

UN Women's Inputs for the General Assembly Report of the Special Rapporteur for Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Girls, on Gender, Peace, and Security

Introduction

UN Women is pleased to respond to the request by the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, to inform her upcoming report on trafficking in persons and gender, peace, and security to be presented to the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly in October 2024. UN Women commends the Special Rapporteur's focus on the gendered impact of conflict and insecurity, including on women, girls, and persons identifying diversely based on sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual orientations, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and the heightened risk they face of being subjected to trafficking in persons.

UN Women plays a crucial role in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, by advocating for the inclusion and leadership of women in peace processes, promoting gender equality in conflict prevention and resolution, and ensuring the protection and rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings. Through this submission, UN Women offers a short overview of global trends and data and presents our strategy to address trafficking in persons in peace and security contexts, including some examples of our response at country and global fora to amplify the call for a human-rights based and gender-transformative approach to this issue.

Global trends and data

This section draws attention to the available global data on trafficking in the context of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in recognition of the gendered impact of conflict and insecurity and the resulting vulnerabilities to trafficking-in-persons of women, girls and persons with diverse SOGIESC.

[UNODC's 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) revealed an 11% decrease in detected trafficking victims and a 24% reduction in victims trafficked for sexual exploitation from 2019 to 2020¹. UNODC considered that these downward trends could be a result of the pandemic "pushing trafficking further underground" rather than a true decline. Sexual exploitation may be shifting to less visible and more dangerous locations. Insufficient anti-trafficking measures increasingly lead victims to rely on methods of "self-rescue"². Justice systems' inadequacies may have contributed to the global decline in trafficking convictions, with a drastic 27% drop in 2020 compared to the

¹ UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022), page III and IV

² This can be defined as victims who manage to escape and reach out to the authorities on their own initiative, rather than others, such as community members, authorities, service providers doing so on their behalf.

previous year. All these factors, compounded with the rise in wars and conflict have resulted in increased insecurities and vulnerability of women and girls, including to trafficking.³

The [2024 Secretary-General's annual report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence](#) noted that trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation -as well as kidnapping with threat and use of sexual violence to extort higher ransom- remains prevalent in the political economy of war as it enables armed groups to generate revenue.⁴ The report also revealed that sexual violence and exploitation associated with abduction and trafficking remained prevalent in several conflict-affected regions where state authority and the rule of law were fragile, including in areas with the presence of terrorist groups designated by the United Nations, non-state armed groups and criminal gangs.⁵ Furthermore, the report mentions allegations and verified cases of trafficking-in-persons for sexual exploitation and other CRSV-related crimes in 11 situations of concern. Trafficking in persons, especially women and girls, to fund armed groups' operations was a pattern seen in Colombia in the context of territorial disputes. Women and girls were reportedly abducted, held captive, and subjected to sexual slavery in the Central African Republic and the Sudan. Conflict and insecurity in various regions have intensified the risk of trafficking, particularly linked to mass movements and displacement of people. In Haiti, where trafficking of military grade weapons and ammunition from abroad has exacerbated violence, over 200,000 forcibly displaced people are at risk of trafficking.⁶ Myanmar faces a crisis with over 900,000 Rohingya refugees residing in Cox's Bazaar amidst worsening security and economic conditions and diminishing humanitarian aid. The situation continues to drive trafficking within, out of, and into Myanmar. Safe houses that provide services to survivors of trafficking in persons consistently receive threats, preventing them from safely offering sustainable and adequate shelter and security.⁷ Mass displacement of Ukrainian civilians has increased their vulnerability to trafficking, often targeted through deceptive online platforms offering false support.⁸ Reports from Yemen of trafficking of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees, particularly women and children, implicate gangs affiliated with parties of the conflict.⁹ In Mali, Libya, Sudan, and South Sudan saw reports of trafficking for the purposes of forced marriage and forced prostitution, including for armed groups.

While these two reports, together with the 2022 Secretary General's report on *Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier*¹⁰ serve as primary sources for global indicators on trafficking,

³ UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2022)

⁴ S/2024/292, para. 10.

⁵ S/2024/292, para. 12.

⁶ S/2024/292, paras 86-88.

⁷ S/2024/292, paras 52-54.

⁸ S/2024/292, paras 71-73.

⁹ S/2024/292, paras 75-76.

¹⁰ A/77/292

including in peace and security contexts, UN Women recognizes the potential to enhance the visibility of this issue through other UN reporting mechanisms. Trafficking will remain underreported, and data scarce, unless targeted fact-finding efforts are undertaken.

The investigative mechanisms mandated by the Human Rights Council present a valuable opportunity to further examine this issue, particularly those operating in peace and security contexts. In 2023, the Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) Libya¹¹ interviewed more than 100 migrants, including victims in cases of alleged trafficking and deprivation of liberty for ransom in connection with smuggling and trafficking.¹² The FFM concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that trafficking in the forms of enslavement, sexual slavery, and forced labor, to name a few, was used by individuals, armed groups, and State actors to incentivize violations and “facilitate the consolidation of power and wealth by [the perpetrators]”.¹³ The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia received reports from humanitarians indicating an “increasing and sometimes visible enslavement through child marriage, survival sex, and trafficking, among others, for which starvation is a driving factor”.¹⁴ Although some investigations have addressed trafficking, there is significant potential to increase its visibility. Recent reports covering situations where the risk of trafficking is high, such as Ukraine, do not include relevant information. In this regard, it is essential to clarify and emphasize how trafficking falls within the mandate of these bodies, which are typically mandated to investigate violations of international human rights law, international criminal law, and international humanitarian law.

The International Criminal Court has not yet prosecuted trafficking in persons under crimes against humanity of enslavement or sexual slavery, or under other related crimes. UN Women’s [toolkit](#) on Gender Persecution in Conflict and Atrocities may be applied to the crime of trafficking in persons in peace and security settings.

Additionally, in addressing the issue of trafficking, taking an intersectional approach is paramount. Evidence indicates that traffickers and smugglers are often the primary perpetrators of discrimination and violence against migrants who identify or are perceived to identify as LGBTQI+. For instance, transgender, gender diverse, and intersex individuals may encounter additional challenges at borders and checkpoints when their legal documentation does not accurately reflect their gender identity or expression. This intersection of vulnerabilities is not yet fully understood due

¹¹ A/HRC/52/83 (2023)

¹² A/HRC/52/83 (2023), paras 3 and 124.

¹³ A/HRC/52/83 (2023), para 125.

¹⁴ A/HRC/54/CRP.3 , para 233)

to the lack of safe access to reporting mechanisms and targeted services, particularly in crisis contexts for LGBTQI+ persons.¹⁵

Furthermore, the Secretary-General's [reports on Women, Peace, and Security](#) consistently report bleak trends of a rising backlash against women's rights and gender equality, stagnation or regression of key indicators, and an increase in military spending instead of financing for peace.¹⁶ The root causes of WPS issues, which frequently overlap with those of trafficking-in-persons, especially women and girls, must be comprehensively and holistically addressed before we are able to see progress in this space.

UN Women's Strategy

UN Women's strategy to human trafficking in peace and security contexts integrates and adapts proven measures to prevent gender-based violence into anti-trafficking work, strengthens the evidence base on the gendered dimensions of conflicts, and strengthens survivor engagement in anti-trafficking programming, including through partnerships with counter-trafficking actors and Member States. Our methodology is hinged upon the principles of participation, protection, prevention and peacebuilding. UN Women provides technical and financial support to implement global initiatives across the full spectrum of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and sheds light on the gendered dimensions and root causes of conflict and protracted crises, which intertwine with those of trafficking in persons, particularly against women and girls.

1) Country interventions

Our country-specific interventions focus on participation, protection, prevention and peacebuilding by providing services to victims and/or persons at high risk of trafficking; amplifying the voices of women-led organizations and support their prevention and awareness-raising efforts; and work with national authorities to improve available protection, services and legal framework.

Protection of victims and persons at risk is a core pillar of UN Women's strategy, which informs several of our programmatic interventions. In Northern Myanmar, as a response to an increase trend of trafficking of young women to China, in 2019 [UN Women and our local implementing partner](#) was able to assist with rescuing some women and providing legal support for court cases. We also

¹⁵ "The Intersections of CRSV against Men, Boys, and LGBTQI+ Persons and Human Trafficking", Policy Paper/Workshop Report; Buckinx, B, Hogg, C.L, Vaughn, C. 2022.
https://oar.princeton.edu/bitstream/88435/pr10r9m39z/1/1222_CRSV.pdf

¹⁶ UN Secretary-General report on Women, Peace, and Security, 2023

provided legal aid, psychosocial counseling, and awareness trainings equipping 35 community mobilisers with knowledge to spread anti-trafficking and protective messages across communities.

The ongoing conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia has resulted in an increased number of women and girls experiencing sexual violence [connected](#) to trafficking for sexual exploitation.¹⁷ UN Women has been [providing psychosocial support and basic business trainings](#) for women in the Amhara region. We have been seeing positive results in helping displaced women rehabilitate from the violence they faced and gain practical skills that allow them to lower their risks to trafficking-in-persons and other forms of violence through starting or contributing to small local businesses.

Our programmes also allow us to amplify the voices of women-led organizations and activists to raise awareness to prevent trafficking in persons. Our work through [the Safe & Fair programme in the ASEAN region](#) focuses on protecting migrant women workers. In Nigeria, we work with men and boys to prevent sexual exploitation and reduce the risks to trafficking in persons. In Ukraine, we raise awareness to prevent online trafficking linked to the armed conflict.

Our Women, Peace, and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) directly supports local and grassroots women's civil society leaders and their organizations in conflict and crisis settings worldwide through flexible and quality funding and capacity support. The WPHF has supported many women survivors and local women's organisations in contexts where the risk of trafficking in persons is high. For example, to respond to the increased risk of trafficking and kidnapping by gangs as part of the displacements of Haitians into the Dominican Republic,¹⁸ the [WPHF](#) supported a civil society partner to tackle gender-based violence and enhance the protection of vulnerable women and girls along the Haitian-Dominican border, as a preventing measure.

In Colombia, where the Government has achieved [mixed success](#) in prosecuting trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation under domestic law, UN Women has supported the transitional justice process and worked closely with the Government, survivors and local women's and LGBTQI+ organisations to promote and advocate for holistic services for women, girls, and those with diverse SOGIESC as a means of preventing further harm and ensuring that victims of any form of gender-based violence, including trafficking, impacted by the conflict receive necessary support.

We are also pleased to support Member States to strengthen global norms and standards for gender equality and women's empowerment. We support Member States in developing and implementing National Action Plans following [Security Council resolution 1325](#). In 2023, UN Women supported over 40 countries to develop and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security

¹⁷ A/77/292, Secretary General Report, Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier

¹⁸ BINHU and OHCHR report, *Sexual violence in Port-au-Prince: A weapon used by gangs to instill fear*, October 2022 available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/20221014-Report-on-Sexual-Violence-haiti-en.pdf>

by providing technical, financial, and operational support to Governments, and conducting impact assessments after their implementation. Throughout these processes, we capacitate and advocate for civil society, women's organizations, and women activists and human rights defenders to lead these processes as they know best what the challenges and opportunities may be in their local contexts, particularly on a crime like trafficking-in-persons.

In Ukraine, where IOM reports over 3.5 million displacement movements as of April 2024, and where pre-existing criminal networks targeting Ukrainian women operated even before the escalation of the war, UN Women has supported the Government in integrating a trafficking response into the Resolution 1325 National Action Plan. Through collaboration with local women's civil society organizations, UN Women lobbied for the drafting and ratification of national policies and legislation to protect women and girls against trafficking for sexual or lab or exploitation. As a result, the Ukrainian Parliament finalized and signed Law No. 2319-IX on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), providing additional protection against trafficking for displaced Ukrainian women.

Coordination with other UN actors working on trafficking is also a crucial aspect of our work. Since February 2022, the Government of Ukraine has activated partnerships with the UN and civil society to respond effectively to the heightened risks of violence against women and girls in conflict contexts, including trafficking. This has included a Framework of Cooperation on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) signed with the UN, and an active Inter-Governmental Working Group with five pillars, one of which is dedicated to trafficking for sexual exploitation. UN Women contributes to this Inter-Governmental Working Group and its sub-working groups with technical expertise and programmatic capacity.

2) Contributions to Global Normative Frameworks

UN Women continuously contributes our expertise to the UN's normative frameworks on trafficking in persons, such as supporting the implementation of [the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children](#), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2001), CEDAW's [General recommendations No. 28](#) (2010) on the core obligations of States parties under article 2, [and No. 38](#) (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.

We also prepare the Secretary-General's report in Trafficking in Women and Girls for the General Assembly on a bi-annual basis and provide technical guidance and observations at informal discussions on [Resolution A/C.3/77/L.6/Rev.1](#) on trafficking in women and girls, most recently updated in 2022. We will continue to participate in inter-agency coordination mechanisms to ensure that the gender dimensions of human trafficking are integrated.

UN Women also contributes to the development of global toolkits that support practitioners and policymakers to strategically address peace and security challenges in relation to trafficking-in-persons. We contributed to UNODC's ["Toolkit on mainstreaming gender and human rights in the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime" \(2023\)](#), which supports legislative drafters and policymakers to mainstream gender and human rights considerations into legislation, policies, and strategies to implement international instruments relevant to the Convention. UN Women also provided technical expertise to Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTED) study titled ["Towards Meaningful Accountability for Sexual and Gender-based Violence Linked to Terrorism" \(2023\)](#). This study was conducted to guide CTED's work in assisting Member States' counter-terrorism efforts, which include links to trafficking used for financing terrorist activities or used to instill fear, to ensure a gender-responsive and human-rights compliant approach to countering terrorism.

Conclusion

Trafficking remains a significant risk in conflict zones, exacerbated by displacement and pre-existing criminal networks. Our strategy prioritizes participation, protection, prevention, and peacebuilding, supporting survivors and amplifying the voices of women-led organizations. We also contribute to global normative frameworks and toolkits, advocating for gender-responsive and human-rights-compliant approaches to counter-trafficking. By leveraging partnerships with UN actors and governments, we strive to enhance protections for vulnerable populations and address the root causes of trafficking in conflict and crisis settings.

UN Women remains committed to working collaboratively with the Special Rapporteur to strengthen our efforts against trafficking in persons within the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework. We value the Special Rapporteur's feedback and are dedicated to enhancing our strategies to address the gendered dimensions of trafficking in conflict and post-conflict settings. By integrating targeted, survivor-led approaches and reinforcing coordination with other UN actors, we aim to ensure a comprehensive and holistic response to trafficking, ultimately safeguarding the rights and well-being of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals in vulnerable contexts.