

## Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

### *Introduction*

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a specialized entity within the framework of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), entrusted with addressing issues concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> As the principal policymaking forum dedicated to women's rights internationally, the CSW plays a pivotal role in fostering dialogue, setting standards, and devising policies and recommendations aimed at realizing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 - Gender Equality, and tackling the myriad challenges confronted by women and girls globally.<sup>2</sup> Collaborating closely with governmental bodies, civil society organizations, research institutions, and other stakeholders, the CSW endeavors to develop and advocate for the most impactful policies and recommendations to advance the rights and well-being of women and girls worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

The CSW should be distinguished from UN Women, the other chief UN organ working toward the rights of women and girls. While the CSW is a functional, policy-making body, UN Women is a program-making body that promotes gender equality through programs and services to implement policies and recommendations designed by the CSW, Member States, and other UN bodies.<sup>4</sup> UN Women also supports the work of CSW by providing documentation on critical areas of concern for gender equality.

The CSW holds an annual two-week session in the UN headquarters in March to discuss progress, identify challenges, and set global standards and policies on gender equality and the rights of women and girls.<sup>5</sup> These sessions center around a priority theme and result in an outcome document called *Agreed Conclusions*, which outlines problems addressed during the meeting and steps for action.<sup>6</sup> The CSW is guided by several documents, including the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* (UDHR) of 1948 and *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) of 1979.

### *Governance, Mandate, Membership and Structure*

The CSW was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) in 1946 and has been operational ever since.<sup>7</sup> Under its mandate, the CSW is required to promote, report on, and monitor issues relating to the rights of women and girls, including political, economic, civil, social, and educational. The responsibilities of the CSW remained consistent until ECOSOC passed resolution 1966/6, which expanded the committee's mandate to include the monitoring and review in progress of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfa) as well as incorporating a gender perspective in UN activities and actions, such as implementation of the *2030 Agenda*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women. *Commission on the Status of Women*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> UN Women. *A Short History on the Commission on the Status of Women*. 2019.

<sup>5</sup> UN Women. *Commission on the Status of Women*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Within its mandate, the CSW is empowered to make policy recommendations, adopt agreed conclusions, declarations, and resolutions, delineate international norms and standards, provide advice to intergovernmental bodies, and facilitate discussions on and monitor progress of the BPfA.<sup>9</sup> However, the CSW does not undertake program implementation, management, or provide direct support to Member States, governments, or civil societies in program implementation or management. While the CSW has the authority to propose budgets for advancing new objectives, these proposals undergo review by the UN Secretariat and approval by the General Assembly Fifth Committee (GA5).

CSW membership is comprised of 45 Member States elected by ECOSOC for four-year terms on the basis of equitable geographic distribution.<sup>10</sup> The CSW bureau contains the Chair and four Vice-Chairs, which are elected for two-year terms and rotate without geographical restrictions.<sup>11</sup> Financial support for the CSW's annual meetings and related activities is sourced from UN Women through the UN regular budget.<sup>12</sup>

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United Nations. General Assembly. *Proposed programme budget for 2022 (A/76/6 Sect 17)*. 2021. Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/en/A/76/6%20\(Sect.%2017\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/76/6%20(Sect.%2017))

UN Women. *A Brief History on the Commission on the Status of Women*. n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>

UN Women. *Commission on the Status of Women*. n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

## Topic: Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence

### *Background*

The UN defines gender-based violence (GBV) as that which is directed toward a person due to their gender or that which affects a particular gender disproportionately.<sup>13</sup> Gender-based violence affects individuals of all genders, but it disproportionately impacts women and girls due to systemic inequalities and power imbalances. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a pervasive and deeply entrenched violation of human rights worldwide. It encompasses various forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, and affects women and girls of all ages, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses.<sup>14</sup> The UN recognizes the importance of preventing and responding to VAWG worldwide and has specialized bodies and positions overseeing the issue, such as as the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. *Proposed programme budget for 2022 (A/76/6 Sect 17)*. 2021.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations. General Assembly. *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104)*. 1993.

<sup>14</sup> UN Women. *United Nations Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women*. 2012.

and Consequences, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in 1994 to investigate and report on VAWG worldwide.<sup>15</sup>

VAWG is a worldwide human rights violation, with over 33% of women globally experiencing physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives.<sup>16</sup> This number is higher in areas with ongoing conflict and instability as well as areas with discriminatory cultural norms. Some factors, such as poverty and lack of education, can lead to an increase in GBV anywhere, regardless of the geographical location. VAWG extends beyond factors such as war and conflict; many cases of violence against women and girls occur within their homes or communities, such as domestic violence. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a woman or girl falls victim to lethal violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member every 11 minutes.<sup>17</sup>

The UN employs various initiatives to address the pervasive issue of GBV globally. The *UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women* (UNTF) provides financial support to organizations and initiatives that work to prevent and respond to VAWG.<sup>18</sup> It focuses on supporting innovative projects that offer comprehensive services to survivors, promote legal and policy reforms, and engage communities in prevention efforts.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the UN Secretary-General's campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women* mobilizes governments, civil society organizations, and individuals worldwide to raise awareness, advocate for policy change, and promote gender equality as a means to end VAWG.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the United Nations *Joint Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence* enhances access to critical services, such as health care, legal aid, and psychosocial support, for survivors of violence.<sup>21</sup> This joint programme, led by UN bodies such as UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO), strengthens national systems and capacities to provide survivor-centered and gender-responsive services, with a focus on ensuring the rights and dignity of women and girls affected by violence.<sup>22</sup> While the United Nations has taken action to reduce GBV, it remains a global issue affecting millions.<sup>23</sup>

### *War and Conflict*

War and conflict exert profound and disproportionate impacts on women and girls, exacerbating vulnerabilities and exposing them to various forms of gender-based violence. In conflict zones, women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence, including rape, forced marriage, and sexual slavery, perpetrated by armed groups, military forces, and even their own communities. Conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50% between 2022 and 2023 with women and girls

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<sup>15</sup> Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences.

<sup>16</sup> World Health Organization. *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates*. 2018.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Killings of Women and Girls by their Intimate Partner or Other Family Members - Global Estimates 2020*.

<sup>18</sup> UN Women. United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women - About Us.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> UN Women. UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign.

<sup>21</sup> UN Women. *Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence*. 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> UN Women. *Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World*. 2019.

accounting for 95% of cases.<sup>24</sup> It is estimated that up to 90% of these incidents involve the use of weapons, creating need for gender-responsive arms control.<sup>25</sup>

Conflict-related displacement often results in the establishment of overcrowded displacement camps characterized by insufficient security measures. Consequently, the prevalence of sexual exploitation and abuse tends to escalate within such environments. Among the vulnerable populations in these camps, women and children are particularly at risk of experiencing violence, with alarming instances of trafficking for sexual exploitation observed. For example, the abhorrent act of purchasing a child for the purpose of rape can occur for less than \$1 USD.<sup>26</sup> Women and children are most at risk of violence following displacement; this holds true for those among the documented 5 million internally displaced and 6 million refugee Ukrainians in 2023.<sup>27</sup> According to UN Women, 90% of displaced Ukrainians are women and children, who are additionally vulnerable to exploitation and violence.<sup>28</sup>

Due to underreporting and lack of active data collection, especially that which may occur in times of conflict, these numbers are only estimates—the actual numbers are likely much greater. Politics of the international community also play a role in the reporting of these numbers—for example, the 2024 edition of the Secretary-General’s annual report on conflict-related sexual violence was the first to include a section on violence perpetrated against Palestinian women and girls despite previously including sections on violence against Israeli women and girls.<sup>29</sup> According to the report, Palestinian women and girls accounted for over 50% of all documented cases of conflict-related sexual and violence in the Middle East in 2023, a situation exacerbated by the Gaza war.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the breakdown of social structures and the rule of law during conflicts create environments where impunity for perpetrators of gender-based violence prevails, perpetuating cycles of abuse and trauma. Women and girls may also experience domestic violence at heightened levels as stress and tensions escalate within households affected by war and displacement. Additionally, the disruption of essential services such as healthcare and education further compounds the vulnerabilities of women and girls, limiting their access to support and resources needed to mitigate the impacts of violence and rebuild their lives.

### *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*

Female genital mutilation (FGM) poses a severe and enduring threat to the health and well-being of women and girls globally, particularly in regions where it is prevalent such as along the African Atlantic coast, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and some areas in Asia.<sup>31</sup> This harmful practice, often justified on cultural or religious grounds, involves the partial or total removal of

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<sup>24</sup> Security Council report of the Secretary-General. *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292)*. 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Meetings Coverage: Security Council. *Gender-Responsive Arms Control, Ending Impunity Key to Reverse Record Level of Sexual Violence against Women, Girls in Conflict Zones, Speakers Tell Security Council*. 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Security Council report of the Secretary-General. *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292)*. 2024.

<sup>28</sup> UN Women. *Trafficking in Women and Girls: Crises as a Risk Multiplier - Report of the Secretary-General Fact Sheet*. 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Security Council report of the Secretary-General. *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292)*. 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF. *Female Genital Mutilation: A Global Concern*. 2016.

external female genitalia, leading to long-term physical and psychological consequences.<sup>32</sup> Girls subjected to FGM often experience excruciating pain, excessive bleeding, and immediate health complications such as infections and urinary problems.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the trauma inflicted by FGM can have lasting effects on mental health, contributing to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>34</sup> Because of this, the UN has identified FGM as an area of focus in working toward global gender equality, as recognized in UN General Assembly (GA) resolution 67/146. Although the number of documented cases of FGM has decreased in the past few years, current trends in progress have been deemed insufficient to keep up with population growth; the number of women and girls globally suffering from FGM is projected to increase.<sup>35</sup>

While FGM is usually performed by traditional providers within states, recent years have seen the practice medicalized with 25% of women and girls who have experienced FGM were subjected to the practice by health care providers.<sup>36</sup> Medicalizing the procedure does not make it safer, but legitimizes the practice and may cause its prolonged continuance; medicalizing the practice also makes it easier for FGM to result in forced sterilization, further removing autonomy from women and girls. Forced sterilization can constitute a form of FGM on its own, or can occur as a result of FGM; it not only violates the bodily autonomy and reproductive rights of women and girls but also leads to long-term physical and psychological consequences.

Addressing FGM requires concerted efforts to protect and support women and girls at risk. Empowering communities through education and awareness-raising campaigns can also help challenge harmful beliefs and norms surrounding FGM and foster a culture of gender equality and respect for women's rights. The UN has prioritized this issue in recent years, with February 6th recognized as the International Day of Zero Tolerance Against FGM.<sup>37</sup> The UNFPA and UNICEF have led efforts such as the *United Nations Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, which aims to accelerate efforts to end FGM by 2030.<sup>38</sup> It supports national governments in developing and implementing multisectoral action plans, strengthens health systems to provide care for survivors, and engages communities to change social norms and attitudes towards FGM.<sup>39</sup>

### *Human Trafficking*

Human trafficking represents a grave violation of human rights, with women and girls disproportionately affected by this form of exploitation. Trafficking victims are subjected to various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.<sup>40</sup> Women and girls account for upwards of 60% of trafficking victims overall; 92% of victims are

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF. *Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change - 2021 Annual Report and Overall Phase III Performance Analysis*. 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF. *Female Genital Mutilation: A Global Concern*. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF. *Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change - 2021 Annual Report and Overall Phase III Performance Analysis*. 2022.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations. International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, 6 February.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Population Fund. *UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation - Who we are, Resources and Funding*.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. 2022.

trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>41</sup> Poverty and economic hardship are significant contributors, as traffickers often prey on individuals facing financial desperation, offering false promises of lucrative employment opportunities.<sup>42</sup> Gender inequality and discrimination also play a crucial role, with women and girls disproportionately affected by trafficking due to unequal access to education, employment, and social protections; additionally, conflict and instability exacerbate vulnerabilities, displacing populations and creating environments ripe for exploitation by trafficking networks.<sup>43</sup>

Child marriage can be regarded as a form of trafficking due to the coercion and exploitation involved in forcing minors into marriage against their will. In many cases, child brides are subjected to conditions akin to slavery, where they have little to no agency or autonomy over their lives. Traffickers exploit the vulnerabilities of young girls, often using deception, manipulation, or outright force to compel them into marriage, where they are subsequently subjected to various forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse, domestic servitude, and forced labor. Forced marriage of any kind threatens the achievement of SDG 5.3, so the UN has made it a priority to address, such as with the creation of the Special Rapporteur on Child, Early, and Forced Marriage, who investigates and reports on child, early, and forced marriage as a violation of human rights with a focus on the rights of girls.<sup>44</sup>

Overall, human trafficking poses a major risk to women and girls around the world, and action—through policy and programs—is necessary in order to combat it. One such example is the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, which supplements the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* and provides a framework for preventing and combating human trafficking.<sup>45</sup> Another is the *United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking*, which is a regional effort that aims to strengthen national responses to trafficking in persons, with a focus on women and girls.<sup>46</sup> The programme supports countries in developing comprehensive strategies to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers, while researching the root causes of vulnerability, such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination.<sup>47</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In contexts of war and conflict, GBV often escalates due to heightened vulnerabilities, breakdowns in social structures, and impunity for perpetrators. Additionally, practices such as FGM continue to violate the rights and well-being of millions of girls and women worldwide, perpetuating harmful gender norms and inequalities. Human trafficking remains a grave concern, with women and girls disproportionately trafficked for sexual exploitation, especially in times of conflict and

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<sup>41</sup> UN Women. *Trafficking in Women and Girls: Crises as a Risk Multiplier* - Report of the Secretary-General Fact Sheet. 2022.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations. UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children.

<sup>45</sup> Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children*, supplementing the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (A/RES/55/25). 2000.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Development Programme IEO Evaluation Resource Center. *The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater-Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP) - Mid-Term Evaluation Report*. 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

instability. While progress has been made in raising awareness and implementing interventions to address GBV, much more still needs to be done to effectively combat this multifaceted issue, protect survivors, and promote gender equality and human rights for all.

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### *Questions to consider:*

1. What factors contribute to gender-based violence? What trends are consistent globally? Regionally?
2. What barriers prevent survivors of gender-based violence from seeking help or accessing support services?
3. How do you prevent victims? How do you help survivors?
4. What policies, laws, or programs are needed to effectively address gender-based violence and promote gender equality in society?
5. For the infinite possible solutions and recommendations out there, what is within the mandate of the CSW? What is not within the mandate?

### *Helpful links:*

1. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>
2. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147362>
3. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>
4. [https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources?f\[0\]=topics\\_hq:1304](https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources?f[0]=topics_hq:1304)
5. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/protection/gender-based-violence>
6. <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>
7. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/female-genital-mutilation>
8. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/a-75-289-sg-report-trafficking>
9. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/UNiTE-Campaign-Action-Circular-May-June-2022-en.pdf>

### *Regional organizations:*

African Union-  
<https://www.au.int/>

Arab League-



<http://www.arableagueonline.org/>

Association of South East Asian Nations-

<http://asean.org/>

Asian Cooperation Dialogue-

<http://www.acd-dialogue.org/>

European Union-

[https://europa.eu/european-union/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en)

Economic Community of West African States-

<http://www.ecowas.int/>

Organization of American States-

<http://www.oas.org/en/>

Pacific Islands Forum-

<http://www.forumsec.org/>

Union of South American Nations-

<http://www.unasur.int/en>

#### *International Agencies*

Europol-

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/>

International Police Association-

<http://www.ipa.-jac.org/>

INTERPOL -

<https://www.interpol.int/>

International Criminal Court-

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/>

#### *United Nations Entities*

International Peace and Security-

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/priorities/international-peace-and-security/>

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-

<https://www.unocha.org/>