

Women, Peace, & Security



History of the Current Situation

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 in October of 2000.¹ This monumental resolution was the first international document to prevent violence against women during conflict and it sparked the international conversation on women's security. However, women are still often overlooked in policymaking and in societies throughout the world. Also, gender equality is

the United Nation's fifth sustainable development goal, but there are still extensive inequalities between men and women across the globe.² Gender equality and female empowerment should enable all women to feel safe and secure in their environment.

Despite such efforts, gender-based violence (GBV) still exists. GBV refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, rooted in unequal power dynamics and societal norms. It encompasses a range of abusive behaviors, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse, which disproportionately affect women and girls but can also impact men and boys. According to the European Commission, GBV is a severe violation of human rights and is often perpetuated by gender inequality, discriminatory practices, and cultural attitudes that condone or normalize violence.³ The International Rescue Committee emphasizes that preventing GBV involves addressing these underlying power imbalances, promoting gender equality, and supporting survivors through comprehensive legal, social, and psychological services.⁴

The security of women is their ability to protect themselves and their property from harm. This includes being protected from GBV as well as discrimination. Many nations have taken strides to ensure the security of women. Additionally, multiple nations have even included women in their security forces and have allowed them to take an active role in peace talks and negotiations. Overall, however, there is still much work to be done all throughout the world. For instance, in areas of conflict, women are especially in danger of sexual violence, exploitation, and oppression. Women all around the world have little to no sense of security, preventing a peaceful and prosperous globe.

The Security Council must seek to not only reduce and eliminate GBV, but it should also endeavor to empower women in the peace process for states experiencing conflict. The inclusion of women in peacebuilding and security processes is crucial for achieving sustainable and lasting peace. In the peace process women bring diverse perspectives and solutions that can address the root causes

¹ "What is UNSCR 1325?" *United States Institute of Peace*. https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

² "Sustainable Development Goal 5." *United Nations*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>.

³ "What is gender-based violence?" *European Commission*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en.

⁴ "What is gender-based violence – and how do we prevent it?" *International Rescue Committee*. <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-gender-based-violence-and-how-do-we-prevent-it>.

of conflict, foster reconciliation, and build more resilient societies.⁵ Their participation ensures that peace agreements reflect the needs and rights of all community members, not just the dominant groups. The United Nations Security Council highlights that women's involvement in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction leads to more effective and durable outcomes, as their contributions enhance the legitimacy and inclusivity of peace efforts, ultimately promoting greater stability and societal cohesion.⁶ Too often due to discrimination and cultural biases women are excluded from the peace process but their inclusion is vital to provide lasting security for men and women.

Recent History of the Issue

Violence During War and Conflict

Women are more severely impacted by violence during times of war and conflict. During conflicts, disorder makes it difficult for the authorities to enforce laws against GBV.⁷ Oftentimes, groups involved in the war or conflict view GBV as a tactic to demoralize their opponents.⁸ With GBV viewed as an effective strategy of conflict, and the ability to engage in GBV with greater impunity during conflicts than during peace, there is often a rise in violence against women in conflict zones. Additionally, women are more often the prime targets of sexually based violence in conflict zones, often due to the fact that they usually cannot move as easily as men and are the prime caregiver of children. Women and girls are forced into sexual actions, early marriage, and intimate partner violence, along with many other GBV scenarios.

Trafficking of women also spikes in areas of conflict. In places with less of a political and economic structure, it is a lot more common for trafficking to happen.⁹ Conflict zones often have their political, social, and economic frameworks shattered. These disruptions make it easier for unscrupulous actors to engage in the trafficking of women.

In places like Haiti where there has been a sustained period of conflict, many women are victims to GBV. According to the World Bank, "in Haiti, physical violence currently affects 29% of women of childbearing age and is perpetrated by an intimate partner in 45% of the cases; violence linked to psychological pressure with the goal to exert control affects over 31% of women; women survivors of domestic violence account for 34%, with 37% of cases resulting in serious injuries."¹⁰



⁵ "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies." *Inclusive Security*.

<https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>.

⁶ "Prospects for Women Peacebuilders Vastly Worse than before Pandemic as Spoilers Ramp Up Action Aimed at Silencing Their Voices, Human Rights Chief Warns Security Council." *UN Press*. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14768.doc.htm>.

⁷ "Tackling Gender Based Violence in Fragile Contexts." *The World Bank*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/03/07/tackling-gender-based-violence-in-fragile-contexts>.

⁸ "GENDER, WAR & PEACEBUILDING." *USIP*. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/NPECSG12_0.pdf.

⁹ "Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability." *United Nations*.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability>.

¹⁰ "Tackling Gender Based Violence in Fragile Contexts." *The World Bank*.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/03/07/tackling-gender-based-violence-in-fragile-contexts>.

Unlike countries involved in an active war, Haiti has seen sustained levels of internal violence and conflict, demonstrating that insecurity below the threshold of war also makes conditions ripe for GBV. While the World Bank's State and Peacebuilding Fund is starting to put more effort into projects to help nations like Haiti, there is still a lack of funding to reduce and mitigate GBV in conflict zones around the globe.

To address GBV in conflict areas, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1960 in 2010. This Resolution 1960 gives an accountability system for conflict related sexual violence with timely collection and action on the reports.¹¹ Understanding the importance of involving women in peace processes to decrease GBV, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2122 in 2013 which also sets out a need for humanitarian aid specifically for sexual and reproductive health services.¹² These resolutions serve as a stepping stone to further the actions taken to protect and ensure the wellbeing of women in places of conflict.

Violence in the Household

Women that do not live in war and conflict zones still face a substantial amount of GBV. Many women around the world have been victims of domestic and workplace gender discrimination and violence. Across the globe, one in three women will be affected by GBV.¹³

For many women, they are exploited by men that are already in their lives; romantic or sexual partners or men in their workplaces. For many countries, this is a common reality. The term femicide was coined to classify the murder of a woman by a man for reasons related to their gender.¹⁴ Often, cases of femicide are done to women by men they already know in their lives. Though even with all that is known about femicide, many cases still go undocumented and therefore could mask the true severity at which these murders happen.¹⁵

Femicide is a global issue, but since the mid-2010s has been repeatedly raised in public debate in Latin America. In 2022, it was reported that 4,050 women were victims of femicide in Latin American countries.¹⁶ Femicide is a clear sign of gender inequality and the discrimination women around the world face daily. While there are nations who are bringing legislative action to fight femicide, such as the 2010 law Chile passed that classed femicide as a specific crime, there is still much that can be done that will make these laws become more prevalent and influential in nations.¹⁷

Honor killings, the murder of women particularly victims of sexual abuse and rape, are also still a prevalent issue within some nations. The term comes from the historical belief that women are the property of their fathers before marriage and then their husbands after marriage. When a woman commits an act of adultery, she is then believed to be ruining her family's honor and in turn the way

¹¹ "Women and armed conflict." *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women/2014/conflict>.

¹² "Security Council Resolution 2122." *Peace Women*. <http://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-2122>.

¹³ "Exploring the Data: The Prevalence of Gender-based Violence in Latin America." *The Wilson Center*. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/explore-gbv-data>.

¹⁴ "The causes of femicide in Latin America." *Institut Barcelona Estudis Internacionals*. https://www.ibei.org/ibei_studentpaper24_71980.pdf.

¹⁵ "Five essential facts to know about femicide." *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide>.

¹⁶ "In 2022, At Least 4,050 Women Were Victims of Femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean: ECLAC." *United Nations*. <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/2022-least-4050-women-were-victims-femicide-latin-america-and-caribbean-eclac>.

¹⁷ "Latin America fights femicide with legislation, but cultural change still needed." *International Bar Association*. <https://www.ibanet.org/latin-america-femicide-legislation>.

for that family to receive their honor back is to murder the woman who had committed these acts, even if they were not consented.¹⁸ These honor killings happen usually by male relatives and rarely get press coverage. While these murders are more common in Middle Eastern and South Asian nations, there are cases of honor killings in every nation around the world.¹⁹ These violent acts on a woman's life are intentionally targeted and are an extreme act against a woman's rights. Addressing attitudes around violence against women in countries not experiencing conflict is an effective way for developing norms against GBV that can prevent and reduce the number of GBV-related acts committed during conflicts. Societies that are accustomed to protecting women during times of peace are more likely to be able to effectively protect them during conflicts—these attitude shifts start by helping make women more secure in the home.

Barriers Faced by Women

Lack of Economic Opportunities

The lack of economic opportunities for women is a pervasive issue that manifests in various forms, including restricted access to education, inadequate representation in the workforce, and limited financial resources. Globally, nearly 2.4 billion women lack the same economic rights as men, which significantly hinders their ability to participate fully in the economy.²⁰ Barriers such as societal norms, lack of support systems, and discriminatory laws create an environment where women are often relegated to informal employment or unpaid labor. This systemic inequality not only restricts their economic potential but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency.

The barriers to economic empowerment have profound implications for women's security and autonomy. When women are unable to secure stable employment or earn a sufficient income, they often become dependent on male family members for financial support. This dependency can trap them in unhealthy relationships, limiting their freedom and choice.²¹ Furthermore, economic instability leaves women vulnerable to poverty, as they are less likely to save or invest in their future. This lack of financial independence can deter mobility, making it difficult for women to escape adverse situations, pursue better opportunities, or invest in their own education and that of their children.



¹⁸ "Murdered women: A history of 'honour' crimes." *Al-Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/8/1/murdered-women-a-history-of-honour-crimes>.

¹⁹ "The Horror of 'Honor Killings', Even in US." *Amnesty International*. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/blog/the-horror-of-honor-killings-even-in-us/>.

²⁰ "Nearly 2.4 Billion Women Globally Don't Have Same Economic Rights as Men." *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>.

²¹ "Four Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment in Emerging Economies." *Technoserve*. <https://www.technoserve.org/blog/four-barriers-to-womens-economic-empowerment-in-emerging-economies/>.

Additionally, the broader economic impacts of women's exclusion are significant, affecting entire communities and economies. The World Bank emphasizes that addressing barriers to women's economic activity can not only improve individual livelihoods but also stimulate overall economic growth and prosperity.²² When women participate fully in the workforce, societies benefit from diverse perspectives and talents, leading to more innovative solutions to problems. Ultimately, dismantling the barriers that restrict women's economic opportunities is crucial not only for achieving gender equality but also for fostering sustainable development worldwide.

Barriers to Political Participation

Barriers to women's political participation are significant and multifaceted, with many women in various countries still unable to vote or run for office due to restrictive laws and cultural norms. In some regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, societal attitudes and legal frameworks create formidable obstacles, effectively disenfranchising women.²³ Additionally, women often face systemic discrimination that discourages them from seeking leadership positions within political institutions. Research indicates that while women are increasingly visible in politics, they remain underrepresented, particularly in high-ranking offices, due to persistent stereotypes and biases that question their leadership abilities.²⁴

The lack of representation in political institutions directly impacts the security and welfare of women. When women are not adequately represented in decision-making bodies, their unique needs and perspectives are often overlooked, resulting in policies that fail to address issues like gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and economic empowerment.²⁵ This lack of attention not only perpetuates existing inequalities but also hinders efforts to create a secure environment for women. The political participation of women is particularly vital in countries emerging from conflict and instability. By having a seat at the decision-making table, women can help ensure that their views are represented and needs are met, helping reduce GBV. By increasing women's participation in politics, societies can ensure that their voices are heard and their rights are protected, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and secure environment for all.

Case Study: Increasing the Number of Women Peacekeepers

One key power of the Security Council is its ability to authorize and deploy peacekeeping missions to conflict zones. Historically, 99% of peacekeepers have been men—as are most nations' militaries. Unfortunately, male UN Peacekeepers have frequently perpetrated sexual violence during

²² “Addressing the Barriers that Hold Back Women’s Economic Activity in the Mashreq Countries Would Boost Growth and Prosperity.” *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/23/addressing-the-barriers-that-hold-back-womens-economic-activity-in-the-mashreq-countries-would-boost-growth-and-prosperity>.

²³ “We must dismantle barriers to women’s political participation. Here’s why.” *UNDP*. <https://www.undp.org/blog/we-must-dismantle-barriers-womens-political-participation-heres-why>.

²⁴ “2. Views of obstacles for women seeking high political office.” *Pew Research*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/09/27/views-of-obstacles-for-women-seeking-high-political-office/>.

²⁵ “Women’s leadership and political participation.” *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>

peacekeeping missions. In recent years peacekeepers in both the Central African Republic and Haiti have been accused of sexual violence and exploitation.²⁶ These incidents often involve the abuse of



power and betrayal of trust, leading to severe consequences for survivors and diminishing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. In response, the UN has implemented stricter measures and accountability mechanisms to address and prevent such misconduct, though challenges remain in eradicating these abuses entirely. An increase in the number of women UN

Peacekeepers is one solution that the Security Council could pursue to reduce sexual exploitation and increase the chance of successful peacekeeping missions.

Increasing the number of female peacekeepers in UN missions is a critical effort to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of peacekeeping operations. As outlined by the UN and Women in International Security (WIIS), female peacekeepers contribute unique perspectives and skills that can improve relations with local communities, address gender-specific issues more effectively, and foster a more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution.²⁷ However, this effort is not without challenges. Female peacekeepers often face significant risks, including gender-based violence, inadequate support, and barriers to full participation due to entrenched biases and insufficient infrastructure. Addressing these risks requires dedicated policies, support systems, and commitment to overcoming institutional obstacles to ensure that the increased presence of women in peacekeeping roles translates into meaningful and impactful contributions to global peace and security.²⁸

Efforts to recruit more women peacekeepers are ongoing. As of December 2021, women constitute approximately 7% of UN peacekeepers—this represents 6% increase since 1993.²⁹ This slow increase in the number of women peacekeepers, despite increase recruitment efforts, highlight's a significant gender disparity in peacekeeping roles. Ongoing efforts to recruit more women include targeted outreach, enhanced support systems, and policy reforms aimed at addressing barriers to their participation and ensuring a more inclusive and effective peacekeeping force.

Case Study: Gender Based Violence in the Ukraine War

In the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, GBV has emerged as a severe and pervasive issue, particularly impacting women and girls. According to Amnesty International, as Russia's full-scale invasion

²⁶ "Fresh allegations of sexual abuse made against UN peacekeepers in Central African Republic." *Africa Renewal*. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/fresh-allegations-sexual-abuse-made-against-un-peacekeepers-central-african-republic>; "UN Peacekeeping has a Sexual Abuse Problem." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/11/un-peacekeeping-has-sexual-abuse-problem>.

²⁷ "The Importance of Meaningful Participation of Female Peacekeepers." *Women in International Security*. <https://wiisglobal.org/the-importance-of-meaningful-participation-of-female-peacekeepers/>.

²⁸ "Women in Peacekeeping: A Key to Peace." *United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/en/exhibits/news/page/women-peacekeeping-key-peace>

²⁹ "Women in peacekeeping." *UN Peacekeeping*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

continues, Ukrainian women face grave risks including sexual violence, domestic abuse, and exploitation, exacerbated by the instability and breakdown of social services.³⁰ The United Nations has reported that the war has intensified these risks, with displaced women and girls suffering from increased vulnerability to violence and a lack of adequate protection and support.³¹ Russian soldiers have used sexual abuse and rape as a weapon against Ukrainian women throughout the war.³² In Bucha, a town invaded early in the conflict, dozens of women and girls were raped during the occupation.³³ Despite international commendation of and prohibitions on the use of rape and sexual violence in conflict, its use continues as the Russians view it as an effective tool to demoralize the Ukrainian people and military. Because of the nature of the conflict, efforts to hold Russian perpetrators accountable for their crimes have so far failed. This lack of accountability further weakens norms against GBV.

But GBV is not just perpetrated by Russian soldiers. Two years into the conflict, the situation remains dire, with GBV rates continuing to rise. In the first 5-months of 2023 alone domestic violence cases increased by 51%.³⁴ The conflict has not only magnified existing gender inequalities but also strained resources and systems designed to support survivors of violence.³⁵ The conflict has eroded many of the societal prohibitions against violence and because of their economic, political, and social vulnerability, women and girls often face the brunt of this violence. Efforts to address these issues are urgently needed to provide relief and protection to those affected, ensuring that GBV is effectively tackled amidst the ongoing crisis. In both the conflict in Ukraine and other places in conflict, the Security Council must think critically about methods to safeguard and protect women and girls from violence.

Questions to Ponder

How can the United Nations increase the number of women involved in peace efforts and peace talks?

How can the United Nations more effectively recruit, train, and retain women peacekeepers?

How can the international community discourage GBV in societies experiencing conflict?

How can women be better protected in conflict zones?

³⁰ “Ukraine: Women face grave risks as Russia’s full-scale invasion enters its second year.” *Amnesty International*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/ukraine-women-face-grave-risks-as-russias-full-scale-invasion-enters-its-second-year/>.

³¹ “Women and girls after two years of war in Ukraine.” *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2024/02/women-and-girls-after-two-years-of-war-in-ukraine>

³² “Rape has reportedly become a weapon in Ukraine. Finding justice may be difficult.” *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/30/1093339262/ukraine-russia-rape-war-crimes>

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ “Gender-based violence skyrockets in war-ravaged Ukraine.” *Human Rights First*. <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/gender-based-violence-skyrockets-in-war-ravaged-ukraine/>

³⁵ “Women and girls after two years of war in Ukraine.” *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2024/02/women-and-girls-after-two-years-of-war-in-ukraine>