

Surf City XIX

Huntington Beach High School

UN Women

Topic A: *Protecting Women Refugees*

Topic B: *Promoting Women in STEM Fields*



Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

On behalf of the Huntington Beach High School Model United Nations Program, we would like to welcome you to our Surf City XIX advanced conference!

Our annual Surf City conference upholds the principles and intended purpose of the United Nations. Delegates can expect to partake in a professional, well-run debate that simulates the very issues that those at the United Nations discuss every day. Both novel and traditional ideas will be shared, challenged, and improved.

It is our hope that all delegates will receive the opportunity to enhance their research, public speaking, and communication skills as they explore the intricacies of global concerns through various perspectives, some of which may be very different from their own. We hope their experiences here give them new insight and values that they can apply outside of the realm of Model UN for the betterment of the world community.

Please do not hesitate to approach our Secretariat or Staff Members with any questions or concerns that you may have throughout the day. We wish the best to all our participants and hope that they may share a fulfilling experience with us!

Enjoy the conference!

Sincerely,



Zach Bernstein
Secretary General



Vivian Bui
Secretary General



Lauren Le
Secretary General



Alison Miu-Martinez
Secretary General

Meet The Dais

Kylie Barnhart

Hi Everyone! My name is Kylie Barnhart and I'm going to be one of your chairs for this year's Surf City MUN Conference. As a senior, this is my fourth year of MUN and I can't wait to see the debate for our UN Women committee. UN Women is one of my favorite committees to debate because of how interesting it is to research and talk about issues that even women here in the US face every day. At Huntington, I have been involved in both the Girls Soccer & Track & Field teams, as well as various other clubs and activities. Outside of school, I spend my time working as a host, coaching my younger sister's AYSO team, and spending time with my friends and family. I am super excited for this conference and don't hesitate to email surfcity.unwomen@gmail.com with any of your questions or concerns.

Natasha George

Hello Delegates! My name is Natasha George and I am so excited to be chairing UN Women at Surf City XIX this year! I am a senior at Huntington Beach High School, and this is my fourth year being a part of the MUN program. Model United Nations has given me the opportunity to meet new people, become internationally aware of pressing issues facing our society, and improve my public speaking skills. Aside from MUN, I devote a significant amount of my time playing club beach volleyball (and will be playing collegiately next year at the University of Oregon), volunteering in my community through National Charity League, leading the Sustainability Club, staying involved with my school through ASB, and being one of the captains of the Varsity Beach Volleyball Team. When I'm not doing homework or playing volleyball, I spend my time taking hot yoga classes, surfing with my friends, and going to the beach. With a strong passion for these prevalent topics, I cannot wait to see what all of you bring to debate and wish you the best of luck!

Lily Fosmire

Hello Delegates! My name is Lily Fosmire, and I will be one of your chairs for Surf City XIX. I am super excited to be chairing UN Women, because it is such an important and educational committee to be a part of. I am a junior this year, and this will be my first time chairing. Apart from MUN, I run Varsity Cross Country and Track, contribute to my school through heading the Suicide Awareness and Prevention Club, as well as other opportunities to give back. I have also coached at SCATS Gymnastics for 3 years, where I can relive my memories there as a kid. I love spending time with friends, going to the beach, and exploring. I am excited to meet you all in committee, good luck!

All Papers are due on **JANUARY 30, 2022** by 11:59pm to

surfcity.unwomen@gmail.com

Topic A: Protecting Women Refugees

Background

As the global number of refugees has reached some of the highest levels in history, the amount of women who contribute to this number has only continued to grow. Reasons why many women are forced to flee their homes include sexual abuse, warfare, financial instability, natural disasters, and an overall search for a better life for themselves and their families. Many countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq have faced much higher rates of refugee encampments and dangers in recent years¹. Many refugees have fled from countries with strict religious governments and are in danger of being persecuted for their sexual orientation, religion, gender, or disabilities. Most commonly, religious persecution is a driving factor for many people who end up becoming refugees. India has been recently claimed a “Country of Particular Concern” within the refugee crisis because of an increase in anti-Muslim persecution since 2019 that even led to violent riots and the deaths of hundreds of Muslims². War is another prime example of refugees fleeing for their safety as an attempt to avoid danger or even death. Over 38 million refugees exist as a result of wars, mostly occurring in the Middle East. For example, an attack in August of 2017 resulted in Myanmar’s largest displacement of Rohingyas, the country’s most oppressed ethnic group³. Finally, refugees often leave their home countries due to natural disasters, including droughts, earthquakes, and other factors that may negatively affect their quality of life. Extreme hunger is typically due to droughts in certain areas, like the Middle East which has 20 million refugees that face hunger. Due to the increase in migration from the Middle East’s endangered countries, the number of refugees worldwide has risen to an astounding 80 million². This number has grown exponentially, but is currently at an all-time high. Of these 80 million refugees, a little over 50% are women and children, the most vulnerable populations to sexual violence, trafficking, kidnapping, and other mistreatment of refugees. Overall, these numbers come as a result of the mix of political instability, societal concerns, and weak economies as post-conflict zones continue to arise, significantly impacting women and children.

Around 20% of all female refugees are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. Whether used as a punishment, threat, power, or to fulfill sexual desires, rape and other violent acts against women poses as a significant problem among refugees. Sexual crimes against women not only affect victims physically, but they also leave longstanding mental effects on raped or assaulted women. One of the most widely shared mental illnesses associated with rape is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)³. PTSD and rape are closely linked, and the disease alters victims' personalities, cognitive function, and ability to carry out basic tasks, depending on the severity of the case. In refugees specifically, women are affected 200% more by PTSD than men, and almost 40% of refugee women have been sexually assaulted and have developed PTSD from their experiences. Many women affected by this mental illness are unable to speak out about their experiences, whether being hindered culturally or by their own mental triggers. Many cultures silence female voices or believe that rape and sex are subjects that should not be discussed, causing fear of rejection from their culture. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a hub for mistreatment of raped women; victims that come forward are at high risk of becoming completely marginalized from their society, as the DRC greatly shames women that have been raped, but defend the assaulter⁴. Oftentimes the person that assaults these women is in a position of power over them, adding fear that they will be harmed or killed if they speak about their experiences. Also, women who have been deeply traumatized by these experiences are extremely vulnerable to

external triggers of PTSD. For example, speaking or even thinking about their abuse could result in nightmares, flashbacks, or send the victim spiraling and therefore halt recovery. Studies continue to recognize PTSD and the prevalence of the illness among refugees, especially women. A recent study from NCBI has gathered that 71% of refugee women experience PTSD symptoms, rising from 66% in the past. The same study delves into the lasting effects that it has on the affected women, such as depression, and in more serious cases, dissociation and suicidal thoughts. 95% of women refugees affected by PTSD are thought to have depression or show signs of major depressive episodes, with this number continuing to rise as the number of refugees does the same.

Another issue that many female refugees face is forced child marriage. The experience deeply traumatizes and harms the forced bride, often leading to further abuse. Child brides are much more susceptible to rape, abuse, and other forms of assault, because of the societal norms created in many of the affected countries that support and defend the man. Out of 2400 Syrian refugee women, over 33% had been married off as a child⁵. Translating this number over to the roughly 2.5 million female refugees generates a rough estimate of 825,000 child brides from the nation alone, and, worldwide around 40 million women and girls were married as children. Along with the trauma that result from sexual assault, there are also numerous physical conditions that may affect the bride. For example, the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS is extremely common because of the lack of testing and protection methods available to refugees and the victims. In the US alone, 14% of refugees migrating tested positive for HIV/AIDS in 2006⁶.

The issue of refugee women has come to the attention of large groups and media in recent years. An example of attempts to combat the issue include the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, which took place in 2016 was a major event that paved the way for awareness of the subject⁷. One of the most impactful ways that the Summit was used was to change the thinking of people around the world. Instead of seeing refugees and migrants as a “burden,” the Summit aimed to alter people’s thinking to see refugees as ways to improve their countries’ economies and job circuit. Another major idea that was presented at the Summit was the ability for multiple countries to take responsibility for refugees and make their safety a priority. The Summit was titled a “significant milestone in refugee and migrant protection,” representing the true impact that it has had on countries’ views and actions on the subject.

As the United Nations, it is important that we are able to fully understand each issue that migrant and refugee women face in order to combat the growing issues that they present. From climate change to persecution, the reasons that refugee women are fleeing ultimately lead to sexual violence, unsafe pregnancies, mental, and physical health issues that must be combatted through the UN.

United Nations Involvement

Although women represent more than half of the 19.6 million refugees in the world, only 4 percent of projects in the United Nations inter-agency appeals were specifically geared towards women in 2014. Additionally, only 0.4 percent of all funding to conflict-stricken states went specifically to women groups or women agencies in the years 2012 to 2014⁶. Since the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergencies and Armed Conflict in 1974, and the Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1969, various United Nations systems have made significant progress in addressing female needs and priorities in conflict-affected countries. UN Women has worked tirelessly in efforts to shine the light on the needs and protection of women refugees, including the urgent need for humanitarian

action to certify access to safe spaces and protection in their host country, along with secure and safe transit routes to ensure success in building their new life in potential host countries. This statement was made on World Refugee Day, on June 17, where UN Women advocated for the potential for young female refugees to have tremendous capacity for resilience and the potential to be effective change agents. They proceed to state that refugee women have a critical role in crisis prevention and response, and their decision-making leadership is essential for long-term peace and stability⁷.

One of the first United Nations resolutions focused on women in post-conflict regions was on October 31, 2000, when the Security Council passed S/RES/1325 on women, peace, and security. The resolution emphasizes the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, including conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. The Interagency Taskforce on Women, Peace, and Security was founded by the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality and is led by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Women's Advancement, which all had a part in shaping this resolution. To execute Resolution 1325, the cooperation of the Women's Committee on Refugee Women and Children was utilized to develop a framework for a women's peace and security agenda.

On September 19, 2016, the United Nations held a High-Level Plenary of the General Assembly in New York to discuss large-scale refugee and migration flows into host countries, with the goal of uniting nations behind a more compassionate and coordinated strategy. Since then, UN Women has collaborated with other UN agencies to assist the Member States in assuring that the conclusion of this summit prepares the way for the protection of women's and girls' human rights in refugee circumstances. The World Conferences on Women in Mexico, Copenhagen, and Nairobi, which took place from 1975 to 1985, were the first actions against gender-based violence by the United Nations, which includes the recognition of refugee women to be at most concern. Particular concern was raised for women who had been victims of violence, regardless of being in conflict stricken regions. Recognizing GBV as a social problem that must be addressed via increased public knowledge was one of the outcomes and paved the way for the focus to go towards GBV in refugee camps and rehabilitation centers. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was founded in February 1947 and developed the first international accords to reform discriminatory laws and acknowledge women's political rights. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was approved by the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 1993. Since then, the most significant UN development has been the establishment of UN Women in 2010, which works to empower women, in both the developed and underdeveloped regions of the world⁸.

Outside of UN Women, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) took part in various inter-agency fora such as UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Sub-Working Group on Gender, which helped ensure safe, private shelters, aided with installation or maintenance, and offered equitable food distribution and separate basic sanitation. Resolution 1820 was one of the earliest Security Council decisions to acknowledge the problem of sexual assault in war-torn nations, and calls on Member States to uphold their legal commitments to prosecute those guilty for war crimes, rape, and other kinds of sexual violence, in order to guarantee that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal legal protection and access to justice. When the United Nations General Assembly adopted and enacted S/RES/2585 in July 2021, which established the objective of restoring the order of the cross-line helpful guide conveyance system to Syria, being the most frequent refugee crisis as of 2021. The absence of terminology and protection in Syria for

women's vulnerabilities in this resolution illustrates the work and progress that still has to be made, including the debate that will take place in this committee.

Case Study: Women of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian conflict has caused great misery for millions of people since early 2011, displacing an estimated 11.5 million Syrians (nearly half of the estimated pre-war population). 5.5 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries as refugees, including Turkey (3.6 million), Lebanon (1.5 million), and Jordan (1.3 million). Syria's crisis has progressed faster than any other on the planet, and Syrians remain the world's biggest forcibly displaced population. It took two years for 1 million people to be displaced when the war broke out in March 2011. Now, more than half of the pre-war population has been internally displaced or forced to seek safety in neighboring nations after nine years. Syrians typically left with the basic necessities that they could carry as the crisis progressed and the regions of bombardment shifted. The abrupt and dramatic commencement of relocation has wreaked havoc on children's and adults' psychological well-being by tearing family and community networks. Documentation and other objects proving a person's identification were lost as Syrians left, and many continue to flee. Mothers, fathers, and children depart without state identification in search of a safe place to reside, causing problems traveling inside the nation (due to roadblocks and checkpoints) as well as seeking shelter in neighboring countries.

Women and girls are bearing the brunt of the crisis, from food insecurity to lost educational opportunities, lack of potable water or health care, and high incidence of gender-based violence. Early marriage is a source of worry in 69 percent of communities. Gender-based violence (GBV), domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence have all grown, with many women saying that their husbands are more likely to turn to violence when the external turmoil takes a toll on their family's psychological well-being. As a result of the fighting, there are many single female-headed homes without a major earner. As people take on non-traditional responsibilities in society, all of these developments have resulted in adjustments in home dynamics, social order, and community structure. Thus, the UN Women, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the International Labor Organization (ILO) organized awareness raising sessions and job fairs in the Oasis centers to help Syrian women refugees work outside of the camps, increasing the number of work permits issued to Syrian women refugees from 3% in 2017 to 11% in January 2018. The four Oasis centers serve over 16,000 refugees each year, providing over 400 cash-for-work options, child care, counseling, and referrals for gender-based violence. This is just an initiative utilized to integrate Syrian women back into society. To ensure that participating nations in this committee involve themselves in an efficient manner in terms of solution building, it is important to analyze all 5 of the unique challenges faced by Syrian women as they flee their homeland.

Many Syrian refugee men are unable to support their families due to a lack of labor opportunities. As a result, their customary function within the family has been disturbed in recent years, causing stress and low self-esteem. Men's discontent has escalated into physical violence towards their spouses as they face increased poverty and despair. Women have also reported being aggressive towards their children as a result of stress. Most women are hesitant to leave their spouses and partners because of the way marriage and domestic violence have been viewed traditionally and legally in Syria. Many people aren't even aware that social services are accessible to them in this situation. Even if a woman is single or lives in a secure household, she may be subjected to gender-based violence (including sexual assault, forced marriage, and honor killings).

There are no organized camps for individuals living in displacement in Lebanon, which has a population of roughly 30% Syrian refugees. As a result, many Syrians in the nation are forced to live in makeshift tented villages, abandoned buildings rented out to refugees, or other unsafe living conditions.

Even before the conflict, almost 10% of Syrian weddings included a bride under the age of 18 years old (the legal age for marriage in the country is 17 for girls and 18 for boys)¹⁰. According to a recent UNICEF survey, the prevalence of early marriage in certain camps was as high as 32%. Because of the cultural and economic protections that marriage provides Syrian women and girls, much of this is unavoidable. For parents who are trying to make ends meet as refugees (often unable to find work in jobs similar to those they had before the conflict), marrying off their daughter means one fewer mouth to feed while also ensuring that their daughter is cared for by someone with more resources than they have. In the last decade, early and forced marriages have become more common in Syria to enable girls flee violence and turmoil at home and be safe from sexual harassment and assault in displacement camps. Especially in the best of circumstances, many parents regret making this decision, even if they see it as a dire need.

Many Syrian women were educated before the start of the conflict, but only a small percentage worked. Because their husbands disappeared, were murdered, or were unable to join them when they fled Syria, many Syrian refugee women have found themselves in charge of their households as a result of the Syrian crisis. For many women, this means learning a practical trade that will allow them to earn money as refugees, which is a short list to begin with. To make ends meet, others have turned to sex labor. Even individuals who worked before the conflict are finding it difficult to adjust to the new situation. On top of this, their children are not getting proper educational opportunities as well. 2.4 million Syrian children are currently out from school, some for as long as six years. Syria had a high primary school attendance rate of 97 percent before the war, but schooling was suspended by the fighting since it was (and continues to be) hazardous for children to attend school¹¹. This has hampered their capacity to engage in school, as well as their potential to live full and creative lives in the future. The longer the violence lasts, the higher the chance that an entire generation of young Syrians may be "lost" owing to a lack of safe, high-quality education.

Mental health concerns are frequent among refugees of both genders, but each has its own set of difficulties. Crisis and violence come at a great cost to the status quo, and many Syrian refugee women's lives have been entirely turned upside down. Those who are living in displacement and have no ties to their prior "regular" life (such as family members, particularly male family members) are more subject to emotions of isolation, loneliness, and despair.

When it comes to Syrian refugee women, much progress has been accomplished during the previous four years of the fighting. Social assistance services were made more accessible and available to both men and women, where a ten-point plan to enhance the lives of all refugees was introduced.. Children's caregivers benefited from caregiver engagement programs that helped them deal with stress and family dynamics, including the increase of . Syrian women could also take advantage of skill-building opportunities, and many had already begun to learn how to protect themselves and feel safer in their host towns. However, COVID-19 and the accompanying lockdown limitations have undone much of this progress¹². The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon and Jordan reported a decrease in calls to protection hotlines for gender-based violence in the first few months of the lockdown, not because the amount of abuse had decreased, but because the ability to safely and discreetly make a call had been hampered by the shelter-in-place orders.

Questions to Consider

1. What can be done to address the lack of job access for women refugees—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How can aid be provided to women refugees while ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers?
3. How can the issue of gender-based violence be eradicated in refugee camps?
4. What are the major ways that refugee women are affected when reintegrating into society?
5. In what ways do women face more difficulties than men while migrating out of poverty or war stricken countries?
6. How have nations actively worked against women refugees?

Endnotes

1. <https://www.womenforwomen.org/blogs/5-facts-about-what-refugee-women-face>
2. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/religious-persecution-around-globe-guide>
3. <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>
4. <https://trialinternational.org/latest-post/sexual-violence-stigma-at-all-levels/>
5. <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/protecting-female-refugees-against-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-camps.html>
6. <https://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/health-conditions/infectious-diseases/hiv/>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8125581/>
8. <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2017/02/new-study-finds-child-marriage-rising-among-vulnerable-syrian-refugees/>
9. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/06/un-women-statement-on-world-refugee-day>
10. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-refugees-and-migrants>
11. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/06/un-women-statement-on-world-refugee-day>
12. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>
13. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/women.html>
14. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-syria-humanitarian-update>
15. <https://www.concernusa.org/story/syrian-refugee-women-challenges/>
16. <https://www.concern.net/news/syria-crisis-explained-5-things-know-2021>

Topic B: Promoting Women in STEM Fields

Background

Globally, women only make up about 28 percent of all STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) employees in the workforce and with STEM jobs being one of the fastest-growing and highest paid jobs in the world, this has only widened the gender pay gap.¹³ Not only that, but jobs in STEM are seen as one of the most stable jobs entering the future of technology and offers careers that will be able to last a lifetime. Along with that, as the global community has continued to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals, it has become apparent that more individuals with knowledge in various fields in STEM are needed. Therefore, it becomes imperative that the United Nations gears its focus towards ensuring women are given equal opportunity and protection in the STEM field, but with a small majority of countries being unaware or unconcerned about this issue, the UN lacks the means to make these changes. Numbers vary throughout countries, however, more progressive nations such as Myanmar have around 80% of STEM researchers as women, in stark contrast to much of South and West Asia along with Africa, in which that percentage drops to a mere 15% with the majority of that percentage working in low ranking and paying positions.¹⁴

At the core, this issue stems from the lack of the global education system's push towards women in STEM fields. Starting in elementary schools, girls are subject to facing levels of discrimination, placing the majority of young women into classes more focused on writing and art, rather than math and science classes. In a study done by the American Association of University Women, they saw boys and girls equally showed proficient levels of math and science skills, however, in highschool years, there was only about 1 girl for every 13 boys that placed about 700 on their Math or Science SAT section.¹⁵ In addition to that, within Europe, girls showed on average, an even higher desire to focus on STEM in their primary school classes but were still performing lower on tests as they progressed to secondary school. Even the most progressive countries, such as Sweden, still see this gap in their education system due to a lack of representation for women STEM leaders and a lack of media coverage. Rather than accomplishments of women managing difficult endeavors in their fields, the global NEWS system is plagued by more and more with stories of countries actively fighting against the success of women, discouraging young girls from believing they have the capability to pursue male-dominated careers. Within TV shows and movies, only about 12% of onscreen characters with identifiable STEM jobs were women, only furthering the social construct that STEM jobs are inherently jobs for men. Therefore, this problem does not stem from the ability of women to achieve in these high level fields, but rather the global education system and society as a whole still functioning off of misogynist ideals developed hundreds of years ago.

This becomes an even bigger problem, as mentioned previously, in countries where women are still trying to gain equal rights and the right to an education, particularly in third world countries such as South Sudan, where 73% of young women lack the opportunity to be educated.¹⁶ Similar to South Sudan, women globally and specifically within the Central African Republic are illiterate, with only 17% of women being able to read or write. These statistics are based off of a plethora of factors, including but not limited to: misogynistic discrimination within a country, lack of teachers and school supplies, and rising levels of war, leaving women with no time or money to receive high-level schooling. With STEM jobs requiring more formal education compared to fields in writing or business, many women have almost no opportunity to succeed in

a STEM field without the right degree of knowledge. As war in countries such as Afghanistan and Syria has persisted, women have been used as a tool of warfare and are subject to rape, taking away their opportunity to have the sense of individuality needed to get the right education. Another example of this is in Yemen, where women are not protected by the government as individuals and are currently fighting for legislation that gives women the right to maintain self-sovereignty. Over 85% of the women in Yemen are controlled in some way by their families or their husbands, forcing them to gear their focus towards making food and having kids, leaving no time for school or work.

Even within developed countries, this problem still exists as a result of deep-rooted ideals of women being the “homemaker”, leaving millions of women to feel inferior to their male counterparts and unmotivated to pursue jobs in STEM fields: something that is seen as a male’s industry. When looking at enrollments in college-level STEM courses for women in a developed country such as Australia, around 35% of all enrollments are women, however, this number decreases significantly when entering the workplace. This gender gap in STEM is most commonly explained by the fact that women who do not have the technical confidence to pursue STEM are subject to intimidation of their male competition. However, the harsh reality of this is that it is not the levels of confidence restricting women from continuing their education into work, but rather the inflexibility that STEM careers provide for women and more specifically, mothers. Globally, mothers are less likely to be employed in STEM careers compared to men or women without children and face even more difficulties following the Covid-19 pandemic, with women on average spending around 15 more hours of unpaid work and labor than men.¹⁷ Not only that, but even when women do partake in STEM fields in developed countries, the gender pay gap between men and women working the same job has grown to be about a 12.9% difference.¹⁸ This is not a factor of education, however, with around 46% of women in developed countries having a 4-year degree, compared to only about 36% of men. Therefore, even if a woman desires to compete for a high level job and has the education to do so, the incentive for maintaining a STEM related job is low as a result of this pay gap and the education inequality.

In the case that a woman is able to find a job within a STEM industry, she becomes subject to corruption within that company, with women in STEM reported to be 75% more likely than men in STEM to become subject to harassment, intimidation, or unfair treatment. Unfair treatment includes, but is not limited to: less promotions than male coworkers for the same performance, being consistently ignored, being insulted about things that do not affect workplace performance, etc. Although change has been enacted throughout many countries, protecting unfair treatment, it is not necessarily rules or regulations that the world must focus on, but also undoing the stigma held against women in the workplace. In a study done by the Harvard Business Review, they focused on investigating the differences between how men and women are viewed in high level professions. The subjects wore motion and communications sensors which, as a result, showed that women had the opportunity to interact much less with senior level coworkers and were given much less eye contact during presentations, however, showed equal levels of productivity and focus at their time at work.¹⁹ This only makes the issue of promoting women in STEM more difficult, therefore, although simple solutions may be able to solve distinct inequalities, the world community must focus on changing the depiction and attention women are given with maintaining and earning job positions and STEM degrees.

As the United Nations continues to work towards equality within STEM fields for women, all of these factors are equally important to consider. Whether it be first or third-world countries, or nations in which have little to no representation for women, UN Women has the duty to continue the fight for equal opportunity and success in the workplace.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations cares deeply about the success of women and has increased its support of women internationally greatly in recent years. A major example of this increased support is the UN's International Day of Women and Girls in Science Day²⁰. Celebrated annually on February 11, the day was created to bring awareness to the inequalities of women in the workforce, and urge people to take initiative. For 2021 and 2022, the goals of this day are to celebrate the women at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, including female doctors, researchers, and first responders.

Sustainable Development Goals are another way that the UN raises awareness for issues that it feels are of utmost importance. *Gender Equality* is Goal 5 out of 17 and the UN aims to complete these goals by 2030. Although they recognize that there has been immense progress in recent years on the path to gender equality, the United Nations urges for more effort in creating gender equality, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing their efforts almost to a halt²¹. Women are affected exponentially more by the pandemic, making up most of the first responders that tend to patients and also at-home caretakers, which were some of the most vulnerable populations during the heat of the virus. Another large effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on SDG 5 is the lockdowns creating more opportunities for domestic abuse, which the UN plans to combat through goal 5.2.

A specific document that has had a large impact on bringing awareness to the inequalities of women in STEM is A/RES/68/227²², which addresses women in development positions. Session 68 of the General Assembly focuses largely on women's issues, including working on the increase of women in the workforce. One of the points that the document makes is that the UN-Women branch must be strengthened in order to see improvements. The document also recalls the points of the previous session's A/RES/67/227 which states that equality for women and girls in development is extremely important to both their success and the development of the world. The document calls upon the Member States of the UN to increase women in power and to urge the implementation of women-based projects in order to create gender equality. An example of an NGO created to ensure gender equality is the Association for Women's Rights in Development, which specializes in creating job opportunities for women worldwide. AWID's goal is to create "a world where feminist realities flourish, where resources and power are shared in ways that enable everyone, and future generations, to thrive and realize their full potential with dignity, love and respect, and where Earth nurtures life in all its diversity," through dedicating their organization to the success of women in the workforce. Through the use of women-run NGOs and other bases of funding and contribution to the economy and nations, gender equality can be achieved over time. A/RES/68/227 also urges the eradication of stigma and stereotypes against women and their abilities. Much of the inequality in STEM fields and the workforce comes from harmful stereotypes created to lessen the abilities or voices of powerful women within their field. By educating children and cultures on the importance of women and not stereotyping them on the basis of gender, the UN hopes that women will be presented with more opportunities and the ability to create change for themselves. Finally, the document emphasizes the importance of women-based projects and focuses on post-crisis zones. These crisis zones are often culturally against women in power, and by creating focal points in these specific areas, UN-Women pushes for the eradication of harmful patriarchal standards, but instead equal and fair societies in which women are allowed to flourish.

Case Study: Women in STEM in Afghanistan

As Afghanistan's government has become corrupted and continued to face the imposing threat of total control of the Taliban, Afghanistan remains one of the countries with the most discrimination against women. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's prime minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan issued a statement as of December 2021, regarding his belief that it is necessary to include women in the workplace, however, the militarized Taliban has acted in opposition to this. This militant group was seen going to various non-governmental and governmental companies and rushing into their administrative offices, declaring that women shall no longer be allowed to work, following their ban on women going to school in August.²³ Following these ambushes, nearly all women have resigned from their jobs, leaving only few nurses to continue working, resulting in about a projected 1 billion dollar decrease in the already damaged Afghan economy. As the Taliban has declared previously regarding other detrimental actions that have been taken, their reasoning lies within the Sharia Islamic law, a religious document that was also used for ISIS to justify the 9-11 bombings. This proves to make it difficult for women in Afghanistan to fight for equal rights in the workplace and specifically within STEM careers because the Taliban has the ability to interpret the Sharia law any way they see fit.²⁴

As mentioned previously, the Taliban has recently imposed regulations preventing women from attending school and therefore leaving the majority of girls without a degree necessary to participate in a STEM field. Even with the absence of this ban, the country of Afghanistan has faced decades of more and more restrictions against women attending school and with the current state of the country, even if it was legal, many women would not be able to. Some of the reasons for this is the growing rates of child marriage, sexual violence becoming more common throughout the nation, the escalating conflict and general lawlessness of the country, and the fact that only about 41% of all schools in Afghanistan have a facility to teach in.²⁵ In 2001, following the US invasion into Afghanistan as a result of the 9/11 attacks, many of the structures, including school buildings were demolished, along with many teachers killed in the crossfire. With Afghanistan being one of the poorest countries in the world, they sought help from other wealthier nations and NGOs that were able to provide grants for the country to begin to rebuild their education system. However, this job, even 20 years later, remains unfinished, as many of these structures have been taken over for war purposes or have been abandoned due to being located in unsafe areas. Therefore, for the girls who were able to return to the school in 2001, their education was short-lived and only momentarily improved the education gap throughout the country. In places in which education is possible for women, as a result of the media along with statements issued by government, the public views women as a lesser sex, and therefore discriminatory attitudes are prevalent towards women in pursuit of an education. Therefore, in a country in which only 50% of women have been able to receive even just one year of schooling, it is nearly impossible for women to work in fields in STEM, particularly because those jobs inherently require an education.

One of the biggest difficulties when it comes to establishing change within the country of Afghanistan is the inaccuracies within the government reporting data on women throughout the country. As an attempt to protect themselves from condemnation and further deterioration of the public's view on the country, the UNHCR has stated that Afghanistan likely falsifies its reports on how much progress is being made to integrate women throughout society and overestimates the numbers of women who are able to access high-level jobs. The issue with these false reports is that it becomes unclear what Afghanistan needs from the world community in order to begin solving this gender inequality and how it can be done without imposing on the sovereignty of the nation. Along with that, donors, unaffiliated with the government do not know where their money

is going as a result of these false reports and therefore, in the past years, has resulted in around a 32% decrease in donations made by private citizens and organizations.²⁶

In a report from the Afghan Ministry of Education, they reported knowledge that there were discrepancies regarding women attending schools and left no data regarding the backgrounds of these women and or the number of girls left without an education. This is not a matter of legislation however, with laws within Afghanistan stating that all citizens must attend at least 9 years of school, but rather that the government simply does not have the finances or control over their people to ensure these discrepancies are solved. Afghanistan has worked in opposition to the SDG's and has not publicly stated within their country and to their citizens the necessity for women to attend school and therefore, many people, even those who have access to safe schooling, do not see the benefit in giving their daughters an education. Therefore, as mentioned previously, since schooling is such a necessary part of any person working within STEM, as it can put lives at stake otherwise, women in Afghanistan amount to making up less than 10% of STEM researchers throughout the country.²⁷ As a result of the lack of governmental cooperation in explaining the necessity of women in school, this has set a precedent for the entire nation to view women as homemakers rather than people capable of achieving in high level professions. This precedent creates a vicious cycle in which women are then denied basic human rights and their individuality which in turn only pushes the nation further away from ever achieving equality. Therefore, it is necessary that the United Nations begins working towards developing a plan to ensure women are able to move towards education so that they may be able to pursue STEM and to keep Afghanistan accountable in their statistical discrepancies.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the stigma and stereotypes around women in STEM be lessened and eventually eradicated?
2. In what ways has the COVID-19 pandemic created difficulties for women specifically in positions of power?
3. How is the global economy suffering due to the lack of women in STEM?
4. How does your country intend to continue teaching and empowering young women so that they gain confidence in their worth to the world, to ultimately pursue STEM careers?
5. What solutions may be added beyond legislation to ensure equality for women in the workplace?
6. How can the world assure countries protect women's rights without imposing on the country's sovereignty, and what laws ensure that women in society, the workplace, and the government are treated equally and safeguarded from sexual harassment?

Endnotes

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