



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT YOUTH CONVENTION 2017

# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (HRC)

TOPIC GUIDE





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## ABOUT THE CHAIRS

**ZHANG  
JINGWEN**  
HEAD CHAIR

Jingwen is a friendly Year 6 student who has been repeatedly mistaken as a teacher for some mysterious reason. She can easily lose track of time in reading her favourite novels and writing. She is also a contemporary dancer and movie lover. This is her third time chairing at SDYC and she looks forward to hearing more intriguing speeches and meeting new friends. Jingwen wishes all delegates the best experience at SDYC 2017!

**TANIA  
UDELLA  
DJONGIANTO**  
VICE CHAIR

Tania is a Year 5 student in NUS High. This is her third time at SDYC and her second time as a chair. She has participated as a delegate in local conferences such as Singapore MUN 2016. Tania enjoys reading and is an avid fan of Haruki Murakami's works. She also appreciates a wide variety of music, from Kpop to R&B and hip-hop. In her free time, Tania enjoys going to her MMA gym to practice Muay Thai. She hopes to see interesting and productive debate in HRC and that delegates will step out of their comfort zones, make new friends and have fun.

**DEEPAK  
ALAGU**  
VICE CHAIR

Deepak Alagu is a 16 year old student with a keen interest in geopolitics, world affairs and political discourse. He finds Model United Nations conferences a wonderful platform for delegates from different backgrounds to discuss and debate pressing global issues. He is delighted to be given the opportunity to chair the Human Rights Council, and hopes that all participants will have a fruitful and memorable three days at SDYC 2017.



## COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

Established in 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The UNHRC concerns itself with important human rights issues such as freedom of speech and religion, women's rights, the rights of racial and ethnic minorities, and rights to sanitation, housing and security. One of the Council's most important powers lies in its ability to address specific country situations or thematic issues through a system called 'special procedures'. The Council also utilises the Universal Periodic Review to evaluate the human rights situation in all 193 UN member states. Member states are elected to serve in the UNHRC by the UN General Assembly, and once their terms expire, they are replaced by countries in their regional groups.

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Millions of children worldwide from all socioeconomic backgrounds, ages, races, and religions suffer from exploitation and abuse today. Children are susceptible to exploitation due to their physical vulnerability and credulity. Victims of child exploitation may not recognise that they are being exploited. In cases where they do, the children may fail to receive proper assistance as they are afraid of informing their legal guardians, or know not of existing legal assistance or threats posed by the perpetrators. Child exploitation includes child slavery, sexual exploitation of children, child begging, and employment of children in armed forces.

Trafficking and exploitation of children is an increasing risk to children around the world. Child trafficking is lucrative and often linked with criminal activity and corruption. It is estimated that around 215 million children are forced to engage in child labour today, with 115 million of those children doing hazardous work. <sup>[1]</sup>

Given the large number of victims of child exploitation, the UNHRC has placed significant importance and emphasis on this issue. Violence, exploitation and abuse are practised by parents, other family members, caretakers, teachers, employers, and even law enforcement authorities. Only a small fraction of violent and exploitative acts are reported and investigated, and few perpetrators are held accountable. <sup>[2]</sup> Laws are required to be established to regulate the proper treatments of children, and more importantly, law enforcement should be effective to get rid of child exploitation. A majority of countries already have relevant legislation in place; however, their law enforcement authorities are



either negligent in detecting violations of children's rights, or fail to act accordingly to eradicate the plague of child exploitation. Furthermore, problems such as the trafficking of children and sales of child brides may involve multiple stakeholders across different countries, making negotiations tedious and complicated due to the various parties that need to be dealt with. Therefore, collaborative efforts by all nations around the world are needed to alleviate the severity of the problem.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Child Exploitation

Child exploitation is defined as the act of using a minor child for profit, labour, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage according to the Legal Dictionary. <sup>[3]</sup> Victims of child exploitation are forced to act against their will. Child exploitation is often associated with inhumane treatment of the child, and the acts that the child is forced to partake in may harm the child physically, emotionally, or mentally.

### Child Trafficking

A child has been trafficked if he or she has been moved within a country, or across borders, whether by force or not, with the purpose of exploiting the child according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Trafficking refers to the planned movement of a child with the purpose of exploiting the child. Trafficking may include transaction of payment or benefits from traffickers to guardians, parents or someone the child relies on who agree with the child being trafficked and exploited.

### Forced Child Begging

According to Anti-Slavery International, forced child begging involves forced labour under the menace of penalty for which the child beggar has not offered voluntarily. Child beggars are often victims to drug addiction, physical and psychological trauma.

### Child Refugees

Child refugees (fleeing from mainly Syria or other similarly war-torn countries) made up of more than half of all refugees fleeing war and persecution. As refugees' rights are not recognized and protected by governments and many countries around the world, such as the U.S., have suspended its refugee settlement programme, child refugees often lack basic needs like housing, food and water, making them more vulnerable to various forms of abuse or labour exploitation. <sup>[4]</sup>



## Child Marriage

According to UNICEF, any formal marriage or informal union before the legal age of marriage (or marriage with parental consent in certain countries) is defined as child marriage. Girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage due to the widespread and outdated tradition of buying child brides in many rural regions. Girls who are forced to marry before the legal age of marriage are more likely to suffer from domestic violence and complications during teenage pregnancy and giving birth. Children affected by child marriage are often obligated to marry in order to alleviate poverty and pay debt for their families. Child marriages may lead to deprivation of health, opportunities and education. <sup>[5]</sup>

## Sexual Exploitation of Children

Sexual exploitation of a child is defined as the act of employing, using, persuading, inducing, enticing, or coercing a minor child to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depictions. Actual acts that are considered sexual exploitation of a child include indecent touching or exposure of or to a child, use of sexually explicit language towards a child, involvement of a child in pornography, showing a child pornographic material, early, forced marriage, [rape](#), [incest](#), and sexual slavery. <sup>[6]</sup>



## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Until the late 1800s, when general awareness of the protection of child rights was emphasized, the English Common Law designated children as property owned by their fathers.<sup>[7]</sup> Due to the lack of official organizations and legal support to protect the rights of exploited children, children's suffering and exploitation cases fell to attorneys for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), who argued that laws protecting children should not be fewer than laws protecting animals from abuse and generated enough outrage over child abuse that in 1874, citizens formed the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.<sup>[7]</sup> The American society called for laws to prevent child exploitation, but it was not until 1970s that every state in the U.S. established "mandatory reporting" laws, which required professionals, such as doctors and teachers, to report suspected child exploitation to the relevant authorities.<sup>[7]</sup> Currently, most developed countries have legislation to combat child exploitation in place. Many developing countries, however, have yet to come up with relevant legal support structure to alleviate the plight of children being exploited.

In some religions and cultures, people feel that child marriage is justified as many who suffer from poverty turn to child marriage as a solution to their poverty. In most of these communities, young brides can be used to settle feuds or can be seen as a gift. In addition, dowries for younger brides tend to be cheaper than if they were older. In these communities where women are not seen as a viable source of income, marrying off their young daughters is seen as getting rid of unnecessary financial burden. Some of these societies are also largely patriarchal, where the men do whatever they please to women, including rape and violent abuse. In these societies, women are married early to prevent them from having to suffer sexual assault, as a married woman is seen as another man's property and thus will not be assaulted.

In a bid to protect more children from exploitation, various laws have been drafted by countries to crack down on those who exploit children. For example, the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) drafted by the U.S. in 1938 protects children from being exploited by their employers, while ensuring that they are not employed in jobs that may be detrimental to their mental or physical health.

## KEY QUESTION

How can the UNHRC mitigate child exploitation to ensure the rights of children are upheld?



## KEY ISSUES

### 1. Child Trafficking

Trafficking of children involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation. <sup>[8]</sup> According to the International Labour Organization, it is estimated that more than 1.2 million children fall victim to child trafficking each year. Children from all strata of society regardless of family income level and social status may fall prey to human trafficking. The issue is not only severe in developing countries such as Bangladesh, India, China, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, but also in developed countries such as Canada, the U.S. and Japan.

The Affection Lure refers to exploitation of children by someone they depend on or trust. Exploiters may take advantage of disagreements between children and parents, misfortune experienced by children, such as parents' divorce, neglect, or substance abuse to gain favor of the children and lure them into doing what they dictate. Groups of children can be kidnapped, coerced, or deceived to leave their hometown and brought to another place to carry out work inappropriate for children, such as acting as sex slaves and excessively laborious tasks. In order to circumvent investigation and security checks at the customs, traffickers usually bribe the officials and policemen. Torture of children is prevalent in the child trafficking industry with the purpose of making children submissive to the captors' demands.

Before the U.S. tightened its borders, there was a large influx of illegal immigrants from Mexico into the country. According to U.S. Border Control data, from 1983 to 2006, more than one million migrants were detained, trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. <sup>[9]</sup> Among them were human traffickers and child victims who would later find it considerably difficult to seek legal support in the U.S. due to their nationality and financial status. Cross-border child trafficking is the hardest to tackle given the lack of adequate and effective legislation, and the difficulty in investigation. The combination of structural and economic frailties of Nepal and Bangladesh and their proximity to the Indian border has created a loophole for human traffickers to traffick children into India. Researches by Leeds Metropolitan University have highlighted the non-existence of repatriation procedures between India and Nepal, and the failure to implement the procedures that do exist between India and Bangladesh. Due to these failures, the safe and speedy reunification of children who have been trafficked is impeded. Furthermore, due to the multiple stakeholders involved in cases of cross border child trafficking, the time taken to solve the case is prolonged and the process of investigation involves collaboration among countries and a considerable amount of resources.





Human traffickers have also taken advantage of the European migration crisis to force more children into the sex industry and slavery. In 2016, the EU police agency reported that at least 10,000 unaccompanied children had disappeared from the radar of official agencies since arriving in Europe. 4,700 children had been lost to officials in Germany, while up to ten children a week are reported missing in Sweden. There is considerable difficulty for the authorities to trace the whereabouts of undocumented child refugees under the current refugee system. Child refugees are deemed as cheap and easy to be trafficked by criminals, with trafficked children aged between six months and ten years sold for merely €4,000 (£3,000) to €8,000, although amounts of up to €40,000 have been reported in some cases. Given the challenges of investigation and the prevalence of child refugee trafficking, very few child refugees are rescued by the authorities. In fact, it was reported that there was a 300 per cent increase in the number of Nigerian victims of trafficking in 2013 and 2014. Therefore, delegates need to consider how to reduce the incentives and increase the deterrents for engaging in child refugee trafficking.

## 2. Forced Child Begging

Forced child begging is an extremely severe and pervasive issue arising from poverty, inadequate social support for the poor, and a lack of law enforcement in developing countries such as China, India, Cambodia, Vietnam and Iran, and worsened by ineffective governments. Governments in developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K are actively engaging in eradicating child beggars but the effectiveness of their measures differs.

Children are enslaved by criminal groups or gangs to beg along streets; sometimes, criminal groups will maim and mutilate children to draw the attention of passers-by to their piteous state, with the ultimate objective of receiving alms. In India, approximately 60,000 children are kidnapped and forced to beg by criminal groups according to official statistics in 2011.<sup>[10]</sup> This group of children are extremely vulnerable, given their physical condition and the lack of appropriate legal support for them to live dignified lives. They are usually trafficked from poor rural families and are illiterate, with no means and know-how to seek help with their plight.

Currently, comprehensive data of forced child beggars and social services referral mechanisms to help child beggars are largely unavailable in many countries. Hence, efforts by police and authorities to help child beggars and tackle child exploitation may lack specificity and fail to yield their best results. For instance, efforts by many regimes in Nigeria in their bid to reduce the problem of child beggars have yielded little or no significant impact on improving the lives of children on the street (UNICEF, 2001). This is also largely because measures adopted by Nigerian governments tend to be motivated by politics, inadequately monitored or implemented. Majority of criminal groups have extensive



connections with government officials in developing countries, which pose significant resistance to the eradication of child beggars. <sup>[11]</sup> It is urgent for the United Nations Human Rights Council to provide legal assistance to this group of children and maintain social order and stability.

Nevertheless, in order to carry out thorough investigations and to trace the movements of criminal groups, a large number of police officers need to be deployed. Established criminal groups usually have a highly complex hierarchy of power within their organisations, and the arrests of members at the bottom of this hierarchy bear no significant impact on the criminal groups as a whole. Due to the amount of manpower and resources required, many governments are reluctant to devote precious resources to deal with child begging issues, which are considered long-drawn and unlikely to yield outcomes in the short term.

### 3. Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse, in which children are forced to perform sexual acts on others in exchange for gifts, money or affection, according to the United Kingdom's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. <sup>[12]</sup> Most children in these situations may not have the awareness that they are being exploited. In many cases, their abuser could be someone on whom they depend. As such, unlike most of the other key issues presented here, instances of child sexual exploitation are not easy to detect. Cases of child sexual exploitation have been reported not only in developing countries such as Sri Lanka and Thailand, <sup>[13]</sup> but also in developed countries like the U.S. or UK.

Domestic child sexual exploitation refers to situations in which children being exploited are tricked into believing that they are in a consensual and loving relationship, according to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. <sup>[14]</sup> Since this type of child exploitation is one of the hardest to trace, countries like the UK have put in place various information websites such as those by the National Health Service and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children that provide education to the public on sexual abuse as well as government helplines within easy access to anyone who needs help. Such sites have greatly increased the public awareness of child sexual abuse in the UK, an issue that was unfortunately not widely discussed before. <sup>[15]</sup>

In developing countries where organised crimes are more common, child sexual exploitation commonly occurs in gangs, where it is used as a form of initiation or exertion of power, or when the children are being trafficked for sex. For instance, organised child-sex rings are prevalent in countries like Sri Lanka and Haiti, which manage to conduct large-scale sex trafficking despite government crackdowns. <sup>[16]</sup> In 2007, a group of Haitian orphans helped identify a group of 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers who gave



them food for sex while they were on a peacekeeping mission to Haiti. Eventually, 114 of them were repatriated, but none of them were ever jailed for their crimes.<sup>[17]</sup>

Child sexual exploitation can also occur without physical contact, such as through online means. Young people are forced to send sexually explicit images or videos of themselves, and are blackmailed by the abusers to continue with a provision of these compromising images of them. These images may also be distributed without their permission. Like domestic sexual abuse, this type of abuse is hard to detect due to the anonymity on the Internet.<sup>[12]</sup> In 2015, a man in Sweden was found guilty of hiring men in the Philippines to identify children and sexually assault them while the man watched from Sweden on a livestream. The children in this case were as young as 5 years old.

#### 4. Child Marriage

According to the definition by the United Nations Children's Fund, child marriage, a formal marriage or informal union before age 18, is a reality for both boys and girls, though girls are disproportionately the most affected. Child marriage is more widespread in developing countries such as Bangladesh, some parts of India and Syria, and can lead to a lifetime of suffering and deprivation.<sup>[14]</sup>

In India and Pakistan, girls are married off as early as nine years old, to a boy around the same age as them. This is a common practice to ensure the safety of the girl, as married girls are less likely to suffer from sexual crimes such as rape compared to those who are unmarried. In addition, dowries are cheaper the younger the girl, hence serving a financial purpose. In such marriages, the girl misses out on much of her education and childhood due to her early marriage, as brides in these communities are usually kept at home.<sup>[16]</sup>

In Syria and rural regions of other developing countries, however, it is customary to marry girls to much older men as a form of payment. These marriages end up harming the girl much more than the first type of child marriages mentioned, as these marriages are usually sexually abusive. While many of these girls eventually accept their fate, a few have fought back. A famous example is Nujood Ali, a Yemeni girl who was forced to marry a 30-year-old man at the age of ten, who abused her physically and sexually. She was successful in escaping from her spouse and obtaining a divorce on grounds of abuse, gaining international attention for what she did.<sup>[18]</sup> When she returned home, however, her father rejected her, and the money she received from benefactors every month was taken away by her father to feed his own vices.<sup>[19]</sup> The others who tried to follow in her footsteps also suffered a similar fate. For many who still practice child marriages, they view attempts to stop child marriages as culturally insensitive, resulting in much difficulty for governments to put a halt to the practice in rural areas where tradition dominates.



## 5. Child Slavery

Child slavery is defined as the enforced exploitation of a minor's labour for another party's gain according to Anti-Slavery International, a major non-governmental organization (NGO) that works on human rights issues. The key difference between child labour and child slavery lies in the factor of choice. Till this day, child slavery remains prevalent in our society; children make up an estimated 26% of slaves worldwide (Figure 1).<sup>[20]</sup>

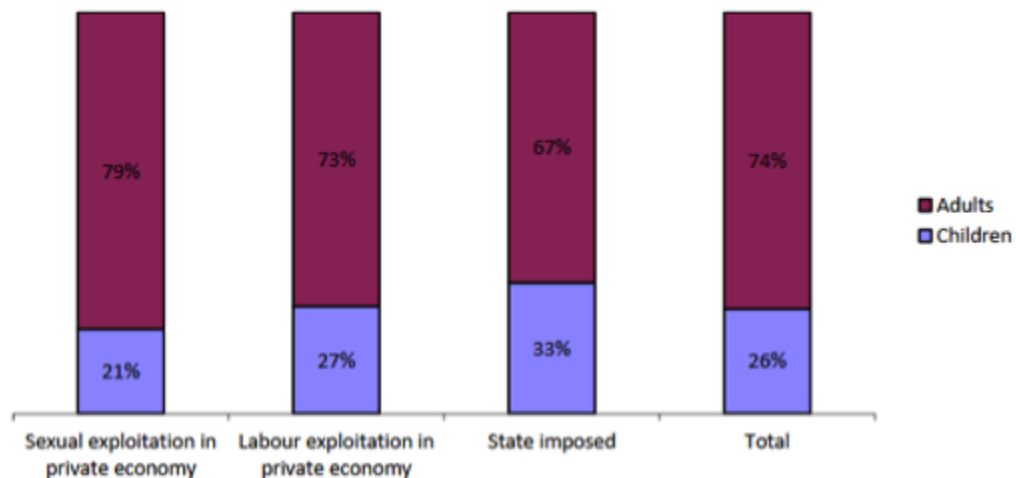


Figure 1. Breakdown of victims of forced labour by age group from the International Labour Organization documentation

One of the most pervasive forms of child slavery is domestic servitude. It is predicted that about 10.5 million children - 62 per cent of whom are between five and fourteen years old - are working as domestic workers in people's homes.<sup>[21]</sup> They are forced to do chores such as cooking, ironing, cleaning, gardening, looking after other children and caring for the elderly. These children are often kept away from the public eye and subjected to physical, psychological and sexual abuse. This occurs all over the globe, even in developed countries. Persecution, however, is challenging as domestic work is poorly regulated and undervalued in many countries.

Another omnipresent type of child slavery is forced labour in mines. Mining is notoriously one of the most arduous and dangerous professions in the world because of the numerous accidents resulting in significant loss of life over the years, as well as the workplace health hazards that miners face. Despite this, the International Labour Organisation estimates that one million children, some as young as three years old, work in subsistence small-scale mining and quarrying in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.<sup>[22]</sup> This qualifies as slavery due to the existence of fear, coercion and complete reliance on the



employer. As a result of the nature of work involved in the mines, these children are at a higher risk of various short- and long-term health complications, including spinal injuries and physical deformities due to the heavy loads they carry. Tackling this problem is difficult as it commonly occurs in frontier communities where traditional societal structures have broken down and lawlessness is rife.

A key form of child slavery that has been brought to light in recent years is the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. According to a 2014 Human Rights Watch report, all the major players in the Syrian civil war - the Syrian government forces, the rebel Free Syrian Army, and extremist Islamist groups like the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra - have been complicit in recruiting and using children under 18 years in combat and in direct support roles. <sup>[23]</sup> Child soldiers are also engaged in combat in various other countries including Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Iraq, Thailand and Yemen. It is believed that there are hundreds of thousands of underage soldiers worldwide forced to bear arms. These children often come from war-torn villages and are taken in by various militant groups for the simple reason that they are young and impressionable, and can be easily manipulated. They undergo training and eventually become so conditioned to war and murder that shooting becomes “just like drinking a glass of water,” in the words of Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier during the Sierra Leone Civil War who was forcibly recruited by a rebel group. <sup>[24]</sup> The United Nations has signed several “action plans” with governments including Myanmar, Somalia and Chad to rid their armies of minors. <sup>[25]</sup> There is, however, definitely more work to be done, as evidenced by the large number of child soldiers present today. Delegates have to consider how to deal with rebel groups and government forces in various conflicts that persistently continue to recruit child soldiers.



## PAST INITIATIVES

The United Nations has set up international treaties to counter child exploitation, such as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959, which explicitly states that “a child is entitled to a name and nationality; to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation, and medical services; to an education; and, for the handicapped, to “special treatment, education and care.” Any “neglect, cruelty and exploitation, trafficking, underage labour, and discrimination” to children are prohibited under the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. As the first international consensus on the proper treatments of children, it outlined fundamental tenets of children’s rights for countries to follow. It is a historic document that first acknowledged the rights of children and confirmed adults’ obligation to care for children. <sup>[26]</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a human rights treaty established in 1989. It not only lays out children’s rights during peacetime, but also includes the standard for treatment of children during armed conflicts. Among the 195 sovereign and independent states represented by the United Nations, 192 member nations were signatory states of the convention. However, there are three countries, including the U.S., that are not bound by this convention up till today. CRC was the first legally binding international convention to affirm and protect children’s rights. The treaty has prompted changes in regulations and laws to protect children better, revolutionized the way international organizations deem their work for children, and devised methods to ensure children’s rights are upheld in times of armed conflict. <sup>[27]</sup>

The optional protocols to the CRC on Sex Trafficking and Armed Conflicts were adopted in 2000.<sup>[28]</sup> These two protocols addressed issues such as child sexual exploitation, illegalized child pornography, and prohibiting the enlistment or participation of children under 15 years in armed conflicts. Violations of the protocol on armed conflicts, however, is rampant in war-torn regions, such as Iraq and Syria. As a result, in 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a third Optional Protocol on a communication procedure, which empowered children to bring forward complaints regarding the violations of their human rights under the CRC and the two Optional Protocols. <sup>[29]</sup>

The Minimum Age Convention was set up in 1973 to regulate the minimum age of legal labour and reduce child labour around the world.<sup>[30]</sup> The Convention outlaws child labour in hazardous industries, child slavery and sexual exploitation of children. The article calls on governments to take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, and especially to provide for a minimum age of employment, appropriate regulation of work hours and conditions of employment, and



appropriate sanctions to ensure enforcement of the article.<sup>[31]</sup> Once ratified by a country, the country must implement the Convention into national legislations and labour market regulations.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted by the organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1990 and was the first regional treaty on children's rights. It prohibits children's participation in any hazardous work and protects children against all forms of exploitation and abuse. It also noted that to ensure spiritual health for all children, special care should be given to handicapped children given their vulnerable conditions.<sup>[30]</sup> The ACRWC and the CRC are the regional and international children's rights treatises which cover the broadest areas, ranging from political, civil, and economic rights, to cultural and social rights.

## LINKS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In late 2015, the United Nations established a set of Sustainable Development Goals<sup>[32]</sup> to ensure that countries can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Of the 17 Global Goals, the most relevant ones with regards to the issue of child exploitation are "No Poverty", "Good Health and Well-being" as well as "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions".

Poverty is an undeniably an underlying causative factor of child exploitation. Many exploitation cases occur in impoverished regions, for example, child labourers are overwhelmingly present in poorer nations.<sup>[33]</sup> In fact, poverty has been identified by the UNHRC as a root cause of child labour and sexual exploitation.<sup>[34]</sup> Therefore, tackling poverty and promoting equality will reduce the number of child exploitation cases significantly.

The Council's main objective during the committee sessions is to ensure that children's safety and well-being are not compromised due to various forms of child exploitation such as child trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation. For this aim to be achieved, sufficient laws and regulations need to be in place with adequate enforcement by the relevant authorities so that justice is meted out to those who exploit children, and would-be perpetrators are deterred. However, developing countries and remote areas generally lack the resources to effectively implement and enforce child protection laws.



## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

### China

The situation of child exploitation in China differs across different regions and is most widespread in rural areas. A large proportion of child exploitation cases occur in sweatshops and factories owned by large corporations.<sup>[35]</sup> Chinese law prohibits the use of child labour but allows for the employment of children under special circumstances, or if their “occupational training” and “educational labour” do not adversely impact their safety and health. In fact, the Ministry of Education recommends that schools in poverty-stricken regions organise revenue-generating “Work and Study” programmes to compensate for budget shortfalls. There is, however, widespread abuse of the system by schools and employers as a result of vague regulations and supervision. There are many documented instances of children working in abusive conditions and facing long working hours, hazardous work environments, etc. which has led to calls by Human Rights Watch to put an end to such programmes.<sup>[36]</sup>

Child marriages are also on the rise in rural China. Although the legal age for marriage is 22 for men and 20 for women, there is no specific punishment for couples who tie the knot earlier. As a result of the previous one-child policy and the traditional preference for sons to daughters, there exists a massive gender imbalance in China, with 33.6 million more men than women. This prompts males to marry early to eliminate the possibility of staying single for life.<sup>[37]</sup>

### India

India is believed to have one of the highest number of child labourers in the world. Child labour has shot up sharply in urban India as falling agricultural returns, landlessness and scant work opportunities impel rural families to migrate to cities. Urban child labourers now make up 2.9 per cent of the child population, up from 2.1 per cent just a decade ago. It is notable that this data excludes children who work in the unorganised sector e.g. as domestic workers, agricultural workers, etc. to assist their families.<sup>[38]</sup>

Child trafficking is another major issue in India. The trafficking is largely domestic in nature, and involves children from poor, rural regions being sold into work in cities, typically as domestic helpers to serve wealthy families. Child trafficking is deeply engrained in poor states like Chhattisgarh, where more than 10,000 children were registered as missing between 2011 and 2013. Factors that contribute to the trafficking include widespread poverty and the lack of adequate law enforcement.<sup>[39]</sup>





## Cambodia

Cambodia's rapid development and urbanisation have fuelled an increase in child labour and slavery, notably in the construction industry. Cambodian law prohibits any child under 18 years of age from engaging in hazardous labour. Employers can hire children as young as 15, but only to perform "light work" that does not harm their health or mental and physical development. The practice of child labour, however, is generally supported and encouraged by parents to supplement household incomes.<sup>[40]</sup>

## Vietnam

Child exploitation, specifically forced labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking, is rampant in Vietnam. Child labourers, who make up close to ten per cent of the child population, generally work long hours with minimal pay in factories or on farms. Child traffickers often target rural villages, where they offer to take children to cities in order to give them vocational training. These children eventually end up as slaves.<sup>[41]</sup> Sexual exploitation of children is also common in Vietnam, and most children enter prostitution due to coercion and deception. There exists a high demand for child prostitution services by Vietnamese and foreigners from different backgrounds, fuelling the child sex tourism industry.<sup>[42]</sup>

## Iran

Child exploitation is prevalent in Iran, a country often criticized for its human rights violations. As many as 22 per cent of children under the age of 18 do not attend school, and about half of these children are believed to be engaged in child labour and slavery.<sup>[43]</sup> Although Iran prohibits any child under the age of 15 from working, domestic work is excluded, giving rise to the employment of children at home or in domestic workshops without any legal repercussions.<sup>[44]</sup> In addition, children are subjected to capital punishment for serious crimes such as murder. The majority of those on death row were sentenced in trials that did not meet internationally accepted standards, and allegedly experienced abuse while detained in prison.<sup>[45]</sup> Other key issues in Iran include child trafficking and marriage.

## United States of America

Although the United States is a developed country, child exploitation remains a serious and pervasive issue. The United States is the largest producer and consumer of child pornography content in the world. Furthermore, child trafficking is a major problem in the country, and a large proportion of these cases involves sex trafficking. An estimated 100,000 to 300,000 children are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation in the United States.<sup>[46]</sup>



## North Korea

Child exploitation is rife in North Korea, and the nation has drawn international criticism for its egregious children's rights abuses. The ruling Workers' Party of Korea and other government agencies require children to take part in forced labour on behalf of the State. For instance, children are made to work long hours with no remuneration in paramilitary forced labour brigades, also known as *dolgyeokdae* in Korean.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Russian Federation

Various forms of child exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation, are widespread in Russia. Children are pictured in pornographic publications, work as prostitutes and are trafficked to other countries, often in the Middle East. A large number of these individuals come from families at risk, namely families that are in poverty or that have members who experience alcohol and drug addiction. Child prostitution is most common in St. Petersburg and northwestern Russia, regions that report a high incidence of sex tourism.<sup>[48]</sup>

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. How can countries collaborate on tackling the issue of child trafficking between borders?
2. How can countries increase the effectiveness of the enforcement of child protection laws?
3. How can countries work together to target the root causes of child exploitation?
4. How should possible solutions be framed so as to produce maximum impact while taking into account socio-economic limitations and sovereignty concerns?
5. How entrenched should NGOs be in combating the issue of child exploitation?



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