



SLRMUN 25



**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

STUDY GUIDE

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)

SLRMUN 2025 Study Guide

Committee Mandate

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), established in 1946 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. It is the principal global intergovernmental body dedicated to assessing progress, identifying challenges, and formulating policies to advance women's rights. The Commission plays a key role in monitoring the implementation of international agreements, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into all aspects of UN initiatives.

UNCSW convenes annually in March at the UN Headquarters in New York, bringing together member states, UN agencies, and civil society organizations to discuss a priority theme related to gender equality. These sessions result in policy recommendations and resolutions aimed at guiding governments in enacting legislation and programs that promote women's rights. By fostering global cooperation and driving legislative change, UNCSW continues to be a key force in shaping gender equality policies at national and international levels.

Message From The Chairs

Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to the Commission on the Status of Women. As your chairs, we acknowledge the immense challenges women and girls have faced this past year. From escalating conflicts to the ongoing impacts of climate change, gender-based violence, and economic inequality, the setbacks to gender equality have been significant. Refugee women, in particular, have endured unimaginable hardships, including displacement, family separation, and heightened risks of exploitation and abuse.

We expect delegates to thoroughly research their assigned countries' foreign policies and stances on gender equality. Your resolutions should not only be innovative but also practical, addressing the root causes of these issues while considering the diverse needs of women and girls worldwide. We encourage collaboration, open dialogue, and a commitment to tangible solutions that can truly make a difference in the lives of women and girls.

Thank you, and we look forward to a productive and impactful conference.

CONFERENCE TOPIC

Addressing the heightened risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking faced by female refugees

Introduction

The plight of female refugees is one of the most pressing humanitarian crises today, as they are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (GBV), exploitation, and human trafficking throughout all stages of displacement. Women and girls fleeing conflict, persecution, or disaster often encounter sexual violence, forced labor, child marriage, and human trafficking, exacerbated by factors such as lack of legal protection, inadequate shelter, and limited access to basic services. The intersection of displacement and gender vulnerability places female refugees at a significantly higher risk compared to their male counterparts.

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as harmful practices such as forced marriage, honor killings, and female genital mutilation (FGM). For female refugees, GBV occurs in various contexts. During flight, many are raped, sexually assaulted, or exploited by traffickers, border guards, and even fellow refugees. In refugee camps and host communities, overcrowded and insecure living conditions increase the risk of sexual violence, while economic hardship forces some women into survival sex or abusive relationships. In transit and detention centers, women detained while seeking asylum face sexual abuse from authorities or smugglers. Even upon resettlement in host countries, female refugees remain vulnerable to domestic violence, discrimination, and labor exploitation due to their precarious legal and social status.

Female refugees are prime targets for trafficking networks, as they often lack identification documents, financial resources, and social support. Many are trafficked for sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution and pornography, while others are subjected to forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, or factories under inhumane conditions. Adolescent girls are at particular risk of child marriage, where they are coerced into early unions for financial security, only to face domestic abuse, marital rape, and reproductive health complications. The lack of legal status and protection mechanisms in host countries further traps female refugees in cycles of exploitation, as many fear deportation or legal repercussions if they seek help.

Despite international frameworks such as the UNHCR Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence and the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking, implementation remains weak due to insufficient legal protections, lack of refugee-friendly reporting mechanisms, and inadequate funding for gender-sensitive refugee programs. Many female refugees struggle to access legal aid, healthcare, and psychosocial support, leaving them without redress when faced with abuse. Cultural and linguistic barriers, coupled with the stigma surrounding gender-based violence, prevent survivors from coming forward, leading to underreporting and impunity for perpetrators.

The international community has a critical role in addressing these challenges through policy reforms, humanitarian aid, and cross-border cooperation. Governments and humanitarian organizations must strengthen refugee protection systems, ensuring that camps and asylum centers have gender-sensitive security measures, access to legal aid, and specialized medical and psychological services for survivors of GBV and trafficking. Expanding economic empowerment programs, such as skills training and employment opportunities, can help female refugees gain financial independence and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.

Additionally, law enforcement agencies and border control authorities must be trained to identify and prevent human trafficking while respecting the rights of displaced women.

Understanding the Problem

Women and girls constitute nearly 50% of all refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and asylum seekers worldwide, yet they face unique and severe risks that often go unaddressed. Gender-based violence (GBV) is both a cause and consequence of forced displacement. Women fleeing war, persecution, or disaster often encounter violence at every stage of displacement—in their country of origin, during transit, and even upon resettlement. The lack of legal protections, financial independence, and social support networks makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, trafficking, and exploitation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that one in five displaced women experience sexual violence, but due to fear, stigma, and lack of access to reporting mechanisms, the actual number is believed to be much higher. Studies by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have shown that traffickers specifically target displaced women and girls, exploiting their precarious legal status and lack of economic opportunities. This problem is further exacerbated in conflict zones, where the breakdown of legal structures enables widespread impunity for perpetrators.

Case Studies

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Sexual Exploitation in Lebanon and Jordan

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, over 5.5 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Many female refugees in these host countries have fallen victim to forced prostitution and early marriages. Reports from Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicate that Syrian girls as young as 12 or 13 are being married off to older men in host countries under the guise of “protection,” when in reality, these marriages often lead to domestic violence, marital rape, and abandonment.

In Lebanon, where one in four people is a refugee, traffickers target displaced Syrian women for sexual exploitation and forced labor. Many are lured with fake job offers and then forced into prostitution, particularly in regions like Bekaa Valley, where several trafficking rings have been uncovered. A 2016 police raid in Lebanon exposed one of the largest trafficking networks, where 75 Syrian women and girls were found enslaved in a brothel, locked in rooms, and repeatedly beaten and raped. The survivors later revealed that traffickers had taken advantage of their undocumented status and fear of deportation.

Rohingya Women and Girls in Bangladesh’s Refugee Camps

The Rohingya crisis, which escalated in 2017, led to the mass displacement of nearly one million Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, particularly in the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps. These camps have become hotspots for sexual violence, human trafficking, and forced child marriages. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in

Persons reported that Rohingya girls are being sold into forced prostitution in major cities like Dhaka and Chittagong, while others are trafficked to Malaysia and Thailand via dangerous boat journeys.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and UNHCR have documented alarming cases of rape by camp guards, forced prostitution by traffickers, and survival sex among adolescent girls. Due to the lack of legal recognition of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, these women have no legal recourse and remain in cycles of abuse and exploitation. The crisis is worsened by poor camp security, with women reporting constant threats of rape when accessing water and sanitation facilities.

Nigerian and Sub-Saharan African Women Trafficked to Europe

The ongoing conflict and instability in countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and Eritrea have forced thousands of women to undertake perilous journeys across the Mediterranean to Europe. Many of these women fall victim to human trafficking networks operating in Libya, where they are detained, raped, and sold into sexual slavery before reaching their intended destinations.

A 2017 International Organization for Migration (IOM) report revealed that over 80% of Nigerian women arriving in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route were likely victims of sex trafficking. Traffickers force them into prostitution upon arrival, threatening them with violence, debt bondage, and harm to their families back home. Survivors have described being locked in brothels, subjected to rituals meant to ensure obedience, and forced to repay "travel debts" through coerced sexual labor. The situation is further exacerbated by Europe's tightening border policies, which push vulnerable women further into the hands of traffickers.

Further Reading Links

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>
2. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/preventing-gender-based-violence-in-refugee-settings>
3. <https://www.iom.int/handbook-direct-assistance-victims-trafficking>
4. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/09/they-said-we-are-their-slaves/sexual-violence-and-human-trafficking-eritrean>
5. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/humanitarian-action-gender-equality-2019>
6. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-warns-devastating-spike-risk-gender-based-violence-women-and-girls-forced>
7. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/10/policy-brief-from-evidence-to-action-tackling-gbv-against-migrant-women-and-girls>
8. <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/protecting-female-refugees-against-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-camps>
9. <https://globalizationandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12992-022-00860-2>
10. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11651565/>