

EKIN SNY J MUN BACKGROUND GUIDE

Committee: The United Nations Human Rights Council
Topic: Access to Economic Rights for Female Refugees and Displaced Persons



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Letter from the Chairboard

Izmir

Fellow Delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to this year's conference and to the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Committee. We are truly honored to serve as your chairboard and look forward to engaging, insightful, and productive debates throughout the conference.

We are committed to ensuring a professional, inclusive, and academically enriching environment where every delegate feels encouraged to participate, ask questions, and contribute meaningfully.

This background guide is designed to support your preparations for the conference and to provide a foundation for your research. However, we encourage you to go beyond it, deepen your understanding of the issues at hand, and arrive prepared to defend your country's stance with confidence and diplomacy. We have worked diligently to create a committee experience that is intellectually stimulating and rewarding.

We look forward to witnessing your skills, dedication, and diplomatic spirit throughout the committee sessions.

Should you have any questions or require assistance, please do not hesitate to let us know.

We wish you the best of luck and hope you have a memorable and inspiring conference!

Sincerely,

The United Nations Human Rights Council

Mr. Efe Kapcı - Chair

Ms. Nabila Arab - Co-Chair

Mr. Can Kayikci - President-Chair



1. Committee and Topic Introduction



The United Nations Human Rights Council

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system. It was established in 2006 to promote and protect human rights around the world. It is responsible for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations to ensure the effective implementation of international human rights standards. The UNHRC also serves as a key forum for dialogue on thematic issues, including the protection of vulnerable populations such as refugees and internally displaced persons. Within its mandate, the UN Human Rights Council plays an important role in examining and advancing the protection of economic rights as part of the broader framework of International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

Instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recognize economic rights, including the right to work, education, adequate housing, and an adequate standard of living. The UNHRC monitors the implementation of these rights through mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the work of Special Rapporteurs, with a focus on a wide range of rights, including extreme poverty, housing, and violence against women.

The issue of access to economic rights for female refugees and displaced persons is closely linked to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which provides international protection and assistance to displaced populations. While UNHCR addresses operational and humanitarian needs, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) complements this work by focusing on accountability, legal standards, and the promotion of gender equality within international protection systems. It also collaborates with entities such as UN Women to address gender-specific challenges faced by displaced women.

Access to economic rights remains a critical issue within the international human rights framework, particularly for women affected by displacement. Female refugees and displaced persons often encounter systemic barriers that limit their participation in economic life. These barriers include discriminatory legal frameworks, the lack of required documentation, restricted labor market opportunities, and social norms that inhibit women's economic independence. Additionally, displacement contexts frequently expose women to heightened risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking, further constraining their ability to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Over the years, the UN Human Rights Council has emphasized that ensuring equal access to economic rights is essential for both individual dignity and long-term development. Economic exclusion not only perpetuates poverty but also undermines broader human rights protections. Through resolutions, international advocacy, and cooperation with Member States and humanitarian actors, the UNHRC encourages the adoption of gender-responsive policies that promote women's access to education, employment, financial resources, and social protection systems.

While displacement affects all individuals, including men and boys, who also face loss of livelihoods, unemployment, and limited access to essential services, pre-existing gender inequalities often place women at a disproportionate disadvantage, reinforcing cycles of dependency and marginalization. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive and inclusive approaches that recognize the specific vulnerabilities of women while ensuring that economic rights are accessible to all displaced persons without discrimination.



2. The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda

The Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda, anchored in UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and subsequent resolutions, recognizes the positive role that young people can and do play in conflict prevention, resolution, and building toward sustainable peace. The YPS Agenda moves beyond viewing youth solely as victims or perpetrators of violence; it frames them as essential partners in constructing peaceful societies.

The YPS Agenda is built on five key pillars, in which: (1) **Participation** ensures that young people are actively included in decision-making processes, (2) **Protection** safeguards young people's rights and safety, (3) **Prevention** supports youth-led efforts to address the root causes of conflict and stop violence, (4) **Partnerships** strengthen collaboration among youth, governments, UN entities, and civil society, and (5) **Disengagement and Reintegration** assist young people in leaving violence behind and successfully re-entering society.

Young female refugees sit at the intersection of displacement, gender, and youth. Their economic disenfranchisement is a direct threat to peace and security. Without access to education, decent work, or financial resources, they remain in a state of protracted vulnerability, which can fuel social unrest, exploitation, and cyclical poverty.

Therefore, advancing the economic rights of young female refugees is not just a humanitarian or development goal; it is a strategic investment in YPS, transforming them from beneficiaries into active agents of stability and recovery in their communities.

The legal frameworks, social structures, and economic conditions of host countries play a decisive role in shaping access to economic rights for female refugees and displaced persons. While these rights are clearly recognized under IHRL, forced displacement and gender-based discrimination continue to prevent displaced women from exercising them in practice.



3. Topic Background

Legal and Structural Access to Work and Employment

Legal and structural access to work and employment is a central concern within the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council, particularly in relation to the economic rights of female refugees and displaced persons. The right to work is firmly grounded in IHRL, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), which affirms that everyone has the right to freely choose or accept employment without discrimination. Despite this, many host states maintain restrictive legal frameworks that limit refugees' access to formal labor markets through permit requirements or sector-specific bans. These legal constraints often disproportionately affect women, who already face systemic discrimination and reduced access to opportunities. As a result, female refugees are more likely to be excluded from stable employment and forced into informal work arrangements. This directly undermines their economic rights and limits their ability to achieve financial independence and long-term stability.

From the perspective of the UN Human Rights Council, structural barriers are equally significant in preventing displaced women from accessing employment.



Figure 1: At 17, Intesar Hassan became the head of her household after fleeing Syria in 2015. She lives in the sprawling refugee camp of Azraq, Jordan, with her ailing father and five siblings. Hassan now earns a salary as a qualified beautician doing makeup, hair, and nails inside the sprawling camp. Life as a refugee is the new normal for thousands of women like her, and no one knows when they will find another home or go back to their home countries.



3. Topic Background (Continued)

Legal and Structural Access to Work and Employment (Continued)

Throughout the years, reports, discussions, and findings released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have documented administrative and social challenges faced by refugees in host countries. These include complex bureaucratic procedures, high costs associated with work permits, and the non-recognition of foreign qualifications. For women, these challenges are compounded by limited access to education, caregiving responsibilities, and restrictions on mobility. Additionally, gender norms within both refugee and host communities may discourage women from entering the workforce. The UN Human Rights Council emphasizes that addressing these structural barriers is essential to ensuring women's equal enjoyment of economic rights. Without such efforts, legal rights alone remain insufficient in practice.

Another key issue examined within the UNHRC is the role of legal identity in enabling access to employment. According to the World Bank (2018), legal documentation is a prerequisite for participation in formal economies and access to financial systems. Female refugees are disproportionately affected by a lack of documentation due to discriminatory nationality laws, loss of papers during displacement, or barriers related to registration processes. This lack of legal identity prevents many women from securing lawful employment or benefiting from labor protections. Consequently, they are often driven into informal sectors where wages are lower and risks of exploitation are higher. The UN Human Rights Council recognizes that ensuring access to documentation is a fundamental step toward protecting economic rights. Strengthening civil registration systems and removing legal barriers are, therefore, priorities in advancing gender equality.

To address these challenges, the UN Human Rights Council endeavors to promote comprehensive and rights-based approaches to employment access. Drawing on guidance from the International Labour Organization (2017), the UNHRC encourages states to adopt inclusive labor policies that integrate refugees into national economies while upholding human rights standards. These policies include simplifying work authorization processes, ensuring equal pay and safe working conditions, and supporting women's access to vocational training and financial resources. The UNHRC also calls for the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices that restrict women's participation in the workforce.



3. Topic Background (Continued)

Education, Skills Development, and Gendered Vulnerability

Access to education is recognized as a basic human right under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), which obliges states to ensure access to inclusive and equitable education for all. Nonetheless, displacement significantly disrupts access to education, particularly for girls and women, due to financial constraints, insecurity, and social barriers. Many female refugees face interrupted schooling, limiting their ability to acquire essential skills for employment. This directly affects their long-term economic opportunities and reinforces cycles of poverty. Within the UN Human Rights Council, ensuring access to education is viewed as a key step toward empowering displaced women and enabling their participation in economic life.

Challenges related to access to education for displaced women are often compounded by structural inequalities and gendered expectations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2020) highlights that girls in displacement settings are more likely than boys to drop out of school due to early marriage, household responsibilities, and safety concerns. These struggles are intensified by inadequate infrastructure, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and limited access to secondary and higher education. As such, many displaced women are unable to develop the necessary skills for formal employment. This lack of skills further marginalizes them within labor markets and increases their vulnerability to exploitation. The UN Human Rights Council emphasizes that addressing these disparities is essential for achieving gender equality in access to economic rights.

Skills development programs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between education and employment for female refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021), targeted vocational training and capacity-building initiatives can enhance women's employability and promote their self-reliance. Nevertheless, access to such programs remains uneven, with many women continuing to be excluded due to caregiving responsibilities, mobility restrictions, or lack of information. Additionally, training programs are not always aligned with market needs, limiting their effectiveness. Gender-sensitive approaches to skills development are therefore necessary to ensure that women can fully benefit from these opportunities. The UN Human Rights Council supports initiatives that integrate education, training, and employment pathways for displaced women.

Gendered vulnerability remains a critical concern linking education and economic rights in displacement contexts. UN Women (2019) emphasizes that limited access to education and skills increases women's exposure to poverty, exploitation, and gender-based violence. Without adequate education, women are less able to access formal employment or advocate for their rights within host communities. This vulnerability not only affects individuals but also undermines broader development and social cohesion.



3. Topic Background (Continued)

Informal Labor Exploitation

While the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) guarantees the right to just and favorable conditions of work, many displaced women are unable to access formal employment due to legal and structural barriers. As a result, they are often pushed into informal labor markets where legal protections are weak or nonexistent. This includes domestic work, agriculture, and low-wage service sectors that are often unregulated. In such environments, women are frequently subjected to unfair wages, unsafe working conditions, and a lack of social protections. Within the UN Human Rights Council, addressing informal labor exploitation is essential to safeguarding the economic rights and dignity of displaced women.

The conditions within informal labor sectors often expose female refugees to heightened risks of abuse and exploitation. According to the International Labour Organization (2018), informal employment is characterized by the absence of contracts, job insecurity, and limited enforcement of labor standards. For displaced women, this vulnerability is intensified due to their legal status, language barriers, and dependence on employers. Many women may face wage theft, excessive working hours, or even forced labor conditions without access to legal recourse. In some cases, fear of detention or deportation prevents them from reporting abuses. These factors create an environment where exploitation can persist with little accountability. The UN Human Rights Council emphasizes the need for stronger oversight and enforcement mechanisms to protect vulnerable workers in informal sectors.

Human trafficking and gender-based exploitation are also closely linked to informal labor conditions among displaced populations. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) highlights that refugees and displaced women are particularly at risk of being trafficked for forced labor or sexual exploitation. Limited access to formal employment and economic opportunities increases susceptibility to deceptive recruitment practices. Women may be coerced into exploitative work arrangements under false promises of income or legal status. This not only violates their fundamental human rights but also entrenches cycles of poverty and dependency. The UN Human Rights Council addresses these concerns through advocacy for stronger anti-trafficking measures and victim protection frameworks. Combating exploitation in informal labor markets is critical to ensuring economic justice for displaced women.

Efforts to reduce informal labor exploitation must focus on creating safe and inclusive pathways to formal employment. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021) emphasizes the importance of expanding legal access to work, strengthening labor rights protections, and promoting economic inclusion for refugees. Policies that regularize employment status, enforce minimum wage standards, and provide access to social protection systems are essential in this regard. Additionally, targeted support for women, including legal aid, skills training, and access to financial resources, can reduce dependence on informal and exploitative work.



4. Past International Actions

- **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2019)** launched the “Global Strategy for Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion” to improve access to economic opportunities for refugees, with a particular focus on women. This initiative aimed to move beyond humanitarian aid by promoting self-reliance through access to labor markets, financial services, and entrepreneurship programs. It emphasized gender equality by addressing specific barriers faced by female refugees, including limited mobility, lack of childcare assistance, and discriminatory practices. The strategy encouraged partnerships with governments and private sector actors to expand decent work opportunities. It also supported vocational training and microfinance initiatives tailored to women’s needs. In several host countries, the program contributed to the increased participation of refugee women in income-generating activities. This reflects a broader shift toward integrating economic rights into long-term protection frameworks for displaced populations.
- **The European Union (2016)** adopted the “Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals,” which included measures to support refugee women’s access to employment and education. This plan recognized that refugees’ integration into host societies heavily depends on ensuring their access to economic rights and opportunities. It introduced targeted policies such as language and skills training and labor market integration programs. Special attention was given to women facing multiple forms of discrimination and social exclusion. The initiative also promoted collaboration between Member States to share best practices on inclusion policies. Funding mechanisms were established to support local projects aimed at empowering refugee women economically. This action demonstrated the EU’s commitment to addressing structural barriers and promoting inclusive economic participation.
- **The International Labour Organization (2017)** implemented the “Programme on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience,” which included specific provisions for refugees and displaced women. This program focused on creating decent job opportunities, particularly for refugees and displaced women, while ensuring compliance with international labor standards. It addressed the vulnerabilities of women in informal employment by promoting work formalization and legal protections. The initiative also supported capacity-building for governments to design inclusive labor policies. Training programs were developed to enhance women’s skills and employability in diverse sectors. In countries affected by displacement, the program contributed to improved working conditions and reduced exploitation. This highlights the importance of labor rights as a key component of economic rights for displaced populations.



4. Past International Actions (Continued)

- **The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women** were first issued in 1990 and then updated in 2008. These guidelines marked a significant institutional shift, formally recognizing that refugee women face distinct protection risks requiring targeted responses. They established the principles of Age, Gender, and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM), mandating all UNHCR programs to assess and address the specific vulnerabilities of women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. The guidelines explicitly address economic dimensions, recognizing that women's economic empowerment is integral to protection. Nonetheless, evaluations have consistently found that AGDM principles have been unevenly applied across operations. Unfortunately, economic programming often treats women as a homogeneous group rather than addressing the intersecting barriers of age, disability, marital status, and nationality that shape individual women's experiences.
- **The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)** is considered the most ambitious recent attempt to reshape the international response. It was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in 2018. The GCR explicitly moves beyond the traditional humanitarian framework toward a model of burden-sharing that includes development actors, international financial institutions, and the private sector. Its Programme of Action identifies "enhancing refugee self-reliance" as a core objective, with specific calls to include refugees in national systems, including labor markets, education, and social protection. The GCR emphasizes the need for gender-responsive approaches; however, it is non-binding. Its success relies on voluntary pledges by states and other stakeholders. By 2023, the global funding gap was greater than 50 percent in terms of meeting GCR objectives. Livelihoods and economic inclusion were among the most underfunded areas. For women's economic rights, this gap means that programs which were designed to address gender-specific barriers remain chronically underresourced: their promise is visible but their reach is limited.



5. Recommendations and Solutions

- The UNHRC should strive to promote legal reforms that ensure equal access to employment for female refugees. This includes repealing discriminatory laws and simplifying work permit processes. Alignment with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights should be continuously encouraged. Equal access to employment reduces reliance on informal labor and strengthens women's financial independence. This supports overall economic rights protection. It also promotes gender equality in host states.
- The UNHRC should expand access to education and vocational training for displaced women. Related programs should focus on practical and market-relevant skills. Cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) can support the implementation of such programs. Barriers to girls' education must be reduced, and flexible learning options should be provided, particularly as education improves long-term employment opportunities.
- The UNHRC should seek to improve refugee women and displaced persons' access to legal identity and documentation. Many women are excluded from work due to a lack of official papers. Partnerships with the World Bank (WB) can support the creation of registration systems. States should also aim to simplify their documentation procedures. Overall, legal identity enables access to jobs and services, and, in doing so, reduces refugee women and displaced persons' vulnerability to exploitation.
- The UNHRC should strengthen labor protections for displaced persons, particularly women, in informal sectors. Many displaced women are exposed to unsafe labor conditions and low wages. Cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) can improve labor standards. Furthermore, monitoring systems should be enhanced, and victims should have access to legal support. Safer work environments must be ensured.
- The UNHRC should intensify its efforts to promote financial inclusion for female refugees. Access to banking and credit is essential. Collaboration with UN Women can support this. Microfinance programs should be expanded, and financial literacy should be encouraged. This helps women build sustainable livelihoods.
- The UNHRC should ensure access to childcare and social services for displaced women. Indeed, care responsibilities often limit women's access to employment. As such, providing childcare enables women's workforce participation. Moreover, social protection systems should include refugees. This reduces gender-based barriers, improves economic opportunities, and supports family stability.



GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can the UNHRC strengthen international legal frameworks to ensure equal access to economic rights for female refugees and displaced persons?
- What measures can states take to align national laws with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in order to guarantee the right to work without discrimination?
- How can host countries reduce legal and administrative barriers that prevent displaced women from accessing formal employment opportunities?
- In what ways can educational systems be adapted to better support skills development for refugee women and girls in displacement contexts?
- How can partnerships with organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) improve access to livelihoods and economic inclusion programs for refugee women and displaced persons?
- What strategies can be implemented to address gender-based violence and exploitation that limit women's participation in economic activities?
- How can the international community support financial inclusion and access to resources for female refugees through engagement with entities such as UN Women?
- What policies can be introduced to transition displaced women from informal labor markets into safe and regulated employment sectors?
- How can improved data collection and monitoring mechanisms enhance the protection of economic rights for displaced populations?
- What role can international cooperation, including through actors like the European Union, play in fostering sustainable economic opportunities for female refugees?



RESEARCH AIDS

Significance:

Having solid research and becoming confident in your knowledge before walking into the committee is the first step in the process. Research well, become well-versed in the topic and your country. Don't forget that during the conference, you will be playing the part of a knowledgeable and experienced diplomat. Do the research, act the part!

- OHCHR – List of Human Rights Council Reports (Session 53): Reports like (A/HRC/53/28) on Refugee Protection, Internal Displacement, and Statelessness, in addition to documents focused on education and migrant rights.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session53/list-reports>.
- OHCHR – Migration and Human Rights: Overview of the UNHRC's special procedures. It includes details regarding the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/migration>.
- OHCHR – Migrants in Vulnerable Situations: Human rights standards and documents related to migrants. It includes links to resources tied to policy and rights.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/migrants-vulnerable-situations>.
- OHCHR – UN Human Rights Report 2023: Annual global human rights report addressing inequalities and economic rights within the broader UNHRC mandate.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/ohchr-reports/ohchr-report-2023.pdf>.
- UNHRC Resolution 52/20 (on the human rights of migrants, including vulnerable groups): Official UNHRC resolution mandating Special Rapporteur reporting on migrants' rights.
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4012101?ln=fr&v=pdf>.
- Universal Human Rights Index (UNHRC documentation search tool): Access to resolutions, reports, and decisions related to refugees, education, economic rights, and gender.
<https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>.

