵² Delegates should approach wildlife trafficking as a problem that connects environmental protection, organized crime, economic instability, community involvement, climate change, and international security. Solutions should not only focus on discouraging local poaching or increasing security at borders, but should also consider how criminal networks, changing markets, and governments influence these environmental crimes. By researching past resolutions, meetings, and frameworks, delegates should focus on improving what frameworks and systems have already been created, while filling gaps in enforcement and economic stability to make these efforts more coordinated and effective.²⁵³ By strengthening national enforcement, disrupting market flows to criminal organizations, protecting vulnerable communities,

and improving cooperation throughout the international community, delegates can discourage this illegal market and protect millions of species and ecosystems around the world.

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 Does your country provide free legal aid to criminal defendants who cannot afford a lawyer? If so, at what point in the process does that right kick in, right after arrest, or only once a case actually reaches trial? If not, what happens to someone in your country who cannot afford it?
- 2 Public defenders in a lot of countries are drowning in cases. Is that true for your country too? What would it actually take, politically and financially, for your government to fix that?
- 3 Does your country's infrastructure consistently support these cases, or are there persistent gaps – for example, insufficient trained staff, underfunded specialized units, or a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms – that cause survivors to fall through the cracks?
- 4 Has your government said anything official about regulating AI in the justice system, or is it still an open question?
- 5 Not every country solves disputes exclusively through formal courts, some rely heavily on traditional or community-based systems instead. Does your country use anything like this? If so, how does it interact with the official legal system?
- 6 What does pretrial detention actually look like in your country? How long can someone realistically be held before seeing a judge, and does your government track (or even publish) how many people are in that situation right now?

TOPIC B

- 1 Does your country have laws against animal trafficking, and if so, what are the actual penalties? Are those penalties strong enough to deter organized criminal networks, or are they treated as minor costs of business compared to drug or weapons trafficking?
- 2 Does your country have anti-money laundering frameworks that specifically cover wildlife crime, or does your financial intelligence system treat it as a lower priority than other illicit trades? Where are the gaps?
- 3 Are rangers, customs officials, or judges in your country known to be vulnerable to bribery, and what has your government actually done about it?
- 4 Is your country a source, transit, or destination country for wildlife trafficking, or more than one simultaneously? How does that position shape what solutions your country would realistically push for at this conference?
- 5 Is your country immediately involved in a conflict, or does it border a region currently in conflict? How does this affect the state's ability to enforce any anti-trafficking laws your state may have?
- 6 Many countries involved in this committee have signed international frameworks like CITES, which have the purpose of unifying anti-animal trafficking efforts. What reservations or changes would your country like to pass in order to protect their domestic economies?

Important Documents

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About the Authors

TOPIC A: SEBASTIÁN CARSTENS

Sebastián Carstens is an undergraduate at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas, Venezuela, where he studies Law. He has been involved in Model United Nations since 2022, beginning as a high school delegate and gradually taking on organizational responsibilities, work that led him to serve as Co-Secretary General for Logistics of his high school's Model UN conference in 2025, alongside multiple outstanding delegate distinctions earned in competition. This is his second year on staff at NHSMUN; he previously served as Assistant Director for the World Trade Organization committee. Alongside his academic work, he has also gained early professional experience at a law firm specializing in intellectual property. Following his undergraduate degree, he plans to pursue graduate studies abroad across a range of legal fields, including intellectual property, corporate law, and oil and gas law. His experience across delegate competition, conference organization, and legal practice informs the approach he brings to directing this committee.

TOPIC B: RAHUL NIMMAGADDASAI

Rahul Nimmagaddasai is a 2nd year at the University of Florida majoring in finance, with a minor in computer science. He is working to become an investment banker at J.P. Morgan Chase. This will be his 5th year in MUN, as he started from his sophomore year of high school. He has staffed both UF's high school conference, GatorMUN, as a chair for the UNEP, as well as staffing the backroom for UF's collegiate conference SunMUN, in the Reform Party committee. He has also chaired for Florida Gulf Coast University's high school conference SWFLMUN, in which he was a co-chair for the IMF+UNDESA committee on Cryptocurrencies. He was the USG of Specialized Assemblies at FlagMUN, held by Flagler College in St. Augustine. This year he is just as involved. Alongside directing at NHSMUN, Rahul is directing the Petrograd Soviet Committee at GatorMUN, which is a committee topic that he has wanted to direct for a while. He is also involved with directing at UF's high school training conference SwampMUN where he will be directing the UNEP, which was the first committee he ever staffed at UF. Rahul is also directing a SOCHUM GA for FlagMUN.

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