

#GirlsVoices: Meeting Needs of Migrant Girls On the Move

"Refugees are constantly being told that they must remain silent. Yes, it is hard to be heard above the roar of warplanes or the thump of yet another explosion. But it's also hard to be heard above the incessant refrain that refugees have a lesser right to exist – or none at all – and that refugee girls are worth less than anyone"

Emi Mahmoud, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, Sudanese Poet, Activist, Founder of One Girl Walk

Girls face some of the strongest challenges when making the journey for asylum and a new life, yet as a group, girls' needs often remains a significant gap in law, policy, funding and service provision. Subsumed under the terms 'children' and 'women and girls', data specific to the experiences of girls through migration and resettlement is often lacking, which leads to challenges in securing specialised resources.

Too often victims to a combination of sexism, racism and xenophobia, vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation and abuse, girls' rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), CoE Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention) and UN High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) gender-sensitive guideline are often neglected.

Whether on the move, in untenable tented communities, short-term asylum centres or at the point of settlement and integration, there is much more that can be done to ensure all girls can heal from their experiences and meet their potential.



Discover the Melissa Network:

Ms ZR is a 20-year old Afghan woman who arrived in Greece 5 months ago. Ms. ZR has a long story. Forced to marry as a child bride to an old man in Afghanistan she was abused in every possible way, made practically his sex slave. Once she resisted his abuses, she was stabbed in the stomach.

Realising no one could help her but herself, ZR ran away. She landed on the island of Lesbos from Turkey and was placed in Moria camp, a camp of around 9,000 people living in a space designed for just 3,100. The conditions in Moria camp, sexual assaults, made many like her commit suicide, which she tried by hanging herself.

Wishing to give herself a chance at life, she came to Athens. Now supported the Melissa Network, she stays in a hostel while a stable accommodation is arranged. She displays what aid groups describe as a mental health case. She had panic attacks and PTSD symptoms, like sudden seizures. The Melissa Network supports women and girls like ZR to heal and thrive.



Facts & Figures

- Globally, **refugee girls at secondary level are only half as likely to enroll in school as their male peers**, even though girls make up half of the school-age refugee population
- A total of **42%** of all child asylum seekers in Europe are girls
- In France, **12 % to 21 % of girls were at risk of FGM** out of 205,683 girls originating from countries where FGM is practised
- **75% of refugee children have experienced violence and assault** by an adult along their migration route
- 4 out of 5 girls arriving from Nigeria to Italy are potential **victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation**

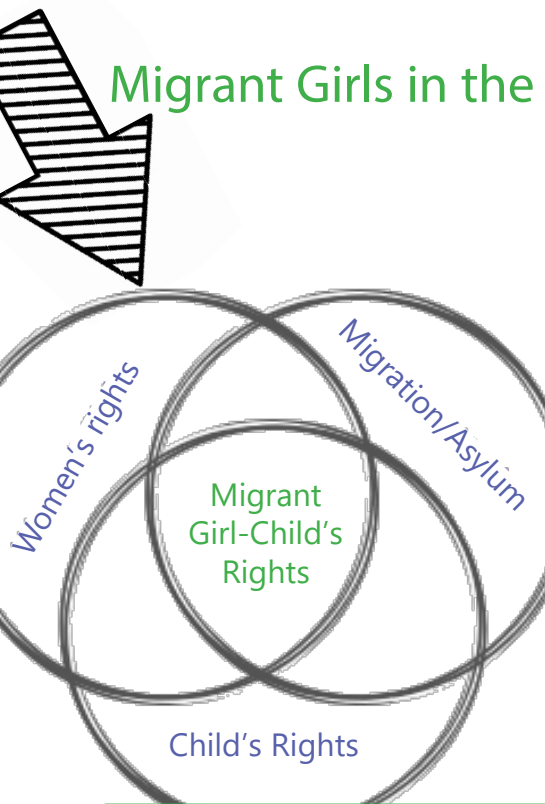
Europe has a responsibility to migrant girls

The European Union (EU) is a region of destination for many individuals, leaving their country for various reasons: refugees, displaced persons, unaccompanied minors, families, students, daughters of migrant workers; some of them might also be undocumented. Girls will always be part of the migrating population, and have specific needs that must be recognised and met. Under the Istanbul Convention (Art. 3) it is noted that "women" includes girls under the age of 18' and yet girls' needs are inconsistently mainstreamed in new laws, policies and supports. These must be in addition to standard responses for women and for migrant/refugee children, and girls' ability to access services must never be compromised due to societal status or cultural practices.

To date, the European Union has increased investment in the area of migration but this investment has focused on 'security', i.e., the supposed challenge to the safety and wellbeing of current EU citizens by migration flows. This ignores much research showing the net benefit of migration and that investment into integration and education is a key way to prevent isolation but rather facilitate the social and economic contributions of migrant communities who are in search of a brighter future.

To stay true to its core values of human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, we call on the EU to respect the human rights and dignity of girls

Migrant Girls in the European Union - OUR DEMANDS



- **Migrant/refugee girls' legal framework** should be developed and defined as according to existing frameworks on women's rights, children's rights and migrant people's rights.
- Law and policy implementation under CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention should include **mainstreaming the needs of children and migrant/refugee women and girls.**
- **Reform asylum processes:** The EU must recognise the impact of their return policies on the safety and lives of those seeking asylum. Child and gender appropriate accommodation, in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action (2015), must be provided as a priority both in emergency settings and throughout the asylum process.
- **Combatting men's violence against women and girls:** The EU and all member states and acceding/candidate countries must ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, without bias or reservation as to migrant, refugee and undocumented women.
- **Reinstate effective humanitarian search and rescue operations** at sea including an international agreement on fair and balanced acceptance of those saved to ensure meeting of responsibilities under Dublin Regulations.

LEGAL

- **Access to Education:** Every child has the right to access education, yet many girls are left without while moving through the asylum process due to inappropriate reception centres that are not fit for purpose. Where education is available, specific efforts must be made to ensure girls are enabled to attend
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:** Girls' SRHR needs and rights must be recognised – refugee and migrant girls are at high risk of sexual violence, rape and pregnancy yet their SRHR needs are often forgotten in service development, particularly in specific children's supports.
- **Train** all staff, guardians and foster families on increased risk of sex trafficking and prostitution, child marriage, sexual violence, FGM and traditional harmful practices for unaccompanied girls.
- **Combatting sexual exploitation:** Trafficking of girls is often under the umbrella of 'child trafficking' or 'trafficking of WAG for sexual exploitation', meaning the data on prevalence and specific responses to trafficking of girls are lacking. Migrant and refugee girls are a high-risk group for grooming, trafficking and forced marriage: training, prevention and response programmes must be implemented on all of these issues, particularly for those working in frontlines and in combatting the sex trade.

STRUCTURAL

- **Funding:** While there has been a significant increase to planned EU spending on migration, the focus on 'borders and security' is of significant concern: a humanitarian approach to this issue is essential to align our approach with European values, value the benefits of migration to Europe and ensure no deaths or suffering are caused by a 'Fortress Europe' approach to migration. It is also crucial to increase support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.
- **Data:** Clearer, up-to-date information about the experiences faced by girls on the move is crucial, with sex-disaggregated data that goes beyond the experiences of "children" and "unaccompanied minors" so that we can provide appropriate services and responses to girls.

INVESTMENT



The European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) is the largest umbrella organisation of migrant-led women's non-governmental organisations within the European Union (EU), working to promote migrant women's rights, the concerns, needs and interests of migrant women in the European Union.

www.migrantwomennetwork.org @ENoMW



The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. For a feminist Europe.

www.womenlobby.org @EuropeanWomen



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