



# **UNITED NATIONS WOMEN**

ACSTMUN 2026

---

Topic Guide

# Table of Contents

<b>Committee Overview.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction to the Topic.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Definitions of Key Terms.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background and Context.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Current Situation.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Key Challenges and Issues.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Previous UN Actions and Resolutions.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Possible Solutions and Policy Options.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Citations &amp; References.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## UNW - United Nation Women

**Topic:** Addressing Forced Marriages and Honor-Based Violence

**Chair:** Laura R.

**Co-Chair:** Maissane H.

---

### Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was established in July 2010 by the UN General Assembly as part of a broader UN agenda to strengthen global efforts toward gender equality. UN Women was created by merging four previous UN bodies: DAW (Division for the Advancement of Women), INSTRAW (International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women), OSAGI (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), and UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women). UN Women serves as one entity to serve for gender equality and the secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women. Its mission is to advance women's rights, close any gender gaps, and empower all women and girls by changing laws, services, and social norms.

UN Women focuses on four main priorities: leadership and political participation, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and peace, along with security. Despite major international progress through frameworks such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), gender equality remains deeply entrenched worldwide. Through supporting Member States, coordinating the UN system, and partnering with civil society, UN Women plays an important role in placing the rights of women and girls at the centre of global development (About UN Women).

## Introduction to the topic

Forced marriages and honor-based violence are widely recognized by the United Nations as harmful practices and severe violations of international human rights, disproportionately impacting women and girls worldwide (UNFPA; United Nations). These practices are rooted in deeply entrenched gender inequality, patriarchal power structures, and discriminatory social norms, and they deny victims fundamental rights such as the right to life, liberty, security, education, and bodily autonomy (United Nations). Forced marriage remains a widespread global issue, with approximately one in five girls worldwide married before the age of 18, despite international commitments under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.3 to eliminate child, early, and forced marriage by 2030 (UNFPA).

Honor-based violence, including so-called “honor killings,” is recognized within the broader framework of gender-based violence and continues to undermine global efforts toward gender equality and women’s empowerment (United Nations). As a result, addressing these practices is a matter of international concern, requiring coordinated legal, social, and cultural interventions in line with global human rights frameworks and UN Women's mandate to promote gender equality and protect the rights of women and girls worldwide (United Nations).

## Definition of Key Terms

- Forced Marriage: A marriage in which one or both parties are married without their free and full consent, often under coercion, pressure, or threats.
- Honor-Based Violence (HBV): Acts of violence, including murder, assault, or intimidation, committed to protect or defend the perceived “honor” of a family or community.
- Gender Equality: The state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in every aspect of life.
- Women’s Empowerment: The process of increasing women’s ability to make choices, access resources, and participate fully in social, economic, and political life.
- Human Rights: The fundamental rights and freedoms entitled to every individual, including protection from violence, discrimination, and exploitation.
- Cultural Norms: Shared expectations, beliefs, or behaviors within a community that can influence practices such as forced marriage or honor-based violence.

- Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Violence directed at an individual because of their gender, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse.
- Legal Frameworks: National or international laws and policies designed to protect individuals from forced marriages, HBV, and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Advocacy: Actions and campaigns to raise awareness, influence policy, and promote social change on issues affecting women and girls.
- Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5): The UN goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls worldwide.

## Background and Context

The practice of forced marriage and honor-based violence stems from deeply entrenched social norms that prioritize family honor, control over female sexuality, and rigid gender roles. In many societies, marriage is viewed not as an individual choice but as a familial or communal obligation, often used to preserve economic stability, social status, or cultural traditions (UNFPA). Honor-based violence arises when women or girls are perceived to have violated these norms; by refusing a marriage, seeking divorce, engaging in relationships of choice, or asserting personal autonomy, leading families or communities to

resort to violence to restore perceived honor (OHCHR). While these practices are frequently justified under the guise of tradition or culture, the United Nations has consistently emphasized that no cultural or religious belief can justify violations of fundamental human rights (United Nations).

Over time, forced marriages and honor-based violence have become matters of international concern due to their widespread prevalence and severe consequences. According to UNFPA, millions of girls are forced into marriage each year, often resulting in interrupted education, increased risk of domestic violence, early pregnancy, and long-term health complications (UNFPA). Globalization, migration, and displacement have further internationalized the issue, as these practices now affect both developing and developed countries, challenging states to balance cultural sensitivity with the protection of universal human rights (UN Women). Armed conflict, poverty, and humanitarian crises have also exacerbated the problem, with forced marriage sometimes used as a coping mechanism or a tool of control in unstable settings (UN Women).

Despite increased global awareness and legal reforms, these practices persist due to weak enforcement mechanisms, social stigma, lack of access to education, and limited support systems for survivors. In many regions, victims face significant barriers to reporting abuse, including fear of retaliation, community pressure, and mistrust of legal institutions (OHCHR). As a result, forced marriages and honor-based violence remain underreported and inadequately addressed. Their persistence underscores the need for coordinated international action, making this issue central to the mandate of UN Women and the broader global effort to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in line with international human rights law and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations).

## **Current Situation**

Forced marriage and honor-based violence remain widespread violations of human rights, affecting millions of women and girls globally. According to recent UN reporting, although there has been some decline in child and forced marriages, from about 24.1 % of women married as children in 2003 to 18.7 % in 2023, progress is uneven and far too slow; at the current rate, child marriages may not be eliminated for decades (Wylie). Many countries have developed national action plans or updated laws to end violence against women, but gaps in implementation and protection persist, leaving many survivors without meaningful support or justice.

Meanwhile, gender-based violence more broadly remains alarmingly extensive, with approximately one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime; progress in reducing these rates has been minimal, with only slight annual declines over the past two decades (Lifetime toll). Violence in both private and public spaces, often rooted in discriminatory social norms that tolerate practices like forced marriage, continues to undermine women's rights and well-being. Ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises intensify these risks, with women and girls facing heightened vulnerability to forced marriages, sexual violence, and honour-related abuses.

## **Key Challenges and Issues**

One of the primary challenges in addressing forced marriages and honor-based violence is the tension between cultural relativism and the enforcement of universal human

rights standards. In some states, these practices are defended as cultural, traditional, or religious norms, leading to political reluctance to criminalize or actively prosecute offenders (OHCHR). Weak legal frameworks, loopholes in family or personal status laws, and inconsistent enforcement further allow these practices to persist, even in countries where they are formally illegal (UN Women). Additionally, political instability and conflict exacerbate the issue, as forced marriage is sometimes used as a survival strategy in humanitarian settings or as a tool of control during armed conflict, complicating international intervention and accountability efforts (UNFPA).

Practical and ethical challenges also significantly hinder progress, particularly regarding prevention, reporting, and survivor protection. Many governments face limited resources to fund education programs, shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial services necessary to support survivors and prevent abuse (UN Women). Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of trust in authorities discourage victims from reporting cases, resulting in widespread underreporting and unreliable data (OHCHR). Conflicting national interests, such as prioritizing state sovereignty, avoiding social unrest, or managing migration-related concerns, can further limit international cooperation and policy alignment (United Nations). These combined obstacles highlight the complexity of eliminating forced marriages and honor-based violence and underscore the need for coordinated, well-resourced, and culturally sensitive yet rights-based global strategies.

### **Previous UN Actions and Resolutions**

The United Nations has taken multiple formal actions to address forced, early, and child marriage as harmful practices and human rights violations. In 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution on child, early, and forced marriage (A/RES/69/156),

marking a historic global commitment to end these practices. This was followed by several successive GA resolutions reaffirming and strengthening Member States' obligations, including in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022, and most recently through the 2024 GA resolution that continues to call for accelerated action to prevent and eliminate forced marriage worldwide (Document viewer). These resolutions highlight the need for legal protections, access to education and justice, and measures to ensure free and full consent in marriage.

In addition to the General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council has been active on this issue. For example, in 2023, the Council adopted a resolution on child, early, and forced marriage that urges States to take thorough, human rights-based steps to prevent and eliminate forced marriage, address root causes, and protect the rights of women and girls, including access to justice and education (HRC\_RES\_53\_23-EN.pdf). These resolutions demonstrate UN engagement across bodies to frame forced marriage as a violation of human rights and to increase international cooperation and accountability.

### **Possible Solutions and Policy Options**

Addressing forced marriages and honor-based violence requires a comprehensive, multi-level approach that combines legal reform, prevention, survivor support, and international cooperation. UN Women and other UN bodies emphasize that effective responses must be grounded in a human-rights-based framework while remaining sensitive to local contexts to ensure community acceptance and sustainability (UN Women). Strengthening national legislation in line with international standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); is a critical

first step, but laws alone are insufficient without enforcement mechanisms, institutional capacity, and public awareness (United Nations).

In addition, long-term prevention depends on addressing root causes such as gender inequality, lack of education, and economic insecurity. Education and empowerment programs for women and girls, as well as engagement with men, boys, community leaders, and religious authorities, have been identified by UN agencies as effective strategies for shifting harmful social norms (UNFPA). International cooperation is also essential, particularly in cross-border cases involving migration, displacement, or trafficking, where victims may fall outside the protection of a single national system (OHCHR). Delegates are encouraged to consider integrated policy approaches that balance state sovereignty with international responsibility to protect fundamental human rights.

**Policy options delegates may consider include:**

- Strengthening and harmonizing national laws to explicitly criminalize forced marriage and honor-based violence in accordance with CEDAW and other international human rights instruments (United Nations).
- Expanding survivor-centered support systems, including shelters, legal aid, healthcare, and psychosocial services, with dedicated funding and trained personnel (UN Women).
- Investing in education and community-based prevention programs that challenge harmful gender norms and promote women's rights, particularly targeting youth and

local leaders (UNFPA).

- Enhancing data collection, reporting mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks to address underreporting and improve evidence-based policymaking (OHCHR).
- Strengthening international and regional cooperation to address cross-border cases, protect migrant and refugee women, and share best practices among Member States (United Nations).

## Works cited

A/HRC/RES/53/23 Assemblée Générale,

[digitallibrary.un.org/record/4020097/files/A\\_HRC\\_RES\\_53\\_23-FR.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4020097/files/A_HRC_RES_53_23-FR.pdf).

Accessed 12 Feb. 2026.

“About UN Women | UN Women – Headquarters.” About UN Women,

[www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women](https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women). Accessed 12 Feb. 2026.

“Document Viewer.” United Nations, United Nations, 19 Dec. 2024,

[docs.un.org/en/A/RES/79/158](https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/79/158).

“Lifetime Toll: 840 Million Women Faced Partner or Sexual Violence.” World Health Organization, World Health Organization,

[www.who.int/news/item/19-11-2025-lifetime-toll--840-million-women-faced-partner-or-sexual-violence#:~:text=Nearly%201%20in%203%20women,viole,nce%20by%20an%20intimate%20partner](https://www.who.int/news/item/19-11-2025-lifetime-toll--840-million-women-faced-partner-or-sexual-violence#:~:text=Nearly%201%20in%203%20women,viole,nce%20by%20an%20intimate%20partner). Accessed 12 Feb. 2026.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Harmful Practices. United Nations,

[www.ohchr.org/en/women/harmful-practices](https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/harmful-practices).

United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations, 1948,

[www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights).

United Nations. Violence against Women. United Nations,

[www.un.org/en/global-issues/violence-against-women](https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/violence-against-women).

United Nations, High-Level Event on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Globally, <https://www.un.org>

United Nations General Assembly, Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, UN Doc. A/RES/—

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Child Marriage,

<https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Child Marriage. UNFPA,

[www.unfpa.org/child-marriage](http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage).

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Child Marriage Statistics and SDG Target

5.3, <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

UN Women. Ending Violence against Women. UN Women,

[www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women).

UN Women, Mandate and Strategic Priorities, <https://www.unwomen.org>

Wylie, Helen. 25 Million Child Marriages Prevented in Last Decade Due to

Accelerated Progress, According to New UNICEF Estimates, 6 Mar. 2018,

[www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according](http://www.unicef.org/turkiye/en/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according).