



The Hague International Model United Nations

Forum: Human Rights Council Subcommittee 2 (HRC-2)

Issue: Measures to eradicate domestic violence [femicide]

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a significant, persisting international concern threatening fundamental human rights and gender equality. Femicide is often the most extreme outcome of ongoing domestic abuse, which involves the intentional killing of women by the hands of intimate partners or family members.

The origins of domestic violence and accompanying femicide can be traced to deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women, that continue to yield large numbers of femicide cases, despite the growing awareness and public outcry to the issue.

The first significant efforts to combat domestic violence and femicides can be traced back to the 1970s that shifted domestic violence which was a largely dismissed matter in legal, medical and social fields to a critical social concern. Feminist movements during this period began to highlight the significance of the issue, as activists and organizations advocated for women's rights. This led to the establishment of shelters for domestic violence victims and introduction of legal reforms aimed at protecting women from domestic abuse and femicide. Since then, ongoing initiatives and efforts by organizations like UN Women have aimed to protect women by means of community engagement, support systems through shelters and medical aid as well as legal frameworks.

However, despite these advancements, alarming global statistics persist. According to the latest report of femicides by UN Women and UNODC ("One woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by their

intimate partner or family member”) [20], femicide remains to be a pervasive issue globally, with data showing that one female is killed every 10 minutes. The largest number of intimate partner and family member femicides were recorded in Africa, followed by Americas and Oceania that also recorded significant rates of such crimes in 2023 as shown in the chart below [8].

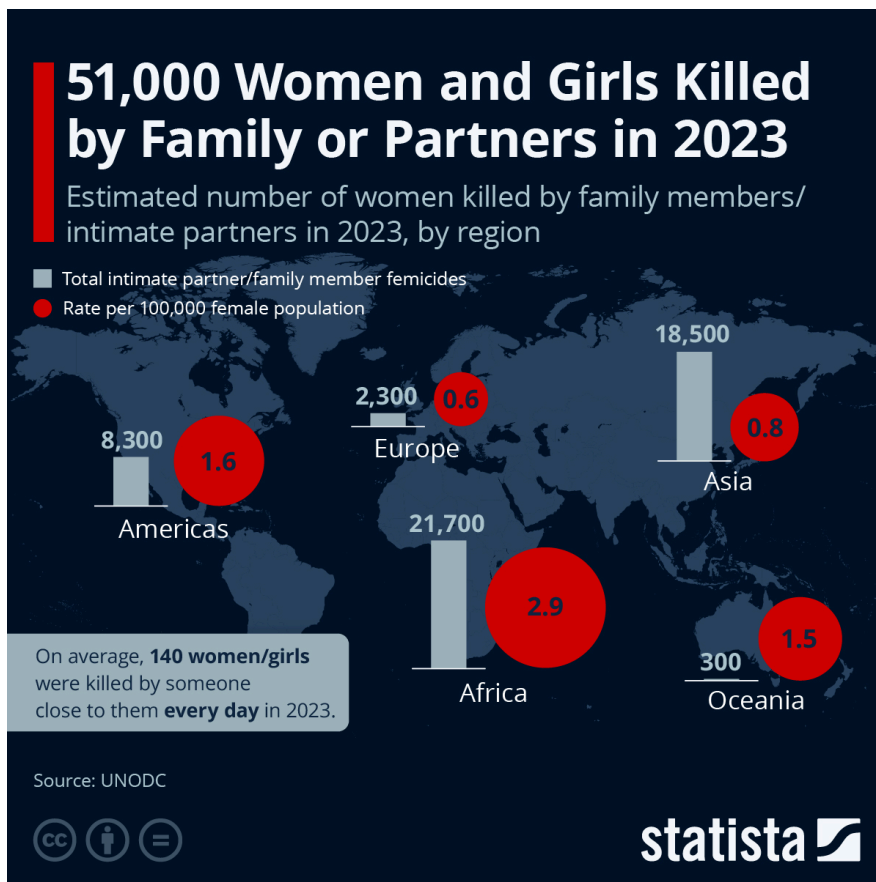


Chart from UNODC on the estimated number of femicides in households in 2023, by region.

Additionally, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation due to the increased exposure of women to their abusive partners, as well as the worldwide lockdowns that inhibited accessibility to necessary facilities. Often referred to as the “shadow pandemic,” the Covid-19 cases strained healthcare services and facilities, including shelters and helplines for abused victims that reached capacity.

Domestic violence, particularly femicide, is a persisting issue affecting millions of women globally. These recent cases and reports highlight the critical need for strong justice systems that hold perpetrators accountable while ensuring adequate support for victims.

Definition of Key Terms

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence refers to a violent, aggressive behaviour and abuse within a household

(marriage or cohabitation) in a relationship used by one partner to gain power and control over their partner or spouse. It can manifest as physical, sexual abuse, or as other threatening, coercive behaviors exerted by one partner over another. Ongoing domestic violence can escalate and result in femicide.

Femicide

Femicide is the murder of a woman or a girl with a gender-related motivation, particularly by a man. It is the most extreme manifestation of violence against females that results from a continued pattern of abuse and various forms of violence at home. It is driven by gender stereotypes or harmful social norms and structures that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women.

Gender Based Violence

Gender based violence can manifest in various forms including physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse, or threats of abuse. It is directed against a person on an account of their gender, particularly impacting women and girls.

Honor Based Violence

Honor based violence is committed with aims to protect or defend the honor of a group of people, particularly a family or a community. This predominantly occurs when women are threatened, violated or killed for actual or perceived immoral behavior that is deemed to have brought dishonor and shame on the family or community she belongs to. It is often linked to patriarchal structures, taking many forms including abduction, forced abortion, virginity testing, female genital mutilation and so on.

Women's Shelters

Shelters established for women who are victims of domestic abuse and violence. It is a place providing temporary protection, habitation and support for women escaping domestic abuse. The shelters assist victims and their families in gaining necessary resources to start a new life in a safe environment, far from the perpetrators.

CEDAW

Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is an international legal treaty that requires States to implement measures to eliminate discrimination against women, as well as to promote gender equality and women's rights. It is one of the main international agreements that guide the work of organizations such as the UN WOMen.

SDG 5

The Sustainable Development Goal 5 is concerned with gender equality, aiming to achieve

gender equality in all aspects of society. As one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the UN in 2015, it emphasizes the need for progress in the area of gender equality and elimination of violence against women in all countries.

Background Information

Domestic violence and femicides are manifestations of systemic gender based discrimination against women that continue to take the lives of millions of women and girls by the hands of intimate partners or family members. Discrimination and violence against women have persisted throughout history, as it was most often normalized in many cultures, often viewed as a private family matter that was virtually neglected rather than being recognized as a critical social issue. The abusive and coercive behaviours are part of a larger and systematic pattern of dominance and chronic abuse of power. This results from ingrained gender inequality which is one of the primary drivers of domestic violence. Patriarchal structures create power imbalances where women are viewed as subordinate to men which continues to be prevalent in many cultures and societies. Therefore, in cultures where male dominance is emphasized and accepted, discriminating and violent behaviors within households towards women tend to be normalized and dismissed. Studies show that extent of abusive behavior against women are significantly and consistently more observed in communities where gender roles are rigidly defined. Among such studies, a report by Safe and Equal particularly highlights the significance of gender inequality creating societal conditions conducive to violence against women, with rigid gender roles being a primary driver [24]. These conditions dictate fixed beliefs on the patriarchal roles of men and women, leading to an environment with increasingly possible occurrences of violence as men are enabled to exert control over women.

Although the latest statistics provided by the UN and WHO show the pervasive nature of violence against women within households which are shown to affect women globally, there exists a variation in domestic violence and femicides rates among different countries mainly due to the adequacy of legal response to such crimes. Overall, higher rates of domestic violence are mostly seen in developing countries of Africa and Oceania regions, with the highest prevalence estimates of intimate partner violence being Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Equatorial Guinea and so on, according to NIH. Other regions are not exempt from domestic violence and femicide cases. In Europe, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU's survey has revealed that 1 in 5 women have experienced violence from a household member, despite the legal frameworks and support systems being in place to protect women. Challenges particularly remain in enforcement and cultural attitudes towards the issues. The Americas, and particularly Latin America, face alarming femicide rates. Although various initiatives were implemented to combat the femicide rates, the enforcement remains inconsistent. On the other hand, Asian countries show lower reported prevalence of domestic violence. However, it is important to note that cultural norms in Asian societies often silence victims, leading to underreporting of domestic violence cases. Thus, to combat the issue of domestic

violence, a careful consideration for cultural tolerance of abuse and implementation of legal frameworks that enforce criminalization of domestic violence is required, where adequate support foundations are laid out for victims and perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes.

Addressing root causes of domestic violence and femicides: prevention strategies to tackle the cultural tolerance of abuse against women.

Cultural norms and societal attitudes play a significant role in perpetuating domestic violence and femicides. The reinforcement of acceptability of violence against women is predominantly observed in many communities around the world due to patriarchal systems and values that deeply ingrained gender inequalities and stereotypes. Such cultural tolerance is the key root cause of violence against women in domestic settings as abusive behavior is normalized, and furthermore, such standards inhibit victims from seeking help and authorities from enforcing justice effectively.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes several factors contributing to this cultural tolerance, most significant being community norms, limited access to education and past exposure to violence within families that normalize abusive behavior.

Traditional patriarchal customs dictate gender roles and relationships. Such deep rooted patriarchal values pressure women to remain in abusive relationships due to cultural stigma surrounding divorce. Patriarchal customs manifest through various practices in different countries. In Kyrgyzstan, traditional practices of bride kidnapping and kalyn payment (bride price) significantly hinder women from reporting domestic violence. These traditional customs enforce the perception that once a woman is married, she becomes the property of her husband and his family, which reinforces gender inequality and diminishes women's agency and autonomy. Women become subjected to a lifetime of societal and family pressure to accept and endure potential abuse and violence in silence. In many cases, the stigma of divorce and leaving your husband, combined with the lack of support from their community, discourages victims from seeking help.

Another notable occurrence of violence against women manifests in the form of honor based violence. In such cases, domestic violence and resulting femicide is justified as a means to restore family honor which is tied to behavior of its female members. Women may be subjected to abuse, forced isolation and murder for actions perceived as dishonorable. This includes pregnancies before marriage, choosing their own partner, seeking a divorce or challenging traditional gender roles in other ways. For instance, cases of honor based violence have been reported in India where women who marry outside of their 'caste' or religion, face severe repercussions which include murder by family members to restore the family's reputation.

Domestic violence is deeply rooted in gender inequalities which leave women trapped in cycles of abuse, pressured by the society to remain silent. Preventing violence against women requires

protection of victims and challenging of harmful cultural norms.

Addressing legal frameworks: need for implementation and enforcement of laws and policies in combating domestic violence and femicides.

Effective legal framework is fundamental to combating domestic violence and femicides, by protecting victims and holding perpetrators accountable. There are many international agreements that collectively establish a framework for addressing domestic violence and femicides such as CEDAW, DEVAW and various other UN General Assembly Resolutions. And while many countries have adapted the frameworks and enacted laws aimed at protecting women from abuse and holding perpetrators accountable, significant gaps exist in the implementation and enforcement of these policies. Many countries experience lack of consistent application of enacted laws, which lead to failure of legal measures to deter violence and provide protection and justice to victims, perpetuating cycles of violence and inequality.

International conventions emphasize the importance of legal provisions to safeguard women from domestic violence. However, these legal frameworks are only effective when adequately implemented and enforced. Challenges exist in enforcement of such laws which stem from cultural and social stigmas as explored in Sub-topic 1, lack of awareness, insufficient resources, corruption and inconsistent application.

Many victims remain unaware of existing laws and their rights due to lack of education and campaigns that raise awareness. This results in underreporting of domestic violence cases and undermines the efforts of legal frameworks. Additionally, insufficient resources is a remarkable shortcoming which leads to delays and inadequate support for victims. This was particularly an issue during Covid-19 pandemic that significantly limited accessible services and support facilities for women such as shelters, resulting in “shadow pandemic” with increased rates of domestic violence. This highlights the need for protection policies at emergency situations. Corruption and bias also significantly hinders effectiveness of legal policies. For example, Mexico has laws designed to combat violence, including the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence. However, despite these laws, enforcement is an issue due to corruption and lack of political will.

While countries have established legal frameworks intended to protect women from domestic violence and femicides, the lack of enforcement significantly undermines these efforts. There is also a need to address gender inequality in general, as the World Bank reports how only 18 countries are truly free of any law that disadvantages women. More than 150 countries have at least one law discriminatory towards women which can undermine legal policies that protect women against domestic violence.

Addressing the role of ongoing conflicts in perpetuating domestic violence.

As seen by the “shadow pandemic” from Covid-19 pandemic which exacerbated domestic

violence and femicide, emergency situations and crises often result in increased rates of violence against women.

Ongoing conflicts, whether in forms of civil wars, ethnic disputes or conflicts between different countries which significantly exacerbate the prevalence of domestic violence. Conflict settings create an environment of heightened stress, economic instability, displacement and weakened law enforcement which contribute to increased violence against women.

Conflict situations often lead to normalization of violence as acts of aggression become more socially accepted. Studies have shown a marked increase in domestic violence in regions affected by prolonged civil wars. For example, this was seen in the case of the Peruvian Civil War in which women who were exposed to the violent events during the civil war were more likely to justify and accept violence against women in households, remaining in violent relationships. Those with the highest exposure to conflict were found to have an increase in the likelihood of facing violence in households by 11% [13]. This is attributed to the normalization of violence as societal tolerance of aggressive behavior extends to private life in households.

As seen in the case of ongoing conflict in Syria, displacement, economic instability and dismantling of social services have left women particularly vulnerable. Reports from refugee camps reveal alarming rates of intimate partner violence. Conflict environments create dangerous conditions for women due to lack of inadequate protection policies and limited access to justice. The breakdown of support systems and frameworks can further isolate victims, leaving them with little to no options for escape or assistance. These conflict scenarios encourage perpetrators of domestic violence to commit severe crimes against women, knowing there is minimal risk of accountability. Similarly in Afghanistan, studies by UCL Institute for Global Health have found that women inhabiting conflict zones experience significantly larger rates of domestic violence [23].

This highlights the critical role ongoing conflicts play in perpetuating domestic violence and femicides. There is a need for member states to address these issues and provide humanitarian aid, as well as improve conditions of refugee camps in order to mitigate gender inequality challenges posed by conflict environments.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN involvement: UN organizations such as UN Women, UNICEF and UNODC advocate for global gender equality. Additionally, various resolutions and initiatives have been adopted by the General Assembly to recognize violence against women as a critical violation of human rights and urging member states to implement measures to promote awareness, improve data collection and eliminate all forms of violence against women. The UN has established a framework for addressing the issue, however, ongoing efforts and enforcement at regional levels are necessary to ensure resolutions are

implemented into effective actions in member states.

World Health Organization (WHO): WHO mainly works to provide guidance on establishing effective public services and public health responses to violence against women. Their research offers prevalence of domestic violence and the impact on health. An example of their framework which serves as a guide for policy makers to implement effective measures is the RESPECT Women Framework which was developed in collaboration with UN Women. This framework outlines strategies for prevention of violence against women.

UN Women: UN Women is a primary UN organization that focuses to combat gender inequality, working to empower and support women. The organization actively provides fundings for women's shelters and support programs to protect domestic violence victims. By partnering with state governments, civil society organisations and other UN agencies, UN Women work to prevent domestic violence and femicides. Some of their key initiatives include The Spotlight Initiative which was launched in 2017 in collaboration with the EU that aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women by 2030. This targeted regions with exacerbated situations such as Africa and Latin America. Through various activities and initiatives UN Women combats domestic violence and femicides globally by addressing specific issues and contexts faced by countries.

UNODC: This UN agency assists the implementation and development of legal frameworks and law enforcements to combat domestic violence and ensure perpetrators are held accountable. Their primary focus is on supporting criminal justice proceedings, that focus on adopting an approach centered around protecting victims.

Mexico: Mexico experiences one of the highest rates of femicides and domestic violence in the world, with alarming statistics showing that in 2022, there were 968 reported cases of femicides, which represents a 127% increase from 2015 [14]. Mexico has been active in international conferences regarding women's rights and gender based violence in which the country ratified various international treaties aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights such as the CEDAW, as well as supporting resolutions aimed at combating gender based violence. However, Mexico faces criticism for not implementing similar commitments domestically. Femicide was only established as a distinct category in Mexican law in 2012 which allowed for specific legal actions against perpetrators, ensuring their accountability. The effectiveness of the legal framework is undermined by systemic issues of impunity and lack of enforcement of policies aimed at protecting women. Many perpetrators of domestic violence and femicide cases are often not held accountable and go unpunished due to poor investigation practices and societal stigma surrounding domestic violence.

South Africa: South Africa also faces one of the highest rates of domestic violence globally with femicide rates estimated to be five times the global average [10]. Most of the domestic violence cases

are of intimate partner violence, as a national survey revealed that one in five women reported experiencing violence in physical form from an intimate partner. The government recognizes the severity of the issue as a national crisis. The main legislative measures in South Africa include the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 which provides protections and support for victims, allowing women to obtain protection orders against the perpetrators. In recent years, the country has also established The National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) in 2020 which outlines an approach involving multiple sectors to combat gender based violence mainly by focusing on support systems and services for victims and improved law enforcement responses. However, South Africa remains to face one of the highest rates of gender based violence by intimate partners or family members due to remaining challenges in implementation. This is caused by the corruption within law enforcement agencies and cultural attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event	Description of event
December 18th, 1979	CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly: CEDAW is referred to as the source of the international bill of rights for women. CEDAW obligated signatory member states to eliminate discrimination in their states which included tackling domestic violence and femicides.
December 20th, 1993	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women	This General Assembly Resolution recognized violence against women as a critical violation of human rights, urging states to condemn domestic violence and femicides.
1999	International Day	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: The General Assembly designated this International Day for November 25th to raise awareness and facilitate efforts to combat violence against women.
December 19th, 2006	Resolution on the Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women	This resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly urged member states to intensify the efforts to eradicate all forms of violence against women. .
2008	UNiTE	UNiTE to End Violence Against Women: UNiTE was launched by UN Women where the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon launched a global campaign that called to raise public awareness and increase political will to eradicate violence against women around the world.

December 30th, 2021	Resolution on Femicides	This resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly to address the alarming issue of femicides, requiring urgent action by member states – to implement strategies for prevention of femicides and protection of women’s rights.
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Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

UN General Assembly Resolutions

The UN General Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions over the years mentioned previously, aimed at eradicating all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and resulting femicides. Calling for intensified efforts, these included commitments to improve data collection, support services and facilities as well as legal frameworks. The resolutions have been key to shaping international standards and encouraging policies in member states. However, a notable shortcoming is that the effectiveness of the implementation of frameworks encouraged by the UN are often hindered due to inconsistent and ineffective implementation in countries and regions, particularly in areas where cultural attitudes and stigmas around gender based violence can obstruct progress.

International Campaigns

UN’s initiative of UNiTE to End Violence Against Women Campaign in 2008 aimed to raise awareness around violence against girls, calling for action to invest in relevant organisations to ensure accessibility of essential services to victims and to eradicate impunity and establish laws to hold perpetrators accountable. This campaign successfully raised international awareness particularly on social media by the hashtag #NoExcuse.

Another international campaign was the “HeForShe” campaign from 2014 by UN Women, hosted by UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson. Her speech widely circulated social media, yielding increased awareness of educating men to protect women’s rights.

However, similar to other efforts by the UN, translating the commitments to concrete actions and effective policies in governments remains a significant challenge as many countries lack adequate legal frameworks and enforcement of policies to protect women.

Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs established in 2012 by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development are an urgent call for action by all countries [1]. The SDG 5 aims to “Achieve gender

equality and empower all women and girls” by 2030, recognizing gender based violence which includes domestic violence and femicides as one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally. In particular, SGD target 5.2 aims to eradicate violence against women in both public and private spheres; target 5.3 aims to eradicate harmful practices such as early, forced marriages which play a role in the causation of honor based violence.

Along with other SDGs, Sustainable Development Goal 5 represents a significant global commitment to address gender inequality which include the alarming issue of domestic violence and femicides. It is notable as the first global development agenda that addresses all forms of violence and harmful practices against women, encouraging countries to prioritize gender based violence in their national policies and legal frameworks.

Countries

India: India’s Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act from 2005 provided a legal framework, including protection orders, women’s shelter access for victims and monetary relief. While this marked progression, there has been inconsistency in the actual implementation of these policies due to lack of awareness, police insensitivity and frequent delays in judicial processes.

Tunisia: in 2017, Tunisia’s Law on Eliminating Violence Against Women criminalized all forms of gender based violence which included domestic violence. This legal enactment emphasized protection of victims and awareness campaigns. This effectively raised awareness as well as expanded legal protections, however, cultural stigmas and enforcement challenges persist, particularly in rural areas.

United Kingdom: In 2004, the UK initiated a Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act which provided legal frameworks for protecting victims, including provisions for the prosecution of domestic violence perpetrators. This act was significant in improving the legal response to domestic violence reports. However, there remain ongoing concerns about underreporting of domestic violence cases.

Possible Solutions

- Education and Campaigns: As explored earlier, the root cause for domestic violence remains to be the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and values that normalize violence against women in households and create cultural stigmas, preventing victims from seeking help, often resulting from lack of education. To combat this issue, development of national public awareness campaigns is crucial in targeting harmful cultural norms and stereotypes, especially as in many developing countries, there is a lack of awareness in legal policies

among the population. Such campaigns should engage male population, and emphasize respect for women's rights and gender equality. Changing societal attitudes begins with education. Thus, member states should prioritize access to education for all, ensuring a shift in cultural acceptance of abuse. School curricula should integrate gender equality, including classes on gender equality and healthy relationships. This integration in the early generation will aid in fostering generations that value and practice gender equality, challenging traditional patriarchal norms.

- **Community Interventions:** Regional and local community leaders and officials must advocate against domestic violence and promote gender equality in order to mitigate the underreporting of domestic violence cases. Raising awareness within communities ensures cultural sensitivity while challenging harmful practices such as bride price, dowry and honor based violence.
- **Representations and Regulations of Media:** Media in all its forms must be regulated to eradicate glorification of abuse or misogynistic stereotypes and ensure that content portraying empowered women and gender equality is encouraged. Media holds the power to shape public perception. Positive representations of women and equitable relationships is thus fundamental to counter cultural norms that tolerate abuse.
- **Strengthening Legislations of Domestic Violence:** All member states must adopt comprehensive laws and criminalization of all forms of violence against women. Any potential gaps in legal definitions may leave different forms of violence unaddressed, allowing perpetrators to evade accountability. Thus, all forms of violence must be addressed including physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse.
- **Legal Aid and Accessibility:** Governments should provide free or subsidized legal assistance to victims. These services must address financial and language barriers that often deter victims from reporting domestic violence cases and seeking justice. Accessible legal support will empower victims to take action.
- **Public Awareness on Legal Rights:** Despite existing frameworks designed to protect women, there is often a lack of awareness of such policies especially in rural regions of countries. To ensure awareness of legal rights, widespread awareness campaigns must be conducted to inform citizens of legislations, available protections and procedures to report violence within households. Many victims remain unaware of their legal options which perpetuate cycles of abuse.
- **Data Collection:** Collection and publication of national data on domestic violence and femicide cases should be mandated which include reporting rates, prosecution rates and

convictions. Obtaining reliable data will highlight existing gaps in enforcement, ensuring victims are supported while perpetrators are held accountable.

- Promoting Conflict Resolution: Actions may vary depending on the conflict in question, however, international efforts must be strengthened to mediate and resolve ongoing conflicts by means of diplomatic negotiations and peacekeeping missions. Reducing armed conflict will eradicate conditions that perpetuate instability which exacerbate domestic violence.
- Humanitarian Aid Addressing Domestic Violence: Humanitarian Aid must integrate domestic violence prevention strategies by providing shelters, counseling and legal aid. Women more often face heightened risks of abuse in conflict zones that can be mitigated by integrating protection services into emergency response efforts.
- Addressing Domestic Violence in Refugee Camps: Refugee camps are often sites of violence against women including domestic forms. It is important to secure facilities and improve conditions within refugee camps in which women can report abuse, seek medical attention and access legal support easily. Women in displacement settings are highly vulnerable to abuse, and thus establishment of safe spaces offer a critical lifeline to victims.

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