



STOLEN BY THE PREDATORY CLIMATE: THE MYSTERY OF WOMEN TRAFFICKED IN A WARMING WORLD

Final Blog

Pragya Pandey

4/20/26

Emerging Topics in
Environmental Law

INTRODUCTION:

I often ponder how life would look in a displacement camp; how a single event, like a Tsunami or flood, leaves the most vulnerable women and girls (also referenced as gender) at the peril of trafficking. Have we ever questioned why the situation leads to women and girls being trafficked and sold as economic commodities? Who is creating this demand? Where are morality and justice when a select few view these events of climate tragedies as an opportunity to earn a few dollars? These individuals disguise themselves as ‘recruiters’ and target the vulnerable, luring displaced women and girls in displacement camps or otherwise with a promise of work, only to later sell them into trafficking and forced labor. As we move through 2026, the data is becoming hauntingly clear: the warming world isn't just melting glaciers; it is melting the safety nets that protect the most vulnerable from the world's most ancient cruelty: human trafficking, especially gender trafficking.

Time and again, I have found myself excogitating these questions, and it feels like the right time to pen down my thoughts. My blog focusses on how climate related disasters act as a material governance and social risk, displacing vulnerable women and young girls from their homes, safety nets and of their livelihoods. The impact is ten-fold because they often lack land rights, financial independence, and access to resources to build lives back or even escape these environments, leaving them disproportionately at risk of trafficking and abuse. However, as of today climate change is not considered a prominent reason driving gender trafficking. These two events are treated independently which eventually creates a legal and regulatory gap in establishing a robust solution.

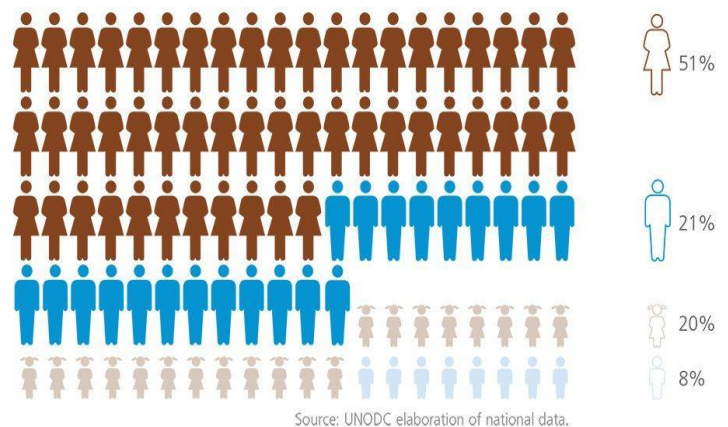
My blog dismantles this separation by establishing that there is a viable statistical and legal significant correlation between the two and proposing a multi-pronged solution. In addition, the blog evaluates the role of the State, assesses legal advisory opinions, and identifies effective regulatory and legal pathways to integrate climate-induced gender crimes into climate laws and policies, ensuring their efficient implementation across the global supply chain.

ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDERED TRAFFICKING: *"The environment is the silent partner in the crime. It breaks the home so the trafficker can walk through the front door."* — Excerpt from 2025 UNODC Stakeholder Dialogue

Climate change is not just a localized tragedy, but it acts as a catalyst for the systemic exploitation of gendered vulnerability, exacerbated by catastrophic events such as droughts, floods, extreme heat, and crop failures. These violent climate events, which previously occurred maybe once in 100 years, have become more frequent, increasing the probability of trafficking. These threat multipliers dismantle three primary shields against trafficking: **economic stability-the destruction of agricultural land and assets, physical security - the loss of shelter and safe passage, and social networks - the fragmentation of families and community support systems.**

Several reports states that climate change affects women and girls more disproportionately than men because they are still, in many areas of the world, the primary caretakers of the house with no paying jobs. They have limited access to financial resources, land rights, and disaster training, and are directly impacted. This lack of support during both rapid-onset climate disasters such as floods, wildfires, tsunamis, typhoons, and cyclones and slow-onset climate change processes such as drought, salinization, extreme heat, and land degradation damages their agricultural land, undermines their financial security, and destabilizes them economically, thereby making them more vulnerable to predators and increases the risk of gender trafficking¹ while migrating to establish a new life.

Trafficking victims can be women, men, boys and girls



A PLAGUE ACROSS GEOGRAPHY

¹ Climate, Trafficking and Gender: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/t>



Gender trafficking is not just a growing concern for the Global South where it's more ingrained in the system; it is also an issue in the Global North where trafficking and associated exploitation is often more hidden. While demand in the North is fueled by a global appetite for invisible, low-wage domestic labor and a predatory commercial sex market, the Global South remains vulnerable and the most fragile ecosystems for climate-induced gender violence. These issues are especially prevalent among the Global South nations which are comparatively poor and have less resources than the Global North nations. This disparity in financial and physical resilience triggers poor populations differently than rich and turn women and girls into expendable commodities. What is perceived as an opportunity for one group creates an unjust and inequitable situation for others, resulting in profound mental, social, economic, and psychological implications that impair the very fabric of society.

REGIONAL HOTSPOTS AND RISK MULTIPLIERS ACROSS THE GLOBAL SOUTH:

- South Asia (the Sundarbans Delta):** Due to the rising soil salinity, water scarcity, and climate shocks, farmers lose their lands and food becomes scarce, exacerbating poverty and gender violence incidents. This drives an exponential² increase in negative coping mechanisms like girl child marriage and sexual trafficking³ in India and Bangladesh⁴, as it is one less person to feed in exchange for money, livestock, and food to survive or gain resources to help mitigate economic losses. These girls often fall prey to "climate grooms"—traffickers who pose as suitors before selling them into brothels or forced labor (child brides⁵ are quite common in areas where the number of women has predominantly been low because of gender feticide). As per recent 2024

² Facts And Figures: Ending Violence Against Women, UN Women: <https://www.civicresearchinstitute.com/online/PDF/DVR-3005-03-UN-Report.pdf>

³ Facts And Figures: Ending Violence Against Women

UN Women, June/July 2025: <https://www.civicresearchinstitute.com/online/PDF/DVR-3005-03-UN-Report.pdf>

⁴ Rafiqul Islam Montu, Deepening Climate Crisis Fuels Child Marriage in Bangladesh, Inkstick,

28 October 2024: <https://inkstickmedia.com/deepening-climate-crisis-fuels-child-marriage-in-bangladesh/>

⁵ Sam Eaton, After the floods come the human traffickers, but these girls are fighting back, October 4, 2015:

<https://womensenews.org/2015/10/after-the-floods-come-the-human-traffickers-but-these-girls-are-fighting-back/#:~:text=But%20it%20wasn't%20until,trafficking%20really%20began%20to%20rise.>

UN Women: <https://www.civicresearchinstitute.com/online/PDF/DVR-3005-03-UN-Report.pdf>

Sam Eaton, After the floods come the human traffickers, but these girls are fighting back, October 4, 2015:

<https://womensenews.org/2015/10/after-the-floods-come-the-human-traffickers-but-these-girls-are-fighting-back/#:~:text=But%20it%20wasn't%20until,trafficking%20really%20began%20to%20rise.>

and 2025 report highlights⁶, families have been found stuck in the climate debt trap⁷ taking predatory loans to survive these disasters, eventually being forced to repay the debt with the forced exploitative labor or bodies of their daughters and wife⁸.

- **The Drought-Affected Earth (East Africa):** Record-breaking droughts in the 2020s have institutionalized ‘famine brides’ and secure bride prices as a survival strategy. To secure livelihoods, out of desperation they marry off their young daughters to older men in exchange of money- this marriage is a form of trafficking disguised as tradition. In Kenya’s Rift Valley, North and Archambault, acute food insecurity has produced ‘famine brides’ who often end up in domestic servitude and trafficking.⁹ Statistics show that globally so far, around 12 million girls are married off after increasing natural disasters as a survival strategy¹⁰. Research shows that for every 10 per cent deviation in rainfall, there is around 1 per cent increased risk in the prevalence of girl child marriage.¹¹

Picture: Women and girls, caught in a small sandstorm, fetch water in Wajir. Because there was a water crisis due to climate change, young girls were kidnapped, sold, and raped¹².



- **The Cyclonic Cycle across Southeast Asia:** Across Southeast Asia, typhoons and tsunamis disproportionately displace women and girls, turning temporary displacement camps into prime

⁶ Who Owes Who?:

<https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/FINAL%20Who%20Owes%20Who%20-%20FINAL%20COPY%20FOR%20WEBSITE%20-%205th%20Feb%202025.pdf>

⁷ Aminur Rahman, Quazi Arunim Rahman, Climate Change and Human Trafficking in Bangladesh, September 16th, 2024:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2024/09/16/climate-change-and-human-trafficking-in-bangladesh/#:~:text=Moreover%2C%20extracting%20thousands%20of%20gallons,them%20financially%20destitute%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B>

⁸ Rowan Harvey, TRANSFORMING DISASTER RESPONSE: WOMEN-LED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, October 2024:

<https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ActionAid-Report-Transforming-Disaster-Response-Women-Led-Climate-Solutions-in-Asia-and-the-Pacific-2024.pdf>

⁹ Ana Agostino, Gender equality, climate change and education for sustainability: <https://www.e4conference.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Equals24.pdf>

¹⁰ Global polycrisis creating uphill battle to end child marriage – UNICEF, May 3rd, 2023:

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/global-polycrisis-creating-uphill-battle-end-child-marriage-unicef#:~:text=Worldwide%2C%20an%20estimated%20640%20million,estimate%20included%20in%20the%20analysis>

¹¹ Global polycrisis creating uphill battle to end child marriage – UNICEF, May 3rd, 2023:

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/global-polycrisis-creating-uphill-battle-end-child-marriage-unicef#:~:text=Worldwide%2C%20an%20estimated%20640%20million,estimate%20included%20in%20the%20analysis>

¹² Stella Paul, How Climate Change Is Fueling Violence Against Women, May 20, 2016:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/climate-change-threat-women-health-security_n_573f5850e4b045cc9a70ecf3

hunting grounds for trafficking. Traffickers exploit lagging administrative services in displacement camps and pose as employment agents in front of women who as primary caretakers face livelihood collapse while men have migrated to cities and lure these vulnerable women and girls as young as 12 with false recruitment and job opportunities for domestic work in cities, only to later sell them into the sex trade, forced labor, prostitution, and fake marriage. Significant disasters, such as - cyclone Aila (2009)¹³ and cyclone Amphan (2020)¹⁴, have historically displaced millions and triggered spikes in trafficking and compromised their human rights¹⁵

- **Migration Mirage Across the Globe¹⁶:** Displaced by floods and drought, women often move to urban cities where they end up in slums, often lacking legal protection, making them easy prey for recruiters promising non-existent dignified work and forcing them into prostitution and sex trafficking¹⁷. This is called as Climate-Trafficking Nexus¹⁸ where slow-onset disasters (like drought and soil erosion) and sudden-onset disasters (like floods) act as risk multipliers for increased gender trafficking¹⁹. These settings exacerbated by climate vulnerabilities disproportionately fuel gender sex trafficking²⁰ and survival sex in displacement camps and urban fringes²¹.

‘What kind of world and society are we establishing where the aftermath of a storm is not just for aid, but a harvest for traffickers?’

THE STATISTICAL PROBLEM: THE MYSTERY OF MISSING WOMEN²²

¹³ Ritwika Mitra, In the Sundarbans, Climate Change Has an Unlikely Effect – On Child Trafficking, January 20, 2022:

<https://science.thewire.in/politics/rights/sundarban-delta-climate-change-child-trafficking/>

¹⁴ Reetika Revathy Subramanian, Climate Brides: (Un)Tying the knots between climate change and child marriage, October 2025:

<https://antitraffickingreview.org/index.php/atjournal/article/view/900/612>

¹⁵ Kiran Pandey, Extreme weather events in India made women, children more vulnerable to modern slavery, flags report, September 20, 2021:

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/climate-change/extreme-weather-events-in-india-made-women-children-more-vulnerable-to-modern-slavery-flags-report-79128>

<https://wrd.unwomen.org/explore/insights/extreme-weather-events-india-made-women-children-more-vulnerable-modern-slavery>

¹⁶ Climate Chains: Mapping the Relationship between Climate, Trafficking in Persons and Building Resilience in Ethiopia, 2025:

<https://publications.iom.int/books/climate-chains-mapping-relationship-between-climate-trafficking-persons-and-building-Ethiopia>

¹⁷ Climate, Trafficking and Gender, 2025: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2025-034-el-climate-trafficking-gender.pdf>

¹⁸ FROM A VICIOUS TO A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE, 9th April 2021:

https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ASI_ViciousCycle_Report_web3.pdf

<https://www.antislavery.org/latest/climate-change-modern-slavery/>

¹⁹ Global Report on TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2024, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

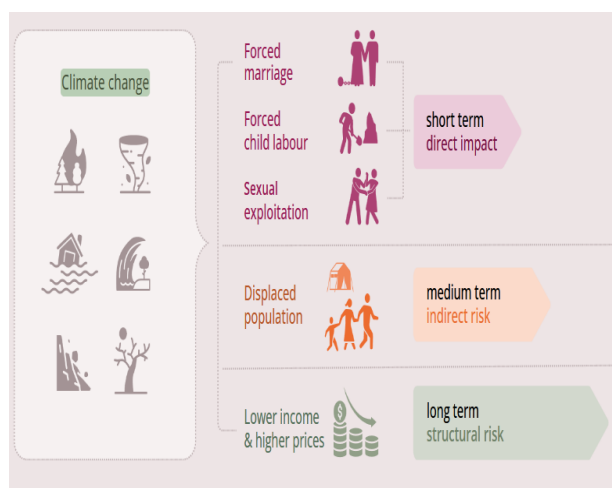
²⁰ Mikaila V. Smith, Applying the United Nations Trafficking Protocol in the Context of Climate Change,

<https://cjl.uchicago.edu/print-archive/applying-united-nations-trafficking-protocol-context-climate-change>

²¹ Ritu Bharadwaj, Danielle Bishop, Somnath Hazra, Enock Pufaa and James Kofi Annan, Climate-induced migration and modern slavery, September 2021: <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-09/20441G.pdf>

²² Prof Sonja Ayeb-Karlsson Human trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation: the ‘loss and damage’ from climate change a fund will not compensate, December 12, 2023: <https://theconversation.com/human-trafficking-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-the-loss-and-damage-from-climate-change-a-fund-will-not-compensate-218981>

As per the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports and published data – gender trafficking due to climate change, conflict, and poverty made up **61%** of total human trafficking in 2022²³. In regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, a 38%²⁴ surge in the trafficking of girls²⁵ is recorded. Data



shows that every **1°C rise in global temperature** correlates with a **4.7% (~5%)²⁶ increase** in gender-based violence and exploitation, which includes recruitment into trafficking networks. Specific climatic events have established "trafficking pipelines," such as those following cyclones in **Bangladesh²⁷**, and the exploitation within the **Philippines' Typhoon Belt²⁸**. After hurricane Katrina and Harvey, United States documented rise in online sex ads²⁹ specifically targeting "girls needing to recover losses" after major storms. Sudden onset disasters frequently have an impact on both the supply and demand side of the trafficking market. As reported, after Hurricane Harvey, women were more likely to lose their jobs and homes and thus become ready targets for traffickers, and hundreds or thousands of male aid workers arrived in the area as potential 'customers.'³⁰ As per a 2017 Polaris report, after Hurricane Katrina, around 3,750³¹ people were identified as victims with no transparent data about women and girls trafficked out of this total number. This is one of the largest trafficking cases recorded due to a climate induced aftermath in the United States of America. These patterns are facilitated by the

²³ Global Report on TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2024: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

²⁴ UN report: Human trafficking up by 25% worldwide in 2022, December 12, 2024: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1239800>

²⁵ Climate, health, and humanitarian crises fuel violence against women and girls: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-ending-violence-against-women>

²⁶ Climate change will result in an additional 40 million women and girls experiencing intimate partner violence every year, finds Spotlight Initiative brief, Spotlight Initiative, April 21, 2025: <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/news/climate-change-will-result-additional-40-million-women-and-girls-experiencing-intimate-partner>

²⁷ Applying the United Nations Trafficking Protocol in the Context of Climate Change, Mikaila V. Smith: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1811&context=cjil>

²⁸ Alyssa Mari Thurston, Heidi Stöckl, Meghna Ranganathan, Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review, May 6, 2021: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/6/4/e004377#ref-21>

²⁹ How climate change contributes to violence against women: <https://www.zonta.org/images/docs/ourcauses/zontasaysnow/HowClimateChangeContributesToViolenceAgainstWomen.pdf>

³⁰ Elizabeth M. Wheaton, Edward J. Schauer and Thomas V. Galli Economics of Human Trafficking: <https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/247221/original/Economics-of-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

³¹ Danielle Castano, MA, Natural Disasters and Human Trafficking in the U.S., January 15, 2025: <https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/natural-disasters-and-human-trafficking-in-the-u-s>

widespread prevalence of smartphones, as the internet provides an easy and relatively discrete way for traffickers to recruit both customers and victims.³²

The irony is despite increase in these trafficking numbers due to climate crisis, there is no specific global or domestic legal framework that recognizes that these trafficking events are **climate-induced crimes**, rather than merely a standard criminal offense. At present, these two events, climate change and trafficking of women and girls are viewed in silos. The term "mystery" in my blog title refers to the thousands of women who simply vanish from official records³³ after a climate disaster. When a flood hits, a woman might be listed as "missing" or "displaced." But months later, she isn't in a refugee camp or back at home. She is part of a shadow economy that generates billions of dollars globally, but her financial, physical, and emotional security have been stripped. Because climate-induced migration is often undocumented, these women lose their legal personhood. They have no papers, no rights, and no way to call for help. The climate didn't just take their homes; it took their identities, making them invisible to the law and easy prey for exploiters.

THE LEGAL VACUUM: A SYSTEMIC FAILURE AND THE LEGAL ROLE | RECOMMENDATIONS

Millions of women and girls disappear from displacement camps, estimated to have 80 % of displaced people by climate-related disasters as women (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, 2022)³⁴ or from their own homes affected by climatic events. These disappearances are often not recorded³⁵ or even if recorded, the numbers are manipulated. In many regions, disappearances are recorded as "missing persons" or "runaways" rather than trafficking victims to avoid political scrutiny or to cover up jurisdictional failures³⁶. Often times because of jurisdictional restrictions, legal systems as well are not able to identify them as victims of climate-change trafficking or even climate refugees and

³² Mikaila V. Smith, Applying the United Nations Trafficking Protocol in the Context of Climate Change:

<https://cjl.uchicago.edu/print-archive/applying-united-nations-trafficking-protocol-context-climate-change>

³³ Salimah Shivji, What the tides bring in, December 7, 2024: <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/india-sundarbans-climate-change-trafficking>

³⁴ Climate Change, Forced Displacement and Gender Inequality, April 2024: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/130033/html/>

³⁵ Research Global Report on TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2024: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

³⁶ Global Report on TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS 2024: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

this gap creates a legal vacuum³⁷ for the vulnerable gender.³⁸ Currently, both international and domestic laws across geographies fall short of recognizing trafficking crime intensified because of climate crisis, creating a significant protection gap that traffickers exploit with impunity. Many domestic legal systems require proof of force, fraud, or coercion for a trafficking conviction. When a woman is forced to migrate due to a natural event like a flood, the legal system often views her subsequent exploitation as a separate, isolated labor or immigration issue rather than a result of the climate crisis.³⁹

Where is this Vacuum seated:

1. The Definition Crisis: Climate Refugees vs. Economic Migrants/Migrants: As per the 1951 Refugee Convention, a ‘refugee’ is someone who, owing to a **‘well-founded fear of being persecuted’** is fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country⁴⁰. The Convention doesn’t recognize climate change as a persecutor and thereby crimes due to that. It does **not** include climate change or environmental disasters.

The Gap: Because "climate refugees" are not legally recognized under this treaty, they often lack the right to enter other countries or claim asylum due to climate crisis, leaving them "stateless" or in limbo where traffickers operate most freely.

For example: Women who fled the Sundarbans flooding delta or typhoons of Southeast Asia were classified as an economic migrant (defined as a migrant who fled due to loss of livelihood and to find a job and not because of well-founded fear of persecution as per the convention) with no legal status in the displacement camp. But the prime reason these women actually migrated was because of a climate crisis which is hardly recognized.

³⁷ Inter-Agency Coordination group against Trafficking in Persons, Annual Report, 2024: https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_ar2024.pdf

³⁸ Gender, Migration, Environment and Climate Change: <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/gender-migration-environment-and-climate-change>

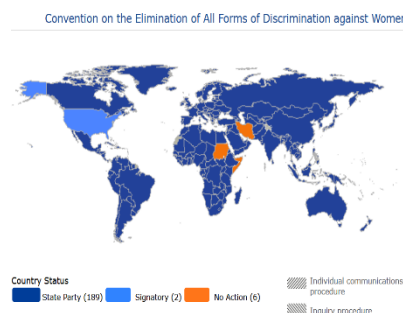
³⁹ https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_ar2024.pdf

⁴⁰ The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees:
<https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees>

They also had no legal work permit or state recognized protection in the host country, leaving them at the peril of traffickers who threaten them and force them into sexual trafficking. The parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention should amend the Convention so it recognizes climate displacement as a legal ground for protection, ensuring that the trafficked and abused women's and girls rights are guaranteed. It is high time to amend the convention.

2. CEDAW as a legal Shield and The Palermo Protocol and Abuse⁴¹:

Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁴² is an international treaty often described as a "bill of rights for women". It defines discrimination against women, mandates equality in political, economic, and social life, and requires legal protections to abolish discriminatory laws, with 186 nations having ratified it⁴³.



Similarly, the Palermo Protocol (2000) is a landmark UN treaty that provides the first globally agreed definition of human trafficking including gender and mandates that signatory nations criminalize trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute offenders. It focuses on the "3Ps"—prevention, protection, and prosecution—and defines trafficking as the recruitment and exploitation of people through force or deception. Even if this protocol is legally binding, its legal status is only applicable to the countries that ratify⁴⁴ the protocol (185). Climate-induced disaster is the ultimate position of vulnerability, leading to abuse and trafficking. When a state and a legal system fail to provide relief from climate disasters and any steps for climate adaptation, it inadvertently creates the conditions and opportunities for this gender trafficking abuse.

⁴¹ Palermo Protocol, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, November 15, 2000: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>

⁴² Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

⁴³ Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

⁴⁴ No. of countries ratified the Palermo Protocol:

https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=en, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/ctoc/signatures.html>

Both frameworks are applicable only to the ratifying countries and, even in the countries that have ratified them, they sometimes don't get integrated into the domestic laws which provides a legal shield to traffickers.

3. Jurisdictional and Transnational Prosecution Challenges: Gender trafficking is not bound by geographies – it is a crime that crosses borders and is often beyond the ambit of domestic jurisdictional regime. For example, a woman trafficked from a storm or cyclone that hit in rural parts of United States of America to Vietnam or Russia faces a jurisdictional challenge for any kind of justice and relief.

Advocates are trying to bring the concept of Universal Jurisdiction in cases where climate disasters are used as a cover for mass gender trafficking, allowing perpetrators to be prosecuted regardless of where the crime was committed or the nationality of the victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS| STRATEGIC PATHWAYS| ROLE OF STATE:

Holistic Laws: States have a larger role to play with respect to modifying policies, creating interdisciplinary laws, and strengthening domestic laws by integrating international court's advisory opinions and international treaties principles. To protect women and young girls against trafficking and associated violence exacerbated by climate crisis, governments must integrate anti-trafficking measures into climate-related disaster response protocols. Integrating gender crimes such as trafficking into climate law ensures that these two events are not seen as separate and in silos but as one affected by another, pushing the efficient implementation of measures and rules.

For instance: by invoking CEDAW⁴⁵ into domestic laws, states treating climate-related disaster relief as gender-neutral, and failing to recognize that women and girls are impacted more than men, should be obligated to implement gender-sensitive climate adaptation measures. Preventing gender trafficking

⁴⁵ CEDAW: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

should be a binding human rights requirement rather than a secondary humanitarian goal, and failure to do so should be considered a violation of a country's international treaty obligations.

Recognizing Gender Victims as Climate Refugees | The Judicial Shift - 2025 Advisory Opinions and the Refugee Gap: The International Court of Justice (ICJ)⁴⁶ and Inter-American Court of Human Rights⁴⁷ 2025 landmark advisory opinions are useful to this analysis as these opinions⁴⁸ will bridge the gap identifying victims situation exacerbated by climate crisis, creating a pathway to provide legal status to the climate-displaced victims, and guaranteeing their rights are protected under the law. As per these opinions, when climate change causes degradation that endangers the right to life and personal integrity (as in cases of trafficking), leading to involuntary human mobility, exacerbated by the climate emergency, states have a non-refoulement obligation under the right to life (Article 6) in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, towards the trafficked women and girls, ensuring their rights are not violated. *"States 'must establish an adequate regulatory framework that provides, at the domestic level, effective legal and/or administrative mechanisms to guarantee the legal and humanitarian protection of persons displaced across international borders due to the effects of climate change. In doing so, the Court recommends that States adopt several measures, including establishing safe settlement areas and monitoring and preventing instances of human trafficking."*

In alignment with these opinions, the state must grant climate refugee status to these women and girls, set criteria for determining the refugee status in the context of the adverse effects of climate change by amending the 1951 Convention, and apply the criteria to a refugee displaced unfairly by climate change. The amended criteria can look like this:

⁴⁶ Blog: The ICJ Advisory Opinion on climate change and the interrelationship between environmental protection and human rights, October 21, 2025: <https://www.dpglaw.co.uk/blog/the-icj-advisory-opinion-on-climate-change-and-the-interrelationship-between-environmental-protection-and-human-rights/#:~:text=In%20particular%2C%20the%20ICJ%20recognised,they%20have%20been%20displaced%20would>

⁴⁷ Monica Namanya, The Inter-American Court's Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights: A Win for Climate-Displaced Persons? July 29, 2025: <https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-inter-american-courts-advisory-opinion-on-the-climate-emergency-and-human-rights-a-win-for-climate-displaced-persons/#:~:text=Introduction,American%20Convention%20on%20Human%20Rights>

⁴⁸ Lena Riemer and Luca Scheid, A Differentiated Path Forward: The Inter-American Court's Advisory Opinion on Climate Change and Human Mobility Rights, July 10, 2025: <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/climatechange/2025/07/10/a-differentiated-path-forward-the-inter-american-courts-advisory-opinion-on-climate-change-and-human-mobility-rights/#:~:text=The%20IACtHR's%20analysis%20on,reconceptualize%20climate%2Dinduced%20human%20movement>

- A well-founded fear of being persecuted or trafficked/abused for reasons due to climate crisis such as loss of fertile land, drought, sea-level rise, drastic changes in temperature or precipitation, leading to food insecurity, water scarcity, or physical insecurity.
- Causal link for reasons of climate change – include situations where social pressures result in trafficking.
- Interaction with Conflict and /or Violence- These women should have valid claim for climate refugee status where the adverse effects of climate change exacerbate violence, trafficking incidences and render the State incapable of protecting the victims of such violence, resulting in well-founded fear, impeding the physical and economic access to food, livelihood, amounting to infringing their basic human rights.

Economic Independence: States must provide women with land rights (many laws are inclined towards transferring land rights to sons) and adopting climate-resilient technologies to retain livelihoods (like salt-tolerant farming). This will help reduce the desperation and survival choices of selling women and girls in exchange for money to traffickers disguised as recruiters and climate grooms.

Understanding the technical relation between climate change and the trafficking violence: The solution to be designed should consider how two variable factors are connected. Usually, this correlation between climate change and intensity of gender trafficking is linear, $I=f(\Delta T)$, where intensity of gender-based trafficking (GBT) (I) is expressed as a function of the change in global mean temperature (ΔT) –change in temperature and warming up leads to climatic catastrophes, in turn increasing the desperation index of vulnerable women and girls – a predictable relationship

However, this correlation can become non-linear and complex with several factors chiming in and once a climate threshold reaches where it's not just a bad harvest, but a permanent death of local economy, pushing 100% of the population to migrate and, increasing the vulnerability risk, thereby increasing exponentially the incidences of trafficking, and triggering a cascading collapse and dissolving the entire

social structure. The equation can look something like this: $I = I_0 \cdot e^{k(\Delta T + V + S)}$ – the intensity is driven by compounding variables

Where: V = Vulnerability (loss of land/assets), S = Social Dissolution (breakdown of law and order), and k = The rate of environmental degradation exacerbated due to climate crisis.

What would the State's Role look like in a linear Equation: The State acts as the "coefficient of resilience" (R). When the State implements the solutions above, the equation transforms: $I = Rf(\Delta T)$

As R (State Resilience/Legal Protection) increases, the incidence of trafficking (I) decreases, even as ΔT continues to rise. Without R, i.e., the state's role hitting the Non-Linear Tipping Point becomes invincible, thereby states have a pertinent role to play addressing these gender-based trafficking induced by climate crisis. For example: this resilience could be invested in building trained response teams that are able to recognize climate-induced trafficking signs.

Strategic Regulatory Pathways and Cross-Border Protocols: State should conduct mandatory gender audits taking into account the climate financing measures that demonstrate robust anti-trafficking protections. States, through domestic laws, should recognize climate-induced forced displacement and migration as one crime, granting victims immediate legal personhood, a temporary protected status and access to state-sponsored economic reintegration. In addition, states adopting the recent ICJ opinions must establish a Cross-Border Jurisdictional Protocol that allows for the prosecution of traffickers who move victims across borders during climate-related mass migrations.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN DETERMINING THE SOLUTION:

Because women and girls work so closely with nature, they are the natural experts in dealing with the climate crisis. They have been using climate resilient practices from time immemorial and to continue doing so they must have access to financial and legal resources and land rights⁴⁹. Gender equality is a prerequisite to address the gender trafficking increased by climate change and hence women should be

⁴⁹ Role of Women: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

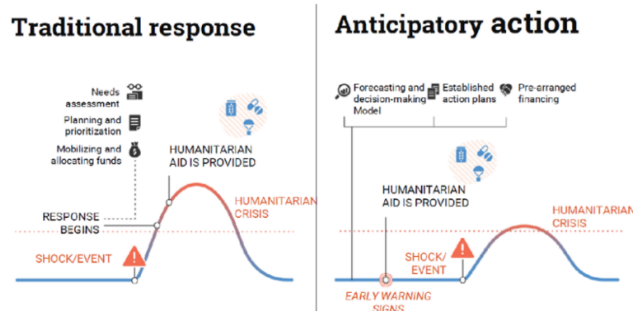
included in policy making and decision making at each level. More female representation in parliaments will lead to acknowledgement of these chain of problems and the adoption of more stringent climate change policies integrating gender-based crimes like trafficking into climate laws.

CONCLUSION:

Gender-based trafficking is not a single event, but a systemic crime substantially affected by the climate crisis. By leveraging binding laws like CEDAW, establishing a holistic accountable system by State, and a robust judicial system, the reactive response to the problem can become proactive.⁵⁰

Anticipatory Action to Support Attention to Climate Change Impacts and GBV

Anticipatory action (or FbA)



⁵⁰ Climate, Trafficking and Gender: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2025-034-cl-climate-trafficking-gender.pdf>