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 tentsed 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.

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 traffick 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/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.
• Combating 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.

The European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) is the largest umbrella organisation of migrant-led women’s non-governamental 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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