

# UNHRC

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# Introduction to Committee

## Topic 1: Digital Surveillance and the Right to Privacy

### *Introduction*

Rapid advances in digital surveillance technologies have transformed how governments and private corporations collect, analyze, and store personal data. Tools such as biometric identification systems, facial recognition, predictive analytics, and large-scale data aggregation are increasingly used for purposes ranging from national security and crime prevention to public health and commercial targeting. While these technologies can enhance efficiency and safety, they also raise serious concerns about the erosion of privacy, civil liberties, and accountability. The right to privacy is recognized under international human rights law, including Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, existing legal frameworks often struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving surveillance capabilities. This creates gaps in protection, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized populations who may lack awareness of their digital rights or the ability to challenge misuse of their data.

DISEC is tasked with examining how digital surveillance can be governed in a way that balances legitimate security needs with the protection of fundamental human rights in an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced world.

### *Subtopic 1: Government and Corporate Involvement in Surveillance*

Governments are primary users of surveillance technologies for law enforcement, border control, counterterrorism, and public order maintenance. At the same time, private corporations play a

central role in developing, operating, and monetizing surveillance tools and data infrastructures.

This public–private overlap complicates accountability and regulation, as responsibilities for data protection and rights compliance are often fragmented.

International norms increasingly emphasize that government use of surveillance technologies must be lawful, necessary, proportionate, and subject to oversight. Various Guiding Principles on Government Use of Surveillance Technologies stress transparency, independent authorization, and safeguards against abuse. However, implementation varies widely across states, and many countries lack comprehensive domestic legislation governing digital surveillance.

Corporations, particularly multinational technology firms, collect vast amounts of personal data through digital platforms, cloud services, and data brokerage. While companies may be required to assist law enforcement, concerns arise when cooperation occurs without sufficient legal safeguards or judicial oversight. Weak regulation can allow personal data to be exploited for profit or accessed by state authorities in ways that undermine privacy rights.

Effective governance therefore requires cooperation between governments and the private sector to establish clear standards for data collection, storage, sharing, and deletion, while ensuring accountability mechanisms that protect individual rights.

### ***Subtopic 2: Accommodating Marginalized Groups in Privacy Protections***

Digital surveillance disproportionately affects marginalized populations, including refugees, migrants, low-income communities, and individuals with limited digital literacy. These groups are often more likely to be subjected to data collection through biometric registration, monitoring systems, or digital identification programs, yet may lack awareness of how their data is used or the rights they possess.

Guidance such as the UNHCR Information Integrity Toolkit on Data Protection and Privacy emphasizes the importance of informed consent, transparency, and digital literacy, particularly in

humanitarian contexts. Refugees and displaced persons frequently rely on digital systems to access aid, legal documentation, and services, making them especially vulnerable to data misuse, breaches, or surveillance beyond the original purpose of collection.

Socioeconomic disparities further exacerbate these risks. Limited access to education, legal resources, and technological knowledge can prevent individuals from understanding privacy policies or challenging violations. In rapidly changing digital environments, these gaps can widen, reinforcing inequality and exclusion.

Addressing privacy in the context of surveillance therefore requires inclusive policy design that accounts for differing levels of digital awareness, prioritizes education, and ensures protections are accessible to all populations, not only those with technical or legal expertise.

### ***Subtopic 3: Developments in Artificial Intelligence and Surveillance Technology***

Artificial intelligence has significantly expanded the scope and scale of surveillance. AI-driven systems can analyze vast datasets in real time, enabling facial recognition, behavior prediction, and cross-border tracking. These capabilities raise new concerns about mass surveillance, profiling, and discrimination, particularly when algorithms are trained on biased or incomplete data.

Contemporary analysis highlights the growth of both state-led and corporate surveillance, including cross-border data sharing and private-sector monitoring of consumers and employees. Unlike traditional surveillance, AI systems often operate with limited transparency, making it difficult to understand how decisions are made or to contest errors.

Technological developments are advancing faster than regulatory frameworks, leaving uncertainty over responsibility, oversight, and redress. As AI systems become more integrated

into security and governance structures, the absence of clear international standards risks normalizing intrusive practices that undermine privacy and civil liberties.

DISEC must consider how emerging technologies reshape the meaning of surveillance and whether existing international norms are sufficient to address these changes.

### ***Possible Areas for Policy Development***

- Expansion of digital literacy and public awareness programs to ensure individuals understand their data rights
- Development of international standards or guidelines for AI-enabled surveillance technologies
- Enhanced corporate accountability mechanisms for data protection and transparency
- Cooperative frameworks between states, international organizations, and the private sector

### ***Questions to Consider***

- How can international bodies effectively work with governments and multinational corporations to preserve the privacy rights of individual citizens?
- Should global standards on surveillance be revised to accommodate rapidly changing technologies? If so, how frequently and through what mechanisms?
- How can protections be tailored to address the unique vulnerabilities of marginalized populations in digital surveillance systems?

## Topic 2: Addressing Systemic Racism in Law Enforcement

### Institutions

#### *Introduction*

Systematic racism within law enforcement institutions remains a persistent global issue with existing consequences for asylum seekers, migrant communities, and refugees. While law enforcement agencies are tasked with maintaining public safety and upholding the rule of law, this is not always apparent, and discriminatory practices including racial profiling and barriers to accountability and justice have led to a mistrust in these institutions. For displaced populations, these issues fully exacerbate existing struggles of assimilation including social exclusion and language barriers.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) plays a central role in addressing structural discrimination within state institutions. This topic requires delegates to analyze how historical legacies, institutional bias, and accountability mechanisms have allowed this discriminatory policing to exist and consider how international oversight can address the issue and promote reform.

#### **I. Subtopic 1: Discriminatory Policing Practices and Their Impact on Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

Discriminatory policing practices disproportionately target refugees and asylum seekers due to immigration status and national origin. Racial profiling is defined as the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials “of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the

individual's race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin" as according to the ACLU. This coincides then with criminal profiling, practiced by police, and being the reliance on a group of characteristics associated with crime. Racial profiling has been documented largely in airport security screenings, border enforcement, and routine police encounters.

According to the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), racial and ethnic minorities are subjected to stop-and-search practices at significantly higher rates than any other group, with it being reported that 79% of border guards at EU airports using ethnicity as an indicator for recognizing someone attempting to enter a country in an irregular manner. These practices are harmful for refugees and asylum seekers particularly, as they may already fear state authorities due to past experiences of persecution or unstable legal status.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has documented unlawful profiling and police practices across EU member states, finding that migrants and refugees are often stopped and questioned without legal justification. Beyond Europe, Amnesty International has reported the dismantling of protections for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, specifically Black people in countries such as Tunisia, creating an increase in racial profiling and policing. Past UNHCR protections including the role in processing asylum claims were removed by Tunisian authorities, which has led to many human rights violations, fostering xenophobia and racism, and dismantling any existing refugee protection. Although this is happening outside of the EU, the member state's contribution can lead to complicity in serious human rights violations. Such actions have exposed asylum seekers and migrants to further displacement and harm.

## **II. Subtopic 2: Barriers to Accountability and Justice**

One of the most significant challenges in addressing systematic racism in law enforcement institutions is the lack of effective accountability mechanisms. In many states, police misconduct investigations are conducted by bodies closely affiliated to the law enforcement agencies, which leads to conflicts of interest and a lack of transparency.

The International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice in Law Enforcement established following the murder of George Floyd has identified patterns in racial bias and the excessive use of force within policing systems specifically in the United States. These trends of racial discrimination and legal immunity within policing systems reflect broader global trends, in which institutional protections shield enforcements officials from persecutions or any form of accountability.

Structural discrimination within policing institutions also contributes to broader social and economic exclusion. Submissions to UN human rights mechanisms including the Ontario Human Rights Commission emphasize that racial profiling reinforces systematic inequality, as it limits access to employment, education, and other public services for immigrant and minority communities. The absence of independent oversight and accessible complaint mechanisms leaves many victims without avenues to get justice and hold institutions accountable. Ultimately there is weak oversight and a lack of independent investigations that come from an institutional bias which is unable to bring justice for victims of discriminatory policing.

### **III. Subtopic 3: Historical Roots of Systemic Racism in Law Enforcement**

Modern policing institutions are deeply shaped by historical legacies of colonialism and racial hierarchy. In many regions law enforcement systems were originally designed to control colonized populations instead of protecting them, which has embedded racialized assumptions into institutional structures/practices.

Academic research highlights how policing was used to advance and enforce racial hierarchies in early European colonies, apartheid-era South Africa, and settler-colonious societies such as Australia. In the United States, law enforcement has historically been used to suppress Indigenous communities and various marginalized populations, which has contributed to persistent disparities in policing practices.

These historical roots continue to influence contemporary policing through militarization, disproportionate surveillance of minority communities, and the framing of racialized groups as threats to security and safety. Refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom originate from formerly colonized regions, are often subjected to these patterns, demonstrating how historical injustice continues to impact present-day human rights violations.

### **IV. Possible Solutions**

Delegates may explore a variety of possible solutions including expanding upon the following:

- Establishing anonymous and accessible reporting mechanisms for victims of police abuse
- Mandating anti-racism and cultural competency training for law enforcement personnel

- Requiring states to collect and publish all data on police stops, arrests, and use of force
- Strengthening independent oversight bodies and giving them authority to investigate and recommend sanctions
- Expanding access to legal aid and remedies for refugees, asylum seekers, and minority communities impacted by discriminatory policing.

#### **V. Guiding Research Questions:**

1. Should the UNHCR and other international bodies play a more direct role in monitoring and reporting systematic racism in law enforcement institutions? If so, how, and will this infringe on national sovereignty?
2. How can international bodies effectively work to break historical and structural patterns of discrimination which have shaped current policing practices towards refugees and minority groups?

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