



# IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

## GBV IN FOCUS

A seasonal newsletter

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## Project News

*The Violence against Women Migrants and Refugees: Analyzing Causes and Effective Policy Response* Project takes an intersectional approach and analyzes how discriminations and inequalities based on gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and age interact to make certain women more vulnerable to GBV and less able to access support and services for survivors than others.

Data collection and analysis of the interviews have been completed. The research team has been busy writing, presenting and creating academic outputs from the project data (read more on this below). The team has also been exploring unique forms of knowledge mobilization, looking into alternative and non-conventional ways to promote and facilitate the research among knowledge users.

The GBV-MIG team would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to Camila Reis, former editor of the 'Immigrants and Refugees: GBV in Focus' newsletter. Camila has successfully defended her MA in Global Development Studies and is moving on to new endeavors. We would also like to thank Larissa Sweeney, who edited this issue of the newsletter and worked as a Research Assistant with the GBV-MIG project. Stay tuned to read more about Camila's research and to meet your new editor, Eva Kazakou!



# TEAM ACTIVITIES

The GBV-MIG team have been busy presenting the findings from the project, mobilizing knowledge, including conference presentations across three different countries.

## Spring 2023

### Reimagining Peace and Peace Building in the Research Network Women Peace and Security (RN WPS)

Dr. Evie Tastsoglou was invited to present at the Annual Symposium in Halifax in March 2023. Her presentation was titled “Exclusionary Intersectionalities in the Lives of Immigrant and Refugee Women in Canada”.



### 25th Metropolis Canada Conference

Dr. Evie Tastsoglou presented at the Conference in Ottawa in March 2023. Her presentation was titled “Violence against Women Migrants and Refugees: Policy Considerations and Pathways”.

## Fall 2023

### European Conference on Domestic Violence

Research Associate, Busra Yalcinoz-Ucan presented at the European Conference on Domestic Violence in Reykjavik in September 2023. Her presentation was titled “Examining Immigrant Women’s Interactions with GBV-Related Services and Structures in Canada: Barriers and Vulnerabilities”.



## Summer 2023

### ISA World Congress

The GBV-MIG Research Team presented at the ISA World Congress in Melbourne on June 28, 2023. The presentation was titled “Feminist Intersectional Approaches to Understanding the Experiences of Gender-Based Violence among Newcomer Women in Canada”.

Dr. Evie Tastsoglou was invited to present the GBV-MIG project at session Persistence and Change: Collaborative, Conceptual and Contextual Global Understandings of Gender-Based and Intersectional Violence.

She also presented on “Gender-Based Violence in Migration: Interdisciplinary, Feminist and Intersectional Approaches” at the Author Meet Critic session.



# FROM THE RESEARCHER'S DESK

## The Desire to Thrive and Succeed: Economic Integration of Refugee Women in Canada

Written by: Dr. Sally Ogoe

For many refugees who resettle in Canada, that idea of a free start, new beginnings and unending opportunities is an expectation many arrive in the country with. Hence, success has often been tied to reaching their economic goals; finding well-paying jobs and securing a financially stable future. When thinking about the labour market, the idea of economic integration for immigrants has simply been the opportunity to have a job in the Canadian labour market, with success being evident through education-job match and upward wage mobility. But in reality, is it that simply? Especially in the case of a refugee and more so a woman?

My research highlighted the human capital refugee women arrive in Canada with and the impact it has on their labour market access over a span of years, while also factoring in the impact of family obligations and structures in the labour market (discrimination, recession, et cetera).



For most resettlement countries, timely economic integration of refugees has become a vital component of integration practices and policies. However, despite refugee women's access to working legally in Canada upon arrival or after a certain period of time, a significant proportion of these women face barriers (as a result of low levels of education at arrival, language fluency and lack of Canadian work experience), discrimination and racialization in the labour market.

There is also a family dynamics problem – many refugee women come from countries where men typically dominate the family and as such, moving to a new country with more equitable power in family dynamics and having to work can be challenging – this is not to imply that male dominance does not exist in Canada.

\*The views expressed in 'From the Researcher's Desk' are that of the author and do not necessarily represent the GBV-MIG team.



# FROM THE RESEARCHER'S DESK

Furthermore, fertility plays a big role in women's employment (that is the kind of jobs they can be available to work in and hours if they have kids) which has implications for their income and career advancement. In other cases, there is the traditional and secondary role which refugee women play by way of taking up low paying jobs and working extra-long hours in Canada to facilitate their spouses' investments toward higher human capital qualifications in the Canada.



The resulting effects from these highlighted factors are that even though it may seem refugee women are eventually integrated into the Canadian labour market, they lag behind in terms of self-advancement, financial independence as well as preparation for better job opportunities.

## Lessons Learned

Even though labour market barriers are unavoidable for refugees in general in the Canadian labour market, these promising practices can help bridge the gap:

- ✦ Developing appropriate and strategic programs that will equip refugee women to succeed in the labour market (e.g., more attention should be given to existing language programs such as English as a second language, employment programs).
- ✦ Existing policies and regulations which guide the Canadian labour market operations needs to be reviewed and updated to prevent institutionalized discrimination.

**Dr. Sally Ogoe was a postdoctoral fellow on a CIHR-funded study of the social, economic and mental health outcomes of newcomers in Canada, USA and Mexico and is currently a Senior Research Associate at the University of Winnipeg.**



# FROM THE RESEARCHER'S DESK

## COVID-19, Gender-Based Violence, and Refugees in Context: Syrian Refugee Women in Lebanon

Written by: Dr. Saja Al Zoubi

Refugees face greater risks of experiencing gender-based violence (GBV). Violent conflict, displacement, poverty, and chaos are compounded by policies that lack protection considerations throughout all stages of the migration journey, increasing susceptibility to GBV. Further, for those who experience GBV, it is often more challenging to report incidents to authorities due to the fear of repercussions, such as deportation, detention, or ostracization.

The connection between refugees and increased susceptibility to GBV is clear in the Syrian context. The Syrian war has resulted in an escalation of instances of GBV, both within the country but also in the countries Syrians sought asylum. Of 13 million displaced people, more than 6 million refugees have experienced verbal, physical and sexual violence, with the majority of the victims' being women and girls.

Moreover, the global COVID-19 pandemic further deteriorated Syrian livelihoods, resulting in greater instances of intimate partner violence (IPV). Although there is a wealth of research tackling GBV in refugee communities, few studies focus on domestic violence and IPV.

In my research, I examine how the pandemic has affected domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) in the context of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon. For this study, both male and female heads of twenty-five households, along with divorced women, living in Syrian camps in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, were interviewed through WhatsApp in 2020.

During the pandemic, the Lebanese government issued restrictive COVID-19 policies against Syrian refugee communities. Such restrictions became problematic as Syrian refugees would rather choose to die in refugee camps than seek healthcare from medical clinics out of fear of persecution or deportation due to their status.



The situation in the refugee camps was exacerbated by the Lebanese civil society which blamed the overcrowded camps as the source of the pandemic, arguing that Syrians needed to be isolated.



# FROM THE RESEARCHER'S DESK

Several lockdowns were imposed on the camps, prohibiting Syrians from working, and even children were no longer allowed to play outside their tents. Similarly, humanitarian organisations were prevented from entering many of the Syrian camps by local municipal authorities, impeding a key source of necessities for those living in the camps.

The combination of these policies and practices led to a deterioration of living standards, increasing poverty and vulnerability and adding more pressure and stress upon Syrian refugees. The latter significantly impacted their mental health, resulting in increased domestic violence against women and children.

While some women got divorced to escape their abusive spouse, many entered another type of domestic violence, this time by their fathers and brothers who were struggling to cope with the additional members' expenditures. Many of the women interviewed expressed worry about their children due to the violence perpetuated by their father and the community, and some women were made to leave their children behind for a new forced marriage. Domestic violence was already common among some Syrian refugee communities prior to the pandemic due to . . .

Lebanese policies that limited men's mobility and work opportunities resulting in shifting gender norms as many women became the bread winners of their households, threatening societal perceptions of male masculinity. However, the COVID-19 significantly increased this phenomenon, while decreasing women's resilience to survive and reclaim their agency following violent experiences. The vulnerability and precarity facing refugee women created a system that trapped and prevented them from speaking out against domestic violence, which, moreover, was further exacerbated by a lack of access to supporting organizations and authorities.

This research underlines the importance of NGOs and humanitarian organisations to advocate and support women and girl survivors of all forms of violence. There is a need for the host country to recognize refugees at national and local levels to guarantee their protection. This recognition must be in line with international conventions and compacts to ensure that refugees are protected, especially during pandemics and other crises, and to support women and girls who are survivors.

[Read more by Dr. Al Zoubi on Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.](#)

**Dr. Saja Al Zoubi is a development economist, and a gender and livelihood expert for the EU delegation to Syria and a lecturer with the Global Development Studies and Political Science departments at Saint Mary's University.**



# INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## Shipwreck in Pylos, Greece

Europe has always been a destination for migrants and refugees, however, since 2015 a “refugee crisis” has emerged due to the sharp increase in inflows. This has led to the militarization of the European Union's external borders, making the Mediterranean one of the deadliest seas to cross. Throughout the years, thousands were reported to have died or gone missing on the Central and Western Mediterranean routes, even though there is continued cooperation amongst EU Member States and Frontex on the management of the external EU borders.

Greece, along with Italy and Spain, has been one of the major EU gateways. In 2022 the European Anti-Fraud Office issued a Report regarding the involvement of Frontex in the allegedly illegal activities of the Hellenic Coast Guard. The latter has been accused for several years of illegal pushbacks, in violation of the Geneva Convention principle of non-refoulement.

The climax of this securitization in the Mediterranean Sea occurred on June 14, 2023, when an overcrowded ship sank off Pylos, in the Peloponnese (Southern Greece). According to credible sources, an overcrowded fishing trawler, that carried 400 to 750 people, mainly from Pakistan, Syria and Egypt, began its journey from Libya heading to Italy. The boat had reported encountering problems, according to Alarm Phone, a self-organized hotline for refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, but Greek authorities said it repeatedly turned down offers of help. In the end, the boat capsized and there were only 104 survivors (all men and boys), while among the 82 recovered bodies, only one belonged to a female.

Five months later, 40 survivors of Pylos' shipwreck filed a criminal complaint before the Naval Court of Piraeus, demanding an immediate investigation of the event. The survivors stated that the Greek government had failed to do enough to ensure the safety of those aboard and they wanted a thorough investigation into what happened in the wake of the worst shipwreck in the Mediterranean in years.

**Eva Kazakou**  
PhD student, Global Development Studies  
Saint Mary's University



Photo: The Brussel Times



Photo: Evangelos Bougiotis/ EPA



Photo: REUTERS/Stelios Misinas



# INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## Reports of SGBV as Sudan Conflict Continues

Since April 2023, Sudan has been in a state of conflict due to fighting between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Force (SAF), resulting in an estimated 4.5 million internally displaced people. The fighting initially took place in cities across Northern and Khartoum states, but has since spread across the Darfur and Kordofan regions. As a result of the fighting, the country is experiencing multiple humanitarian crises with shortages of basic necessities such as water and food, along with reports of human rights violations related to gender-based violence, civilian killings and forced displacement.

An increased number of instances of sexual and gender-based violence have been reported against internally displaced and refugee women in Sudan since the conflict broke out. From the onset of the conflict to July 2023, UN offices in Sudan received 21 reports of conflict-related sexual violence against at least 57 women and girls. Reports have identified women being attacked for their ethnicity and in some cases, because they were known activists. Officials have called for an immediate end to gender-based violence, including sexual violence as a tactic of war to terrorize people and for investigations into all of the alleged gross violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law.

Despite the atrocities, women are acting with agency, making decisions for the betterment of their family during such perilous times. Rahama, a woman living in Khartoum and about to give birth to her third child made the difficult decision to leave for Ethiopia just a few days before giving birth. Rahama, along with her family made it safely to Ethiopia where they are receiving assistance from International Organization for Migration (IOM) and partners who referred her to a nearby medical centre where she had a successful delivery.

**Larissa Sweeney**  
Research Assistant  
GBV-MIG Project



Over 40,000 people have arrived in Ethiopia from Sudan a month after the conflict erupted. Photo: IOM 2023/Kaye Viray



Three women and a teenaged girl who survived sexual violence in West Darfur. © 2023 Belkis Wille/Human Rights Watch



Rahama hopes to start a new life with her family in Jimma, Ethiopia. Photo: IOM 2023/Kaye Viray





# NATIONAL NEWS

## Ontario Launches Free Job Training for Newcomers

The Ontario government announced that it is investing \$2.6 million in four free training projects to help more than 300 newcomers find meaningful jobs with local employers. The funding will be used to provide a variety of resources to help newcomers obtain long-term employment, such as training opportunities, paid internships and job placements, language training, and digital literacy courses.

Of this funding, \$1 522 396 is allocated for the Newcomer Women's Services Toronto (NEW) to help prepare 230 newcomer women with employment readiness, career coaching and a paid internships. Sara Asalya, Director of NEW, said "This invaluable funding allows us to reach out to those in need, provide essential services, and bring about positive change in the lives of countless immigrant women."



## Supreme Court upholds agreement that lets Canada send refugees back to U.S.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) between Canada and the United States is constitutional.

The STCA is a bilateral deal, recognizing both Canada and the U.S. as "safe" countries for asylum seekers, stating that refugee claimants are required to request asylum in the first country they arrive.

Refugee advocacy groups have argued that the policy is unconstitutional, and that the safety of the claimant in the United States, where asylum seekers are automatically detained, treated poorly and sometimes face deportation.

## Gender wage gap study shows some improvement for immigrant women in Canada

Statistics Canada released a new study showing the Gender Wage Gap (GWG), the difference in hourly pay between Canadian-born men and women working in similar positions. Immigrant women who landed in Canada as children narrowed their gap with Canadian-born men from 14.7% in 2007 to 10.5% in 2022. Immigrant women landing as adults narrowed their gap with Canadian-born men from 27.4% in 2007 to 20.9% in 2022.

