

Human Rights Council (HRC) - BaMUN 2025



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Topic 1: Exploitation of Refugees due to Conflicts

Main questions for debate:

- What strategies can prevent human trafficking and forced labor among refugee populations?
- How can international laws, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, be enforced when national laws and systems are inadequate?
- What responsibilities do host countries have, especially those with limited resources, and how can they be supported by the international community?
- Should the definition of "persecution" include widespread social practices beyond state-sponsored persecution?
- What role does security play inside refugee camps, and how can both humanitarian workers and refugees be protected?
- To what extent do security concerns justify limiting the rights and freedoms of refugees, and at what point does this become a form of exploitation itself?
- What are the most effective methods for combating human trafficking and smuggling networks that prey on vulnerable refugees?
- How can the intersection of conflict, gender-based violence, and exploitation be better addressed?
- How can root causes of conflict and displacement help reduce future refugee crises?
- What are the most effective long-term solutions for protracted refugee situations: local integration, voluntary return, or resettlement to a third country?

Background information:

Violent conflicts across the world have led to a growing number of refugees who are forced to flee their home in search of safety. According to the **UNHCR**, **over 100 million people are currently displaced globally**, many living in unstable conditions where they are vulnerable and victims to numerous forms of exploitation. Refugees often face human trafficking, forced labor, sexual abuse, child recruitment, economic exploitation, and more, especially in areas lacking proper legal protection of oversight of human rights.

The exploitation of refugees is deeply connected to the disintegration of governance during conflicts. When states or territories become unstable, armed groups, criminal networks, and even employers take advantage of the refugees' desperation and lack of documentation. Refugee women and children are particularly at risk, often

facing gender-based violence and trafficking. In addition, limited access to education, employment, and asylum deepens their vulnerability and desperation.

Although international forces such as the **1951 Refugee Convention** and its **1967 Protocol**, along with the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** aim to ensure safety for refugees, enforcement remains inconsistent, particularly in conflict zones or countries with limited resources. Humanitarian agencies struggle to provide protection due to restricted access, lack of funding, and political tensions among host and donor countries.

Ultimately, the exploitation of refugees due to conflict remains a complex global challenge that highlights weakness in international protection systems. Addressing this issue requires consistent and willing **collaboration** among governments, international organizations, and civil society to strengthen legal protection and access, **improving humanitarian responses, and promoting long-term solutions that reduce the risks faced by refugees** in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Useful vocabulary:

- *Refugee* - A person who has been forced to flee their country due to war, violence, persecution, or conflict and has crossed an international border seeking for safety.
- *Internally Displaced Person (IDP)* - Someone who has been forced to flee their home for similar reasons as a refugee but has not crossed an international border.
- *Asylum Seeker* - An individual who has left their country and is seeking international protection, but whose refugee status has not yet been determined.
- *Exploitation* - The act of taking unfair advantage of someone, often through forced labor, trafficking, or abuse of power.
- *Human Trafficking* - The illegal trade of humans for the purpose of forced labor, sexual exploitation, or other forms of abuse.
- *Gender-Based Violence (GBV)* - Harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including sexual violence, exploitation, or abuse.
- *Conflict-Induced Displacement* - The forced movement of people as a direct result of armed conflict or violence.

- *Humanitarian Assistance* - Aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and after crises.
- *Host Country* - A nation that receives and provides shelter to refugees and displaced people.
- *Protection Gap* - A situation where refugees' basic rights and safety are not fully ensured by legal or practical measures.
- *Resettlement* - The process of transferring refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and grant permanent residence.
- *Repatriation* - The voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin when conditions are safe and stable.
- *Non-Refoulement* - A key principle of international law that prohibits the return of refugees to a country where they may face danger or persecution.
- *Internally Displaced Camps (IDP Camps)* - Temporary settlements established to house displaced people within their own country.
- *Human Rights Violations* - Acts that breach fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by international law, often occurring during conflict or displacement.

Case studies:

Syrian Refugee Crisis (2011–Present):

Over 13 million Syrians have been displaced due to the civil war. Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey have faced exploitation in informal labour markets and human trafficking networks. The UNHCR and ILO have launched joint initiatives to formalise refugee labour and improve protection mechanisms.

Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh:

Nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar are at risk of trafficking, child labour, and gender-based violence. The UNHCR and UNODC have collaborated with Bangladesh to strengthen camp security and prosecute trafficking networks.

Conflict in Ukraine (2022–Present):

The Russian invasion displaced over 6 million Ukrainians across Europe. While many European nations granted temporary protection status, reports of labour exploitation and trafficking have emerged, especially among women and unaccompanied minors.

Past UN action + Countries:

The United Nations has taken several initiatives to address the exploitation of refugees:

UNHCR Frameworks:

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol remain the cornerstone of international refugee protection, obliging states to protect refugees' rights and prohibit purging. The UNHCR also leads the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), which aims to strengthen international cooperation and ease pressure on host countries.

UNODC Action Against Trafficking:

The UNODC implements the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, particularly targeting human trafficking and forced labour among displaced populations.

HRC Resolutions:

The Human Rights Council has passed several resolutions condemning human trafficking and exploitation in conflict zones, including Resolution 41/10 (2019), which calls for states to ensure refugee protection from exploitation.

Security Council Involvement:

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has recognised the link between conflict, displacement, and trafficking, particularly in resolutions such as Resolution 2388 (2017), urging member states to address trafficking in persons in conflict situations.

United States:

The U.S. supports global anti-trafficking measures through the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and funds international humanitarian programs via USAID and UNHCR. However, its asylum and border control policies have been criticised for creating vulnerabilities among asylum seekers at its southern border.

China:

China has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention but is often criticised for lacking domestic refugee legislation. It primarily cooperates through UNHCR on limited cases, while its border controls with North Korea and Myanmar have raised concerns about forced repatriations.

Russia:

Russia has played a dual role in hosting refugees from neighbouring conflicts like Ukraine and Georgia, while also being accused of fuelling displacement in other areas through military actions. Russia has endorsed anti-trafficking measures at the UN, but often prioritises state sovereignty over humanitarian intervention.

European Union (collectively):

The EU has supported the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to combat gender-based violence among refugees, but has faced criticism for externalising asylum responsibilities to neighbouring states, such as Libya and Turkey.

Sources for delegates:

- [Article: Refugees: Risks and Challenges Worldwide | migrationpolicy.org](#)
- [The Problem of Refugees in The Light of Contemporary International Law Issues](#)
- [Ensuring the Safety of Asylum Seekers - Background Guide](#)
- [Protecting Refugees: questions and answers | UNHCR](#)
- [Frequently-asked Questions - Refugees/Migrants UN](#)
- [Addressing refugee security-UNHRC](#)
- <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4444afcb0.pdf>
- [Global Refugee Forum: UN expert says States must commit to urgent action to prevent trafficking among asylum seekers and refugees | OHCHR](#)
- [Ukraine: Armed conflict and displacement heightens risks of all forms of sexual violence including trafficking in persons, say UN experts | OHCHR](#)
- [The 1951 Refugee Convention | UNHCR](#)
- [Fact Sheet: International Refugee Protection System](#)
- [Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees | OHCHR](#)

Topic 2: The Question of Transgender People Serving in Armed National Forces

Main questions for debate:

- Does allowing transgender individuals to serve compromise military readiness and operational effectiveness due to potential medical needs or physical requirements?
- Are the medical treatments and requirements for transgender service members a distraction from core military functions?
- Are there specific, unavoidable risks associated with transgender service members that negatively impact troop morale or unit cohesion?
- Should an individual's need for medication, such as hormone therapy, medically disqualify them from service, particularly in high-stress environments?
- Is the higher rate of mental health challenges reported in the transgender community an indicator of psychological instability that is incompatible with military service?
- Does the potential for complications from hormone therapy or surgery pose a risk to a service member's deployability or ability to perform duties?
- Is a ban on transgender people serving in the military discriminatory and a violation of their civil rights and equal opportunity to serve their country?
- How does the principle of military service, which has historically been a path for diverse individuals, reconcile with excluding a specific group based on their gender identity?
- Are the arguments against inclusion based on outdated stereotypes or actual, quantifiable risks to the military mission?
- What are the financial costs associated with the medical care transgender service members may require?
- How do these costs compare to the costs of accommodating other existing medical needs within the military?
- Are there alternatives, such as accommodating transgender service members like other personnel with long-term medical needs, that would be more cost-effective and equitable?

Background information:

The inclusions of transgender individuals in national armed forces has become an important topic in discussions about human rights, equality, and military readiness. Transgender people - those whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned to them at birth - have faced struggles to openly serve in the military. In some nations, policies allow full participation regardless of gender identity, while others maintain restrictions due to medical, logistical, and social concerns.

Debate over this issue often centers on questions of fairness, cohesion, and practicality. Supporters of inclusion argue that every individual should have the right to serve their country and that discrimination based on gender identity violates international human rights principles. Opponents sometimes mention concerns about medical costs, operational readiness, or the impact on unit dynamics.

Internationally, there have been many approaches to this issue. Some states have implemented inclusive policies that provide medical and psychological support for transgender service members, while others have limited or prohibited their participation. The issue also intersects with broader discussions on gender equality, mental health, and the modernization of military institutions.

Overall, the question of transgender people serving in armed national forces highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing individual rights with national defense considerations. It requires cooperation among governments, human rights organizations, and defense institutions to ensure that policies are both fair and effective in maintaining the integrity and inclusivity of military service.

Useful vocabulary:

- *Transgender* - A term describing a person whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.
- *Gender Identity* - An individual's deeply felt internal experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- *Gender Expression* - The external presentation of one's gender through appearance, behavior, or mannerisms.
- *Cisgender* - A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- *Transition* - The process by which a transgender person begins to live according to their gender identity; may include social, legal, and/or medical changes.
- *Gender Dysmorphia* - Distress that may occur when a person's gender identity does not align with their assigned sex and body.
- *Military Service Ban* - A policy or regulation that restricts or prohibits individuals from serving in the armed forces based on specific criteria.
- *Inclusion Policy* - A framework ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all individuals within an institution.

- *Equality and Non-Discrimination* - Principles ensuring that individuals are treated fairly regardless of personal characteristics such as gender, race, or sexuality.
- *Medical Readiness* - The condition in which military personnel are physically and mentally prepared to perform their duties.
- *Human Rights Framework* - International standards and laws that protect the basic rights and freedoms of all individuals.
- *Unit Cohesion* - The bond and cooperation among members of a military unit, considered essential for operational effectiveness.
- *Policy Reform* - The process of reviewing and changing existing laws or regulations to adapt to new social or ethical standards.

Case studies:

United States Military Policy Shifts (2016–2021):

The U.S. experienced major policy reversals concerning transgender service. The ban introduced in 2019 sparked international criticism from human rights organisations and was condemned by the UNHRC as a violation of equality principles. Its reversal in 2021 marked a return to inclusive service policies.

United Kingdom Armed Forces:

Since 1999, the UK has allowed transgender individuals to serve openly. The Ministry of Defence provides medical support and anti-bullying protections. Studies found no negative impact on unit cohesion or operational readiness, countering earlier opposition claims.

Russian Federation:

Russia's 2014 and 2020 medical classification codes effectively bar transgender individuals from military service. The state's stance reflects broader policies against LGBTQ+ rights and has drawn criticism from the UN Human Rights Committee for violating international obligations.

Past UN action + Some Countries:

The United Nations does not directly regulate national military recruitment policies but it upholds principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunity through several human rights frameworks

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Establishes equality and the right to work without discrimination.

Yogyakarta Principles (2006, updated 2017):

Provide guidelines on applying international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, including equal access to public services and employment.

UNHRC Resolutions on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity:

Resolutions passed from 2011 and 2016 affirm that all individuals, regardless of gender identity, are entitled to full human rights and protection from discrimination.

UN Expert Statements:

The UN Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity has repeatedly condemned military bans on transgender individuals as discriminatory and contrary to international human rights norms.

United States:

The U.S. has had fluctuating policies. The Obama administration (2016) lifted the ban on transgender military service. In 2019, the Trump administration reinstated restrictions, citing medical and readiness concerns. The ban was reversed again in 2021 under President Biden, restoring full inclusion and access to medical care for transgender service members.

China:

China does not allow openly transgender individuals to serve in its armed forces, citing medical disqualifications. Discussion on gender identity in the military remains minimal due to strict social and political controls.

Russia:

Russia bans transgender individuals from serving, classifying “gender identity disorders” as medical conditions incompatible with military service. This aligns with broader national laws restricting LGBTQ+ rights.

United Kingdom and Canada:

Both countries fully allow transgender individuals to serve openly and provide gender-affirming healthcare. Their militaries have been praised for implementing inclusive training and anti-discrimination policies supported by UN human rights recommendations.

Sources for delegates:

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)
- [A/HRC/50/43 General Assembly](#)
- [Human Rights Watch Country Profiles: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#)
- [HRC | Transgender Military Service](#)
- [ADVANCING THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND INCLUSION OF LGBTI PEOPLE](#)
