

# Shining a light

*Reality of violence against women is overwhelming, but there is hope.*

Sexual- and gender-based violence, whether it takes place in homes, on the streets, in sex industries or war zones, affects women of every nation, belief, class, race and ethnic group. It is silenced by custom, institutionalized in laws and state systems, worsened by increasing militarization, and passed from one generation to the next.

## THE FACTS

**Violence:** An estimated 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, either with an intimate sexual partner or with someone who is not their husband or partner. Some studies show this figure reaching up to 70 percent of women.<sup>1</sup> Of all women victims of homicide in 2012, almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members.<sup>2</sup>

**Genital Mutilation:** Approximately 200 million girls in 30 countries have suffered female genital mutilation or cutting.<sup>3</sup>

**Trafficking:** Millions of women and girls are caught in modern-day slavery. Women represent 55 percent of the estimated 29.8 million victims of forced labor worldwide<sup>4</sup>, and 98 percent of the estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation.<sup>5</sup>

**Sexual Harassment:** In the United States, recent surveys have found that one in three women between the ages of 18 and 34 has been sexually harassed at work<sup>6</sup> and 65% of women have experienced street harassment.<sup>7</sup>

**Rape:** One in four men surveyed for a 2013 U.N. study in Asia and the Pacific admitted raping at least one woman.<sup>8</sup>

**Child brides:** More than 700 million women today were married as children (under 18). Of these women, more than 1 in 3 were married before 15.<sup>9</sup> Child marriage poses life-threatening risks for adolescent girls and their newborns. Among girls aged 15 to 19, approximately 3 million unsafe abortions take place each year. Pregnancy- and child birth-related complications are the second leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year olds globally.<sup>10</sup>

### *Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan*



The practice of bride kidnapping is widespread in Kyrgyzstan and many other nations. Kamilla, a volunteer with the Women Support Centre explains: “According to these traditions, when a Kyrgyz man wants to get married, he picks a bride and starts to arrange her kidnapping. This is a grave violation of human rights. Women often experience physical violence and rape. They feel humiliated and see themselves as property.”

Only one out of 700 cases is pursued by the justice sector, and only one in 1,500 cases of abduction results in a judicial sentence. The most recent studies show that 38 percent of Kyrgyz women are married through this practice — this averages to 32 bride kidnappings a day, with 40 percent of these kidnappings involving rape. Approximately 14 percent of women currently aged 25 to 49 in Kyrgyzstan report that they were married by age 18.

In late 2012, the Kyrgyz parliament toughened the penalty for bride kidnapping. The new sentencing guidelines suggest up to 10 years of prison time (the offense previously was punishable by a maximum three-year prison term). Almazbek Atambayev, Kyrgyzstan’s president, approved the change on Jan. 26, 2013. Numerous NGOs, activists, artists, sports teams, the media, and members of the private sector continue to participate in the UNiTE to End Violence Against Women Campaign in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>11 12</sup>

*Image from UN Gender Theme Group Kyrgyzstan/Baktybek Meimanbekov*



Center of  
Concern

*Women are hope of new Syria*

Syrian refugee women can play a key role in shaping the future of their war-torn homeland. “Despite the conflict, horrors and human rights abuses they have escaped in Syria, refugee women have an amazing motivation and determination to be a positive part of shaping Syria’s future,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR director of International Protection.

More than 80 percent of the more than 2.2 million Syrian refugees are women and children. This is a particularly vulnerable population facing serious protection risks such as early marriages, child labor, isolation and lack of livelihoods.

UNCHR has been leading campaigns and initiatives to support refugees and prevent sexual and gender-based violence. These include supporting the growth and activities of women’s empowerment groups across the region as well as education and livelihood programs. Also important is fighting to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws and push for broader human rights protections. “I was absolutely struck [when] meeting a Syrian teacher who had lost her husband and was supporting her three children by making and selling candles in an abandoned shopping mall in Lebanon. Amidst this misery, she had built a small business and was strikingly positive. I saw in her the future of Syria,” Türk said.<sup>19</sup>

Image from [UNCHR/S. Baldwin](#)

**Displacement:** Globally, more than 80 percent of all refugees and displaced people are women and children.<sup>13</sup> Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by armed conflict: rape and sexual violence are routinely used as strategic tools of war and instruments of genocide.<sup>14</sup>

**CURRENT CRISES:**

1. **Syria:** As of January 2017, the UNCHR estimates that there are 4.8 million refugees who have been directly affected by the ongoing violence in Syria.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced, and 12.2 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>16</sup> Women and children refugees (who make up three-quarters of the refugee population) face a higher risk of exploitation, violence, and abuse, problems exacerbated by weak legal protections, cultural attitudes, and low awareness among women of their rights. Amnesty International interviewed 40 refugee women and girls who traveled from Turkey to Greece and across the Balkans. All reported being groped, harassed, abused, financially exploited, and pressured to have sex.<sup>17</sup>

2. **Democratic Republic of Congo:** Armed conflict has continued for nearly 20 years in the DRC, especially in the eastern provinces. Women human rights defenders have provided grassroots assistance to civilians, but their work exposes them to imminent threats of violence. Civilians face persistent human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, ranging from unlawful killings, rape and sexual violence, and arbitrary detentions to indiscriminate attacks, intimidation, and looting.<sup>18</sup>

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- [U.N. Trust Fund to End Violence against Women](#)
- [U.N. Refugee Agency](#)
- [Amnesty International: Women’s Rights and Violence Against Women](#)
- [U.N. Sustainable Development Goals](#) (Goal 5: Achieve Gender equality and empower all women and girls)
- [World Health Organization: Violence Against Women](#)
- [Human Rights Watch: Women’s Rights](#)
- [UNiTE to End Violence Against Women Campaign](#)
- [U.N. Women Orange the World Campaign](#)
- [Association for Women’s Rights in Development](#)
- [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#), the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States



## ENDNOTES

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