

Committee: Un Women

Issue: Improving living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee camps.

Position: co-chair

## **INTRODUCTION**

Improving the living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee's camps involves a comprehensive approach aimed at mitigating gender-based violence [GBV], ensuring privacy, promoting health and fostering empowerment through education and economic opportunities. Key initiatives include establishing safe spaces, improving sanitation, providing dignity kits, ensuring female representation in camp management and conducting safety audits. Protection is at the heart of the responsibility that the international community bears towards refugees. Refugees as a group are disadvantaged and thus vulnerable to actions that threaten their protection. First, refugees are victims or potential victims of human rights abuses, conflicts and other acts of aggression. Second, they are outside of their own countries and unable or unwilling to afford themselves of the protection that their own governments should provide. International protection entails taking all necessary measures to ensure that refugees are adequately protected and effectively benefit from their rights. Women share the protection problems experienced by all refugees. Along with all other refugees, women need protection against forced return to their countries of origin; security against armed attacks and other forms of violence; protection from unjustified and unduly prolonged detention, a legal status that accords adequate social and economic rights; and access to such basic item such as food, shelter, clothing and medical care. In addition to these basic needs shared with all refugees, refugee women and girls have special protection needs that reflect their gender: they need, for example, protection against manipulation, sexual and physical abuse and exploitation, and protection against sexual discrimination in the delivery of goods and services.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The historical context of improving living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee camps marks a shift from treating them as passive beneficiaries to recognizing them as a distinct, high-risk group needing specialized, gender -sensitive protection. Historically, refugee camps were designed with neutral one-size-fits all standards that often-neglected specific gender -based needs rendering women and girls vulnerable to violence, trafficking and exploitation.

1989- The founding of the Women's Refugee Commission it was established under the International Rescue Committee, this body was created to specifically address the neglected protection needs of women, children, and youth in crisis situations.

1990s the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on the protection of refugee women formalized the need for security against sexual abuse and equitable access to services.

UNSCR 1325 [2000] A landmark resolution recognizing the unique, disproportionate impact of conflict on women and the necessity of their participation in peace and security.

Improving living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee camps 2024-2026 is currently challenged by acute underfunding, climate related disasters and the rise of double displacement. With over 120 million people forcibly displaced in which are women. Women in camps remain at high risk of rape, sexual harassment and exploitation. In 2025 GBV incidents in contexts like Gaza and Sudan have significantly increased, with reports of intimate partner violence and exploitation in exchange for aid. Potential future developments for improving living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee camps are increasingly focusing on technology -driven, safe-by-design infrastructure, and gender -responsive, community initiatives. These innovations aim to reduce gender-based violence. Increasing the use of direct cash assistance program, gender -responsive programming, participation in governance, improved legal and health access and safe houses and protection are potential future developments.

### **Major Countries and organisations**

UNHCR is the leading agency for protecting refugees. It implements Age, Gender and diversity policies including initiatives to register women individually.

UN Women focuses on the empowerment of crisis -affected women. They provide livelihood training, create community -based shelters for GBV e.g. Rohingya camps and support women's support groups.

IOM implements the Women's Participation Project in various countries to improve the safety and representation of women in camp management.

Canada promotes a feminist international assistance policy that prioritizes funding to local organizations supporting women's rights and empowerment in refugee situations.

Iran hosted the largest number of refugees according to data from UNHR there were nearly 3.5 million refugees in Iran.

### **Past UN Action**

UNHCR supports women to participate and improve their leadership role within their communities. For example, in Zambia, UNHCR introduced a quota system so that more women would be elected as refugee leaders in a refugee settlement. In Colombia, UNHCR sponsored a project which empowered internally displaced women to advocate for themselves and obtain better services from authorities. UNHCR empowers women economically. UNHCR helps women to develop

businesses; for example, In Cox's Bazaar, refugee women from fifteen different villages received skills training by UNHCR and have been earning money making toys, household items, and art. UNHCR also supports refugee women with cash assistance, which makes them less vulnerable to exploitation. UNHCR works towards improving refugee girls' access to education. UNHCR partners with governments and universities to offer scholarships to refugee women. UNHCR also works with businesses to provide refugees with schooling material and connectivity for digital education. UNHCR also organizes food distributions in schools with the World Food Programme to boost class attendance and reduce malnutrition. Host governments can allow refugee girls to enrol in their public schools and provide incentives for girls to attend school. For example, despite the lack of enrolment spaces, Lebanon has established an educational system where refugee children attend public schools in the afternoon. Host governments can improve refugee women's access to justice, especially for victims of GBV, by guaranteeing their legal representation, improving their access to national legal services such as counselling services and informing them of their legal rights in their host countries. Host governments can facilitate the access of women refugees to public health systems national reproductive health services. Refugee-hosting governments can play a key role in protecting the rights of refugee women and girls. Businesses can employ refugee women. For example, IKEA Group in Jordan is employing refugee women and girls to produce artisan-made goods which are sold around the world. Businesses can conduct skill training for women refugees or further develop their talents.

### **Current Statistical Data**

The number of people forced to flee persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order rose in 2024, reaching a record 123.2 million. This is an increase of 7 million people or 6 per cent compared to the end of 2023. One in 67 people globally were forcibly displaced at the end of 2024. Slightly more than one-third forcibly displaced people globally were Sudanese (14.3 million), Syrian (13.5 million), Afghan (10.3 million) or Ukrainian (8.8 million). During 2024, millions of people were displaced, including an estimated 20.1 million within their own country<sup>15</sup> and 5.4 million as refugees and asylum-seekers. Over the last decade, the number of forcibly displaced people has almost doubled. However, the rate of increase in the number of people forcibly displaced slowed in the second half of 2024. As shown while there was an estimated increase of 5.2 million forcibly displaced people in the first half of 2024, the increase in the second half of the year dropped to only a third of that, 1.7 million. Operational data and initial estimates for 2025 indicate that global forced displacement may begin to fall during 2025. By the end of April 2025, UNHCR estimates that total forced displacement globally has fallen slightly by 1 per cent to 122.1 million. <sup>16</sup> During the remainder of 2025, much will depend on the dynamics in key situations. This includes whether peace, or at least a cessation in fighting, is possible to achieve, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Ukraine; whether the situation in

South Sudan does not deteriorate further; whether conditions for return improve, in particular in Afghanistan and Syria; and how dire the impact of the current funding cuts will be on the capacity to address forced displacement situations around the world and create conducive conditions for a safe and dignified return. In 85% of countries reporting to UNHCR in 2024, most refugees did not condone violence against women, marking a slight positive shift. Furthermore, UNHCR and partners reached over 1.7 million people with programmes addressing violence against women and girls [GBV] in 86 countries in 2024. UNHCR also built the capacity of border and asylum authorities for better screening, referral and case management at points of entry. By end-2024, 91% of refugees and asylum-seekers were individually registered in 98 countries, an increase from 89% in 2023. More than 3.4 million people were registered, including 2.9 million newly registered in UNHCR's progress system – 426,000 more than in 2023. UNHCR conducted registration, verification and documentation jointly with States in countries such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan, Sudan, and Türkiye. Over 4.6 million people received civil status, identity or legal status documents in 88 countries. In 78 countries, 70% of refugee children under five had their births registered – a critical step in ensuring legal identity from early life.

## **Possible solutions**

Improving the living and safety standards for women and girls in refugee camps requires a multifaceted approach focusing on infrastructure, protection and empowerment. Key immediate solutions include installing solar -powered lighting, implementing secure lockable sanitation facilities, fostering women-led management. Establishing dedicated, secure, and accessible spaces for women and girls that are designed and managed by them. These spaces provide crucial services like psychosocial support, legal aid, and reproductive health services. Training, monitoring, and holding staff accountable to a strict Code of Conduct regarding GBV, ensuring confidential reporting and swift access to justice. Conducting sensitization sessions with men and boys to promote positive masculinity and reduce violence. Providing cash-based interventions and vocational training (e.g., tailoring, handicrafts) to enhance self-reliance, reduce reliance on high-risk coping mechanisms (like transactional sex), and provide financial independence.

## **KEY TERMS**

### **Gender-based violence (GBV)**

This refers to harmful acts such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse that women and girls face because of their gender. In refugee camps, overcrowding, poverty, and lack of security increase the risk of GBV. Preventing GBV is essential to protect dignity and human rights.

### **Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)**

This happens when people in positions of power, such as aid workers or security officers, take advantage of vulnerable women and girls. It includes forcing them to

exchange sexual acts for food, shelter, or services. Strong rules and monitoring systems are needed to stop this.

### **Safe spaces**

These are protected areas in refugee camps where women and girls can meet, receive counselling, learn skills, and report abuse without fear. Safe spaces also promote confidence and emotional healing.

### **Protection mechanisms**

These include security patrols, trained staff, reporting systems, and community watch groups. Organizations like UNHCR help set up these systems to reduce violence.

### **Human rights**

Women and girls in refugee camps still have the same rights as everyone else, including safety, education, and healthcare. Protecting these rights is a key responsibility of governments and humanitarian organizations.

### **Accountability**

This means holding offenders responsible and ensuring justice for survivors.

### **Reporting systems**

Confidential and safe systems encourage victims to report abuse without fear of stigma.

### **International protection frameworks**

These are global agreements and laws that protect refugees and women's rights.

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