

REFUGEE WOMEN

Unpacking Gender-based Violence

EVENT REPORT

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Global
Independent
Refugee
Women
Leaders



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► Overview

Why did we hold this conference?

From 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world. The international campaign originated from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute coordinated by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. This year, Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders, GIRWL, come together and want to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence under the overarching theme, "Refugee Women Unpacking GBV 2020", reflecting on the core principle of the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Subsequently, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and particularly domestic violence, has escalated around the world.¹ There is evidence that women's rights organizations (WROs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are on the front line providing early warning systems and making efforts to adapt VAWG service provision and integrate VAWG into COVID-19 response plans.² The pandemic has exacerbated key risk factors for VAWG, such as food shortages, unemployment, economic insecurity, school closures, massive migration flows and the threat of civil unrest.³ There has been an alarming increase in multiple forms of violence against women and girls, especially physical, psychological, sexual and economic forms of domestic violence fuelled by household economic and food insecurity and confined living conditions due to lockdown and social isolation measures.⁴ ⁵ School closures, financial and food insecurity have heightened the risk of violence for girls including sexual exploitation, harassment, and child marriage.⁶ There are also reports of increased sexual abuse and harassment, both online and offline, and in some settings, an increase in femicides.⁷

¹ UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, COVID-19 and Global Impact on Violence against Women: A Protracted Crisis, (2020).

² UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, A Bottom-up View of the Shadow Pandemic: Impact of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women Through the Lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations, (2020).

³ idem 2.

⁴ UN Women, COVID 19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls (2020).

⁵ UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, COVID-19 and Global Impact on Violence against Women: A Protracted Crisis, (2020).

⁶ Idem 4.

⁷ Idem 2.

Millions of conflict-affected women and girls who are stateless, undocumented, and displaced are living in cramped refugee and displacement sites with desperately poor hygiene and sanitation facilities. Quarantines and social isolation have negatively influenced mental health, increasing the risk of problematic coping behaviours including family violence and conflict.⁸ Limited physical mobility, suspended public transport, and closed or stretched-to-capacity specialist support services (i.e., SOS hotlines, shelters, crisis centres, legal aid, rape clinical management, sexual and reproductive health services) has hindered the ability of VAWG survivors to access support including first medical aid, justice, health care, psychosocial care and social protection.^{9 10}

In this heartbreaking context, we as GIRWL consider this conference fundamental to have a refugee women-led space to address these realities and link ourselves with it to accomplish our key objectives:

- ▶ Promote general knowledge on the state of GBV against all women and girls.
- ▶ Promote the intersectionality approach in the analysis of the gender-based violence against women and girls.
- ▶ Share an overview of the realities of these diverse internally displaced, refugee and migrant women and their challenges in relation to the pandemic COVID 19, as well as the pandemic within the pandemic: GBV.
- ▶ Make a broad and stronger network for GIRWL to look for possible partners in the future.

How was it organized?

The organization of the conference was developed through a close collaboration between the GIRWL team and the World Refugee & Migration Council (WRMC). It was developed in different stages. First, GIRWL submitted the concept note, which was revised and approved along with the proposed budget and agenda for the event. Next, the process for identifying the participants for each panel began knowing that there was a very important objective: to respect a wide representation of refugee, migrant or displaced women and guarantee to the extent possible the intersectionality between the condition of being a refugee, migrant or displaced person with different identities such as age, origin, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity,

⁸ Amber Peterman, Alina Potts, Megan O'Donnell, Kelly Thompson, Niyati Shah, Sabine Oertelt-Prigione, Nicole van Gelder Paterman (Center for Global Development), *Pandemics and Violence against Women and Children*, (2020).

⁹ Idem 8

¹⁰ UNFPA, *COVID-19: A Gender Lens. Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality*, (2020).

indigenous roots, among others. Because of this goal of intersectionality, the conference took place on December 11 at the end of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Because the core of our work is focused on human rights, we knew that this conference should focus on refugee, migrant or displaced women and their own experiences and voices. GIRWL and WRMC worked diligently to achieve these goals.

To promote the participation to attendees to the conference, we developed a social media strategy and a communication strategy to guarantee an open communication with the interested audience before, during and after the conference.

Before the conference

We launched a save-the-date invitation with a link for registration. The organizers read every comment and question from registered participants regarding logistics, languages, fees, requirements, content, possible partnerships, and responded to each of them. A social media strategy served to inform possible participants and other audiences about the conference, the main focus areas of GIRWL and what the speakers would bring to the discussion. This strategy included Facebook Live videos, posts on Facebook and Twitter, interaction with followers, and reactivation of the social media accounts.

During the Conference

While the conference was being held, we used a whiteboard tool and a Q&A system to continue the interaction with the participants and other interested people who wrote to the organizers. Due to the limited time of the conference, there was no possibility to have open questions on air, however these two tools, the whiteboard and the Q&A chat box, allowed the moderators and the rest of the organizer team, to refer to those questions to address to the panelists.

After the Conference

Contact with the speakers as well as with the participants that requested further communication in the whiteboard and in the Q&A tool has been maintained. Two reports will be published about the conference: this detailed report addressed to partners and a summary report addressed to refugee women and girls, which will be available in English, Spanish, Arabic and Farsi/Dari to guarantee that it reaches the widest possible audience of women and girls.

During the introduction, GIRWL members explained why this conference was relevant and necessary. They referred to the need to provide a platform for refugee women themselves to talk about the different kinds of violence they have faced in the journey to their new land, in the

▶ Panel 1: Violence against women in the access to sexual and reproductive health

process of applying to a refugee status, or in their new lives as refugee/migrant/displaced women. GIRWL members said a fundamental goal of the conference was to create a safe platform to recognize and speak up about the violences women are facing from inside their own houses, from refugee men in centres or camps, but that can also come from authorities on a more structural (and sometimes systematic) way.

“We recognize the importance of addressing violence against women ... we understand gender-based violence as every act directed as a harmful practice against a human being because of their gender, and we know that because of power relationships and patriarchy the most of the times that violences are against women,” said Bárbara Romero, a GIRWL co-founder.

On behalf of the World Refugee & Migration Council, Devota Nuwe – who is Head of Programs at the Refugee Law Project, School of Law, Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda – welcomed participants and talked about the work that the Council has been doing to support refugee voices and promote solutions for the problems facing refugee women and girls.

“We would like to promote leadership roles for women and youth, thereby giving a voice to more than half of those who are forcibly displaced,” Devota said about the Council’s recommended actions which are becoming a reality through this conference and refugee-led networks like GIRWL.

The first panel was focused on the limitations and violence in the access to a diversity of services on sexual and reproductive health for refugee, migrant and displaced women of all ages.

The panellists shared information about the different layers of violence that women faced referring to gender-based violence and violence against their identities, as women, in their home countries, indicating that sometimes this is one of the reasons for them to leave their homeland. They also discussed the violence they faced during the journey, referring to multiple cases of women from Latin America that take contraceptive pills before the journey because they know they will be raped by other migrant men, but also by officials at the borders and in the centres when they get to the United States of America. Likewise, women from Middle East are to say anything to their partners out of fear about rape. Added to this are the language barriers and the unknown system in their host country, with the uncertainty of how, where and to whom they can ask for help.

The first panellist was Nicole Santamaría, a transgender intersex woman of indigenous roots from El Salvador who is an asylum seeker in the United States of America. Nicole is the

executive director of the Organization El/La Para Translatinas, where they work in particular with immigrants, trans and gender-nonconforming, and gender-diverse communities.

Nicole mentioned that the violence against sexual and reproductive rights, around the world and in particular in countries like hers, are serious for the LGBTQ community and for women in general. Indicating that “our lives are at constant risk, our identities are not respected, are even prosecuted and/or exterminated ... the lack of that access (SRHR) ... it starts with our own countries of our region and then persists in our different migration journeys.”

“In particular I am greeting each one of you from the United States of America, in California. The migration journey has been quite a challenge because the sexual abuse, rape and other kind of sexual abuse that has happened ... to those from the Caribbean and Latin America. Cisgender women take contraceptives pills in order not to get pregnant during the journey.... We are trying to protect our own bodies in order to not suffer more in this journey. The violence is systemic...it starts when you go, for example, to different borders and actually the police officers, the immigration police officers are also the ones who are perpetrating this kind of violence against our bodies.”

She also shared the experience of women in the immigration facilities, known as ICE detention centres. “Onside of ICE detention centres, if a woman arrives with their children, they are separated from their children. So that's one of the first violations of our identities and sexual and reproductive rights. Then, in these past years ... women had experienced forced sterilizations. And also for LGBTQI community, in particular, transgender women are separated from everybody in order to protect them, but actually they are torturing them.... In those isolation cells in jails, they called them cages, in the past two years, two transgender women were murdered.... I'm saying murder because they were asking for their HIV treatments and they didn't have access to that. They (the authorities) denied the access to their medications.”

“Running away from violence and discrimination, instead of finding life, we are also finding the same systems of oppression, the same systems of torturing our bodies. We are not living only the physically violence. We are living also the psychological violence and, also the denial of the services that as women – women who have faced sexual abuse and sexual violence – we don't get.”

– Nicole Santamaría

The second panellist was Parwana Amiri. She is a young Afghan activist who speaks up for refugee human rights. In her intervention Parwana shared that she had witnessed different forms of violence against women in the journey and in the centres, and she continuously meets

women who do not dare to share their stories. She tries to understand their silence but she is also looking for ways to create bonds of trust for them not to be silent anymore.

Parwana shared from her experience and the experiences that she has collected from other women in the camp, she has written letters to address refugee women's rights issues and those letters are already on the internet for people to know what is going on in the camps. She is a writer and has now published two books.

In relation to the experience of the journeys and in the camps, Parwana shared, "I was in contact with many different girls, some of them were unaccompanied minors and they were living in a place that was called safe zone. But actually it was not a safe place for them ... many other girls were afraid of being transferred there.... I mean many things in the refugee camps are getting hidden and mostly about women (referring to cases of violence)."

"In the centres, many people live in groups, in communities by their regional origin. In some of those groups the man is called stronger than the woman, and they're threatening the woman in order to not share their stories.... For the women their rights are not available. They don't know anything about it and there is no organization here to give them information about the ways that they can find solutions or that they can act for, and so they can raise their voices and not to be afraid of that. Sometimes they (the women) are locked in their houses when they don't have their men inside", she explained, saying that if the husbands go outside they lock the door behind them so that the women and young girls cannot get out, or receive visitors.

"There are three reasons that all these stories are getting hidden. The first one is that the state doesn't want these kinds of stories to be shared and they are threatening the ones who are sharing the violence and violent stories because it is a national scandal for them.... The second reason is that the women themselves don't want to share their stories because of cultural and traditional reasons, some of them they try to, but anonymously, they asked to have their names or stories changed.... And then we have the access to the medical part. Even for those who are facing violence, it is not accessible at all in the refugee camps."

– Parwana Amiri

Following the interventions of these two powerful women who are asylum seekers, we heard from Jayne Fleming, a human rights lawyer and the Director of Refugee Protection Programs at Reed Smith LLP. She established the firm's human rights team two decades ago. In 2015,

Jayne launched a project to protect survivors of torture and sexual violence in the Middle East. In 2016, she also launched another project in Greece where she represents hundreds of survivors of torture and sexual violence, and in 2019 she established a public-private partnership with the Government of Canada to resettle survivors of torture and sexual violence to Canada.

Jayne shared her views in terms of analyzing the ecosystems, noting that there is meant to be in place an ecosystem of protection for refugees, with the refugees the central actors and the rest of institutions at their service. However, in her view, the individual who has been forced, for whatever reason, to leave their home country and arrive to a new one, is the person with the least amount of agency. And, unfortunately, those systems operate around them, but often to their detriment.

Jayne focused her analysis into considering the existence of two ecosystems, one of violence and one of protection. She mentioned that “when we think about how those that operate in terms of sexual and reproductive rights or human rights and sexuality, I think about who are the perpetrators of violence in the ecosystem of violence, and what are the protections ... and what are the fundamental rights? First of all, in the global system the imbalances of power, the inequalities, social and economic inequality is the violation of social, economic and political rights. And then, of course, States, especially when they are in periods of conflict.... Religious systems we have to add to the list of perpetrators, societies and cultures that propagate and perpetuate cultural norms that are harmful to women and girls. Communities, individual communities, families, and then, of course, individuals. So we often think about a perpetrator as an individual, but in fact we have to take a much broader macro view. We have to look at it from a panoramic level in order to really understand why the individual is enabled to commit violence against women and girls. It's because of that entire ecosystem of violence that operates around them.”

Jayne shared different heartbreaking stories of women and young girls that she has met in her work in Haiti, Iraq and Spain, and she said that they all have been victims of individual perpetrators who have caused them different forms of violence, but also of the socio-cultural system, religious beliefs and on-the-ground organizations and institutions that are not doing what should be done to stop the rape, child marriage, forced reproduction, psychological and physical violence, and, on the contrary, that are enabling them to happen. Jayne finally referred to the lack of information in the centres, but also to the lack of rights and access to justice.

“We must engage with political actors, with policymakers, with people in positions of power, with economic power holders. We must engage in order to

get them to support our movement, to create an ecosystem of protection which is led by survivors themselves.”

– Jayne Fleming

One of the main conclusions of this panel can be found in the words of Nicole: “Gender-based violence is also the pandemic that has been affecting women and girls forever.... We are nearly in the 2021 and women and girls are still not being seen as human beings.... We, as asylum seekers, don’t get access for legal protection of human rights, don’t speak the language (of the host country), sometimes women faced violence from the same guards that are meant to protect them. Those are layers of violence that keep women and girls far away from their human rights ... there are issues that need to be addressed like white supremacy and the colonialism.”

Jayne added that in order to create an ecosystem of protection the whole system needs to be reversed, the agency needs to be placed on the individuals, and not from an authoritarian point of view but from the bottom up. She referred to GIRWL as a positive example of that change. “Your organization is taking a completely opposite approach and is able to actually engage individuals like me as guests, but not as leaders. Someone who can follow your leadership and participate in your conference at your invitation is exactly the way it should be, and I hope that other organizations will learn from you.” She concluded saying that the whole system should make the change of perspective, listen to individuals, and work from the starting point of their needs, allowing people individual agency. And within this perspective think on the individual, women and girls in this case, not to their economic or physical needs separately, but with a holistic approach that integrates every aspect of a person’s life.”

Parwana’s closing remarks on this panel were focused on what can be done to invite more women to speak up, to empower them, and assure them that they can be safe to share their stories. To this end, Parwana identified that the most important thing to do is provide them with information. She shared about a project that she started, called [1000 Stories and Dreams from Ritsona](#), for which she is interviewing mostly women from all ages and she is collecting their stories of violence against women, using an ice-breaker methodology to create a safe space for women, where they could come together to talk amongst each other. She is also developing classes inside the camp to promote alternative education for the women in the camp, but also to build up the trust and invite the ones that want to participate to share their stories.

The first panel was a reflection of some of the different violence that refugee, migrant and displaced women faced in their journey, in the centres and in the camps, but also in the process to being recognized as a refugee and living as a refugee in a new country. The experiences that were shared were a testimonial that the access for sexual and reproductive health and rights, is very linked to other forms of violence that are happening to women and young girls, both inside of their homes and outside, often coming from those responsible for their safety and wellbeing.

During this panel we were able to reflect on the layers of responsibility of the perpetrators, from individuals to socio-cultural and religious systems, that is affecting women and young girls the most. But we also had the chance to reflect on the active participation of women and young girls themselves to promote their own safety, create networks with their women peers, and strategies to speak up and change the history of violence for them and for other refugee, migrant and displaced women everywhere.

▶ Panel 2: Economic and Patrimonial Violence Against Women

The second panel was designed to be a platform where refugee, migrant and displaced women from different backgrounds could share their views and experiences regarding the economic and patrimonial violence that women are facing.

These specific types of violence are not usually addressed but are fundamental to understand because frequently they are not isolated but are linked to other forms of violence that women are facing simultaneously. The economic and patrimonial violence is commonly present in situations where there is psychological violence, physical violence, and even sexual violence, and it is deeply linked with the autonomy of women and their decision-making process, to speak up about the violence that they are facing.

The first panellist, Tina Dixson, is a feminist researcher who has worked in the field of human rights of LGBTI+ women and refugees. She works on advocacy and is the co-founder of the Queer Sisterhood Project that works on support and advocacy for queer refugee women.

“There are assumptions that once women make it into those safe countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand or to somewhere in Europe, that those challenges stop existing.... But there are a lot of cases of exploitation because people, especially those people seeking asylum, really fear that they will be deported if they make complaints.... A lot of employers exploit those situations and those fears.”

— Tina Dixson

Based on her own work and research experience, Tina discussed the gender gap in relation to access to education, access to jobs, and success in the job market, between women and men. She reflected specifically on the next layer of violence when referring to LGBTIQ+ women.

Tina added to this layer of discrimination and violence the next one, which is being a refugee, migrant or forcibly displaced woman, and how these conditions bring another set of economic and patrimonial violence to the life of women.

“In an environment in which people cannot really fully enjoy their human rights, people cannot be fully who they are, simply love who they love, which also impacts on their opportunities to secure their livelihoods and to live their lives to the fullest potential.... I've seen through my research that there are a quite high rates of forced marriages, in particular when families find out or suspect that women are queer, and that would also have a significant impact on the economic independence and whether they're able to secure their livelihoods independently.”

Tina also referred to the harassment in workplaces once a refugee, migrant or displaced women gets a job. She indicated that even in countries like Australia where there are legal mechanisms in place to denounce such cases, the reality for a large group of women with a migration background is that there is still trauma of the journey, that there is fear of losing the little advancement they have had, there is fear of deportation, and also, as other participants have mentioned in the conference, also fear of repercussions within their communities, so, they would rather not report the violence or harassment.

The second speaker on this panel was Maglaha Hamma, who is an asylum seeker living in SMARA camp for the last 15 years. In Western Sahara she has advocated for women's rights and has been active in different spaces from Women, Peace and Security to international training of conflicts and young defenders. She has also worked advocating on dialogues amongst women and stakeholders.

“The poverty and low income ... is really affecting women, affecting her decisions, her life, affecting her family as well. We tried to start a committee, having women gathered together to have a Committee of Women to change this, to help support women to have equal salaries and equal benefits from the work, but so far it's really not happened.... The woman has no right, has no voice and has no power.”

— Maglaha Hamma

Maglaha also referred to the precarious conditions among asylum seekers. She noted that even though there are some paid jobs in the camps, they are exclusively for men, while women are expected to deliver work as well but as volunteers. She also mentioned that a big role in these expressions of economic and patrimonial violence is the system and culture. She noted the fact that the organizations, humanitarian support offices, governmental institutions, etc., are about 30 kilometres away from the camp, and because of the risk for women and that culturally women are not meant to leave their homes or even the camp without a male responsible, they cannot access those services, or economic opportunities.

The distance between the camp and all these facilities is also a very important barrier when cases of violence against women occur, because for the same reasons, women cannot go to speak about it or to look for help.

“Here in the desert women are doing 50% of all this work like distribution for the food items such as support and assistance and everything ... 80% of the educational work here is on the

shoulder of the woman; but it's all about volunteering. We don't get any support ... in our culture, women are forced to work as a volunteer.... For example, I am asking my brother to give me support, my father died and then when you are married you are asking your husband to give you the financial support, so you always are limited in your movement or in your action, because you have no financial source. We didn't ask for that.”

Maglaha also said that the economic situation of women is not easier necessarily when they get married, because they keep depending on the resources provided by their male partners. In case of violence, or if she requests a divorce, since she would be entitled to some support, the men frequently do not divorce their partners, just abandon them and start a new family somewhere else. Leaving the women with no economic support at all.

The third and final speaker on this panel on Economic and Patrimonial Violence against women was Wafaa Al Hayek, a psychologist from Syria who has worked more than three years in programs for Women’s Protection and Empowerment with the International Rescue Committee.

“I really believe that women are really clever, and they know what they want. All we need is to support them.... It's not about just empowering a woman to reach the resources. It's about how we can minimize the barriers that stop the woman to take the benefits from the economic support... When talking about economic (support), one main factor is to be economically supported, but in a refugee situation, we need to work on the policy, and all the policies that support the document to work and to support her financially.”

– Wafaa AlHayek

She presented the need to have a holistic model when supporting women that have faced violence. She referred to the need to consider their economic, legal support, access to the police, shelter, all of their needs as a whole, and not decide for one or the other, but to see them all as part of each woman’s needs. She also referred to the importance of understanding the background of women, their culture and their beliefs.

Regarding the future and the next steps to promote inclusion and respect for women in the economic sector, Tina Dixson shared that, for her, more important than creating a set of policies is working on the change of mindset of societies to make them more inclusive and respectful of diversity. “We might have, for example, mechanisms in place to rectify discrimination or to file complaints, but when we're talking about the lives that are really precarious, the marginalized people are choosing not to use those mechanisms because they fear what it will mean, because their conditions are unsafe or because there will be repercussions back to them.”

She added to her analysis that frequently the policies are produced for a cis gender male, and do not take into consideration as it should the intersectionality of all the people. "We have to have those intersectional gender lenses in anything that is produced."

Particularly in terms of refugee women, it was stated on this panel that the migrant, forcibly displaced or refugee women should be in the centre of the development of the policies; that their experiences and knowledge are what should guide them; that the efforts supported economically should be the ones that are refugee-led, and not the ones from people that have never gone through the experiences. Additionally, it was noted that the importance of promoting at the same time the economic development with the overall empowerment for women, helping them understand their rights, and providing access to services that they need. Women should be the ones that design, lead and implement activities and programs to help each other when facing gender-based violence.

▶ Panel 3: Bodily violence against women (sexual, psychological and physical violence)

The third and final panel was designed to have a multidisciplinary approach from refugee women with different backgrounds to share about the different forms of gender-based violence that happens directly on the bodies of women, not only the different manifestations of sexual violence, but also the physical and psychological violences and their repercussions on the lives of refugee women.

In the previous two panels there were shared experiences and stories about sexual, physical and psychological violence against migrants, asylum seekers and refugee women, because the fact is that in most of the cases a woman does not just face one kind of violence, but different ones from a same perpetrator(s); but this panel will be focused on these forms of violence and how refugee women are its survivors.

The first panellist was Lilith Raza, a transgender activist with a migration background. She is working for the rights of LGBT refugee and asylum seeker in Germany since 2015, and since November 2017 she's working for the Germany-wide LSVD Project "Queers Refugees Deutschland". The aim of this project is to network the structures existing throughout Germany as well as refugee LGBTI activists and to support them in their work. She is also a member of the Queers Network and she's involved in the European Asylum Network.

Lilith thanked the organizers of the GBV Conference for including in one platform cisgender women, transgender women, intersex women, all together, and expressed that indeed all women, regardless of their bodies and background should be equally on one common platform.

"And all of those people when we come together, we do cry. We tell each other, yeah, you're not the only one going through that. Let's hold hands and let's be support and power to each other. That's what we need."

— Lilith Raza

Regarding the panel, she indicated that facing psychological or sexual violence is something really tough for a woman, for the fact of the violence itself, but also because even if she dares to go to the authorities, in several countries, she is meant to submit proof of such violences against her. "I've personally gone through a lot of violence in my life starting from my early teenage years up until I came to Germany, and it was always something that I had to hide, I had to be ashamed of... and if you are transforming, it's already something to be ashamed of in a culture like Pakistan, that's not allowed to be a transforming and, on top of that, if you get raped or if you are being sexually molested and assaulted even inside your neighborhood, because of it, some time by your relatives, you cannot go to the police. You do not have that institutional

protection in countries like Pakistan. I was denied at that time as well the solidarity also the support of the family because for them it was more of a thing like now we should not talk about it to anyone. I told a couple of friends and they were like, no, you will bring shame to your family if you're going to talk about it, and that shame kills you. It's like you become a victim and you start blaming yourself."

Lilith said that when she came to Germany, and went through the final stages of her transition, and when she began to work on human rights of trans people, as well as other queer refugees, she finally saw that she was not alone, that she was not the only one who has gone through painful experiences like hers.

Regarding cultural background, Lilith acknowledged that, besides what is related to put the shame on women and their families, in Pakistan if you are raped, since there is a criminalization against anal sex, and the survivor goes to the police, they will be accused of sodomy and be put to jail and will not receive any of the support they need. This impossibility of going to the police keeps affecting them if they move to other countries with a broader protection system.

"Those women come here in Germany and tell people this country also gives us the third gender identity, but at the same time it criminalizes our bodies, so it is a paradox in itself. How the legal institutions work? I am baffled by them. Those women when they come here to Germany, they need to produce substantial proofs about their rape cases and about the violence they have lived; you can't do that because you never went to the police, and if you did, you were put in jail and that was even horrible, because the jail mates would also rape you. There are not transgender jails in Pakistan, and if you are not an operated woman, you will be sent to the male one; that's how the system works".

Due to these kinds of paradoxes and impossible-to-fill in requirements is why Lilith works to sensitize institutions, to help them understand that there is a different background that needs to be considered in each case, that every survivor of violence needs to have a specific approach. For her it is important that there is a recognition that besides heterosexual women are a vast diversity of women that, sometimes, because of that diversity, are being persecuted everywhere, and that also need protection, so the systems need to be more inclusive and actually embrace diversity.

Lilith concluded indicating that the impact and traumatization of sexual, physical and psychological violence, does not stop with the moment of the act of violence. "Many people who come to Germany, they also need in their lives to have a psychological ... I wouldn't call it treatment ... but a person who can give them companionship, a person who can provide them

tips on how to get along. I still have nightmares, and my nightmares are mostly consisted of two things: rape and suicide bombing.”

The second panellist was Noura Bittar Søborg who is originally from Syria and moved to Denmark in 2012, fleeing war. Noura graduated from Damascus University and holds a degree in Political Science. She is a freelance writer and published her first article in a Syrian newspaper at the age of 16. In August 2012 she wrote and recorded a short film for Amnesty Denmark called Beautiful Dangerous Words. Now she is working to push politicians in Denmark to add consent aspects when dealing with rape cases.

Noura stated the importance of acknowledging the diversity of women when referring to the attention and prevention of violence against women. She mentioned that the EU Strategy 2020–2025 basically is referring to women and girls that had faced gender-based violence, but that does not include any specification regarding refugee, stateless or asylum-seeking women, and neither there is a specification for the LGBTQI plus community.

“A trip to a toilet in an asylum camp itself is something very scary to women and girls, and also for a person of LGBTQ community because of high risk of rape. And that’s not just from fellow refugees or asylum seekers in the camp, but also from staff, humanitarian staff and police staff in in the camp... we need a better strategy. All the women I worked with, they have no idea what their rights are in the host country.”

– Noura Bittar Søborg

She indicated that there is the need for more sensitive laws regarding the attention to refugee, migrant or displaced women, also regarding lesbian, trans, bisexual, intersex, plus women. But even with the laws that are in place, there is the urgent need of better implementation, not just in Western Europe, but in all European countries.

Noura also talked about the impact of gender-based violence for a woman, adding the layer of complexity of being a migrant, refugee or displaced woman. “What I experienced in interviews with women in the camps and then talking to them and being one of them, is that the fear is the biggest luggage that these women carry because first they are afraid of being in a war zone, then they carry that through. Then the refugee process, leaving the country is very scary, especially for single women, for underage girls, and for mothers. Rape or “sexual favors” is a big issue, for your freedom. You have to pay with the “sexual favours.” Actually, the UN says that at least one of seven refugee women have experienced sexual violence, and that’s a big number.

In Europe, we're talking about 55% of women in Europe who have experienced sexual harassment and 33% have experienced physical or sexual violence.”

Noura also discussed cultural and legal differences regarding laws and the respect for a woman who has faced gender-based violence. “I met a lot of single moms during the last eight years that I've been a refugee. Moms that have been forced to be followed or come with family unification with their aggressor, because the laws are forcing them to be with those violating partners because of the family unification laws in different countries. In Denmark we're talking about seven years if you leave your husband, you lose the custody of the children and you also lose your residency. Despite that, legally we have something that if you can prove violence, you can keep your residency or you can seek refugee status by yourself, but the implementation of these laws is very, very hard.”

Noura indicated that one of the main problems is that the police officers are not sufficiently trained to respond and attend to cases of gender-based violence; the system makes women prove the violence they have faced, and it is considerably hard to do so. She indicated that this lack of preparation complicates for all women but in particular for migrant or displaced women, women with disabilities and LGBTQI+.

Noura concluded indicating that the change that needs to happen is going from top-down to bottom-up in the strategies to attend survivors of gender-based violence, and working with refugees, and get the actually affected people involved in the decision-making process and in the response. Noura indicated that there is the need to more awareness, both to refugees and migrants about their rights, but also to the staff that works with them at all levels, and for that there is the need to allocate more money in the right places.

The third and last panellist was Rachel Levitan, who is working closely with the partners in the US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration at the UN refugee agency and she's helping drive the urgency of international efforts to increase protection, especially for the vulnerable refugees and migrants.

Rachel addressed the key strategy for her to move forward in this reality that the previous panellists were sharing, and the key is to centre the efforts in the refugee women themselves, to ask them, to open the space for them to be in the centre of the advocacy, of the programs, “That means inclusive refugee voices. It means refugee-led organizations. It means women's voices, LGBTQ voices. We rarely hear from older refugees; we very rarely hear from refugees with disabilities or folks who represent the intersection of those identities.”

“I think it’s really an obligation for policymakers – whether in the European Union or the US or other countries that are receiving thousands and thousands of refugees – as well as for the international organizations and other very large humanitarian organizations that are out there, and down to national governments and community groups. Are we really listening to the voices of the needs of survivors? Have we heard what’s needed to provide support? Have we heard what’s needed to change policies and implement those policies? Well, including this point about training, so that’s kind of the central piece, and this conference is an amazing part of that solution. By really highlighting and saying, look, our panels are about refugee voices.”

– Rachel Levitan

For Rachel, the critical piece that is needed in order to design the right services, programs, protocols and policies, is to listen to individual experiences of refugee voices, listen about their lost communities, the trauma, but also the voices of experiences, empowerment and leadership. It is necessary to create more spaces for those voices to be heard and their experiences to be valued.

She also mentioned the importance of creating responsive services for refugee women who face violence and address the impact of COVID-19 on their lives to address the isolation, the vulnerable situations the lockdown has put many women around the world in, and the impact on their livelihoods. There needs to be a guarantee that those specialized services are widely accessible, not just to those who are considered “traditional survivors”, women and girls of a certain age, but also LGBTQ survivors, older women, women with disabilities, from indigenous communities, etc.

Finally, she indicated two elements that need to be considered as part of an effective and respectful response. On one hand, the need of appropriate preparation for frontline service providers, whether they’re from NGOs, hospital workers or schools, to guarantee that they will know how to address each case, how to identify it, and how to create safe spaces for women to share their stories and identify what their needs are, whether it’s medical, legal, psychosocial, economic or mental health support. This is key to support safe spaces for women and girls, LGBTQ, and other survivors to support each other.

On the other hand, it is important that the programs developed for gender-based violence survivors or people who are at risk of GBV involve economic inclusion, and a clear connection to the private sector involvement. This connection to financial institutions, and a support on

economic empowerment, can be key to the independence and success of that survivor for them to recover the control over her own life.

► Closing Remarks

During the closing remarks, Caroline Masbounji from UNICEF stated the importance of basing their strategy on the needs of women and girls and the challenge of knowing how to do it. “In order to know how we help, we need to hear from women and girls, basically we need to hear from you on what are the entry points? What are the best ways to make sure that these services are accessible? We want to channel funds through women-led organizations, refugee-led organizations as a big machine like UNICEF is not the easiest thing to do, and so we're trying to find ways to make that happen but I would also love to hear people's thoughts on what that would look like. I really believe that this is the way we reach women and girls, and this is the way we're effective in what we do.”

The next closing remark was from Rosemary McCarney, who is a representative of the World Refugee & Migration Council and former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations. She reiterated the strategic priorities of WRMC to put a spotlight on women and refugees and displaced, and the violence they encounter. “It's interesting, people often say refugees come with nothing. Well, we disagree. They come with their culture, they come with their experiences and they come with viewpoints and that's why, as the panelists have all said, they need to be put at the centre of program design and to be able to speak to their own lived experiences.”

She closed her intervention saying that the Council's *A Call to Action* report is very clear about transforming the global refugee system, there is the urgent need for a big transformative program and strategy. She said the WRMC is working on the creation of platforms to share the realities of what is happening to refugee women, to work on investment tables and open up spaces for refugee women to be on those tables where their authentic voices can be heard and acted upon.

On behalf of GIRWL, the closing remarks were made by Andrea Ayala, GIRWL co-founder. She acknowledged every story heard, and every initiative that is already put in place or being proposed by the participants to keep their voices heard and to embrace other survivors. She closed her intervention thanking all of the partners and participants that made the Conference happened and recognize the power of solidarity and sisterhood as refugee, migrant, displaced women came together, even virtually, to see, hear and support each other. Getting together is part of a healing process.

▶ Conclusions

- ▶ The conference took an intersectional approach, respecting a diverse representation of panelists, based on four out of five continents, including cisgender, lesbian, trans, intersex, heterosexual, mothers, youth, single, married, from indigenous background, and more.
- ▶ There is a need to approach the diverse realities of refugee-migrant-displaced women and girls in relation to different forms of gender-based violence, in their journeys from their homeland, in the process of being recognized as refugees, and in their current lives in their new countries.
- ▶ One of the main conclusions of the Conference is the importance of developing a safe space to promote the participation of girls and young women to share and learn together about their rights and possibilities. Survivor women and girls need safe spaces to break up the silence.
- ▶ There is a need that other women, institutions and organizations believe survivors stories, and do not revictimize them asking them to prove the experiences they have lived.
- ▶ In the centres and camps there is the urgent need to access information in different languages, that on a friendly way provide information to women and girls about their rights, the services available and the resources that they can count on.
- ▶ Refugee, migrant and displaced gender-based violence survivor women and girls need to be heard and respected from the individual experiences they have faced, but also take into consideration their cultural background to understand and provide the right support.
- ▶ It is important for host countries to recognize all the value and talents that are in the hands of every refugee person, their abilities and knowledge.
- ▶ The bodies of women are still a place of battle. Women are punished through their bodies for speaking up, for the conditions of poverty, sexual orientation, gender identity, migration status, because they are meant to be subordinated to others, because there is imperative – in some cultures – that they give birth to boys, that women must please men, and so many more atrocities. The bodies of women and girls remain as the battlefield of frustration, punishment, anger, revenge, of individuals, groups, social systems, religion and culture.
- ▶ There are violations of human rights happening against women and girls in refugee camps and migration centres, such as sexual harassment, rape, forced hysterectomies, separation from mothers and children and deprivation of medications.
- ▶ In different contexts, refugee, migrant and displaced girls and women had experienced violence from perpetrators that are supported by a permissive system that is not responding as it should to protect, defend and attend to the survivor of those forms of

violence. There is the need to review the system to guarantee women and girls protection.

- ▶ Open up more channels of communication and new strategies to guarantee refugee women can use their own voices when sharing their needs, experiences and challenges.
- ▶ Design, support and fund more bottom-up strategies developed by refugee women and girls, so they can represent themselves.
- ▶ Revise how the policies of refugee centres and camps is being develop, and work to orientate them with more agency for impacted individuals to guarantee their wellbeing, safety and respect, from a holistic perspective.
- ▶ Create more spaces like this conference that embrace the diversity and intersectionalities of refugee women.
- ▶ The programs that support survivors of gender-based violence need to be properly funded. There is also the need to allocate resources to initiatives led by the survivors themselves, to support other survivors, and to develop economic initiatives to ensure refugee survivors the possibility to get back in control over their own lives.
- ▶ Develop more sensitive protocols, policies and laws regarding attention to refugee, migrant and displaced women and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence, and assure that there is accurate implementation and follow up.
- ▶ Develop programs to guarantee that the police officers, medical and school staff, and those responsible for organizations, centres and camps are better prepared to receive, refer and attend to cases of refugee, migrant and displaced women and girl survivors of gender-based violence.

► Annexes

Save the Date



REFUGEE WOMEN: UNPACKING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
#ORANGETHEWORLD #16DAYS

Save the date for this virtual conference:
11 December 2020
Register now:
wrmcouncil.org/unpackingGBV

 Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

 WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL

The poster features an illustration of five diverse women in profile, facing right. From left to right: a woman with dark skin wearing a black headwrap and a red top; a woman with long red hair and a white top; a woman with dark skin wearing a black hijab and a black top; a woman with dark skin and long black hair wearing a purple top; and a woman with white hair wearing a brown top. The background is a solid orange color.


Invitation




REFUGEE WOMEN: UNPACKING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
#ORANGETHEWORLD #16DAYS

Join the virtual conference:
11 December 2020
11:00–14:00 CET
21:00 Sydney | 05:00 Ottawa

Register now:
wrmcouncil.org/unpackingGBV

 Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

 WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL

The poster features the same illustration of five diverse women in profile as the 'Save the Date' poster. The background is a solid orange color.

Promotion

Facebook Live Events

“

In my country **Afghanistan**, I was a prisoner of my own sex. School, dreaming for university or becoming an **advocate** was a faraway dream to achieve.

We the refugee women want to be seen as real actors rather than beneficiaries We want to be held organized and contribute effectively. Supporting **effective self-representation** of **refugee women** requires an **investment** in time, resources and sharing knowledge, as well as a commitment to valuing different forms of **knowledge and experience**.

— **NAJEEBA WAZEFADOST**
GIRWL CO-FOUNDER

LIVE FACEBOOK LIVE 10:30PM SYDNEY/ 12:30 M CET
DECEMBER 7TH 2020

GIRWLNETWORK @GIRWL1 GIRWL Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

“

This year is like no other. Even before COVID-19 hit, **violence against women** and girls had reached pandemic proportions. Globally, **243 million women and girls** were abused by an intimate partner in the past year. Meanwhile, **less than 40 % of women who experience violence report it or seek help.**

Ending violence against women will require more investment, leadership and action. come and join us to find out how **we can make it.**

— **SHAZA AL RIHAWI**
GIRWL CO-FOUNDER

LIVE FACEBOOK LIVE 8:00PM BERLIN/ 9:00 PM DAMASCUS
TODAY

GIRWLNETWORK @GIRWL1 GIRWL Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

“

هذا العام ليس له مثيل. حتى قبل إصابة COVID-19 ، وصل العنف ضد النساء والفتيات إلى مستويات وبائية. على الصعيد العالمي ، 243 مليون امرأة وفتاة تعرضن لسوء المعاملة من قبل شريك حميم في العام الماضي. وفي الوقت نفسه ، فإن أقل من 40 في المائة من النساء اللاتي يتعرضن للعنف يبلغن عنه أو يطلبن المساعدة. سيتطلب إنهاء العنف ضد المرأة المزيد من الاستثمار والقيادة والعمل. نعال وانضم إلينا لمعرفة كيف يمكننا اتخاذ إجراءات.

— **SHAZA AL RIHAWI**
GIRWL CO-FOUNDER

LIVE FACEBOOK LIVE 8:00PM BERLIN/ 9:00 PM DAMASCUS
DEC 8 2020

GIRWLNETWORK @GIRWL1 GIRWL Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

“

We are taking lead to set new approaches, to change the norms, narratives and challenging the patriarchal practices that exist in our policies, systems and mechanisms.

We are unpacking the true and inclusive approach for Gender equality and social Justice

ہم نئی سوچ تشکیل دینے کے لئے پہل کرتے ہیں کیونکہ عمومی معیارات اور بیانیے کو تبدیل کرنے اور نظام، پالیسیوں اور ان پر عمل کرنے کے طریقہ کار میں موجود پدرسری کے عمل دخل کو چیلنج کرنا لازم ہو گیا ہے۔ ہم صنفی مساوات اور سماجی انصاف کے درست اور شمولیت پر مبنی تصور کو سمجھنے کی کوشش میں ہیں۔

ANILA NOOR
GIRWL CO-FOUNDER



FACEBOOK LIVE 4:00PM CET/ 8:30 PM MUMBAI
DEC 9 2020



GIRWLNETWORK



@GIRWL1



“

If there were just one woman or girl targeted by Gender Base Violence, that would be enough to join forces to tackle it.

This is not a private or domestic matter, it is a pandemic that should concern us all.

Let us talk about it, look for strategies and work together.

BARBARA ROMERO
GIRWL CO-FOUNDER



FACEBOOK LIVE 8:00PM CET/ 1:00 PM SAN SALVADOR
DEC 10 2020



GIRWLNETWORK



@GIRWL1



Panelists

**REFUGEE
WOMEN UNPACKING
GBV 2020 -
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM**

**PANEL 1. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
IN ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH.**

Nicole Santamaría, Intersex-trans activist
(El Salvador - USA)

Parwana Amiri, Youth Activist (Syria - Greece)

Jayne Fleming, Human Rights lawyer (Jordan -
USA)

Conference led by  Global Independent Refugee Women Leaders

Hosted by:  WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL



**REFUGEE
WOMEN UNPACKING
GBV 2020 -
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM**

**PANEL 2. ECONOMIC AND
PATRIMONIAL VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN.**

Maglaha Hamma, (Western Africa SMARA)

Wafaa AlHayek, (AUE - Dubai)

Tina Dixon, (Ukraine - Australia)

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Hosted by:  WORLD REFUGEE & MIGRATION COUNCIL



**REFUGEE
WOMEN UNPACKING
GBV 2020 -
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM**

**PANEL 3.
BODILY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
(SEXUAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE)**

Lilith Raza, (Pakistan - Germany)

Noura Bittar Søborg, (Syria - Denmark)

Rachel Leviatan, HIAS (USA)

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Stakeholders remarks

**REFUGEE
WOMEN UNPACKING
GBV 2020 -
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM**

OPENING REMARKS

Devota Nuwe
Head of programs at Refugee Law Project.

CLOSING REMARKS

Caroline Masbounji
Gender-Based Violence - UNICEF

Rosemary McCarney
WRMC member, and former Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations

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World Refugee & Migration Council

Chaired by former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the World Refugee & Migration Council offers bold thinking on how the international community can respond to refugees through cooperation & responsibility sharing.

World Refugee & Migration Council

Chaired by former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the World Refugee & Migration Council offers bold thinking on how www.wrmcouncil.org

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www.wrmcouncil.org

