NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

CSW **BACKGROUND GUIDE** | 53

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Committee History

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is one of the eight bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The CSW recommends policies and strategies to increase women's participation in economic, social, civil, and political life. It cannot make or enforce laws, but it works with governments and civil society to set global standards and reach agreements. Using reports and reviews, it finds new ways to fight gender-based discrimination.[1]

As women's rights gained attention, and with support from Eleanor Roosevelt, ECOSOC created a Sub-Commission on the Status of Women in 1946.[2] By June of that year, the CSW became one of ECOSOC's bodies.[3] In February 1947, the commission held its first meeting in Lake Success, New York. Fifteen women represented their governments as delegates.[4] From the start, the CSW addressed issues not previously discussed globally. This included legal protections and raising awareness for women's issues. Today, the CSW has 45 member states who are elected every four years from all regions of the world. The Commission on the Status of Women also helped to create the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which sets key rights for women and girls. It covers equal work opportunities, political participation, ending violence against women, and protecting their freedoms.[5]

The CSW holds an annual conference at the UN headquarters in New York.[6] The event lasts two weeks in March. It brings together representatives from the 45 member states, NGOs, and UN entities from the CSW Forum, elected by ECOSOC.[7] During the conference, participants discuss current challenges women face. They work to create standards to promote equality and empowerment. Member States and treaty-monitoring bodies ensure that the conference agreements are followed and that the committee's goals are met.

The main outcome of the CSW is the set of agreed-upon conclusions on the priority theme of each annual session. Each session also has a specific priority and review theme. For example, CSW 71 (2027) will focus on the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[8] Overall, the CSW plays a vital role in the UN by defending women's rights worldwide.

1 "How We Work," Commission on the Status of Women, August 23, 2026, www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women.
2 "How We Work," Commission on the Status of Women.
3 "Everything you need to know about CSW," United Nations, August 23, 2025, https://www.un.org/en/delegate/everything-you-need-know-about-csw.
4 "A Brief History of the CSW," UN Women, accessed August 28, 2026, https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history.
5 "How We Work," Commission on the Status of Women.
6 "CSW71 (2027)," UN Women, accessed August 28,2026, https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women/csw71-2027.
7 "How We Work," Commission on the Status of Women.
8 "CSW71 (2027)," UN Women.

TOPIC A

Representation of Women in STEM

Photo Credit: L'Oréal Foundation

Introduction

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are fields that invite invention and growth. STEM education has become increasingly important as demand for workers with scientific and technical skills grows.[1] Despite this, women only account for 28 percent of the global STEM workforce.[2] Women's representation in STEM is still challenged, even though there have been decades of progress toward gender equality.

STEM can relate to climate change, public health, AI, and development. More female participation in STEM not only grows the global STEM workforce, but it also brings new perspectives to global topics.[3] Barriers against entering STEM can come from within families, communities, educational institutions, businesses, and government policies. The root of this issue extends back throughout history with still-present effects.[4]

STEM knowledge is now a common base requirement for hiring, amidst the rapid growth of technology and digital industries. Technology is also transforming traditional occupations and increasing the demand for workers with digital and technical skills. Without equal access to STEM education and training, women risk being left behind as the workforce evolves.[5] Closing this gap is therefore essential for preparing future workers and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Although progress has been made, there are still problems which limit women's representation. Some of these can include stereotypes, access to education, and limited opportunities. Women from rural areas, low-income families, and minority groups face additional challenges in STEM representation.[6] This shows that improving women's representation in STEM requires addressing both past and present inequalities.

Countries have different ideas about how this topic should be addressed. Some directly promote gender equality with scholarships, mentorship programs, employment opportunities, and increased leadership for women and girls. Others focus more on education systems and improving digital access.[7] Addressing this issue is complex. Successful solutions require agreement within governments, nonprofit organizations, and other agencies across the globe.

History and Description of the Issue

HISTORICAL EXCLUSION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN STEM

Historically, women in many societies have faced barriers to education and employment. These barriers have been especially significant in STEM-related fields. From 476 AD to around 1400 AD, there is little to no record of women in these fields.[8] Although historical records frequently overlooked women's intellectual work, women contributed to mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and other early scientific fields in several societies. However, legal and educational barriers often prevented them from receiving formal training or recognition.[9]

During the 1700s and 1800s, women's access to formal education varied across regions, cultures, and social classes. In many societies, however, notions that women were best suited for domestic and caregiving roles limited the subjects they could study and the educational institutions they could attend.[10] Girls in the upper and middle classes received their education either at home or in finishing schools.[11] Girls in the working class sometimes attended religious

or charity-based schools. Often, the instruction focused on subjects considered appropriate for domestic life. Women and girls had fewer opportunities to study advanced mathematics or science. Women were also excluded from many universities and professional institutions. Some women pursued scientific or mathematical interests through private study, family connections, or informal mentorship, but these opportunities were not available to most women and rarely provided a clear path into a STEM career.

Further, many scientific societies and professional organizations excluded women from membership, limiting their access to the networks, resources, and recognition needed to pursue careers in these fields.[12] Other factors included lack of access to laboratories, research funding, and professional networks. Women who did advance in STEM fields faced challenges too. Women's scientific work was often published under male relatives' names or received little recognition.[13] For example, Marie Curie was initially omitted from the nomination for the 1903 Nobel Prize in Physics, despite her essential role in the research. Her name was eventually added before the prize was awarded jointly to Marie Curie, Pierre Curie, and Henri Becquerel.[14] Once recognized, Marie Curie was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize for scientific discovery. By 2017, only 17 women had won a Nobel Prize in physics, chemistry or medicine since Marie Curie, compared to 572 men.[15]

The "Matilda Effect" describes the tendency to overlook or minimize women's contributions, particularly in STEM fields, while giving greater recognition to male colleagues.[16] The term was named after Matilda Joslyn Gage, a nineteenth-century women's rights activist who wrote about how men frequently received credit for women's intellectual and scientific work. There is a recurring pattern of overlooking, minimizing, or misattributing women's contributions to science.

In parts of Europe and North America, industrialization created new forms of paid work outside the home. Women were often concentrated in low-paying jobs with poor working conditions. At the same time, women increasingly organized to challenge their limited access to education, property ownership, political participation, and professional employment. These efforts contributed to early organized women's rights movements. This initially focused largely on legal rights, educational access, property ownership, and voting rights. Later movements expanded these demands to include equal pay, reproductive rights, and protection from workplace discrimination.[17]

Eventually, more universities started accepting women as students too. Women-only institutions were created as well. These universities primarily focused on the humanities, but some of them had small STEM programs. During World War I and World War II, more women enrolled in schools since many men were deployed in war.[18] After the wars ended, some women returned to traditional gender roles after they were pushed out of technical fields to make room for returning men, but others stayed in the roles they proved they could do. However, women during this time often experienced discrimination in hiring, pay, and other opportunities. This led to another wave of

By 2017, only 17 women had won a Nobel Prize in physics, chemistry or medicine since Marie Curie, compared to 572 men

feminist movements which advocated for equal educational and more professional access.

Industrialization affected women's education and employment differently across Asia and Africa. In many places, these changes were shaped by colonial rule, local political systems, and participation in global trade. As the railroads, factories, and export industries expanded, some women gained new educational and employment opportunities, particularly in cities.[19] However, access varied considerably by region, social class, race, and colonial context. In India, women began entering scientific and medical education during the late 1800s. Kadambini Ganguly became one of the first women to earn a medical degree in 1886.[20] In Shanghai, China, women's education expanded during the Industrial Revolution and after the 1898 Shanghai Campaign for Women's Education. The campaign created the first women's association in China, the first Chinese women's journal, and the first Chinese school for women.[21]

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, colonial education systems provided limited and unequal access to formal schooling, particularly for girls. These historical barriers, combined with poverty, conflict, discriminatory gender norms, and limited educational infrastructure, continued to restrict many women's access to higher education after these countries gained independence. Women were especially underrepresented in fields requiring advanced scientific or technical training.[22]

In the Middle East during the late 1800s to early 1900s, modernization efforts in cities such as Cairo, Istanbul, and Beirut led to gradual changes in education systems. Some government and reform movements started opening schools for girls, specifically in urban areas. During the mid to late 1900s, economic growth from oil production in many Middle Eastern countries created new job opportunities in engineering, technology, and healthcare. This led to increased demand for educated workers, and more women began entering universities to study STEM-related subjects.[23]

During the 1970s and 1980s, the women's rights movements created more educational and professional opportunities worldwide.[24] More policies were aimed at reducing gender discrimination in both education and employment.[25] Universities faced increasing pressure to welcome in more women. However, stereotypes about women's scientific abilities continued.

During the early 2000s and 2010s, more women entered STEM education and employment. STEM outreach programs, changing social expectations, and expanded educational opportunities contributed to this growth.[26] However, although more women entered STEM education programs, they continued to leave STEM careers at higher rates than men.

ORIGINS OF GENDER DISPARITIES

Gender disparities greatly affect women's representation in STEM.[27] Women may not have access to the same opportunities, resources, rights, or treatment because of their gender.[28] Gender roles have varied considerably across societies. However, men have historically held greater control over property, formal leadership, and public decision-making in many societies, while women were often expected to perform domestic and caregiving work. Over time, some of these divisions became established as gender norms and influenced women's access to education and employment.[29] Women were often financially dependent on men. These beliefs about specific roles were passed down through generations and eventually became known as "gender norms."[30]

The "leaky pipeline" describes how many women leave STEM as they move from school to professional careers. More women than ever are earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math. However, many do not stay in these fields long enough to become researchers, professors, or leaders.[31] Some

women may face unfair stereotypes about their abilities, while others do not have mentors or role models to support them. Many face discrimination at work or have fewer chances to earn promotions. Therefore, increasing women's representation requires not only encouraging them to enter STEM fields but also creating conditions that allow them to remain and advance in these careers.[32]

Caregiving responsibilities can create another major point of departure from the STEM pipeline. Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of childcare, eldercare, and other unpaid domestic work.[33] Pregnancy, childbirth, or family responsibilities may require women to take leave or reduce their working hours, especially where paid parental leave and affordable childcare are unavailable. Career interruptions can then affect their income, research output, promotion opportunities, and eligibility for future funding.[34] This is sometimes called a motherhood penalty, because mothers may experience lower earnings and fewer opportunities after having children. These disadvantages result from workplace policies and social expectations that place more caregiving responsibility on women than on men.

The structure of STEM careers can make these pressures worse. Scientific advancement often depends on continuous employment, long working hours, conference travel, laboratory access, publication records, and research grants with strict timelines. Women are often expected to be caregivers, not only for young children but also for ill or aging members of their families.[35] Thus, women may fall behind colleagues who are allowed to focus on their studies. Universities, research institutions, and employers can reduce this barrier through paid parental leave, affordable childcare, flexible schedules, extensions to grant and promotion deadlines, and policies that allow both parents to share caregiving responsibilities.[36]

Professional exclusion creates additional barriers. For example, the Royal Society, a scientific academy in the United Kingdom, did not admit women as full members until 1945.[37] Before then, women could contribute to scientific research but lacked equal access to the professional networks, recognition, and institutional influence that membership provided. These barriers made it more difficult for women to publish their work, receive recognition, and advance their careers. Although these formal restrictions have since been removed, centuries of exclusion

High school student participating in a STEM Girls Night hosted by NASA

Credit: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

shaped professional cultures and networks that continued to disadvantage women. This history demonstrates that changing membership rules alone does not immediately eliminate unequal access to recognition, leadership, and career advancement.[38]

Formal membership is not the only factor that determines if women feel able to remain in STEM. Sexual harassment, hostile workplace cultures, and unequal power relationships can also push women out of laboratories, universities, and technical workplaces.[39] Harassment can reduce job satisfaction and professional performance while increasing the likelihood that women will leave an institution or field. Women in junior positions may be especially reluctant to report misconduct when senior researchers control their funding, recommendations, research opportunities, or career advancement.[40] Institutions therefore need reporting systems that protect complainants from retaliation and ensure that allegations are investigated independently.

Political and legal systems have contributed to women's access to STEM education and careers as well. The University of Tokyo in Japan opened in 1877, but women were not allowed to enroll until 1946. By then, men had spent years building careers in STEM, while women had fewer chances.[41] After finishing their education, women still faced many barriers. Leadership roles at the university, scientific groups, and research institutes were held by men. Because of this, women had less influence over the future of STEM education and research.[42] Without representation in political and educational decisions, women had little control over the rules that shaped access to training and jobs. As a result, STEM institutions were designed for men and continued to be shaped by men even when women were allowed to join, which has created ongoing barriers for women still seen today.

Economic barriers also made it harder for women to succeed in STEM. For years, women who became scientists, engineers, or mathematicians faced unfair hiring practices, lower pay, and fewer chances to receive funding or support.[43] Many historians argue that women were overlooked because they had fewer opportunities and were more likely to have their work credited to male colleagues.[44] Many women were placed in lower-level or supporting positions, while leadership roles were usually given to men.

EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Despite barriers, women continued to shape the development of STEM. However, their growing participation did not always result in equal recognition. Women historically made essential contributions to major scientific discoveries. In some cases, their male colleagues received the honors and recognition. Regardless, when women can fully participate in STEM, they have made essential advances in science.

Lise Meitner and Chien-Shiung Wu both made essential contributions to nuclear physics but were excluded when the Nobel Prizes recognized the discoveries connected to their work. In 1938, Meitner and Otto Robert Frisch explained that a uranium nucleus could split and release a large amount of energy, a process they named nuclear fission.[45] However, only Otto Hahn received the 1944 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the discovery. Wu later conducted the experiment that demonstrated that the principle of parity conservation does not apply to certain nuclear interactions.[46] Although her results confirmed the theory proposed by Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen-Ning Yang, only Lee and Yang received the 1957 Nobel Prize in Physics.

Women's contributions expanded as they gained greater access to education, laboratories, professional networks, and public leadership. In medicine, microbiologist Elizabeth Lee Hazen and chemist Rachel Fuller Brown combined their expertise to develop nystatin, the first widely used antifungal medication.[47] In the Philippines, pediatrician Fe del Mundo developed affordable medical tools and approaches for communities

with limited hospital resources.[48] Their work demonstrates that women were not only entering STEM fields, but also directing important scientific research toward overlooked public-health needs.

Women also produced discoveries that transformed entire fields. Rosalind Franklin's X-ray diffraction research provided essential evidence for determining the structure of DNA, but her contribution was not fully recognized during her lifetime.[49] Mathematician Katherine Johnson calculated flight paths for major NASA missions, while facing racial segregation and gender discrimination.[50] These examples show that access alone did not create equality. Women could make essential contributions while still being excluded from professional recognition, decision-making, and advancement.

Over time, some women increasingly used their scientific expertise to shape public policy and organize communities. Rachel Carson's 1962 book Silent Spring drew public attention to the environmental and health effects of pesticides and influenced stronger environmental protections.[51] Later, Kenyan biologist Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement, through which women planted millions of trees while addressing deforestation, poverty, and food insecurity.[52] Their work demonstrates that women in STEM can serve as both researchers and public advocates connecting scientific evidence to government action.

More recently, scientists such as Maria Elena Bottazzi have focused on making innovation accessible across national and economic divides. Bottazzi helped develop a low-cost COVID-19 vaccine technology intended to be produced by manufacturers in low- and middle-income countries.[53] This demonstrates how women's leadership in STEM can influence not only what technologies are created, but also who can access and benefit from them.

These women, despite facing challenges, helped change the course of STEM. This helped open doors for future generations. However, this progress has not automatically produced equality. Governments can help address the remaining barriers by ensuring fair access to research funding, recognizing women's scientific work, enforcing protections against workplace discrimination, and including women in decisions about which research receives support. For CSW, the policy challenge is therefore not simply encouraging women to enter STEM, but ensuring that they have the resources, authority, and recognition necessary to shape scientific priorities and use innovation to address diverse public needs.

GLOBAL REPRESENTATION MOVEMENTS AND GENDER GAPS

Women have also historically been excluded or underrepresented as participants in some areas of clinical research. When studies do not include enough women or analyze results by sex, researchers may overlook differences in how women respond to medicines and other treatments. Similar problems can occur in engineering and technology when products, safety equipment, vehicles, or digital systems

Access alone did not create equality. Women could make essential contributions while still being excluded

A young student participating in a hands-on STEM demonstration

Credit: Escuela de Nivín

are designed and tested using male bodies or experiences as the default.[54] As a result, medicines may cause unexpected side effects, protective equipment may fit women poorly, and technologies may work less accurately for women.[55] Greater representation of women as researchers, engineers, designers, and research participants can therefore make scientific and technological innovation safer, more accurate, and more inclusive.

One of the first major international efforts toward addressing barriers in STEM was the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace. This ran from 1975 to 1985. During the 1980 Copenhagen Conference, the United Nations identified three areas where governments needed to make progress for women: equal access to education, equal access to job opportunities, and access to adequate health care. Hence, this initiative directly impacted women in STEM, since education is a necessary first step towards entering scientific and technical professions. The Decade helped establish international institutions dedicated to women's advancement, including the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).[56]

This international push for equality was reinforced in 1979 through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Several governments realized that advancing women's education and health contributed positively to society and economic development. CEDAW was significant because it transformed many goals of feminist movements and female reformers throughout the past into specific obligations for governments. Article 10 of CEDAW specifically requires states to eliminate discrimination against women in education and encourages states to provide career guidance, educational programs, scholarships, training, and technical and professional opportunities for women. It also calls for the elimination of stereotypical ideas about the roles of men and women in education.[57]

These earlier efforts were then expanded in 1995 with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This was adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women. Representatives

from 189 countries adopted the Platform, making it one of the most significant international commitments to gender equality at the time. The Platform encouraged countries to increase women's participation in education, leadership, and in work by outlining major areas where structural inequalities continued to limit women.[58]

The Beijing Platform also addressed women's representation within medical research. It called on governments and research institutions to eliminate gender bias in biomedical and clinical research, include women in voluntary clinical trials, and provide women with information about research findings that affect their health.[59] This expanded the meaning of representation in STEM. Women should have equal opportunities to conduct research, but they should also be adequately represented among the people whom that research is intended to serve.

Around the same period, some governments began adopting national research requirements. For example, the United States adopted the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act in 1993. With limited exceptions, the law requires NIH-supported clinical research to include women and members of minority groups. It also requires certain clinical trials to be designed so researchers can determine whether treatments affect these groups differently.[60] This illustrates a policy approach available to governments. Public research funding can be tied to participant inclusion and the analysis of results by sex.

The L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science award is one of the most famous programs supporting women in STEM. This award was created in 1998 through a partnership between the L'Oréal Foundation and UNESCO. Their goal is to recognize and support female scientists around the world. Each year, it awards female researchers regardless of the stage of their careers. The program highlights scientific achievements while also providing financial support, visibility, and professional opportunities. A key goal of the initiative is to address the lack of representation of women in high-level scientific positions. By showcasing the work of women scientists, the program helps challenge stereotypes about who can succeed in STEM. It also provides role models, encouraging young girls to pursue careers in STEM fields.[61]

In the 2010s, new programs were created to encourage girls to pursue STEM careers from a young age. These programs focused on building confidence, providing role models, and hands-on experience in the field. They also work to show girls that STEM careers are accessible and achievable. One well-known program is Girls Who Code. This was created in 2012 to teach girls coding and computer science at an early age. The goal is not only to teach coding skills but also to prepare girls for future education and careers in technology-related fields. Their focus is on engineering, software development, data science, and other technical fields. The organization is helping create a more diverse STEM workforce by increasing girls' interest in computer science. They are also giving young girls the opportunity to gain experience and succeed in the field.[62]

Many countries have also created their own programs to help women enter into STEM fields.[63] An example of this is in India with the Department of Science and Technology. Their program sponsors female researchers, mentorship, and innovation. This department created initiatives that encourage girls to enter coding, engineering, and research careers. In South Africa, the Society of Women Engineers has a similar goal. They provide scholarships, mentorship, networking, and career development for women in engineering.[64] Many of these programs aim to introduce STEM subjects at an early age, which helps girls feel confident entering these fields later in their lives.

Another example is the AWM or the Association for Women in Mathematics. This organization was founded in 1971 as a way to address the lack of diversity in mathematics. This organization has more than 3500 women worldwide as members.[65] Similarly, the AWIS or the Association

for Women in Science was founded the same year with a similar mission. The AWIS provides tools for scientific organizations to diversify and retain their female workforces.[66] These organizations have the ultimate goal of helping those with fewer opportunities and representation find community and support to continue their work in STEM related fields.

Different interventions address different stages of women's participation in STEM. Scholarships, teacher training, and mentorship programs may help girls enter STEM education, while equal-pay protections, parental leave, anti-harassment policies, and transparent promotion standards can help women remain and advance in STEM careers.[67] Governments and research institutions can also require researchers to explain why women have been excluded from a study, create recruitment plans for underrepresented groups, and publish results separated by sex when relevant.[68] Providing reimbursement for transportation, childcare, lodging, and other expenses can reduce the financial burden of research participation for study subjects.[69] These measures may make clinical research more accessible to low-income participants and people with caregiving responsibilities.

Including more women in research is only the first step. Researchers must also study whether treatments or technologies have different benefits, risks, or side effects for different groups of women. Delegates can debate whether public funding should require researchers to include women and examine results by sex. They can also consider whether these practices should be voluntary or monitored by research institutions. Achieving full gender equality in STEM is an ongoing global challenge.

Current Status

THE INFLUENCE OF AI ON WOMEN TODAY

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way people live, learn, and work around the world. AI is used in everyday activities such as searching the internet, getting healthcare, and educating. It can analyze large amounts of information, recognize patterns, and develop information much faster than humans.[70] As AI has become more common, its use has been implemented in STEM fields. This has been the root of many concerns, as those in the field are afraid of what this could mean for their future education and job opportunities. These concerns are important when looking at how AI use affects women and girls.[71]

AI, when used responsibly, can help remove barriers that have limited women's participation in STEM. It can expand access to education, create new career opportunities, and support innovation across many industries.[72] These benefits show how AI can become an important tool for increasing gender equality. However, this is only if women and girls have equal access to the technology and the skills needed to use it.

The growth of AI is creating new jobs in areas such as software development, data science, cybersecurity, and machine learning. Many of these careers offer high salaries and opportunities for advancement.[73] This growth could create new pathways for women to enter STEM, especially when it is paired with affordable training, mentorship, and fair hiring practices. But without targeted efforts to address unequal access to education, workplace discrimination, and limited opportunities for promotion, women may remain underrepresented in these growing fields.

AI can improve education by giving students access to online learning tools. These resources can help girls in rural or underserved communities gain skills that may not be available

or offered in their local schools.[74] An example of this is the organization "African Girls Can Code," run by UN Women. This trains around 2,000 young girls aged between 17–25 to become computer programmers, creators, and designers. This aims to help girls pursue STEM fields later on.[75]

AI is also changing the workplace. Routine jobs are now becoming automated, while new jobs are being created in technology and other digital industries. This shift creates both opportunities and challenges for women. Women who have access to STEM education and digital skills may benefit from new career opportunities. For example, in Latin America, the nonprofit Laboratoria trains women in software development, user experience (UX) design, and other digital skills. Many graduates from this program found jobs with technology companies. This demonstrates how targeted training programs can help women enter digital industries.[76]

However, women who work in jobs that are more likely to be automated may face greater risk of job loss if they do not have the chance to learn new skills or technologies.[77] This concern is especially important in industries such as manufacturing, retail, and administrative support. These careers are becoming more obsolete due to AI-powered systems being able to complete routine tasks. For example, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants are replacing some customer service and administrative tasks. Women comprise a large share of the workforce in these occupations. Because of this, many governments and international organizations have emphasized the importance of retraining programs and digital skills education. This will help workers transition into newer technology-based careers.[78]

Access to AI technology is not equal around the world. In many low-income and rural areas, women have less access to computers, reliable internet, and digital education. Around 655 million people around the world have limited access to electricity, with 560 million living without electricity altogether.[79] This digital divide can make it harder for them to develop the skills needed for AI-related careers. This is why greater investment in digital literacy, internet access, and STEM education is important to ensure that women and girls are not left behind as AI continues to grow.[80]

Since AI systems are designed and trained by

Young women learning STEM subjects

Credit: US Navy

people, they can reflect the same inequalities that already exist in society. If these problems are not addressed, AI may reinforce discrimination in various areas.[81] Since AI programs learn from large sets of data, if the data contains unfair patterns or reflects past discrimination, AI systems repeat the same biases. For example, an AI hiring program trained on past hiring systems would favor male applicants if more men were hired in the past. This happened at Amazon. Resumes that included the word "women's" were downgraded and often ignored.[82] This indicates that AI systems are only as fair as the data and decisions used to build them.[83] As a result, AI systems should be tested to reduce bias before wide usage.

Women remain underrepresented in the development of AI technology, partly because fewer women study and work in computer science and engineering than in many other STEM fields. This imbalance can influence how AI systems are designed. Developers choose which problems a system will address, what data it will use, and how it will be tested. If training data include fewer examples involving women, or if developers do not test whether a system works equally well across sexes and genders, the technology may produce less accurate or useful results for women.[84] For example, an AI healthcare system trained mostly on medical data from men may be less effective at recognizing conditions that appear differently in women. Therefore, increasing women's participation in AI development, using representative data, and testing results across demographic groups can help make AI systems more accurate and inclusive.

As AI becomes more common, it is important to make sure that these systems are developed and used responsibly. Increasing women's participation in AI research, education, and leadership can help reduce bias and ensure that these technologies are benefiting all that use them. Encouraging ethical AI development and its use can be a great tool to help expand STEM education for women and girls across the world.[85]

SOCIAL AND RACIAL INEQUALITIES IN STEM

Women who also belong to racial or ethnic minority groups, Indigenous communities, or other marginalized populations face increased barriers in STEM fields. Women can experience discrimination based on both gender and race or ethnicity. Thus, not all women face the same level of difficulty to succeed in school, find STEM careers, or move into leadership roles.[86]

These challenges fall under a term called "intersectionality." Intersectionality explains that people can face more than one type of discrimination at the same time. These discriminations can overlap and create barriers that are different from those faced by either men of the same racial group or women from other populations.[87] Because of this, policies that address only gender or race inequality do not fully solve the problem.

Women from racial and ethnic minority groups often continue to face barriers after entering STEM fields. They may have fewer mentors, fewer networking opportunities, and less access to research funding than their peers. Some also report experiencing discrimination, harassment, or bias in classrooms and workplaces. These experiences can affect confidence, career advancement, and job satisfaction.[88] For example, a 2023 study examined over 500 women who were studying STEM in college.[89] This study found that discrimination and other negative experiences in STEM settings led women to do worse in their classes. In many STEM fields, women from underrepresented groups are less likely to hold leadership positions, receive research grants, or be recognized for their contributions. Policies that support women as a single group therefore may not reach those who face additional barriers.

Gender inequality may also overlap with poverty, geographic isolation, disability, or language. For example, girls from low-income families, rural communities, or minority groups may

attend schools with fewer teachers, outdated technology, limited internet access, or fewer STEM-related courses.[90] These overlapping barriers can make it especially difficult for them to develop the skills and qualifications needed to pursue STEM careers. An example of this would be seen in a 2024 study from Peru. This study examined access to higher education in Peru by gender and household wealth. Researchers found that the gap in college enrollment between girls from the poorest and wealthiest households was larger than the gap between the poorest and wealthiest boys. This suggests that poverty alone does not explain the gap, and that women face additional barriers other than just gender and household wealth.[91] These differences can affect academic performance and reduce the number of girls who continue studying STEM subjects in college.[92]

However, programs designed broadly for women may not reach the women facing the greatest barriers. For example, a mentorship program offered online may remain inaccessible to girls without reliable internet, while an unpaid internship may exclude students who need to earn an income. Programs may also be difficult to access for women with disabilities, women who speak minority languages, or women responsible for childcare. Governments and organizations should therefore examine who can actually participate in a program, rather than measuring success only by the total number of women enrolled.

One policy option is to collect data separated by gender, income, race or ethnicity, disability, and geographic location when doing so is legal and safe. This can help governments identify where different groups of women leave the STEM pipeline. Then, resources can be directed toward the barriers they face.[93] Possible interventions include targeted scholarships, accessible school facilities, expanded internet access, childcare assistance, language support, and mentorship for underrepresented students. Universities and employers can also use transparent standards for research funding, hiring, pay, and promotion to reduce opportunities for bias.

Some states may support programs and funding that specifically prioritize marginalized groups, while others may prefer to improve education and employment opportunities for everyone. Delegates may also disagree about representation targets and the collection of demographic data, especially when governments have different laws and concerns about privacy. CSW must therefore consider how targeted support can address unequal barriers while protecting personal information and allowing programs to be adapted to local conditions.

GENDER EMPOWERMENT UN PROGRAMS

The United Nations has made gender equality a key part of its work to promote development, education, and economic growth. Many UN agencies support programs that increase girls' and women's access to STEM. These efforts aim to remove barriers to education, encourage women to pursue STEM careers, and increase women's leadership in research and innovation.[94]

One of the leading organizations working on

Researchers found that the gap in college enrollment between girls from the poorest and wealthiest households was larger than the gap between the poorest and wealthiest boys

gender equality is UN Women. It supports governments by developing policies that increase women's access to education, employment, leadership, and technology. The organization works with schools, businesses, and governments to remove barriers that prevent women from entering STEM careers. It also promotes equal pay, leadership opportunities, and digital skills training to help women participate in growing technology industries.

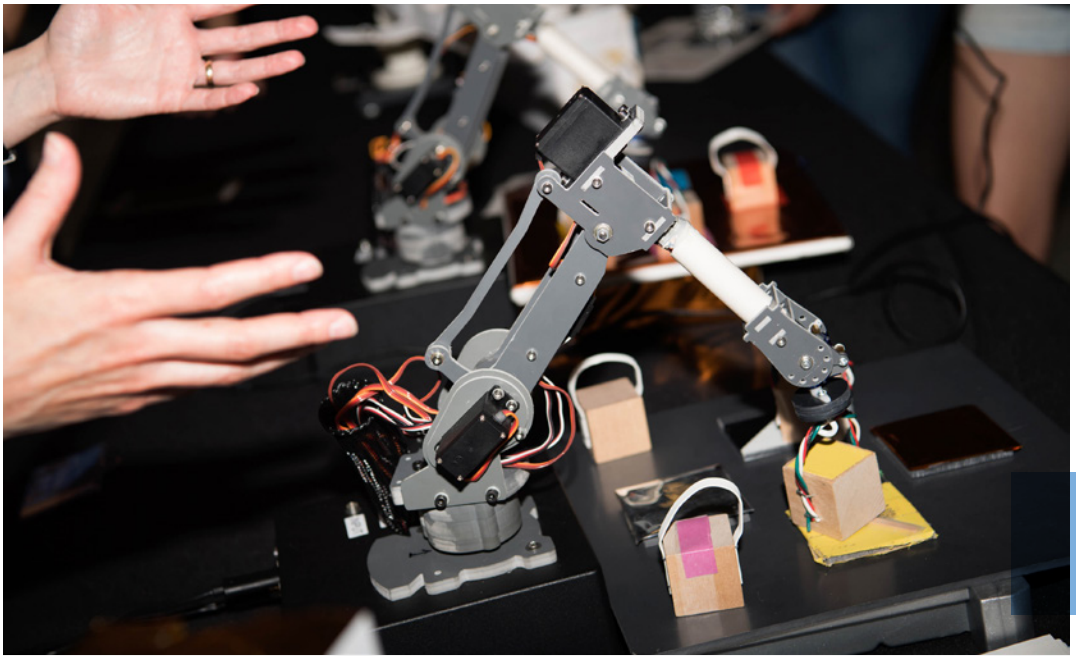
A specific example of a UN Women's organization benefitting women in STEM would be "Girls in Tech." This program is located in the West Bank and teaches girls aged 12-17 computer science, programming, robotics, and other fields in which women are still underrepresented. Their ultimate goal is to give girls hands-on experience in these technical fields so that they can later address issues related to women's rights, health, and climate change.[95]

UNESCO also plays an important role for promoting women in STEM. It conducts research on gender gaps in science and education and provides recommendations to member states on improving STEM participation. UNESCO also helps countries identify barriers that prevent women from entering scientific careers and develop policies to increase participation.[96] Their most recent project is the GenSIS project or the Gender-Inclusive Science Institutions and Systems. This project helps connect women scientists, universities, research centers, and science councils. Overall, their goal is to strengthen women's leadership in these institutions.[97] Another thing UNESCO does is publish reports on global trends in science education, and encourages countries to collect better data on women in STEM to measure progress over time.[98]

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also focuses on expanding educational opportunities for girls across the world. UNICEF supports programs that improve access to schools, digital learning, and technology education, especially in low-income and conflict-affected countries. Many initiatives encourage girls to build digital and STEM skills at an early age. By improving access to quality education, UNICEF helps create a stronger pathway for girls to pursue STEM careers later in life.[99] An example of one of these initiatives is Skills4Girls. This program helps girls ages 11–18 develop skills in STEM, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Skills4Girls has helped over 16 million girls in more than 20 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean.[100]

The United Nations Development Programme also supports women's participation in STEM. This is done through its work on economic empowerment and digital citizenship. UNDP partners with governments to improve digital access, expand workforce training, and encourage innovation. Many projects focus on helping women gain technological skills.[101] The HER Digital Future in China program works with local organizations to provide girls with opportunities to learn about technology and explore STEM careers. This initiative also gives girls in China access to skills and resources that can help with future education and work.[102] These programs recognize that stronger STEM education can contribute to economic growth while reducing gender inequality.

The UN also observes the International Day of Women and Girls in Science every year on 11 February. Established by the UN General Assembly in 2015, the observance raises awareness of the importance of equal access to STEM education and careers. Governments, universities, and research organizations use the day to recognize women scientists, encourage girls to explore STEM careers, and discuss ways to reduce gender gaps in science.[103] The 2026 observance had the theme "From Vision to Impact: Redefining STEM by Closing the Gender Gap." UNESCO brought together more than 4,000 participants, including member states, scientists, students, businesses, and civil society organizations. UNESCO also reported that women still represent less than one-third of researchers worldwide.[104] Discussions focused



Simple-to-build robots can increase interest in STEM fields

Credit: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center

on practical measures such as removing gender stereotypes, expanding girls' access to science education, and creating workplaces that attract, retain, and promote women scientists. Thus, the International Day can be used not only to celebrate women's achievements but also to encourage governments and scientific institutions to adopt policy changes.

Currently, many member states continue to call for stronger international cooperation, better data collection, and increased investment in STEM education for women.[105] United Nations programs have helped to raise awareness of gender inequality in STEM and encouraged countries to develop policies that expand educational and career opportunities for women. By promoting international cooperation, these initiatives aim to create a more diverse and inclusive STEM workforce.[106] Continued investment in these programs will be of greater importance as countries work toward achieving gender equality and preparing future generations of women and their contribution to STEM fields.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

The points of division for how to address women's representation in STEM are complex. Most countries believe that more women should enter STEM fields and have resources to do so, but they do not always agree on how to achieve this goal. One of the main debates is whether policies should be created to directly support women or whether governments should focus on improving education and workplaces for everyone.[107] Member states may also disagree about whether representation targets, gender reporting, and workplace protections should be required or voluntary. Another division concerns whether international funding should be tied to measurable gender-equity outcomes or allow each country to set its own priorities.

Some countries believe that the priority should be removing the barriers that continue to keep women from advancing in STEM careers. These countries would be Targeted STEM innovation and Gender Equity Advocates. Others believe

that the focus should be on expanding STEM education and developing a larger workforce to meet the demands of growing economies. This group would be the Capacity-Building and Development Advocates. A third group argues that lasting progress in STEM cannot happen until countries first address broader challenges such as poverty, unequal access to education, limited infrastructure, and economic development. This group is the National Flexibility and Foundational Access Advocates. These states may also resist international requirements that they believe interfere with national authority over education, employment, or social policy. These different approaches shape the policies that member states support and form the basis of this committee's policy blocs.[108]

TARGETED STEM INNOVATION AND GENDER EQUITY ADVOCATES

This first bloc includes countries that have made gender equality a visible part of their education, research, and employment policies. Countries that may fit into this bloc would be Sweden, Canada, Germany, Finland, Australia, and Denmark. Because women already have broad access to education in many of these states, these countries often believe the greatest challenge is not only helping women enter into STEM but also helping them remain and advance in these fields. Many have identified problems such as unequal pay, underrepresentation in leadership positions, workplace discrimination, and the "leaky pipeline" as major barriers facing women today.[109]

Delegations joining this bloc are likely to argue that governments, universities, and private industries all have a responsibility to reduce gender inequality in STEM. They often support policies that encourage equal hiring practices, improve parental leave, expand mentorship programs, and increase women's representation in research leadership and executive positions.[110] Many also support collecting data separated by gender and other relevant characteristics so governments can measure progress and identify areas that need improvement. Some delegations may support representation targets, gender-responsive research funding, pay-transparency requirements, and regular reporting by universities or technology companies.[111]

International cooperation is also an important priority for this bloc. These countries often support partnerships through UNESCO, UN Women, and other organizations. Their goals are to share research, funding, and successful policies to help other countries improve the status of women in STEM. They also encourage the creation of shared international goals and reporting frameworks for reducing discrimination and increasing diversity in these fields. Delegates also advocate for greater collaboration between universities, governments, and private technology companies to improve opportunities for women. Within CSW, this bloc may push for specific benchmarks that allow the international community to measure women's participation, retention, and leadership in STEM.

CAPACITY-BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATES

Countries in this bloc generally view STEM as an important driver of economic growth, innovation, and national competitiveness. Countries that could fit into this bloc would be Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, Morocco and China. Their primary goal is expanding educational opportunities, building research capacity, and preparing a skilled workforce for growing technology industries. While these countries recognize the importance of gender equality, they often view improvements in STEM education as benefiting the entire population rather than relying primarily on policies reserved for women.[112]

Delegates from this bloc are likely to support policies that increase access to science and technology education, strengthen universities, improve teacher training, and create scholarship opportunities. They may also encourage

partnerships between governments, universities, and private industries to support development and increase employment opportunities in STEM. These countries often emphasize investment in infrastructure, digital technologies, and research, while also supporting targeted outreach, scholarships, and mentorship for women and girls.[113] Expanding internet access, improving lab facilities, and increasing funding for universities are also viewed as important steps.[114]

Many also support international cooperation that provides technical assistance, research partnerships, and funding while allowing flexibility in how these programs are implemented. They may resist mandatory quotas, strict international reporting rules, or funding conditions that do not account for differences among national education systems and labor markets.

This bloc could argue that expanding educational opportunities will help increase women's participation in STEM over time. Rather than relying primarily on regulations, they may prefer incentives, scholarships, outreach programs, and workforce development initiatives that encourage more women to pursue STEM while strengthening national economies and opportunities for others as well.[115] The central position of this bloc is not opposition to programs for women; it is a preference for voluntary incentives and capacity-building over binding requirements.

NATIONAL FLEXIBILITY AND FOUNDATIONAL ACCESS ADVOCATES

Member states in this bloc argue that increasing women's participation in STEM cannot be separated from broader development challenges. Countries that could fit into this bloc would be Iran, Nepal, Kenya, Paraguay, and Mozambique. Many continue to face barriers such as poverty, limited educational resources, teacher shortages, weak infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, limited internet access, and unequal access to healthcare. Many girls in these countries struggle to complete primary or secondary education or face limited employment opportunities, making university level STEM education difficult to achieve.[116]

Rather than opposing gender equality initiatives, these countries often believe that broader investments in education and economic development are necessary before governments can successfully implement advanced policies concerning STEM employment and leadership.[117] From this perspective, strengthening education systems creates the foundation needed for long-term gender equality. Some members may also argue that international bodies should not determine national curricula, representation targets, hiring practices or family policies.[118]

International cooperation is especially important for this bloc. Many countries support programs provided through the UN and other multilateral organizations.[119] Delegations are open to funding, expertise, and resources from other countries while maintaining their own national priorities and local decision-making authority. They may oppose assistance that is tied to uniform gender targets, extensive reporting requirements, or changes to domestic social policy.

Many continue to face barriers such as poverty, limited educational resources, teacher shortages, weak infrastructure, unreliable electricity supply, etc.

This bloc also emphasizes that solutions should be flexible because countries face different economic, social, and geographic challenges. Delegations are likely to support policies that reduce poverty, improve digital access, strengthen public education, and expand opportunities for girls in rural and underserved communities. They often view gender equality as one part of a broader goal to reduce inequality across their societies.[120] Within CSW, they may prioritize voluntary recommendations, locally designed programs, and financial assistance for foundational education and infrastructure.

Committee Mission

The CSW is focused on both gender equality and women's empowerment. Its work now focuses on the goal of creating equal opportunities for women across the world.[121] The mission of this committee is to help develop practical and sustainable policies. The goal for these policies is to increase women's participation, retention, and leadership in STEM. They should be attainable while still recognizing the different social, economic, and cultural challenges faced by each member state. It is encouraged for delegates to examine both the historical and current challenges that limit opportunities for women in these fields.

Delegates should explore solutions that improve STEM education, expand access to technology, and encourage women to pursue roles in these fields. They should also consider how governments, NGOs, and nonprofit organizations can be used to create inclusive STEM environments. There should also be a focus on reducing social and economic barriers while also ensuring that women from all backgrounds can contribute to STEM fields.

However, delegates should recognize that each member state has a different set of national priorities. This means that solutions should be flexible to meet each country's goals. Successful solutions should respect national beliefs while encouraging international cooperation. As new technologies transform economies and labor markets, it is important to examine both the opportunities and challenges they create for women. Successful solutions encourage innovation, but the technologies should also promote equal opportunity.

This committee seeks to advance the principles of the United Nations Charter by promoting policies that improve the representation of women and girls in STEM. Through collaboration, innovation, and international dialogue, delegates should develop recommendations that strengthen education, expand economic opportunities, reduce gender disparities, and build a diverse global STEM workforce. These solutions should be capable of addressing the scientific and technological challenges of both the present and the future, and overall improve the representation of women in the field.[122]

TOPIC B

Gender-Based Violence in Migration Routes

CSW | NHSMUN 2027

Photo Credit: Oxfam East Africa

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed at someone because of their gender. It also includes violence that disproportionately affects a particular gender.[123] It can include physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, and financial abuse.[124] Although people of all genders can experience GBV, women and girls are especially vulnerable.

Addressing GBV against migrant women and girls is an important part of the Commission on the Status of Women's (CSW) mandate to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender-based violence plays a crucial role in migration. For women and gender-diverse individuals, GBV can be a factor that drives migration. This can be because of sexual violence, abuse, or economic marginalization. The migration journey can also increase the risk and impact of GBV. Migrant women travel in unsafe environments where they may face violence because of their legal status, language barriers, and social isolation.[125] Women may face violence before departure, while traveling along migration routes, and after arriving in a destination country.

GBV is present at all stages of migration. Human smugglers, traffickers, cartels, criminal organizations and even authorities may take advantage of migrants' vulnerable situations to commit crimes. This is because migrants may have limited protections or fear reporting abuse.[126] When safe and regular migration pathways are limited, some migrants turn to irregular and more dangerous routes. This can increase their reliance on smugglers and reduce their access to government or humanitarian protection. As a result, migrants may face serious risks throughout their journey. Female migrants especially face risks of trafficking, forced labor, and sexual assault.[127]

Gender-based violence can reflect gaps in legal protections, humanitarian assistance, border procedures, and accountability for perpetrators. When countries and organizations lack gender-sensitive law enforcement and humanitarian aid, migrant women and girls can remain vulnerable to threats. Moving to safety requires more than simply crossing into another country. Migrant women may continue to face violence during transit or after reaching their destination. Therefore, addressing GBV requires countries to move beyond policies focused on border control and develop systems that protect women's safety, rights, and access to essential services.[128]

History and Description of the Issue

THE FEMINIZATION OF MIGRATION

The "feminization of migration" describes women's growing visibility as migrants and workers. This is occurring because many jobs typically occupied by migrant workers are gender-selective, meaning women occupy most of the roles. This includes hospitality, healthcare, or entertainment. As a result, women are migrating at higher rates. They are also more able to be workers, earners, and heads of households.[129] Women do not necessarily represent an increasingly larger share of all migrants, but many more now are independent migrants, workers, earners, and heads of households.

For decades, many migration policies and data systems treated the typical migrant as a male.[130] Women were described mainly as dependents who migrated for family reunification, even when they also worked, supported households, or migrated independently.[131] As a result, international border control policies and

humanitarian assistance were built for men. This remains true for many programs and policies today.[132] In fact, as women began migrating on their own, they often entered a system that failed to protect them. This situation has created many problems along migration routes.

Historically, women often moved to join husbands and families who already moved abroad. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, global migration was mostly male. Women made up between 20 and 40 percent of people who left their native countries.[133] This situation was reinforced in the post-World War II reconstruction era, due to state-sponsored immigration policies. These plans were used explicitly to recruit male workers for industrial and agricultural labor. Women were treated as a secondary role.[134] Some examples of this are the United States' Bracero program and Western Europe's Gastarbeiter (guest worker). The Bracero program was created by an executive order in 1942 and brought large numbers of Mexican agricultural workers to the United States.[135] The Gastarbeiter program was used to close gaps in the labor market in Germany from 1955 to 1973.[136]

Since these initiatives prioritized men, they restricted family reunification. Women's migration was seen as less necessary because many recruitment programs prioritized single male workers. Further, migration frameworks and data systems also frequently classified women as dependents following male family members, rather than as migrants themselves.[137] This created lasting gaps in migration data and contributed to policies that overlooked women's economic roles and protection needs.[138]

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, women gained greater recognition as independent migrants, workers, earners, and heads of households.[139] According to the 2024 International Organization for Migration's World Migration Report, women made up about 49 percent of the global migrant population between 2000 and 2020.[140] However, the proportion of female migration depends heavily on regions.[141]

Female migrant workers are heavily represented in domestic and care work. Some destination states have created recruitment systems specifically for migrant domestic and care workers.[142] Limited employment opportunities, wage differences among countries, and growing demand for care workers in destination states has encouraged some women to migrate from lower-income countries to higher-income destination states.[143] This domestic deficit created the phenomenon of the "Global Care Chain." Global care chains are international networks where caregiving responsibilities are passed from one person or family to another. For example, a woman may migrate to provide childcare or eldercare for a family abroad, while relying on relatives or paid workers to care for her own family at home.[144]

Since the majority of care workers are in private or informal environments, their work is heavily unregulated. In some destination states, domestic workers receive few labor protections or face difficulty enforcing the rules. This area of work is also often excluded from routine state inspections.[145] Therefore, female labor migrants are vulnerable to labor exploitation. This is especially true under restrictive sponsorship

Some destination states have created recruitment systems specifically for migrant domestic and care workers.

programs such as the Kafala system.[146] This is a sponsorship program that directly links foreign workers and their local sponsor. In this system, the employer controls the worker's visa and legal status.[147] Because a worker's immigration status may depend on one employer, leaving an abusive workplace can lead to loss of legal status, detention, or deportation. This power imbalance can make it difficult for workers to report exploitation or seek other employment.[148]

Women who migrate through official employment visas may become vulnerable to exploitation when their legal status depends on their employer. Abuse can occur during recruitment, transportation, employment, or return. Employers or recruitment agencies may confiscate passports, withhold wages, restrict movement, charge excessive fees, or threaten workers with deportation. Even women who enter a country regularly can still experience trafficking, forced labor, or gender-based violence.[149]

Because GBV is so widespread, policies must address more than border crossings. Governments can regulate recruitment agencies, allow workers to change employers without losing legal status, inspect workplaces, provide contracts in workers' native languages, and ensure that workers can report abuse.[150] These interventions fall directly within CSW's concerns about women's employment, economic independence, and freedom from violence.

The feminization of migration is also developing due to humanitarian crises. Humanitarian crises across all regions can increase women's risk of gender-based violence before and during migration. Conflict may weaken law enforcement, healthcare, and other protection systems, while displacement can separate women from family and community support.[151] In crises such as the conflict in Sudan, women and girls may face forced marriage, trafficking, domestic abuse, and conflict-related sexual violence. These risks result from conflict, displacement, and institutional breakdown.[152] In these situations, migration becomes a need rather than a choice for women. Many women choose to escape the oppressive and abusive environment they live in.

Migrant women are not uniform. A woman may migrate for employment, family reunification, greater safety, or a combination of reasons. Her circumstances may also change during the journey. Migration can provide women with employment, income, and greater independence. However, immigration restrictions, discriminatory labor systems, and unsafe routes can also expose women to new forms of violence and exploitation.[153] Migration policies should not treat women only as dependents or victims.[154] They should recognize women as workers and decision-makers while providing protections that respond to the different risks they may face before, during, and after migration.

BORDER ENFORCEMENT, IRREGULAR ROUTES, AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING

International law provides several protections relevant to migrant women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires states to address discrimination against women. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 26 applies these responsibilities specifically to women migrant workers, including those employed in domestic work. General Recommendation No. 32 also addresses the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality, and statelessness.[155]

Other frameworks create protections for people in stages of migration. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines who qualifies as a refugee and establishes the principle of "non-refoulement." Non-refoulement prohibits returning refugees to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened.[156] Further, the Palermo Protocol defines human trafficking and calls for the protection of trafficking survivors. It requires states to prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect survivors.[157] A separate agreement, the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, addresses migrant

Migrants in the US arrested after they crossed the Rio Grande guided by smugglers

Credit: CBP Photography

smuggling for financial or material gain.[158] The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration provides a nonbinding framework for cooperation, including efforts to reduce migrants' vulnerabilities and expand regular pathways.[159]

The Refugee Convention does not list gender as a separate ground for persecution, but gender-related claims may fall under categories such as membership in a particular social group, religion, nationality, or political opinion. Claims for refugee status may involve forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking, domestic violence, sexual violence, or punishment for refusing discriminatory gender norms.[160] If an individual is fleeing persecution, they are protected by non-refoulement and should also receive access to housing, education, work, identity documents, and courts of law.[161] Gender-sensitive asylum procedures once in a destination country may include trained interviewers, confidential interviews conducted separately from family members, interpreters, and safeguards against retraumatization.[162]

Together, these frameworks establish protections for refugees, trafficking survivors, migrant workers, and other migrants. However, they do not guarantee that women can safely reach a border, enter a country, or access an asylum procedure. Additionally, some agreements are nonbinding, and legally binding protections are not always interpreted or enforced consistently. As a result, states must balance border enforcement while also identifying those who need protection, and providing safe alternatives to irregular migration.

Despite these protections, many destination states have responded to migration pressures by hardening their borders. A hard border is "a border between countries that is strongly controlled and protected by officials, police, or soldiers, rather than one where people are allowed to pass through easily with few controls."[163] Border hardening is presented as a tool of national security. Supporters argue that stronger borders can discourage irregular migration and disrupt smuggling networks. Critics argue that enforcement without safe alternatives can redirect migrants toward more dangerous routes and create new protection risks.[164] While these measures may appear gender-neutral, they can specifically harm women migrants.

Women may be affected differently because they are more likely to be traveling with children, have fewer financial resources, or may require reproductive health care.[165]

Many governments have strengthened their borders through fences, patrols, and restricted-access areas. Poland, for example, created a "buffer zone" along part of its border with Belarus to prevent irregular crossings and protect border officers.[166] However, limiting access to this area can also prevent humanitarian aid from reaching migrants. Rather than stopping migration entirely, these restrictions may push people toward remote routes through forests, swamps, and rivers. Migrants then face greater risks from cold weather, injuries, and lack of medical care. Women may also become separated from family members, lose access to health care, or face increased sexual violence in isolated areas.[167]

Another example is the US–Mexico border. Beginning in the 1990s, the United States expanded fencing, surveillance, and enforcement around heavily traveled urban crossing areas. This strategy was intended to discourage irregular migration by redirecting migrants toward remote and dangerous terrain. However, many people continued attempting the journey through the Sonoran Desert, where extreme heat, dehydration, and isolation increased the risk of death. Between 1999 and 2020, more than 3,000 migrants attempting irregular crossings died within the US portion of the desert, although the actual number may be higher because some remains are never found.[168] These cases demonstrate the need to examine whether border policies reduce irregular migration or redirect movement toward routes with fewer protections and greater physical danger. For women, traveling through an isolated desert can also limit access to menstrual products, reproductive health care, and assistance after sexual violence. Women traveling with children may face the additional challenge of protecting dependents while carrying limited food and water.[169]

Another prominent example of border hardening is the international responses to migrants fleeing the Syrian conflict. Although neighboring countries initially admitted large numbers of refugees, several later strengthened their borders as displacement continued. Türkiye constructed a wall and expanded surveillance along much of its border with Syria to prevent unauthorized crossings and address security concerns. It also restricted access to migrant protections and pushed some people toward more remote and dangerous routes.[170] Many refugees and migrants attempted dangerous sea crossings from Türkiye to Greece.[171] Human rights organizations have raised concerns. These hard conditions may prevent officials from identifying women who are refugees or survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence.[172]

These examples demonstrate that border enforcement may reduce crossings along one route without reducing the reasons that women migrate. It can redirect movement toward deserts, seas, forests, or mountains where government oversight and humanitarian assistance are limited. Therefore, states must find ways to maintain border security without increasing women's dependence on smugglers. Possible interventions include expanding regular migration pathways, maintaining access to asylum, allowing humanitarian organizations to enter border areas, training border officials to identify gender-based violence and trafficking, and ensuring that women can report abuse without automatically facing detention or deportation.

TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFICKING AND CARTEL CONTROL

Many migrants rely on criminal organizations to cross borders through irregular routes. Cartels can play a significant role in organizing and profiting from some of these crossings. This is especially true in South America, through Mexico. Because cartels operate outside the law, migrants lack protections. As a result, they

can be kidnapped, forced to smuggle illegal substances, sexually assaulted, or killed on the way to their destination.

For example, security experts have proclaimed that the number of people arriving at the US-Mexico border would not be possible without a high level of involvement by transnational organized crime.[173] Migrant smuggling has become an important source of revenue for organized criminal groups.[174] In 2022, the US Homeland Security Investigations estimated that smuggling enterprises along the US-Mexico border generated approximately 13 billion USD. However, the secretive nature of the activity makes its total revenue difficult to measure.[175] Migrants frequently hire guides, known as "coyotes," to help them cross the border. Some coyotes work with cartels or pay them for permission to travel through cartel-controlled territory. Others operate through smaller or independent networks.[176] Because these arrangements are organized for profit and take place outside legal protections, smugglers may abandon migrants, demand additional payments, or expose them to dangerous conditions. Women may face additional risks of sexual violence, coercion, and trafficking when they cannot pay demanded fees.

Along routes that lead to the US from Mexico, cartels, not federal agents or guards, control who moves and when.[177] Cartels treat physical territory as a monopoly. Those territories are their property and they make the rules. Migrants are considered illicit commodities. They are forced to pay tolls to enter cartel-controlled areas.[178] Cartels enforce strict penalties for breaking their rules. People can be kidnapped, assaulted and even killed in these situations.[179]

Criminal organizations may participate in several illegal activities. This includes migrant smuggling, trafficking in persons, kidnapping, extortion, and drug trafficking.[180] They may force migrants to transport drugs or perform other illegal work.[181] These overlapping activities make it difficult for authorities to identify trafficking survivors and separate them from people suspected of criminal activity. For CSW, the central concern is ensuring that migrant women who were coerced into illegal activity are identified as possible survivors and given access to protection and legal assistance.[182] Smuggling, trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and drug trafficking can provide criminal organizations with several connected sources of revenue at the expense of women and other vulnerable groups.

Criminal organizations may also use gender-based violence to control and exploit migrants along transit routes. Women and girls can be targeted for kidnapping, sexual violence, or commercial sexual exploitation, especially when their immigration status prevents them from seeking police protection.[183] This danger also affects women using formal asylum procedures. Under the original Migrant Protection Protocols, commonly called "Remain in Mexico," certain non-Mexican asylum seekers were required to wait in Mexico while their US immigration cases were processed.[184] Between November 2019 and January 2020, at least 32 women enrolled in the program were reportedly kidnapped.[185] This example demonstrates how a government policy can leave women exposed to criminal

They may force migrants to transport drugs or perform other illegal work

organizations even when they are attempting to pursue protection through a legal process.

Criminal organizations may also use threats against migrants and their families to force women into commercial sexual exploitation or demand regular payments.[186] Survivors may avoid reporting these crimes because they fear retaliation, distrust authorities, or believe that seeking help could lead to detention or deportation. This demonstrates why protection programs must consider both immediate physical safety and threats against family members in other countries.[187]

The absolute control that cartels have over certain corridors has blurred the line between human smuggling and human trafficking.[188] The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air defines migrant smuggling as facilitating a person's illegal entry into a state for financial or material benefit.[189] Human trafficking is the use of force, fraud, or deception to move, recruit, or control people for exploitation and profit.[190] Smuggling does not always become trafficking. However, a smuggling situation can develop into trafficking when a person is subjected to force, fraud, coercion, or exploitation.[191]

Women with limited money, documentation, or independent legal status may have fewer ways to leave an abusive situation. Even after reaching a destination country, some may avoid police or medical services because they fear detention, deportation, retaliation, or being returned to an abusive smuggler. This fear can allow abusers to act without being reported, allowing perpetrators to avoid investigation or punishment. Criminal organizations exploit this fear by threatening migrants with detention or deportation if they contact authorities. Women may face additional risks because insecure immigration status can overlap with gender-based violence, economic dependence, caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to shelters or legal assistance.[192]

These conditions make it more difficult for women to leave exploitative situations and seek protection. In 2022, women and girls made up 61 percent of victims of trafficking, highlighting the seriousness of the situation.[193] These risks highlight the need for policies that protect migrant women and girls from exploitation while ensuring that they can seek help without risking detention or deportation.

FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND THE ROLE OF REGIONAL CONFLICTS

Wars deeply influence global migration dynamics. Conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war and the crisis in the Central Sahel are reshaping migration across their regions and creating new challenges for displaced people. These conflicts can have long-term effects on migrants, especially women and children, who may face greater risks during displacement. Understanding how conflict affects migration is therefore important to developing policies to protect these populations.

Conflicts can create instability that affects both the countries where fighting occurs and their neighbors. For example, the situation in the Sahel displaced millions of people across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.[194] All three countries are governed by military juntas where ongoing violence, food insecurity, and economic fragility have caused millions of people to flee their countries.[195] These problems are further driven by armed conflict, climate pressures, weak infrastructure, poverty, and limited access to basic services.

Armed conflicts weaken the institutions responsible for healthcare, policing, and survivor protection, forcing people out.[196] According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 73.5 million people were internally displaced by Sahel conflict and violence at the end of 2024.[197] This was an increase from 68.3 million at the end of 2023, demonstrating that conflict-related internal displacement continues to grow. Displacement figures count each movement rather than each individual, since the same person may be forced

to flee multiple times. Therefore, even if the total number of displaced people decreases slightly, continued insecurity may still cause the number of displacement movements to rise.

Internally displaced people have not crossed an international border, but they may later join international migration routes if they cannot safely return home or find protection elsewhere in their country. Because internally displaced people remain within their own country, they do not qualify as refugees solely because they have been displaced. Their national government remains primarily responsible for protecting them, even if that government lacks the capacity to do so.[198]

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement establish standards for their treatment, but the Principles are not a legally binding treaty.[199] This can create a significant protection gap for displaced women when their governments cannot provide healthcare, security, documentation, or protection from gender-based violence. Women may travel alone when male family members are fighting, missing, detained, or prevented from leaving a country. At the same time, the collapse of healthcare, policing, and justice systems can leave survivors without services or ways to report abuse.[200]

The conflict in Ukraine shows how government policies and family separation can create gendered displacement patterns. After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, most Ukrainian men between the ages of 18 and 60 were required to remain in the country under martial law, with some exceptions.[201] As a result, women and children comprise a large majority of those initially fleeing to neighboring countries. Many women became solely responsible for children or older relatives while also managing financial insecurity, family separation, and the psychological effects of war.[202] When women travel as primary caregivers, they may need childcare, housing suitable for families, access to schools, reproductive healthcare, and ways to earn an income.[203] Additionally, traveling without other adult family members can increase their exposure to trafficking, exploitation, and gender-based violence. Responses to displacement must therefore consider not only how many people flee, but also who is traveling, whom they are responsible for, and what protections they need.

At the end of 2025, approximately 12.9 million Sudanese people were internally displaced or living as refugees or asylum seekers, making

Displaced people collecting water in South Sudan

Credit: USAID in Africa

Sudan the world's largest displacement crisis.[204] Women and girls have faced conflict-related sexual violence inside Sudan and while fleeing to neighboring countries.[205] Some travel without family support or identification documents, while also caring for children or older relatives. Survivors may then struggle to access reproductive healthcare, treatment after sexual violence, safe shelter, or justice.[206] Sudan demonstrates how conflict can increase women's responsibilities while reducing the resources and institutions available to protect them.

Governments and humanitarian organizations can respond through gender-sensitive reception centers, confidential reporting systems, reproductive and mental healthcare, safe transportation, and screening for trafficking or gender-based persecution. These protections must remain available as displaced women move between internal displacement, international migration, and asylum systems.[207]

Displaced women should also participate in designing these responses. Women-led organizations often provide local knowledge, identify survivors whom larger agencies cannot reach, and operate in communities where international organizations have limited access.[208] However, these organizations may receive only short-term or limited funding.[209] Delegates may consider whether humanitarian funding should be directed more consistently to local women-led groups and whether displaced women should have formal roles in camp management, peacebuilding, and decisions about return or relocation.

The Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh provides an example of this approach. UN Women and its partners consulted approximately 800 Rohingya women and adolescent girls across 16 camps about their priorities and barriers to leadership.[210] Their input contributed to guidelines for camp elections, and Rohingya women were later elected as community leaders and formed women-led community organizations. A network of women volunteers also helped humanitarian agencies reach refugees, identify gender-related needs, and provide information and referrals.[211] This example shows that displaced women's participation can change both how services are delivered and who takes part in camp decision-making,

However, these services may be concentrated in formal camps or reception centers and may not reach women living with host families, moving through informal settlements, or traveling along irregular routes. Governments and humanitarian organizations should therefore consider mobile services, multilingual hotlines, and assistance that does not depend on a woman possessing identification documents or reporting abuse to the police.[212]

Current Status

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ACROSS THE STAGES OF MIGRATION

Power imbalances play a crucial role as people migrate. A lack of money, for example, leaves many migrants vulnerable in the hands of traffickers, smugglers and criminals. Some migrant women engage in what humanitarian organizations call "survival sex," meaning sexual activity exchanged for food, transportation, shelter, money, documents, or protection.[213] Severe economic need and unequal power can limit a person's ability to refuse, especially when smugglers, employers, officials, or armed groups control essential resources.[214] Even if women "choose" survival sex, it is still a form of GBV because it is rooted in power imbalances. In coercive situations, apparent agreement may not represent free and meaningful consent.[215]

The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) is a network that advocates for the human rights of undocumented migrants.[216] Testimonies documented by PICUM show that fear of disbelief, detention, or other immigration

consequences can prevent migrants from reporting crimes. Abusers may exploit this fear by convincing survivors that authorities will not protect them or that reporting violence will make their situation worse.[217]

This creates an important policy debate. Connecting police, shelters, or healthcare providers to immigration enforcement may help governments identify people in an irregular situation, but it can also discourage survivors from reporting violence. Some governments separate essential services and crime reporting from immigration enforcement.[218] This allows migrant women to seek healthcare or report abuse without automatically risking detention or deportation.

In 2025, UN Women reported that more than 60 million forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls faced an increased risk of gender-based violence.[219] The danger can exist before departure, during the journey, and after arrival. For example, a 2020 study of 103 migrants found that 78 percent had already experienced gender-based violence in their country of origin.[220] Despite these risks, programs addressing gender-based violence in major displacement crises remain underfunded. For example, UNHCR operations in Chad are facing a funding gap of 62 percent for the Sudan refugee crisis.[221] Funding shortages can limit access to safe shelters, medical care, legal assistance, and mental health services.

As migrants increasingly rely on mobile phones and online platforms to navigate routes, find employment, and contact family members, gender-based violence has also expanded into digital spaces. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) refers to gender-based violence that is committed, enabled, or intensified through digital technologies, such as mobile phones, social media, and other online platforms.[222] It can include cyberstalking, threats, impersonation, image-based abuse, and the use of technology to recruit people for exploitation. Online abuse may also escalate into violence in physical spaces, allowing perpetrators to reach victims at almost any time or location.

Mobile phones and internet access can be an essential tool for migrants. However, these tools can also be weaponized. Migrant women in particular are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon.[223] In 2024, Spanish and Ukrainian authorities, supported by Europol, dismantled a criminal network that targeted Ukrainian and Belarusian women online with false promises of employment in Spain. Fourteen women, most of whom were Ukrainian refugees, were identified as victims of sexual exploitation.[224] This case demonstrates how traffickers can use digital platforms to identify women facing financial or legal insecurity, gain their trust, and move the exploitation from an online interaction into the physical world.

Several factors may increase migrant women's vulnerability to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Limited digital literacy can make it harder to recognize abuse and protect personal information. An insecure immigration status may also allow perpetrators to threaten women with detention or deportation. Language barriers can restrict access to digital

More than 60 million forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls faced an increased risk of gender-based violence

safety information and reporting systems, while social isolation may leave migrant women with fewer trusted people who can identify abuse and help them seek support.[225]

Technology can therefore serve as both a source of protection and a tool of abuse. Mobile phones allow migrants to contact relatives, locate services, navigate routes, request emergency assistance, and translate languages. However, perpetrators can use the same technology to track, threaten, impersonate, deceive, or exploit them.

CASE STUDY: THE DARIÉN GAP

The Darién Gap is a sixty-mile route connecting Panama to Colombia. It is a roadless rainforest with mountains and swamps. It is an important passage since it connects South America to Central and North America. There is tough physical geography here, yet many people have crossed this corridor while migrating.[226] The Darién Gap has become one of the principal irregular land routes used by migrants traveling from South America toward Central and North America.[227] Visa requirements, the cost of regular travel, and limited access to resettlement or other pathways have contributed to increased use of the route instead of regular routes.

Because of regional instability, the number of migrants crossing the Darién Gap went from 8,000 in 2020 to nearly 500,000 by the end of 2023.[228] Regional instability comes from multiple sources. It could relate to state collapse in Haiti, or political unbalance and violence in Venezuela.[229] By 2025, 7.7 million Venezuelans had left their home country. This is because of political instability, fear of violence and lack of opportunities.[230] Crossings in the Darién Gap reached their peak in 2023 with a total of 520,085 migrants.[231] According to Panama's migration authority, people from Venezuela, Haiti, and Ecuador are the main crossers of this route.[232]

However, this pattern changed sharply after 2024. Panama's Ministry of Public Security reported only 3,091 irregular transits through the Darién, compared with 302,203 in 2024. This was a decrease of 99 percent.[233] At the same time, movement began to reverse direction. Between January and June 2025, Colombia registered 12,347 people entering from Panama, many through informal maritime routes, after changes to US immigration and asylum policies.[234] These

Female migrants in the Darién Gap

Credit: gailhampshire

changes demonstrate how migration routes can shift quickly in response to border policies and regional conditions. Fewer crossings through one corridor do not necessarily mean that the causes of migration or migrants' protection needs have disappeared. Migrants may use different routes, return south, or become less visible to governments and humanitarian organizations.[235]

The journey through the Darién Gap in either direction is incredibly difficult. It is approximately 100 km of dense tropical forest and lasts between 3 and 10 days.[236] The conditions in which migrants travel are very risky. The forest presents various dangers. Examples are disease-carrying insects, snakes, contaminated water, and falls and injuries due to the mountainous terrain.[237] In 2024, 174 people died while crossing the Darién Gap, but each year many people die from drowning, violence, or mixed/unknown causes.[238]

Because of a lack of state authority, many criminal groups control sections of the Darién. An example is the Clan del Golfo (Gulf Clan) in Colombia. They decide who can cross the route and enforce rules through violence. It is important to notice that they also influence the lives of locals. The Colombian military estimates that for each person crossing the Darièn, the Clan gets USD 125.[239]

Women and girls crossing the Darién have reported rape, sexual assault, kidnapping, and extortion.[240] Médecins sans Frontières assisted hundreds of survivors of sexual violence between 2021 and 2024 but warned that the actual number was likely higher because many survivors did not report their experiences.[241] Survivors may fear retaliation, blame from officials, delays in their journey, or referral to immigration authorities. This underreporting makes it difficult to identify the scale of the problem and hold perpetrators accountable. Confidential reporting systems, trained officials, emergency healthcare, and separation between survivor services and immigration enforcement could improve access to protection.[242]

The humanitarian crisis in the Darién Gap is shaped by a combination of restrictive migration policies, limited regular pathways, and gaps in state protection. Hardening borders and strict visa requirements may redirect migrants to alternative, irregular routes.[243] A lack of state security, police, and humanitarian personnel in remote areas leaves criminal organizations in control.[244] Women traveling alone or with children may face additional risks because smugglers and armed groups can control their access to transportation, food, shelter, and protection. On top of everything, migrants may lack adequate sanitation and safe drinking water.[245] Some are forced to drink river water, often contaminated. Pregnant women face additional dangers when they must cross steep terrain and rivers without access to emergency care.[246] Women traveling as caregivers may also give limited food and water to their children before meeting their own needs. Therefore, the health crisis in the Darién Gap affects women not only as migrants, but also through gender-specific health needs, caregiving responsibilities, and exposure to violence.

THE "CULTURE OF IMPUNITY"

International frameworks recognize women's right to live free from violence, yet many migrant women cannot access protection or justice in practice.[247] There is a clear connection between weak legal protections and a "culture of impunity." Impunity occurs when perpetrators are not investigated, prosecuted, or punished. It may result from weak laws, corruption, inaccessible reporting systems, or failures to enforce existing protections. When perpetrators expect that migrant women will be unable or afraid to report them, violence is more likely to continue.[248] Getting away with violence then becomes the rule, rather than the exception.

Migrant women enter protection systems that may already be shaped by gender inequality. Discriminatory laws, economic dependence, and limited recognition of sexual or domestic violence can restrict access to justice before

Migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea

Credit: Commander, US Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet

migration begins. During migration, these barriers may overlap with language differences, unfamiliar legal systems, insecure immigration status, and uncertainty about which country should investigate a crime.[249] Although irregular immigration status does not remove a woman's human rights, it can make those rights more difficult to exercise.

RedLAC has reported that women and girls face gender-based violence at every stage of migration through Central America and Mexico.[250] However, services do not always move as quickly as migration routes change. A shelter, legal clinic, or reporting system may be available along one established corridor but absent when migrants begin using a different route.[251] This creates gaps between the protections that formally exist and those women can actually reach.

The first accountability gap is the fear of reporting abuse. Migrant women may believe that contacting the police will expose their immigration status or lead to detention, deportation, or separation from their children. Abusers can use these fears to threaten survivors into silence.[252] Governments can create confidential reporting systems that allow migrant women to report violence or access healthcare and shelters without automatically being reported to immigration authorities. They can reduce fears of detention or deportation and make it safer for women to seek help.

The second gap involves responsibility across borders. A woman may experience violence in one country, report it in another, and seek asylum in a third. Governments may then disagree over which country should investigate the crime, preserve evidence, or provide services.[253] Survivors may also lose documents, medical records, or contact with witnesses during the journey.

Libya provides a current example of this accountability gap. In February 2026, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported systematic abuses against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Libya, including arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, trafficking, forced labor, and extortion.[254] Women and girls face particular risks of rape and sexual exploitation during their journeys and in detention. Abuses may

involve criminal networks, armed groups, or public officials. The victims are also of multiple nationalities, making it difficult for survivors to determine where or how to report.[255] The situation in Libya demonstrates how fragmented institutions and limited investigations can allow violence against migrant women to continue without accountability.

The final gap is inadequate and unpredictable funding for survivor services. Short-term funding may end before an investigation or legal case is complete, leaving survivors without lawyers, interpreters, counseling, or safe housing.[256] Women-led organizations may be especially affected. A 2025 UN Women survey found that 90 percent of women's organizations had been affected by aid cuts, and nearly half believed they might close within six months.[257]

These protection gaps reinforce one another. Fear of deportation discourages reporting; limited reporting reduces the evidence available to investigators; unclear responsibility allows cases to be abandoned across borders; and funding shortages prevent survivors from remaining involved in lengthy legal proceedings.[258] Perpetrators may then assume that violence against migrant women will have few consequences.

Delegates must therefore consider how to turn formal rights into protections that women can use in practice. Possible areas of debate include confidential reporting, separation between public services and immigration enforcement, cross-border investigations, independent oversight of officials, long-term funding for survivor services, and remedies for women whose rights have been violated. The central question is not only whether protections exist, but whether migrant women can safely access them and whether perpetrators are actually held accountable.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

The central disagreement is how states should protect human rights while managing their borders. Member states disagree over three main questions. First is if migration policy should prioritize deterrence and border enforcement or expand safe and regular pathways. Second is if migrant women should be able to report violence and access essential services without immigration consequences. Third is how the financial and legal responsibility for protecting women should be divided among countries of origin, transit, and destination.[259]

These blocs are not fixed geographic groups. A state may support strong border enforcement while also funding humanitarian assistance, or support firewalls for healthcare while opposing them in policing.[260] Firewalls are policies that separate access to essential services from immigration enforcement. Delegates should research their country's policies on each point rather than assuming that it belongs entirely to one bloc.

A 2025 UN Women survey found that 90 percent of women's organizations had been affected by aid cuts, and nearly half believed they might close within six months.

BORDER CONTROL AND DETERRENCE PRIORITIZERS

This bloc includes states that prioritize the country's sovereignty, controlled entry, and the prevention of irregular migration. These states may support stronger border enforcement, accelerated asylum decisions, detention, return agreements, or partnerships with transit countries.[261] Possible examples include the United States, Italy, Australia, and Greece, although their policies and humanitarian commitments differ.[262]

States in this bloc argue that controlled borders can reduce unauthorized crossings, disrupt smuggling networks, and allow governments to determine who enters their territory. They generally view smugglers and traffickers as the main source of danger, rather than border enforcement itself.[263] According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), female migrants face extreme violence at the hands of smugglers.[264] This is why destination countries view border enforcement as a strategy to neutralize criminal activities rather than an effort to deny protection.

At the same time, international organizations like the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) analyze how border control can push migrants to longer and more dangerous routes.[265] Critics argue that enforcement without sufficient regular pathways may redirect women toward more dangerous routes and increase their dependence on smugglers. However, destination states see these risks as a direct result of smuggling, rather than border policy.[266] States in this bloc must therefore decide whether to combine deterrence with humanitarian access, trafficking screening, rescue operations, and exceptions for survivors of gender-based violence.[267]

RIGHTS-BASED ACCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY ADVOCATES

This bloc emphasizes access to asylum, gender-sensitive procedures, safe migration pathways, and essential services regardless of immigration status. Countries in this bloc include Spain, Brazil, Canada, and Germany, although these countries also enforce immigration laws and do not hold identical positions.[268] These states generally argue that border management should remain consistent with international human rights and refugee law.

States in this bloc may recognize legitimate security concerns while arguing that enforcement should not prevent women from reporting violence, requesting asylum, or receiving healthcare and legal assistance. These countries work to incorporate international treaty obligations into their national laws and policies. One important framework is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), whose implementation is monitored by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.[269] Canada's immigration department, for example, designs its refugee policies with women's needs in mind. They also have programs that help protect the dignity of migrant women, especially if they are victims of GBV. [270]

This bloc may support firewalls, confidential reporting systems, gender-sensitive asylum interviews, alternatives to detention, and greater funding for survivor services.[271] It may also support independent monitoring of border authorities and accountability when officials commit or enable abuse.[272] Its central position is that immigration status should not prevent a woman from receiving protection or seeking justice.

SHARED-RESPONSIBILITY AND REGIONAL-CAPACITY ADVOCATES

Countries in this bloc argue that responsibility should be shared across migration routes. For migration, this bloc includes many countries of origin, transit, and refugee hosting. These states may lack the funding and infrastructure needed to provide shelters, healthcare, legal assistance,

border screening, and long-term reintegration without international support. They argue that high-income destination states should not pay other countries to stop migration without also financing protection systems and expanding regular pathways. Türkiye and several states in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East may emphasize this position, although their individual policies differ.[273]

States in this bloc may also emphasize support for women who return to their countries of origin. Returnees may face trauma, unemployment, debt, family separation, or social stigma. Governments may therefore request international assistance for healthcare, economic opportunities, documentation, and survivor-centered reintegration.

These states focus on different aspects. This bloc may support regional referral systems, funding for local women-led organizations, protections for migrant workers, and economic opportunities in communities of origin.[274] However, states may disagree over whether international funding should include policy conditions or remain under national control.[275] Their central concern is who should pay for protection, which institutions should deliver it, and whether destination states should be allowed to transfer migration responsibilities beyond their borders.[276]

States in this bloc may also strongly believe in community-based advocacy. These are campaigns that want to reduce the social stigma associated with these women. They are used to facilitate the transition back into society.[277] These states may support partnerships with NGOs to accomplish this, like the UN Women's Latin America Regional Programme. This initiative was built to study GBV in Latin America and understand how to tackle it. Partner states were able to achieve strategic results, changing the fate of many women in the continent.[278]

Countries in this bloc may support regional referral systems, funding for local women's organizations, protections for migrant workers, economic opportunities in communities of origin, and survivor-centered return and reintegration programs. They may also call for destination states to finance humanitarian services and expand regular pathways. Their central concern is who should bear the financial and legal responsibility for protecting women before, during, and after migration.

Committee Mission

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) works to promote gender equality, social equity and the global empowerment of women.[279] It develops international recommendations, reviews progress toward gender equality, and provides a forum where governments negotiate policies concerning discrimination and violence against women and girls.[280] During its 68th session, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) condemned all forms of violence against women and girls, emphasizing that such violence remains "pervasive, underrecognized and underreported, particularly at the community level."[281] This demonstrates the CSW's commitment to ensuring that all women and girls, including migrants, can access protection and justice.

CSW has previously addressed violence against women migrant workers and encouraged origin and destination countries to collect comparable data, study the causes of violence, and include migrant women in national action plans. Its 2013 agreed conclusions also addressed the elimination of violence against women and girls. More recently, CSW70 in 2026 focused on strengthening women's access to justice and removing discriminatory laws and structural barriers. These priorities are directly relevant to migrant survivors who may be unable or afraid to report violence.

The CSW is an important tool in addressing GBV along migration routes. It condemns abuses, shapes frameworks and urges states to

meet their obligations.[282] The Commission can draw attention to the experiences of migrant and displaced women and recommend that governments improve their laws, services, and international cooperation. However, it does not directly operate shelters, control borders, investigate crimes, or provide humanitarian assistance.[283] The CSW lacks executive power. It cannot control borders or issue sanctions. However, it can act as a platform for diplomatic pressure and action. The Committee brings world leaders together and puts a spotlight on these issues. It sets clear standards and uses peer pressure to push nations towards finding solutions. This encourages governments to pass better laws, share with other nations and protect human beings.

Delegates should keep CSW's mandate in mind. CSW cannot deploy border personnel, prosecute smugglers, determine individual asylum claims, or require states to admit migrants. It can recommend gender-responsive laws and procedures, promote data collection, encourage funding for survivor services, and develop standards for cooperation among origin, transit, and destination countries.

To stop GBV along migration routes, there are areas that need attention. An example is the establishment of firewalls between crime reporting and immigration enforcement. Another one is the clear lack of humanitarian aid and services for survivors. Third, the funding of NGOs on the front lines needs to be considered by governments.[284] By addressing these questions, CSW can recommend policies that improve access to justice, strengthen survivor services, and reduce the conditions that allow perpetrators to act without consequences.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

TOPIC A

1. What laws or government policies in your country currently support women's participation and representation in STEM?
2. What are the most significant challenges in your country that prevent women and girls from entering or staying in STEM fields?
3. Do girls and women in your country have equal access to STEM education? Are there differences between rural and urban areas?
4. How many women receive STEM degrees in your country? How are those degrees used after completing their education?
5. Are women able to pursue careers in STEM? Do women hold any leadership positions?
6. How is AI changing STEM opportunities in your country?

TOPIC B

1. How does your country's law define gender-based violence (GBV)? How does it prevent or prosecute GBV committed against non-citizens and migrants within your borders?
2. Have there been any reports of GBV in your country or along its borders?
3. What security mechanisms and services does your country provide to displaced populations?
4. How does your country collaborate with other countries and international bodies to track and prosecute transnational trafficking of gender-diverse migrants?
5. Has your country established any policy measures, work permit programs, or humanitarian aid frameworks to reduce the vulnerabilities of migrant women?
6. How could your country improve access to judicial and medical services to support survivors of GBV without fear of deportation?

Important Documents

TOPIC A

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About the Authors

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Giovanna Grant is an undergraduate at Westminster University, where she studies literature, media, and French language. She has conducted multiple research projects on gender studies, literary theory, social action, and linguistics. Giovanna has been participating in Model United Nations since 2021, and has been a director for multiple committees since 2024. Other than NHSMUN, she serves on the staff for the Utah High School MUN conference. Outside of Model UN, Giovanna works at her university's Testing and Writing center, and is the president of both the Social Action Committee and the Pre-Law Society. She looks forward to pursuing her graduate studies in a joint JD and MBA program in the coming years.

TOPIC B: MARTINA BRUMANA

Martina Brumana is an Italian undergraduate at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, where she studies International Relations and Global Affairs. She is interested and conducts research on gender equality, human rights, migration, and environmental issues. Martina has been involved in Model United Nations since high school, which helped her choose the International Relations path for university. She first attended NHSMUN as a delegate in 2025 in the UNCAC committee. She returned in 2026 as an Assistant Director for the UNESCO committee. At university, she has also participated in a Moot Court competition, which further developed her interests in international law, diplomacy, research and public speaking. Martina was also involved in a high school club focused on migration, where she moderated a meeting with the author of a book on the current situation of migrants in Europe. Outside MUN, Martina has a deep passion for the arts and for their ability to bring people together and provide a way to express and understand themselves. She hopes to pursue a career in International Relations and looks forward to continuing her journey in this field in the coming years.

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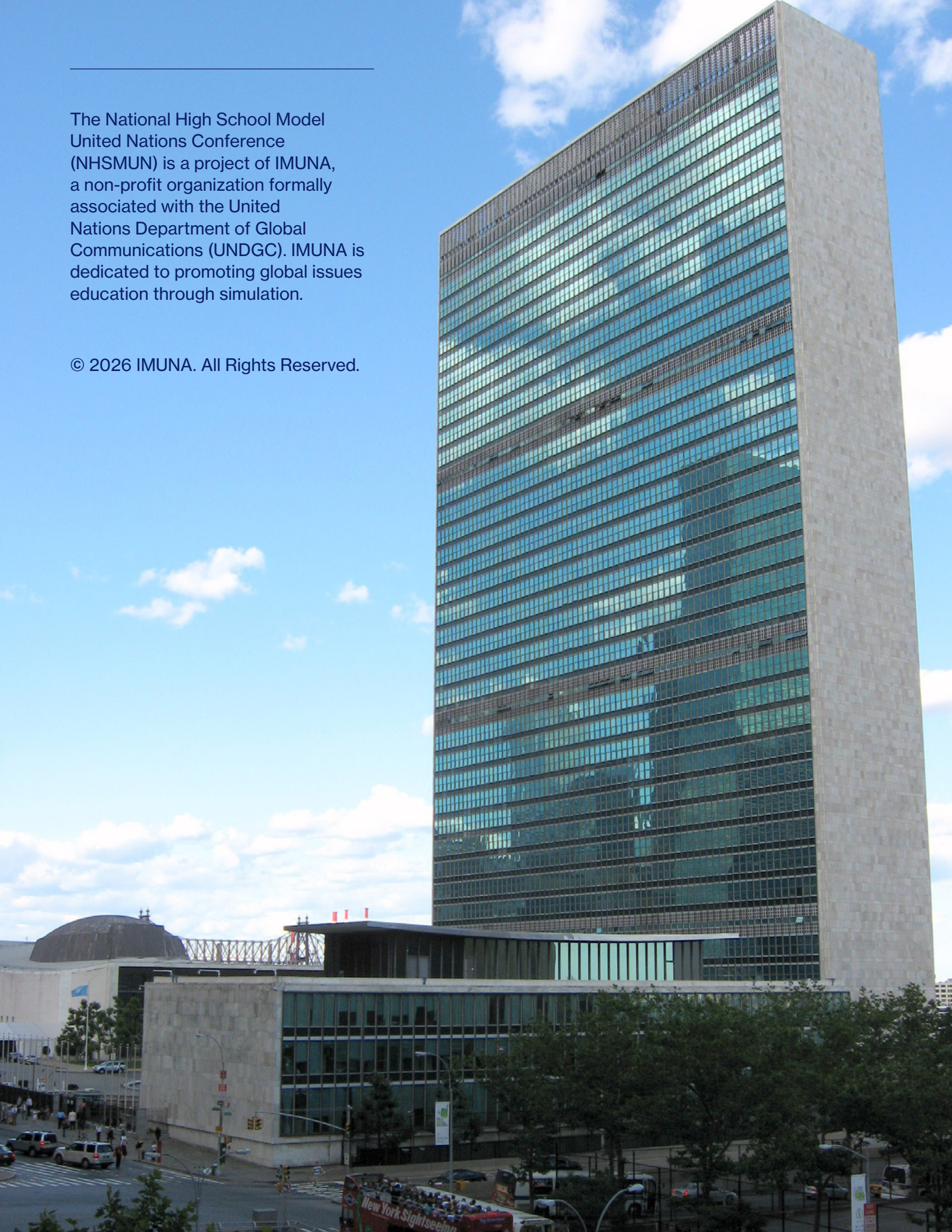
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