



# **GENDER-BASED DANGERS FACING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN**

According to UNHCR, in the summer of 2015, Europe experienced the highest number of refugees since the Second World War. An increasing number of them are women fleeing war-torn regions. They are young and unaccompanied girls, mothers, pregnant women, older women, women with disabilities and others, who have made a desperate attempt to seek secure shelter in Europe.

At every stage of their journey to Europe, women and girls are targeted by individuals wishing to exploit them for personal gain and are exposed to ineffective and inadequate migration policies which discriminate against them. This harrowing journey from start to finish has a disproportionate effect on migrant women's lives and on their children. The physical and emotional trauma experienced by women contributes to the barriers to their effective integration into receiving states.

## COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

As civil war and conflicts continue to rage in many parts of the world, a woman's situation becomes more precarious. In war zones domestic violence as well as multiple forms of sexual abuse and economic disempowerment, are on the increase. Rape and sexual assault are well-documented weapons of war.

## CROSSING BORDERS

Whilst attempting to cross borders, women are a target of smugglers and traffickers to be sexually and economically exploited. Being in a state of transit, women are more likely to be sold into prostitution networks, forced into early marriages and exploited for domestic servitude. Women and girls are frequently at risk of violence, sexual harassment, assault and rape by other migrants and refugees, local residents, police and the authorities, with no recourse to justice or legal mechanisms.

## ARRIVING AT EU BORDERS

A basic lack of fundamental rights at EU borders and subsequently, in processing and detention centres, is the reason why an alarming number of cases of women abused by aid-workers and guard has been reported. Furthermore, the masculinisation of the humanitarian sector and the asylum system is a crucial factor that leads to sexual re-victimization and re-traumatization of women who have already experienced male violence.

## JOURNEY INTO MEMBER STATES

Reaching the 'safety' of European member states does not mean that a woman is free from violence. Lack of adequate shelter in urban and rural areas of Europe contribute heavily to the increased vulnerability of migrant women and girls. The Women's Refugee Commission report that of the 13,000 unaccompanied children who arrived in 2014, 4,000 have gone missing, adding that "a lone girl can be easily trafficked because she won't be missed."

## SETTLING IN MEMBER STATES

Even though women may have been granted refugee status or temporary leave to remain, there is an overwhelming lack of support and integration services for them to access. Once women leave a reception center they are still at risk of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, racism, social exclusion and violation of their rights to employment and justice.

# GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN EMERGENCIES

Whilst men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of the sexual exploitation, rape and assault of women which cannot be overlooked, we argue that gender based violence inflicted upon migrant women in emergency situations has an added element caused by the unwillingness of individual states and international institutions to recognise the need for gender mainstreaming in practical and effective ways.

Migrant women are not only the survivors of war and of male violence; they are also the survivors of ineffective asylum and migration policies - those often being in a direct clash with human rights instruments - and of feeble humanitarian emergency responses. They are also the survivors of the weak response of Europe to the proliferation of gender-based violence.

Migration has a disproportionately harsher impact on women than men. Apart from being subjected to gender based violence, torture and brutality, migrant and refugee women struggle to integrate due to gender-blind policies and practices that do not adequately reflect their needs and experiences.

Faced with a humanitarian crisis, individual states and international institutions launch emergency assistance programs aimed at addressing basic needs (food, water and temporary shelter). Measures aimed at reducing the risk of violence against girls and women, are often considered as an afterthought or when the immediate crisis has passed. Sometimes these measures are never put into practice.

Therefore, a gendered analysis of migration and emergency situations must be conducted with the goal of implementing practical and concrete measures and with the needs of real women at heart.

## THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Europe has a wealth of tools to secure migrant women's well-being and fundamental rights.

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THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION  
ENSURES THE PROTECTION OF MIGRANT WOMEN AND FEMALE ASYLUM  
SEEKERS AGAINST ANY FORM OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE WITHOUT  
DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUND OF MIGRANT STATUS, REFUGEE STATUS  
OR OTHER STATUS  
&  
ENSURES A GENDER-SENSITIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE GROUNDS FOR  
ASYLUM LISTED IN THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION.

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The onus is now on member states to ratify and commit to implementing the Convention demonstrating how they will ensure prevention, protection, prosecution, substantive law and monitoring for migrant and refugee women.

There are some member states who are on their way to ratifying the Convention but have put reservations specifically around the clauses that provide protection to migrant women, thus perpetuating discrimination within the convention itself and attempting to modify the very ethos that underlines it - [A LIFE FREE FROM VIOLENCE FOR ALL WOMEN](#).

## ENoMW CALLS FOR

- All member states to ratify and implement - [without bias to migrant, refugee and undocumented women](#) - the Istanbul Convention, which guarantees the fundamental rights of every woman to be protected from gender-based violence at individual, institutional and structural level, regardless of her legal status.
- All states [to put into practice gender-sensitive responses](#) to the rapidly growing number of violations of female migrants, refugees and asylum seekers' rights within and outside of the European Union.
- International, national and European decision-makers [to allocate funds](#) and provide [solid and secure shelters](#) for every displaced woman and girl at every stage of their journey for a safe future. A basic tent is inadequate at providing safety and shelter for women in recognition of their protection needs.
- In order [to overcome the masculinisation of the humanitarian sector](#), we strongly support the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the UNISDR Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which stresses that:

“Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programs; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as build their capacity for alternative livelihood means in post-war disaster situations.”