

# REPORT: THE INTERACTIVE SIMULATION MODEL ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS



Vienna, November 13–14 — Over two cold rainy days in Vienna, 25 young people from across Europe entered the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) building for the first time to take part in a high-level policy simulation on human trafficking.

The event, titled “Human Trafficking in Conflict Contexts: An Interactive Simulation,” was organized by a taskforce of the European Student Think Tank and brought together emerging policy professionals and students, with the aim to deepen participants’ understanding of the complexities of human trafficking in conflict settings.

Several participants explained that *the topic was quite new to them*:

*"I had taken courses on migration, but human trafficking was always treated very superficially, not in depth. I didn't realize the problem was so huge and so deep. This experience completely changed my perspective."*

Others emphasized how the design of the event, combining expert input, case-based analysis and a full simulation, allowed them to develop a comprehensive understanding of human trafficking as a systemic phenomenon. Other participants underlined the immersive nature of the training:

*"The way we were trained was very involving. I will definitely leave this event with a lot of knowledge that I will implement in the future."*

Participants emphasized how the simulation exposed the blurred lines between complicity and participation, particularly regarding private companies and influential non-state actors:

*"It was striking to see how even private entities may be involved, not always actively, sometimes just through complicity. The exercise showed me how multilayered the network of trafficking and anti-trafficking really is."*

Prior to the event, participants received a pre-event information package that included definitions of human trafficking and specific guidelines for the role-play exercise scheduled on the second day:

- [Click here to see the pre-event package](#)
- [Click here to see the simulation scenario](#)
- [Click here to see the simulation instructions](#)

## DAY 1

The first day opened with a high-level panel discussion featuring distinguished speakers including Ilias Chatzis, Ilias Chatzis, Chief, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section and Officer in Charge (a.i.), Organized Crime Branch, UNODC; Billy Batware, Programme Officer at the UNODC Civil Society Unit; Nicoleta Muntean, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Investigator (OHCHR) and Human Rights Professional, and Anastasiia Todoruk, CEO of International Community NGO.





**Elizaveta Barabanova, EST President, introducing the speakers of the Opening Panel, Day 1**

The panel emphasized that the reality of human trafficking is far from black and white. Participants learned how individuals can see their lives irreparably damaged by something as simple as responding to a false job advertisement, even within Europe. They were encouraged to recognize how victims may not only be exploited but may at times be forcibly turned into perpetrators themselves. Above all, the panelists stressed the need for humanity, sensitivity and dignity when dealing with cases of human trafficking. The speakers underlined the importance of empowering survivors and sharing knowledge within communities to build resilience and improve the capacity to identify potential trafficking risks. Participants were reminded that “it takes a network to defeat a network”. The message strongly resonated with the young audience, who were encouraged to see themselves as protagonists capable of driving meaningful change. Following the panel, participants were divided into smaller groups of 5 to 6 people and engaged in an analytical exercise based on real-life case studies. These cases, developed by the EST team, focused on trafficking situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine and on the border between Thailand and Malaysia. Each scenario was selected for its distinct characteristics and the specific insights it could provide.

The DRC case highlighted a context that remains relatively underrepresented in public discourse and allowed participants to explore the complex interplay of multiple actors and overlapping interests. The conflict context was outlined, explaining how armed

groups such as M23 compete for mineral-rich territories vital to modern technologies. The trafficking chain was described, tracing the process from recruitment to exploitation, emphasizing how conflict minerals enter global supply chains and how the war has reshaped these networks. For this scenario, participants were asked to produce a stakeholder mapping exercise that served as the basis for their recommendations.

[Click here to see the DRC Case study](#)



**Chiara Todesco, EST Head of Working Group on Migration, briefing participants on the DRC Case study, Day 1**

The first group developed a multi-stakeholder map representing all the national, international, private and public actors that have interests in the conflict. Interestingly, they noted how important stakeholders have not been involved in ceasefire negotiations, suggesting that their involvement is essential to promote long-lasting peacebuilding. Furthermore, they recommended raising awareness and accountability of the private sector about the modern slavery related to the mining industry.

[Click here to see Group 2 output](#)

The second group developed a multi-stakeholder matrix along the influence and interest dimensions. Their recommendations focused on legal enforcement and advocacy. They suggested implementing mobile courts to ensure legal enforcement in remote areas, and engaging with survivors to raise awareness in the local communities.



[Click here to see Group 6 output](#)

## The Ukraine Case Study

The Ukraine case enabled participants to explore how conflict can exacerbate vulnerabilities and trafficking risks, particularly for women.

[Click here to see the Ukraine Case study.](#)

Participants produced two distinct but complementary analytical outputs for the Ukraine case, each reflecting a different institutional lens and resulting in a diverse set of policy proposals.



### **Róisín Keenan, EST Head of Gender Equality Working Group briefing participants on the Ukraine case study, Day 1**

One group developed a drivers-and-vulnerabilities matrix that linked discrimination, displacement, poverty, weak institutions, porous borders and digital infrastructure to personal, situational and circumstantial risks, and paired this with prevention strategies focused on digital literacy, cyber-security, cross-border cooperation and safe reporting mechanisms.

[Click here to see Group 3 output](#)

The second group mapped Ukraine's existing anti-trafficking architecture (state programmes, community networks, IO support and neighbouring-country mechanisms) and identified gaps in survivor-centred services, information access, tracking systems and financial oversight.

[Click here to see Group 4 output](#)

Together, their recommendations emphasised the importance of empowering survivors through expanded legal and psychological assistance, improved reintegration pathways; the development of awareness campaigns; greater cybercrime-unit capacity; and stronger cooperation with UNODC, IOM, tech companies and regional partners. Their combined output demonstrated a capacity to integrate frontline survivor needs with broader structural prevention and governance reforms.

### **The Thailand-Malaysia Corridor Case Study**

The Thailand-Malaysia border case provided a lens into the vulnerabilities created by precarious migration patterns. Here, participants worked to develop a mind map or system map to structure their understanding of the multifaceted situation and inform their proposed solutions.

[Click here to see the Thailand-Malaysia Corridor Case Study](#)



## Participants working on the analysis of the Thailand–Malaysia Border Case study, Day 1

Participants produced two complementary analytical outputs for the Thailand–Malaysia corridor, each combining a detailed mind map with a focused policy briefing note. The mind maps visualised the structural drivers of trafficking in the region, including decades of discrimination, chronic underdevelopment, forced migration, corruption, restrictive migration laws, weak enforcement, and high demand for cheap labour, additionally mapping how these factors interact across political, economic, cultural and geographical dimensions.

[Click here to see Group 1 output](#)

The accompanying briefing notes expanded this analysis into concrete policy proposals, including legal harmonisation across ASEAN countries, anti-corruption oversight, non-refoulement safeguards, streamlined immigration procedures, ethical recruitment channels, joint cross-border investigations, digital-platform monitoring, community-based prevention, and stronger rehabilitation systems for victims.

[Click here to see Group 5 output](#)

## DAY 2

On the Second Day, the young participants engaged in the simulation roundtable, where they assumed the role of a state or non-state actor (e.g., representatives from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Multinational companies, National government authorities, Civil society organisations, Regional and international coordination organisations, and Ex-combatants), to propose solutions to human trafficking-related issues. This simulation was designed to enhance participants' analytical, communication, problem-solving, and public speaking skills. To ensure a comprehensive and balanced representation, all participants were reshuffled and divided into six different groups according to the actor they were required to represent.

Prior to the activity, all groups received a detailed description of a fictional armed conflict, along with their respective role sheets and comprehensive instructions. The simulation exercise consisted of two parts. In the morning, participants discussed the unique perspective of their group concerning human trafficking in the fictional context of the armed conflict in the Republic of Suvira. Each group had to negotiate with other actors to learn other stakeholders' perspectives and concerns, and shape their policy briefs.





### **Groups negotiating within the framework of the simulation exercise, Day 2**

After the lunch break, participants dedicated time to a comprehensive review of all views and ideas that had been discussed within their respective groups and during group negotiations. Participants were required to develop ten-minute presentations of their policy briefs. Following each presentation, participants could address questions from fellow groups and respond to feedback.

The UNODC Trafficking & Cybercrime Accountability Unit (Group 1) recommended rebuilding the legal, digital, and institutional architecture through specialised cybercrime units, joint investigative mechanisms, survivor-centred restitution schemes, and improved data systems.

[Click here to see Group 1 output](#)

Multinational Companies (Group 2) focused on supply-chain accountability, proposing stronger due-diligence procedures, third-party audits, improved traceability, anti-fraud safeguards in recruitment, and a multi-stakeholder task force for long-term oversight.

[Click here to see Group 2 output](#)

National Government Authorities (Group 3) emphasised ending the conflict, combating corruption, strengthening labour protections, expanding cybercrime and internal-security



capacities, improving public awareness, and reinforcing regional partnerships for training and data-sharing.

[Click here to see Group 3 output](#)

Regional and International Coordination Organisations (Group 4) called for trust-building, mediation, cross-border cooperation, sustainable NGO funding, enhanced law-enforcement proficiency, and the creation of a digital alert system to detect trafficking risks.

[Click here to see Group 4 output](#)

Civil Society Groups (Group 5) portrayed trafficking as an embedded feature of the conflict economy, highlighting gaps in survivor protection, accountability failures by powerful actors, unsafe digital environments, and short-term donor funding cycles. They proposed enforceable corporate accountability, survivor-centred reporting protocols, and strengthened operational partnerships with local actors and organisations such as INTERPOL.

[Click here to see Group 5 output](#)

Finally, Ex-Combatants (Group 6) developed a comprehensive package centred on protection, prevention, and reintegration, including reforms to DDR systems, digital-skills training, a train-the-trainer model, community-driven rehabilitation, and structured dialogue circles aimed at rebuilding social cohesion.

[Click here to see Group 6 output](#)

Taken together, these outputs demonstrated participants' ability to articulate actor-specific strategies while recognising the interdependencies required for an effective, multi-level anti-trafficking response in a conflict environment.

## Concluding wrap-up session

During the wrap-up session, the young professionals emphasized how the event challenged widespread misconceptions:

*"The panelists showed how we often imagine trafficking as a girl abducted from a remote village and forced into exploitation. But in reality, it's much more complex and requires targeted, multi-actor policies."*

Participants also reflected extensively on the **power dynamics** embedded in efforts to combat human trafficking:

*"Civil society often really wants to act but has very limited power. It was frustrating in the simulation to see that even when you want to do something, your hands are tied, especially when facing big multinational corporations."*

Another participant added a broader societal reflection:

*"We should also reflect on our own consumption patterns. They help create the environment in which human trafficking and modern slavery persist. We all have a personal responsibility."*

The simulation also illuminated the complexity of policymaking and negotiation across institutions:

*"I often didn't think about how many different groups stand behind policymaking. It was very interesting to interact with different stakeholders and understand their points of view, even contradictory ones, and then still produce a common policy brief."*

Many highlighted how much they valued gaining a realistic sense of the work behind international coordination, conflict-related vulnerabilities, and multilevel policy responses:

*"This gave me a new perspective that I will take into my studies and my future professional path."*

The two-day simulation demonstrated the vital role young people can play in addressing complex and sensitive issues such as human trafficking, bringing fresh perspectives and informed debate to the table. We are proud of the high level of engagement and professionalism shown by all participants and we look forward to welcoming the voices of talented young people across Europe through the upcoming initiatives of the European Student Think Tank, including the newly established **Organized Crime Prevention Desk**, which will build directly on the insights generated during this pilot simulation.



