

Concept Note

Community Resilience against the Recruitment of Children

**Community and education responses to online recruitment
by organized criminal groups, in support of article 31 of the Convention**

Hosted by



HWPL

Co-hosted by



Mali • National Union of Nigerian Students in Austria • Universal Peace Federation • International Peace Youth Group

Further Member States, United Nations entities and civil society partners are being invited.

The final list appears in the official COP13 programme of side events.

Theme	Community Resilience against the Recruitment of Children
Objective	Exchange operational experience between Member States, UNODC and civil society on preventing the recruitment of children; identify cooperation that complements existing UNODC prevention work.
Focus	Community and education-based implementation of article 31 of the Convention, under agenda item 3: new forms and dimensions of transnational organized crime.
Format	Multi-stakeholder dialogue (Member States, UNODC, civil society), 50 minutes, hybrid, in English
Date & Time	Within the thirteenth session, 19-23 October 2026. The slot is allocated by the Secretariat and confirmed in the official programme
Venue	Vienna International Centre (VIC), UNODC, Vienna. Room assigned by the Secretariat
Host	HWPL (Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light)
Co-Organizers	Mali • National Union of Nigerian Students in Austria (NUNSA) • Universal Peace Federation (UPF) • International Peace Youth Group (IPYG). Further invitations to Member States, United Nations entities and civil society partners are in progress

I. Background

Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light

HWPL is a non-governmental organization registered with the UN Department of Global Communications, holding ECOSOC special consultative status since 2017. Since 2013 it has implemented long-term grassroots initiatives across 170 countries, including Peace Education Programmes, Interfaith Harmony initiatives, and Youth and Women Empowerment programmes. It currently runs Peace Education and Conflict Prevention Programmes in 1,012 educational institutions in 112 countries.

At the heart of this work is early intervention: equipping young people with identity, belonging and civic purpose before vulnerabilities take hold, so that they are not drawn into criminal networks, drug abuse and cycles of violence.

Why this side event

Organized criminal groups now recruit children through the same online platforms those children use for school and for friendship. Europol reports that minors are involved in over 70 per cent of criminal markets in the European Union, typically aged 13 to 17, recruited through encrypted applications, gamified tasks and coded language. The European Parliamentary Research Service records recruitment of children as young as twelve, correlated with socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and UNODC's *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024* identifies forced criminality as a growing form of exploitation. In resolution 2024/11, adopted by consensus, the Economic and Social Council recorded its deep concern at these risks and called upon Member States to counter them.

The Convention already provides the framework for a response that reaches beyond enforcement. What remains under-examined is the operational layer: who, in practice, reaches a child before a recruiter does. This side event puts that question to Member States, UNODC and practitioners together.

"States Parties shall, as appropriate, collaborate with each other and relevant international and regional organizations in promoting and developing the measures referred to in this article. This includes participation in international projects aimed at the prevention of transnational organized crime, for example by alleviating the circumstances that render socially marginalized groups vulnerable to the action of transnational organized crime."

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, article 31, paragraph 7

II. Opening Segment

Presenter: HWPL, as host organization

The session opens with brief welcoming remarks from HWPL, framing the single question it exists to answer. At the thirty-fifth session of the Commission, the Director of Tanzania's National Prosecutions Service told a full room that crime prevention and law enforcement cannot live in isolation, and that society must be engaged. This session takes that proposition as its starting point and asks what engaging society actually requires.

III. The Evidence

How recruitment works now

This segment establishes the empirical foundation of the session, drawing on UNODC and Europol data rather than on the experience of any single organization: the scale of children's involvement in organized criminal markets, the mechanics by which recruitment now takes place online, and the risk and protective factors identified in the evidence base.

Drivers addressed in this session: weak family, school and community bonds • social exclusion and lack of equal opportunity • the absence of a positive sense of identity and belonging • normalization of harmful behaviour online • the deliberate targeting of children because of their reduced criminal liability

The UNODC and WHO *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention* supply the framework this session applies: protective factors buffer the influence of risk, and effective prevention is person-centred, working through families, schools and communities, and prioritizing those who are most marginalized. The same framework underpins UNODC's own youth programming, including Line Up Live Up and Education for Justice.

IV. Member State Perspectives

National experience and existing commitments

This is the substantive core of the session and the largest share of its time: three Member States from three different contexts, seven minutes each, on national experience of preventing the recruitment and exploitation of children by organized criminal groups, and on the commitments recorded in Economic and Social Council resolution 2024/11.

One co-host delegation has confirmed and will speak on the drivers that expose young people to recruitment by armed and criminal groups. Two further delegations are being invited on three criteria, and expressions of interest are welcome from any Member State that recognizes its own priorities in them:

- **Sponsors of resolution 2024/11.** Eighteen Member States sponsored that text and the Council adopted it without a vote; delegations that helped write it are invited to speak to their own commitment.
- **Three national perspectives.** Three Member States, so the discussion is not drawn from a single context, balanced in geography and gender.
- **Operational experience.** Preference for a national measure actually in place, such as a school-based programme, a community policing partnership or an inter-ministerial mechanism, over policy in the abstract.

Delegations unable to attend in person are welcome to contribute remotely, as one co-host did at the Commission in June.

V. Prevention Approach

What reaches a child first

No external programme can reach every child at risk, but every child at risk is already in contact with adults (teachers, coaches, youth workers, faith and community leaders) who can be equipped to recognize and interrupt recruitment. Rather than adding programmes, the approach expands the capability of the people already in a child's life. Three levels are presented, in ascending order of durability:

- **Equipping the adults who are already there.** Structured training for educators and community leaders in recognizing early indicators, opening a conversation with a child at risk, and knowing where to refer. This is the layer that scales, because it does not depend on an external organization staying.
- **Giving young people a role rather than a warning.** Peer-led civic, sporting and cultural activity that supplies the belonging, identity and purpose recruitment also offers, and keeps young people visible to supportive adults rather than to recruiters.
- **Securing institutional ownership.** Agreements with education ministries, municipal authorities and law-enforcement counterparts, so that prevention survives a change of staff, of funding or of government.

Indicative programme

Segment	Content
Opening	Welcome and framing, by HWPL as moderator
Evidence	How recruitment works now: scale, online mechanics, risk and protective factors
Member States	Three delegations, on national experience and on the commitments recorded in resolution 2024/11
Prevention approach	What communities and schools do: a three-level approach to prevention (HWPL)
Youth voice	A youth practitioner's perspective on peer-level prevention
Discussion	Exchange with the floor
Close	One ask, one offer

Segments in order, with time allocated within the 50 minutes once the slot and the speakers are confirmed. The organizers are committed to gender-balanced and geographically balanced participation, and invite participants to flag accessibility requirements in advance.

VI. Expected Outcomes

- **Outcome 1.** Current evidence on the online recruitment of children, and on what community and education-based prevention achieves alongside law enforcement, is exchanged between Member States, UNODC and practitioners, in support of article 31 of the Convention and article 9 of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol.
- **Outcome 2.** The multiplier role of educators, community leaders and youth workers is set out, and the points identified where civil society field experience complements UNODC's existing prevention work: Line Up Live Up, Education for Justice, and the UNODC-UNESCO work on a culture of lawfulness.
- **Outcome 3.** Expressions of interest in continued exchange are recorded, and a written summary is submitted to the Secretariat for the online compilation of side event summaries.

Contact

Ricarda Haase

UN Vienna Main Representative,
HWPL
+49 157 88301511
ricarda.haase@hwpl.at

Thomas Galler

Representative to UNOV, HWPL
+43 678 1266650
thomas.galler@hwpl.at

un@hwpl.at
www.hwpl.at
www.hwpl.kr

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