IMUN 2026 Research Report

HRC Issue #2: The question of legal status and protection for trafficked persons across borders.

An estimated 27.6 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking ("Human Trafficking"). According to the Palermo Protocol, the definition of human trafficking is "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion… for the purpose of exploitation. Victims of human trafficking could be forced to do manual labor or sexual activities ("Human Trafficking"). Moreover, while human trafficking can occur nationally, international trafficking is also prevalent. The majority of cross-border trafficking occurs through official channels. For example, 79% of victims cross official border control checkpoints ("Trafficking journeys"). Traffickers frequently exploit official channels through document fraud, deception, or severe coercion, making victim detection exceptionally difficult for border authorities. The legal status of these persons is also in question and varies widely across Member States.

Debate should center around the legal status of people who illegally cross international borders while engaging in human trafficking. This includes evaluating whether they should face penalties for their irregular entry, face deportation to their country of origin, or, conversely, receive legal status or citizenship options in their host country due to the hardships they have endured. Because many victims cross borders through legal methods, debate should also include what should be done to prevent this, e.g., increased security measures or policy changes. Each country should keep in mind its historical precedents and the prevailing public opinion on illegal migrants.

Over 40% of all trafficking victims are forced to cross borders ("Global Report"). Trafficked individuals do not only suffer through forced labor, personal liberty restrictions, and violations of bodily autonomy, but may also be deemed criminals themselves due to the illegal crossing of borders, even against their own will. Afghanistan, Eritrea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Myanmar, and Yemen are among the countries that struggle most with human trafficking ("Countries with"). To help prevent this, Member States should raise awareness and increase research, among other more active strategies ("What we do"). For example, many countries have human trafficking hotlines in which, at any time or place, victims can reach help. This has been especially useful in Canada, where the hotline has helped identify over 1500 cases of human trafficking ("10 Initiatives"). The legal status of trafficked persons needs to be decided. Delegates should research using a variety of sources. For general information, the UN has several helpful articles and previous resolutions. Delegation-specific research should also be conducted. Research your delegation's previous stance and actions regarding border security and trafficking regulations, and their general opinion on illegal migrants.

Works Cited

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