BACKGROUND *Guide*

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Agenda: Protecting Women Refugees and Asylum Seekers from Gender-Based Violence

Letter from the Dias

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to OOBMUN 26, and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This background guide has been created with the intention of providing you with a structure for the debate, ensuring that you have the opportunity to understand the topic, find your country's stance, and most importantly, make arguments. As your dias, we look forward to guiding you through an engaging, productive, and intellectually challenging conference.

We would like to emphasize the importance of research before committee sessions. This should include your country's main position, allies, foreign and domestic policy, international agreements, and more. These values are essential, yet require active participation and confidence to be able to execute within the MUN.

For many delegates, this may be your first experience in the world of diplomacy; however, the dias would like to affirm that we will be of your help in this process, aiming to make you feel as involved as possible, and hoping you leave with a positive experience.

The conference will range through different forms of debate; however, the main goal would be to reach a resolution that benefits the majority of the

committee, with the opportunity to make and vote on amendments as delegates please.

Above all, we expect delegates to maintain the utmost respect for their peers and diplomacy. This committee will oversee complex and mature issues that require critical thinking to navigate efficiently. MUN is not limited to debate, but also fosters an environment where perspectives from across the world are accepted equally.

We look forward to seeing your innovative ideas and approach to the agendas.

With Regards,

The Dais of UNCSW | Siddhartha Prabhakar, Emaan Owais, and Gungun Bhatia.

Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was introduced in 1946, shortly after the establishment of the entire UN, through ECOSOC resolution 11(II). The creation of this was to reflect upon the growing recognition of women's rights across the world. Initially, the CSW focused on establishing legal protection for women, with its scope increasing over time,then in 1996, the committee mandate was formally expanded, being assigned the role of monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform and integrating gender perspectives across all UN activities.

The CSW serves as the UN's primary body to make decisions in regards to gender issues. The mandate includes promoting women's rights, developing international standards, identifying challenges and reviewing the implementation of global commitments. Through its annual sessions, the Commission brings together member states, UN agencies, and civil society to debate upon pressing issues and adopt agreed conclusions with the purpose of guiding international and national policy. Though its outcomes are not legally binding, they carry substantial political influence and often shape legislation and global discourse.

The relevance of this agenda to the committee is substantial, as it falls directly within the CSW's core focus on gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Gender-based violence against women refugees and asylum seekers raises concerns about safety, access to justice, and fair treatment in asylum systems, all of which require international cooperation and clear policy guidance. The barriers women face when reporting violence and seeking health care, legal help, and safe housing also show the inequalities that continue in laws, institutions, and social norms. The CSW has addressed these issues throughout its establishment and these are also issues that the committee must address..

Introduction to the Agenda

Millions of people around the world have been forced to leave their homes because of conflict, persecution, and crisis. By the end of 2024, UNHCR estimated that 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced. Women and girls make up a large part of this population, and they often face extra risks. These include sexual violence, trafficking, forced marriage, and exploitation, which can happen during their journey, at borders, in camps, and in the countries where they seek protection.

International law already offers important protections. The 1951 Refugee Convention, CEDAW, and the Global Compact on Refugees all support the safety and dignity of refugees. However, countries apply these standards in different ways. Many women still cannot report violence safely, receive fair treatment in asylum procedures, or reach health care, legal help, and safe housing. Limited funding and a shortage of trained staff make these problems worse.

The risks women face are not the same everywhere, and this agenda covers a wide range of situations. In Sudan, 14.3 million people had been displaced by the end of 2024, and many survivors struggled to find protection services. In Bangladesh, large refugee camps need lasting safe spaces and private reporting systems. In Italy and Germany, the focus is on how women are treated during border procedures, reception, and asylum decisions. UNHCR's 2024 assessment found a high or extreme risk of gender-based violence in 22 of 25 countries facing humanitarian crises, and only 61% of refugees and asylum seekers in 65 countries knew how to reach services. These findings show that protection depends on both strong rules and practical action on the ground.

This agenda asks delegates to find practical ways to close these gaps. The committee should consider how to create clearer shared standards, safer reporting systems, fairer asylum procedures, and better training for staff. It should also think about how to include refugee women and women-led organizations, and how to hold countries and organizations accountable. Delegates should keep in mind that countries have different levels of resources, so solutions must be realistic as well as ambitious.

Key Terms

Delegates should be familiar with the following terms before the conference.

Term	Meaning
1. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Any harmful act against a person because of their gender. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, and economic harm, as well as threats, forcing someone to act against their will, and limits placed on a person's freedom.
2. Refugee	A person who has left their country because they have a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group, and who needs international protection. Persecution based on gender can also support a claim for protection.
3. Asylum Seeker	A person who has applied for international protection and is still waiting for a final decision.
4. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)	Violence linked to gender inequality that causes sexual harm. Examples include sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.
5. Human Trafficking	Recruiting, moving, hiding, or receiving a person through force, pressure, deception, or by taking advantage of their vulnerability, in order to exploit them.

Term	Meaning
6. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)	Any real or attempted misuse of a position of power or trust to obtain sexual favors from a vulnerable person. For example, asking a refugee for sexual favors in exchange for housing, food, or legal documents.
7. Non-Refoulement	A key rule of refugee law that stops countries from sending refugees back to a place where they could face persecution. Other human rights agreements also protect people from being sent back to places where they could face serious harm.
8. Gender-Responsive Protection	Policies and programmes that take into account how gender affects a person's safety, access to resources, and experience of displacement. Examples include safe housing, trained staff, and easy ways to report abuse.
9. Survivor-Centred Approach	A way of responding to violence that puts the survivor's safety, dignity, privacy, choices, and informed consent first, and avoids discrimination and further harm.
10. International Standards	Agreed rules, principles, and good practices, such as treaties and guidelines, that help countries prevent violence, protect affected people, investigate violations, and provide access to justice and support.
11. Referral System	A coordinated way of connecting survivors with the right services, such as medical care, emotional

Term	Meaning
	support, legal help, safe housing, and protection agencies.
12. Accountability	The duty of governments, institutions, and individuals to prevent abuse, investigate reports, fix gaps in protection, and provide suitable remedies to survivors.
13. Intersectionality	The idea that factors such as age, disability, income, race or ethnicity, and migration status can combine and create extra forms of discrimination and extra barriers to protection.
14. Safe Reporting Mechanisms	Private and easy-to-use ways for survivors to report violence and get support without fear of threats, retaliation, or discrimination.
15. Gender-Based Persecution	Serious harm suffered by a person because of their gender or gender-related reasons. It can help show that a person qualifies for asylum.

Key Issues

Women and girls who flee their homes can face serious risks of gender-based violence before, during, and after their journey. The main issues for the committee to consider are listed below.

5.1 Sexual Violence and Exploitation in Refugee Camps

Women refugees and asylum seekers can face sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation in crowded camps, temporary housing, and settlements. Poor lighting, weak sanitation, and a lack of security make them more vulnerable.

- Key fact: UNHCR found that GBV was a high or extreme risk in 22 of 25 countries facing humanitarian crises in 2024 (88%).
- Key fact: UNHCR reported a 50% rise in conflict-related sexual violence in 2023.

5.2 Exploitation During Asylum Procedures and Border Crossings

Women seeking asylum can be pressured, harassed, or sexually exploited by people who control their transport, documents, housing, or basic needs. Fear of being sent back and a lack of knowledge about their legal rights can stop them from reporting abuse.

- Key fact: In UNHCR's 2024 survey of 65 countries, only 61% of refugees and asylum seekers knew how to reach GBV services.

5.3 Human Trafficking and Unsafe Migration Routes

Women escaping danger or instability may depend on middlemen who take advantage of their need for safe travel, work, or housing. A lack of safe and legal routes, and of clear information, makes it more likely that women will turn to these middlemen.

5.4 Different National Laws and Standards

Countries differ in how they handle asylum claims, respond to gender-based persecution, investigate GBV, and support survivors. International laws offer many protections, but countries apply them very unevenly.

5.5 Barriers to Reporting and Accessing Justice

Survivors may stay silent because of stigma, fear of retaliation, discrimination, language barriers, or worry about their immigration status. A shortage of trained lawyers and investigators can also stop survivors from seeking justice.

- Key fact: In UNHCR's 2024 data, only 42% of internally displaced people surveyed in 19 countries knew how to access GBV services. The figure for refugees and asylum seekers was 61%.

5.6 Limited Health Care and Emotional Support

Survivors may need emergency medical care, reproductive health services, trauma-informed counselling, and long-term mental health support. Costs, language barriers, long distances, and paperwork can make these services hard to reach.

- Key fact: At the end of 2023, 6.7 million people in Sudan needed GBV support services, and UNHCR expected this number to rise in 2024.

5.7 Protection of Groups at Higher Risk

Unaccompanied girls, pregnant women, women with disabilities, older women, and women who face several kinds of discrimination face extra risks and barriers to help. Policies that treat everyone the same will not meet their needs.

5.8 Funding, Implementation, and International Accountability

Protection can fail when the host country lacks funding, training, facilities, or capacity. Aid organizations struggle to provide shelter, health care, and specialized support over a long period if they cannot sustain these services.

- Key fact: By the end of 2024, 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, which is 7 million more than at the end of 2023.

Key Stakeholders

The countries below are important to this agenda because of their role as countries of origin, host countries, transit countries, or international supporters. All figures come from UNHCR. Where a figure is global, it is marked as such.

Country	Why It Matters to the Agenda	Key Fact
1. Afghanistan	Women and girls face limits on education, work, and movement. This raises serious protection concerns and questions about whether women can return safely.	UNHCR notes that more than 100 decrees and edicts have limited the rights and freedoms of women and girls since 2021.
2. Sudan	Sudan is facing a major displacement crisis. Sexual violence, a shortage of aid, and limited access to protection services are serious concerns.	By the end of 2024, 14.3 million people had been displaced inside Sudan or had left the country. In 2023, 6.7 million people needed GBV services, and this number rose in 2024.

Country	Why It Matters to the Agenda	Key Fact
3. Democratic Republic of the Congo	Widespread displacement puts women and girls at high risk of gender-based violence. The country shows why prevention and teamwork between aid groups and national authorities are needed.	UNHCR assessments in which communities took part found that women and girls are especially at risk of GBV.
4. Nigeria	Nigeria is relevant to discussions on the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls during emergencies.	Global figure: UNHCR's 2024 assessment found a serious or extreme risk of GBV in 22 of 25 countries facing humanitarian crises.
5. Bangladesh	Bangladesh hosts a very large Rohingya refugee population. Camps need lasting services such as safe spaces, confidential reporting, and help for survivors.	UNHCR's 2024 assessment showed that awareness of GBV services has improved.
6. Pakistan	Pakistan hosts a large number of Afghan refugees. It is important to discussions on asylum, returns, and the protection of women who may face	UNHCR reported on 27 November 2025 that more than one million Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan in 2025.

Country	Why It Matters to the Agenda	Key Fact
	gender-related persecution.	
7. Türkiye	Türkiye is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries. It is key to discussions on host-country duties, services, and fair sharing of responsibility.	By mid-2025, Türkiye hosted about 2.6 million refugees, including about 2.5 million Syrians under temporary protection.
8. Italy	Italy is an important entry point to Europe by sea. Its border procedures and reception systems affect the safety of women during migration and the asylum process.	More than 66,300 people arrived in Italy by sea in 2024. In the first half of 2024, about 6% of sea arrivals were women. This figure covers sea arrivals only, not all asylum seekers in Italy.
9. Germany	Germany is a major destination country. Safe housing, health care, legal help, and survivor services are key policy areas.	Global figure: UNHCR's 2024 assessment found that only 61% of refugees and asylum seekers in 65 countries knew how to reach GBV services.
10. United States of America	The United States is a major donor and takes part in international talks on refugee protection. Funding and cooperation	Global figure: By the end of 2024, 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide.

Country	Why It Matters to the Agenda	Key Fact
	help keep protection and survivor services running.	

Past Solutions

Over time, the international community has recognized that refugee and asylum systems must take the specific dangers faced by women and girls into account. Early refugee law did not directly mention gender-based violence. Later human rights agreements, UN guidance, and protection programmes have built a more gender-aware approach. However, countries do not apply these standards in the same way.

7.1 Existing Legal and Policy Frameworks

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the main legal base for refugee protection. A key principle is non-refoulement, which stops countries from sending people back to places where their life or freedom could be in danger. This is important for women who may face forced marriage, sexual violence, or trafficking if returned.

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) brought more attention to women in displacement. In 2014, CEDAW General Recommendation No. 32 asked countries to review refugee claims with gender in mind. It noted that gender-related persecution can qualify for refugee status and that women's claims are sometimes judged by standards based mainly on men's experiences.

The Global Compact on Refugees (2018) encourages countries to share responsibility for refugees more fairly. It is not legally binding, but it has strengthened cooperation among governments, UN agencies, civil society, and refugee communities.

UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Policy supports inclusive programmes. It includes standard procedures for responding to GBV, private referral systems, and access to safety, legal, medical, and emotional support services for survivors.

7.2 Work on the Ground

UNHCR and its partners have set up several types of support:

- Safe spaces for women and girls
- Case management systems
- Legal assistance
- Emergency cash support
- Community awareness programmes
- Specialized services for survivors

They work with governments, humanitarian organizations, women-led groups, and displaced communities to reduce the risk of GBV and help survivors get timely support.

7.3 Challenges

These efforts still face serious challenges, such as limited funding, a shortage of trained staff, weak reporting systems, unsafe living conditions, and poor access to services. In some places, safe spaces and other GBV services have been reduced or closed because of a lack of money. This shows that current efforts are valuable but need steady funding, better coordination, and clearer international standards.

7.4 Remaining Gaps

Many women asylum seekers still face unsafe travel routes, a lack of private interviews, language barriers, limited access to female staff, fear of retaliation, and too little support. The committee should consider how existing standards can be made more consistent, easier to access, focused on survivors, and realistic for countries with different levels of resources.

QARMAs (Questions a Resolution Must Answer)

Delegates should keep these questions in mind while writing working papers and draft resolutions.

No.	Question
1	How can countries agree on shared international standards to protect women refugees and asylum seekers from gender-based violence?
2	What steps can help women and girls report gender-based violence safely, privately, and without fear of retaliation?
3	How can asylum procedures be improved so that claims involving sexual violence, forced marriage, trafficking, and other gender-based persecution are assessed fairly?

No.	Question
4	What minimum safety standards should apply in refugee camps, reception centres, detention facilities, transit areas, and other places where displaced women may be at risk?
5	How can countries make sure survivors receive timely health care, emotional support, legal help, safe housing, and interpretation services?
6	What training should border officials, asylum officers, police, aid workers, interpreters, and health-care workers receive before working with women refugees and asylum seekers?
7	How can refugee women, women-led organizations, and local community groups take part in planning, running, and monitoring protection programmes?
8	How can countries and humanitarian organizations be monitored and held accountable for following the standards the committee agrees on?

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