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CTC: Topic #1 - Terrorist Exploitation of Children

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The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) released a new Trends Alert in October 2025 about the accelerating rate of child exploitation by terrorist groups worldwide. Terrorist networks have evolved their systems for targeting children by combining traditional physical methods with increasingly advanced digital strategies. This creates recruitment frameworks that abuse various vulnerabilities simultaneously. It also poses an even greater challenge for Member States to protect children from the physical and psychological harm caused by such activities.

Thousands of children worldwide face exploitation from terrorist groups, with their experiences varying depending on their roles within the group. They face mental and physical abuse, including torture and sexual violence, the latter most frequently experienced by girls.¹ Children are forced into roles such as fighters, suicide bombers, informants, and at times forced into physically taxing supporting roles such as cooking, cleaning, and carrying supplies—all experiences regularly underlined by violence. The number of grave violations against children in armed conflict worldwide has reached unparalleled levels, with 41,370 grave violations against 22,495 children in 2024; this is the highest number since the United Nations delegation on children and armed conflict began 30 years ago.² The 2024 numbers represent a 25% increase from the already record-breaking number in 2023 of 32,990 recorded violations against 22,557 children.³ The Trends Alert attributes these increasing numbers to the new elaborate online recruitment strategies currently being developed by terrorist groups.

In terms of online recruitment strategies, terrorist groups utilize “funnel strategies” online. This method guides children from mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to encrypted messaging apps like Telegram and Signal, whose end-to-end encryption (E2EE) and lax content moderation policies make these apps attractive for secure

¹https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/trends_alert_-_children_youth_exploitation_-_2025.pdf

²https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/trends_alert_-_children_youth_exploitation_-_2025.pdf

³ UN News, “‘We are at a point of no return’: Grave violations against children surge for third year”, 20 June 2025. Available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164646>.

communication. This then allows the terrorists to facilitate the dissemination of propaganda, recruitment, fundraising, and operational planning. Terrorist groups also take advantage of gaming platforms such as Discord, Steam and Roblox — all frequently utilized by young people to form social connections. These groups have developed gender-differentiated strategies, which target boys with “masculine crisis narratives” and girls with conversations surrounding family roles and religion.⁴ Meanwhile, traditional offline methods of exploitation also continue. Human trafficking and kidnapping persist in conflict zones, in which groups like Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram abduct children as young as three years old and regularly kidnap schoolchildren in Nigeria, respectively.⁵ Furthermore, terrorists abuse government gaps (instances where the government fails to provide in areas they are responsible for) by providing essential services and building a dependency relationship with helpless civilians, creating a gateway for more exploitation.

Member States face a complex situation in which terrorist groups are adapting their recruitment strategies within weeks, while States require months and often even years to develop protective policies. The lack of specialized juvenile justice systems for terrorism cases also poses an important issue, as children are often processed through adult courts and receive severe penalties and inappropriate detention.⁶ The children who experience exploitation by terrorist organizations require specialized trauma treatment, educational, emotional, and long-term support — all resources that most countries in terrorism hot-spots lack.

For this topic, you are required to develop protective policies that will safeguard children from terrorist exploitation, as well as propose solutions to stop the evolving terrorist methodology to exploit children through both digital and physical recruitment and exploitation strategies. You should also aim to come up with ways to improve the treatment of children post exploitation by establishing a better juvenile justice system for terrorism cases and finding ways to provide children with trauma treatment and necessary resources for their reintegration into society. Some key questions to keep in mind throughout your research are:

⁴<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/terrorist-exploitation-children-rapidly-evolving-outpacing-member-state-responses>

⁵https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/trends_alert_-_children_youth_exploitation_-_2025.pdf,

⁶<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/terrorist-exploitation-children-rapidly-evolving-outpacing-member-state-responses>

- What is your country's position regarding the terrorist exploitation of children? Does your country struggle with terrorist organizations? Have they enacted any policies to aid in this issue?
- What are some ways Member States could battle the traditional physical methods of terrorist child recruitment? What about the more recent online recruitment strategies?
- How could juvenile justice systems be improved when treating terrorism cases? What is the justice system like now and in which areas of it can be improved?
- What are some policies that would help countries have enough/appropriate resources to aid children who survive terrorist exploitation reintegrate into society successfully?
- How does terrorism emerge in the first place? Is there a particular kind of environment that fosters terrorist ideologies? What could we do to help eradicate terrorism as a whole?

Remember you are representing your assigned country's position and not your own. Utilize reliable sources in your research, properly cite them, and keep in mind that plagiarism and the use of AI will not be tolerated. All position papers will be submitted through Turnitin.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns by contacting me at mgutier1@mail.yu.edu. I look forward to reading your work and hearing your ideas and proposals at the conference. Remember to have fun researching and good luck!

All the best,

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