

Violence Against Women and Girls

The term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.(1) Violence against women and girls (VAWG) affects women and girls of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities. Root causes of violence include climate change, poverty, conflict, displacement, consequences of COVID-19, gender stereotyping, patriarchy, misogyny, and negative impacts of technology. Trends include economic violence, which is abusive control of finances as punishment of women due to their social, economic or political situation(2) and violence against Indigenous women due to racial discrimination, colonial history and in some cases, motives behind the marriage mixed marriages.(3) Experts believe that most incidents of violence go unreported, but research suggests that VAWG affects at least 1 in 3 women in their lifetime.(4,5)

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women.(6) In July 2021, the UN Human Rights Council appointed an independent consultant as Special Rapporteur on gender issues, rights of refugees and migrants, transitional justice and developing a humanitarian response on violence against women and girls.(7)

Violence Against Migrant Women

Root causes of migration include economic disparities between countries, conflict, climate change, political instability, demographic pressures, colonization, family reunification, and changing labor demands. Women and girls are likely to experience a continuum of gender-based violence at all stages of migration, from bullying, verbal, physical, and psychological abuse to sexual violence.(8,9,10) Reports also highlight domestic violence, patriarchal violence, femicide, human trafficking, sadism, torture, and psychological trauma.(11) Mixed migration flows represent a combination of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers traveling along similar routes,(12,13) exposing inadequate labour migration policies that may influence additional instances of violence.(14)

Challenges to effectively address violence to migrant women include:

- Underreporting
- Barriers to access support services
- Translation assistance
- Impact of civil registration
- Legal protection
- Societal attitudes
- Gender equality

Despite these challenges, migrant women demonstrate resilience, agency, and leadership in advocating for their rights, building community networks, and seeking solutions to address the root causes of violence and inequality. Achievements since 1995 include:

- International agreements, such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention(15)
- Data and policy responses to manage migration flows(16)
- Legislation in some countries for the provision of protection and support services
- Awareness and advocacy
- Improved data collection and research
- Capacity building of law enforcement agencies and immigration staff

Addressing the status of migrant women requires comprehensive approaches that address the structural factors driving their vulnerability to violence, ensure their access to rights, dignity, and support services, and promote their empowerment and inclusion in society.

Violence Against Older Women

“Violence against older persons is a global phenomenon.... such violence and abuse often go unnoticed and remain a taboo in many societies.” - UN-Independent Expert Claudia Mahler

The United Nations defines an older person as aged 60 years and older, recognizing that ageing definitions vary depending on cultural, legal, and social factors.(17) Women outnumber men at older ages due to their longer life expectancy. In 2022, women globally accounted for 55.7% of people aged 65 or older.(18) Brutality against older women includes physical, psychological, and sexualized violence. Violence occurs in homes, workplaces, care institutions, and communities. This issue is gaining momentum at world assemblies, in work groups, and expert joint statements(19). The following achievements have been accomplished mostly at national levels.

- Legislation and policy responses
- Establishment of reporting mechanisms
- Global awareness and action(20)
- Training for professionals
- Protection services
- Research and data collection(21)

Older women remain invisible in datasets and are routinely excluded from policy and programmes that address violence against women and girls. This omission translates into a lack of protection mechanisms, limited access to tailored services and a lack of effective prevention programmes for older women.(22) Continued efforts are needed to strengthen prevention strategies, improve victim support services, enhance legal and policy frameworks, and promote age-friendly societies that respect and protect the rights and dignity of older women.

- Leadership and political will
- Agreement on the UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons
- Aggregated data to monitor violence
- Response mechanisms if violence is suspected
- Standardized data collection & case analysis
- Capacity building in care support professionals
- Self-advocacy training
- Quality management and auditing
- Geriatric healthcare improvements

Violence against Women with Disabilities

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describes disabilities as long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.(23) An estimated 1.3 billion people have a diagnosis of significant disability.(24) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reports an increased risk of physical, psychological, and sexual violence faced by women and girls with disabilities.(25) Deaf, hard of hearing, and nonverbal women are more vulnerable to violence.(26) Alarming, the OSCE 2021 Survey Report identified specific targeting of people with developmental /

physical disabilities by human traffickers as an emerging trend.(27) Violence against women and girls with disabilities is not just a subset of gender-based violence – it is an intersectional category dealing with gender-based and disability-based violence.(28)

Since 1995, there has been progress in addressing disability violence.

- Recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities in international frameworks
- Increased awareness of the specific vulnerabilities faced by women with disabilities
- Development of national and international strategies
- Initial protective measures and support services

While these achievements represent advancement, challenges persist.

- Limited implementation of existing laws and policies
- Gaps in data collection and research
- Discriminatory practices and societal stigmas
- Insufficient access to disability-tailored support services

Despite progress, gaps still exist.

- Insufficient data disaggregation by sex and disability
- Exclusion of women with disabilities from research
- Violence-type selection bias based on disability
- Limited access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Lack of healthcare capacity for the specific needs of women with disabilities.

It is crucial to remain vigilant and proactive. Efforts to combat violence against people with disabilities must include legal protection, education, advocacy, and the agencies with specialized infrastructure.

Continuing the Way Forward

In 1995, there already was a recognition that although the status of women had advanced in some important respects in the past decade, most progress was uneven, inequalities between women and men persisted and major obstacles remained, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people.(29) As an agenda for action, the Platform sought to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.(30) In 2024, significant work still remains to create a world free from violence for all women and girls.

Recommendations

Efforts must be coordinated across all sectors and involve collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, communities, social services, law enforcement agencies, legal professionals, healthcare providers to create lasting change and ensure the safety and well-being of all women and girls.

1. Promote research, collect pertinent data and compile statistics (measures and instruments) concerning violence against women and girls. Encourage research into causes, nature, seriousness, consequences and effective measures to implement and redress all types of violence. Develop data standards, metadata, and security protocols for information sharing that enables global research data access and analysis and reporting.
2. Invest and partner with the civil and private sectors to design and develop gender-sensitive national support systems that provide well-funded shelters and relief that incorporate long-term social integration for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as medical, psychological and other counseling services, enable inclusive education, and free or low-cost legal aid to enhance self-advocacy, empowerment, and dignity.

3. Adopt institutional mechanisms and assign core resources to perform due diligence in independent oversight, regular reviews and monitoring of all violence against women to implement legal, policy, and education reforms that promote social transformation.

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