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ABSTRACT

English:

This master thesis is a study on how the international migration experience of Syrian refugees is highly subjugated with vast gender unequal challenges for women as opposed to men, ever since the Syrian conflict. It will go into depth of understanding how and why Syrian women refugees have been marginalized because of their sex, both, within Syria as well as the host countries they migrated to: Turkey, Lebanon, and Germany. The study will discuss these major questions with a combination of relevant quantitative data as well as some focus group interviews published by international organisations such as the United Nations as well as the individual host countries' government reports. The outcome of this study is to recognize where gender and empowerment lies amidst the Syrian conflict and the Syrian refugee crisis. Furthermore, in turn, how policy-makers of individual host countries as well as the ongoing Syrian peace process can better improve the inclusion of Syrian refugee women within the international migration framework.

Deutsch:

Diese Masterarbeit widmet sich den internationalen Migrationen syrischer Menschen, die seit dem syrischen Konflikt geflohen sind, und den geschlechtsspezifischen Herausforderungen für Frauen im Gegensatz zu Männern bei deren Fluchterfahrung. Ziel ist die eingehende Untersuchung syrischer Frauen, die auf der Flucht wegen ihres Geschlechts marginalisiert wurden, sowohl innerhalb Syriens als auch in den Aufnahmeländern: Türkei, Libanon und Deutschland. Die Studie wird diese wichtigen Fragen mit einer Kombination aus relevanten quantitativen Daten sowie einigen Fokusgruppeninterviews, die von internationalen Organisationen wie den Vereinten Nationen veröffentlicht wurden, sowie den Regierungsberichten der einzelnen Aufnahmeländer, diskutieren. Das Ergebnis der Studie ist ein besseres Verständnis von Gender und Empowerment inmitten des syrischen Konflikts und der Krisensituation in der syrische Frauen und Männer derzeit leben. Um zu verstehen, wie politische Entscheidungsträger*innen einzelner Aufnahmeländer sowie der laufende syrische Friedensprozess syrische Frauen auf der Flucht besser im internationalen Migrationsprozess betreuen können

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INTRODUCTION

Eleven years into the Syrian conflict, amongst many other humanitarian violations, Syrian women still struggle to voice their concerns as citizens, and as political, economic and civil society actors. In April 2018, Syrian women present at the male-dominated Brussels II Conference ‘Support the future of Syria and the region’ addressed this issue by explicitly illustrating that the negotiation and decision-making processes regarding the ‘future of Syria’ had failed to integrate women. It had failed to address their particular needs; even in regards to protection from violence.

Consequently, under the section of regional/development, the Conference agreed to the long term sustainable development of the Syrian matter. *‘It remains critical to support health and education, economic development, job creation and integration into labour markets, for both host communities and refugees, especially vulnerable groups such as women and youth.... It expressed support for targeted resilience programming and an increase in allocations to women and girls.’*¹ However, the question still remains to this date: why does gender inequality persist among Syrian migrants?

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/04/25/brussels-ii-conference-on-supporting-the-future-of-syria-and-the-region-co-chairs-declaration/>

Inside or outside Syria, the aftermaths of the Syrian conflict influence women constantly. Whether it is inside Syria being the majority target of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV); or at an EU-UN Conference discussing the sustainable development future of Syria; or even being a refugee/migrant to a host country, the persistence of gender inequality is ongoing.

Over the years, with the war still persistent with no appraisal towards an end, things are getting worse for the Syrian refugees – men, women, and children. *'More than 70 percent of Syrian refugees are living below the poverty line and an additional one million have been pushed into poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic'*.² Since December 2019, flooding and outbreaks of violence has displaced tens of thousands of Syrian families. Without any end foreseen, the UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi stated that it is *'the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time and a continuing cause for suffering'*.³ Presently, as of November 2021, approximately 5,675,340 million Syrian refugees have migrated out of Syria to host countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and North Africa.⁴ In the case of the internally displaced people (IDPs), people that have migrated within Syria, the approximate numbers recorded have reached 6.2 million – 2.5 million of which are children.⁵ According to this UNHCR record, IDPs are among the world's most vulnerable people while those in Syria are believed to be the biggest internally displaced population in the world.⁶

Currently, the eleven year prolonged crisis has exacerbated the hardships of Syrian women and girls with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Effects of the virus increased risks for people within the country (IDPs) as well as for refugees settled in neighboring host countries. According to UN Women, *'12 million people in Syria require urgent humanitarian assistance and around 4 million depend on cross-border aid. Some 5.7 million Syrians have fled and are now residing in countries throughout the region. Of those who need humanitarian aid, half are women and girls. Syrian women have higher rates of poverty than men; they face increased risk of gender-based violence; and they*

² <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people>

⁶ Ibid.

shoulder the responsibility of caring for their children and other family members. The rapid spread of COVID-19 is further increasing the risks faced by women'.⁷

According to the UN's Syria Commission of Inquiry, SGBV is a traditional war tactic deemed to instill fear and humility as well as to maintain the social order in the society.⁸ This conflict has increased gender inequalities and the numerous risks of violence for both women and men, though excessively for women and girls. The conflict has created a culture in which violence against women has become an accepted norm. The consequential results of such a culture has worsened the political, economic and social position of women and girls. It has been estimated that 75 percent of young internally displaced girls, living in camps, can no longer go to school due to the risk of sexual violence (GBV voices, 2017: p. 26). This damage clearly expands inequality to other sectors; such as women's engagement in the political processes, women's empowerment through access to the labour markets, and their financial independence.

GENDER EQUALITY

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a person's sex, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation play a huge role in all steps of the migration experience.⁹ This is because gender influences many reasons for migrating. It makes basic migratory decisions as for example, who migrates and where, how people migrate and what networks they use, what opportunities are available at the destinations for these people, and what relations does the destination country have with the country of origin. Aspects such as people's needs, and the possible risks and vulnerabilities involved while migrating is shaped by gender. As gender has such a powerful role in international migration patterns, it has become crucial to understand the relationship between the two to improve migration decisions and regulations for all persons.

But first, what is gender? The term 'gender' can be defined as *'the constitutive element of social relationships, and particularly relationships of power, based on perceived differences between the sexes'* (Scott 1986). Primarily, 'gender' helps categorize men

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/op-ed-joint-women-at-the-centre-of-syria-crisis-response>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=22833&LangID=E>

⁹ <https://www.iom.int/node/102774>

and women's behaviors, so as to institutionalize these gender roles into laws and regulations. The popular notion from this social construct is that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' demonstrate what roles 'men' and 'women' are assigned and what roles they are expected to deliver (Schrover and Moloney, 2013: 12).

By linking the impacts different sexes have in terms of migration, this paper entails that, overall, women and girls find it disproportionately more difficult to exercise their human rights than men in similar circumstances. The socially constructed norms about gender roles differently affect the abilities of both men and women when it comes to accessing the economic, social, and political resources. The disproportionality is worsened under crisis situations – the Syrian conflict and the resulting crisis for refugees. Such crises situations add up to the many differences both gender are already facing in their daily life. These new additions, to the already existent disproportions, come with a lot more vulnerability. The forms of violence and hardships are now further aggravated, leaving women under increased risks of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, mutilation, and even death (Lomazzi, 2016: 56). On the other hand, men are at higher risks of forced recruitment in armed groups. Assessing these gender-dependent challenges, it is understood that gender equality is a fundamental element that needs to be included while dealing with a humanitarian crisis (Syrian conflict).

Firstly, this paper will be contrasting gender equality within the Syrian conflict by focusing on the challenges and experiences faced by the female internally displaced persons (IDPs). Secondly, it will move on to contrast gender equality between the different host countries (Turkey, Lebanon, and Germany). This comparison will be done by assessing the countries' on the institutional level (legislative and policy frameworks), and by focusing on the aspects that have direct detrimental effects on the lives of the Syrian women and their families. Following this, the paper will also analyze the experiences Syrian women refugees have faced through the many focus group interviews and surveys undergone by many international organizations, (UN Women, UNHCR, Amnesty International) to better understand their situation in host countries. Analyzing the experiences of women Syrian refugees in host countries is beneficial because gender cultures of each country are unique. These gender cultures impact the gender equality of Syrian refugee women in their host countries as well. It is not only the Syrian women who are experiencing cultural changes in their country of refuge, but the

host countries are also facing a new change in their communities with the arrival of refugees (a huge influx of refugees in the case of Turkey and Lebanon).

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF THE 21st CENTURY

Just like the UN-EU Brussels II Conference of 2018, Syrian women are greatly outnumbered in numerous UN-led political conferences focused on discussing the future of the Syrian conflict or the Syrian migrants. Is this because half of the Syrian population is unable to fruit the opportunities of education and, in turn, a place in delegations and conferences due to the constant fear of SGBV nurtured within their society? Or is it an outcome of ignorance towards women rights and development, and the inability to consider them different from that of children rights and men rights? This brings us to the question; is the international migration system designed to acknowledge the vast concerns of migrant women as well as the internally displaced women?

One concerning observation regarding the UNHCR statistics under the topic of the Syrian crisis is the lack of focus towards the issues and concerns of women as a unit of their own. This can be foreseen in statements such as *'an estimated 13 million people need humanitarian assistance and more than half of the population remains displaced from their homes - including 6.6 million refugees living in neighboring countries and another 6.7 million internally displaced inside Syria. Women and children comprise more than two-thirds of those displaced'*.¹⁰ Notice that the women are only referred to in a category of 'women and children'. This assumes that both the two are the same unit within the Syrian crisis and have similar issues and needs within the crisis; deeming their association together to be feasible. The same is the case with statements of the UNFPA, often critiqued by feminist scholars. Women are found to be the majority of those displaced by the Syrian crisis. Yet, to this date, no exact figures are known. The UNFPA itself states that about 78% of those displaced are women (UNFPA 2014). However, the accuracy of this stated figure is skeptical because it stirs both women and children in the same bowl.

¹⁰ <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

According to Monica Boyd (2003), during the 1960s and 1970s, women were incorporated in the dynamics of international migration under the statement '*migrants and their families*'. This again clearly proves that the integration of women within international migration as an entity of its own was invisible. The women were considered as an extension of male migrants. They were foreseen only as wives, mothers, or daughters – a relationship withheld from male migrants. This paper finds this phase of the international migration intriguing and delves deeper into the effects and aftermaths such social constructs have had on policies and processes of international migration – especially for Syrian refugees. The social constructs are primarily created by ideologies that have given more weightage to the causes of international migration rather than the composition of migrant individuals (Boyd, 2003). A result of this emphasis is the failure of addressing the gender-specific migration experiences. '*Without clear theoretical underpinnings, it becomes difficult to explain, for example, the conditions under which women migrate, or the predominance of women in certain labor flows and not in others*' (Boyd, 2003). At the time (1980s and 1990s), the social construction of gender within international migration was not focused enough on the individual decisions of men and women. Rather, gender was seen as a fundamental principle capable of inspiring migration and migration-related process such as emigrating to and adapting into a new country, keeping previous connections from the country of origin, and considering returning back to the country of origin.

This trajectory of international migration continued with an active acknowledgment of the lack of women's integration in the 1970s and 1980s. At this phase, women began to be included in the discourse of international migration; making a dramatic shift in its trajectory. The main focus on women, at this point, was examining whether the active integration of women as an entity of their own has led to the modernization of women. It questioned whether such a reform contributed to liberating women from their traditional and socially constructed obligations. According to Hania Zlotnik (2003), up until the 1970s, the world of international migration primarily focused on male migrants or simply stuck to their assumption that most migrants are male. This assumption was majorly made due to the old and prevalent social constructs that international migration is a route chosen under consideration of the economic aspects of one's life, and, the presence of women in an international labor migration is insignificant. Zlotnik further elaborated that this belief was not evidenced by statistical proof. The lack of quantitative

evidence available to prove the lack of women participation in the international labor migration (considered insignificant or negligible) is due to the fact that the population census data on international migration was never classified by sex back in the 1960s and 1970s as it is now.

It is only in recent times that comprehensive global estimates have been given consideration and have been able to demonstrate an estimation of female international migration. Consequently, the first set ever to be released was in 1998 by the United Nations Population Division. In Table 1, below, the data contains estimates for the time period between 1965-1990 where it was then quantitatively evidenced that in 1960 *'female migrants already accounted for 47 out of every 100 migrants living outside of their countries of birth'* (Zlotnik, 2003). As far as developed countries are concerned, the right to family reunification, as well as the social and economic situation of their societies, has attracted more female migrants to transfer. The variety of educational and employment opportunities in the developed region has always been an attractive factor for migrant women. In addition to this, the oil-rich countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as the countries of the Pacific Rim in Eastern and South-eastern Asia, have been the major destinations for women labor migrants. Additionally, ever since 1980, the proportion of women migrants within the international migration system has been increasing. By 2000, women migrants in Eastern and South-eastern Asia had risen to 50.1 percent. This clearly proves that the region had become female-dominated by surpassing the proportion of male migrants. In the case of Western Asia, by 2000, the proportion of female migrants had again steadily risen up as compared to the previous years (48.3 percent), though it did not surpass the proportion of male migrants. Though the picture of female migrants transferring to these regions in pursuit of employment does sound ambitious and independent, it is important to note that not all female migrants were migrant workers. For instance, even before female contract migration became the norm in 1975, the increase in female international migration was already witnessed.

TABLE 1: Percentage of female migrants out of the total number of international migrants (1960-2000).

Major area	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
World	46.6	47.2	47.4	47.9	48.8
More developed regions	47.9	48.2	49.4	50.8	50.9
Less developed regions	45.7	46.3	45.5	44.7	45.7
Europe	48.5	48.0	48.5	51.7	52.4
Northern America	49.8	51.1	52.6	51.0	51.0
Oceania	44.4	46.5	47.9	49.1	50.5
Northern Africa	49.5	47.7	45.8	44.9	42.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	40.6	42.1	43.8	46.0	47.2
Southern Asia	46.3	46.9	45.9	44.4	44.4
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	46.1	47.6	47.0	48.5	50.1
Western Asia	45.2	46.6	47.2	47.9	48.3
Caribbean	45.3	46.1	46.5	47.7	48.9
Latin America	44.7	46.9	48.4	50.2	50.5

Source: Zlotnik. 2003

According to Zlotnik, *'already by 1975, the number of female migrants was significant, amounting to 43 percent of the foreign population in Kuwait, 33 percent of that in Saudi Arabia, about 30 percent of that in Bahrain, and 20 percent of all foreign migrants in the United Arab Emirates. Most of those female migrants were probably admitted as dependents of male migrant workers, although some may have been hired as teachers or nurses, or to work in other occupations reserved for women'* (Zlotnik, 2003). For Sub-Saharan Africa, the rise in the proportion of female migrants was corresponding to the rise in female refugees within the region. Starting in the 1990s, an increased number of female migrants among international migrants is foreseen (rising to 46 percent and steadily moving higher).

Even Bella Hovy (2003) has supported this observation by stating that while data on refugees categorized by age and sex were unavailable, the high fertility rate of women in the Sub-Saharan countries still made it reasonable to believe that the majority of refugee migrants found were women and children. *'In 90 percent of the larger refugee camps—the primary focus of humanitarian aid—the proportion of women varies between 45 and 55 percent. The percentage of children ranges from less than a quarter*

in Eastern Europe and in the Balkans to more than half in most of Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. In short, while most refugees are indeed women and children, the distribution by sex and age differs significantly between regions, countries and refugee scenarios' (Hovy, 2003).

Addressing the lack of data available with regards to categorizing refugees with age and gender, an improvement in data collection had become of utmost importance. And so, from the 1990s onwards, an increasing interest had begun in collecting data in order to focus better on refugee relief programs. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had taken a step forward in achieving this task. Data collection on refugees through individual registrations and population surveys paved the way. Once the UNHCR published data on accounts of gender, the female refugees in Africa were found to be half of all assisted refugees. This ensured that they were not at all overrepresented among the refugee population in the region, and rather, the data proposed a more gender and age-sensitive approach to the refugee relief programs. The special needs and assistance of refugee women and girls could now be adequately addressed. Furthermore, the programs could also cater to the skills, contributions, and roles of these female refugees as agents of change. *'The challenge is to integrate our gender awareness into an understanding of whether individual refugees—men or women—are in a situation that requires specific protection or assistance measures. The more rigorous data collection we have on age, health, education, special needs, and other social and demographic characteristics, the more effective programming can be'* (Hovy, 2003).

The migrant gender composition of the 21st century mostly inclines towards either a *'women-predominant'* (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015) or a gender-balanced frame. According to Donato and Gabaccia (2015), a migrant is he or she who can cross international borders or the ocean and is found in one of the four data sets they analyze. Under this definition, the authors were able to examine the migrant gender composition of the early 21st century while taking into account the age structure of different migrant populations. They called it the *'stock data analysis'* (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015). The method helped define the international migrants as people living outside their country of birth by drawing information from a variety of national censuses, and in turn, allowing to compare and contrast examination of the migrant gender compositions of both emigrant

and immigrant countries. While the data was taken from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS International and IPUMS-USA) made available by the Minnesota Population Center, the largest global data population source, it still is unable to examine the entire world factually. However, the data source specifies variables such as gender, nativity, as well as the age structure of both migrant genders. Additionally, apart from just the Western hemisphere, the data also provides the migrant gender compositions of other regions as well. And so, with this particular microdata set, Donato and Gabaccia (2015) were able to reveal that around 232 million people (3.1 percent of the world's population) are emigrants, living outside their country of birth. This statistics is supported by the UN Population Division as well because they claim that, '*the number of international migrants had reached 232 million globally in 2013 (UNDESA, Population Division, 2013); of the 59.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide in 2014, about 19.5 million are refugees and 1.8 million were asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2014)*'.¹¹

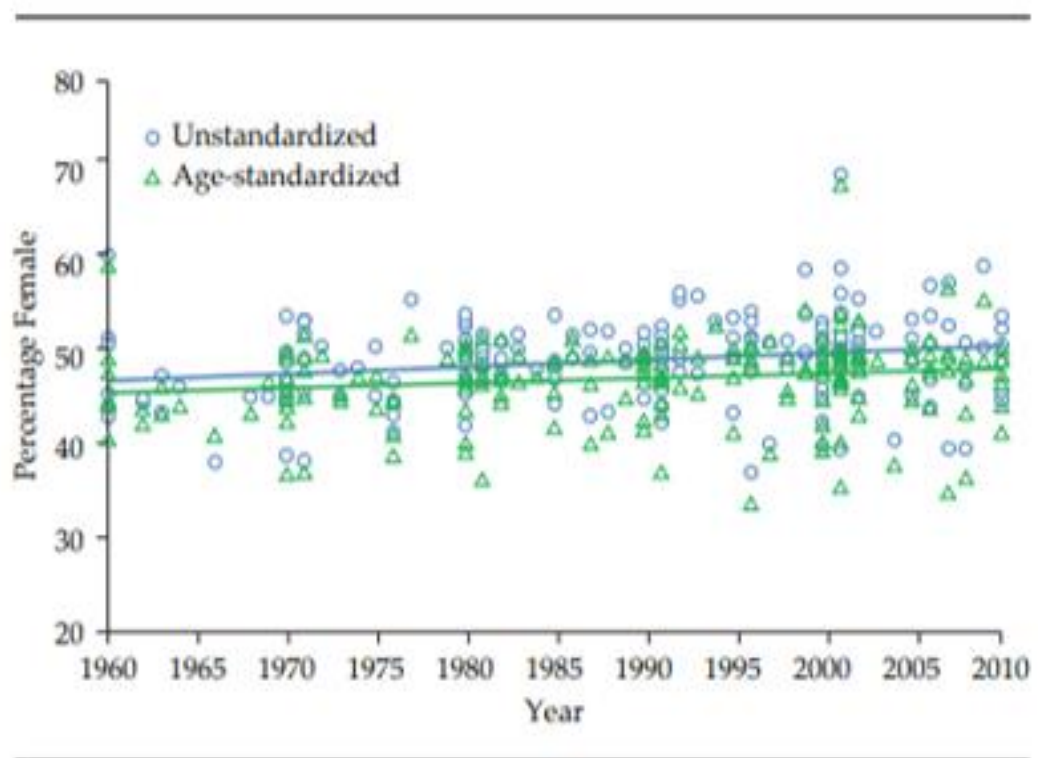
Another significant factor about the stock analysis of Donato and Gabaccia, unlike in other contemporary international migration reports, is the clear distinction between women and children. As the analysis relies significantly on variables such as gender, age, nativity, and national origin, the gender composition between the international migrants is examined by integrating migrants who are eighteen years and above into the analyses. The separation of women and children has given scholars the ability to identify whether the women migrants, under examination, are independent individuals or contingent on their male counterparts. While they are unable to go into depth regarding the understanding of individuality and independent living, the analysis is still able to take dependent children out of the equation of the international migrant gender composition. Due to these particular specifications in the data analysis, Donato and Gabaccia have been able to criticize other international migration reports. For instance, they referred to the adjacent gender migration reports by the United Nations to be immensely exaggerated. '*Without attending to the age structure of stock migrant populations, the United Nations (UN) and others have likely overestimated the degree of migrant feminization*' (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015: 122).

¹¹ https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/refugees_migrants_with_disabilities.html

Reviewing data from Figure 1, below, it can be concluded at best that, over the years, the overall variation in the migrant gender composition has been moderate.

'Standardized estimates of migrant gender composition are more conservative than unstandardized ones, and that the average temporal variation between 1960 and 2010 is modest at best' (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015: 129). The figure also proves the migrant gender composition or, in another view, the feminization of migration has been quite gender-balanced. While the standardized estimates, over the years, have fluctuated within the range of 47 percent to 48 percent, on the other hand, the unstandardized estimates have upgraded from a 48 percent towards a 50 percent. Furthermore, the trends in the figure also show a variety of variations in the migrant gender composition among nations.

Figure 1: Estimates of Gender Composition of Immigrant Populations (1960-2010)

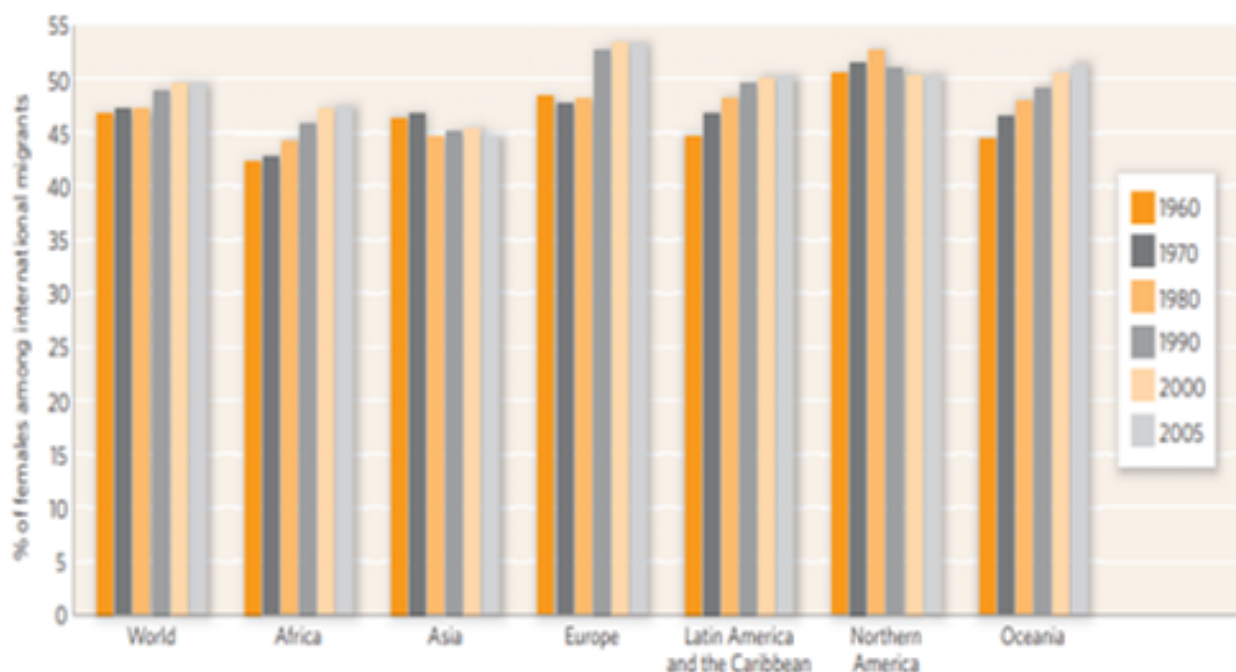


Source: Donato & Gabaccia, 2015: 130

This discussion of the feminization of migration to a global level is supported by the United Nations Population Fund (Figure 2, below). The trend portrays the percentages of women and girls in migration worldwide (continent/region) between 1960-2005. This quantitative evidence proves that ever since the acknowledgement of feminization in migration has been published (2006), we have noticed an ever increasing trend in the

migration of women to this day. The quantitative evidence in the figure demonstrates a worldwide increase of the composition of females as international/ foreign residents; 46.7 percent to 49.6 percent starting from 1960 till 2005. This increase of 2.9 percent is believed to be small as Zlotnik stated, *'Although this trend is consistent with an increasing 'feminization' of international migration, the increase recorded is small compared to the high level of feminization that already existed in 1960'* (Zlotnik, 2003).

Figure 2: Trends in Female Migration by Continent/Region (1960-2005)



Source: UNFPA, 2006: 22

However, the focus of this study is primarily to prove that women and girls have accounted for a high proportion in international migration. It is also important to clarify that the focus of these convergences over the span of 45 years are not towards relations between men and women migrants, but rather the overall growth of migrants and refugees of both sexes. *'Clearly, statistics are not what they used to be. The challenge is to understand their language so as to decipher the story that they are trying to tell'* (Zlotnik, 1984: 943).

Following Zlotnik's statement, it is important to say that just as women migrants have been increasing from 1960 to date, so have the male migrants. In conclusion to this figure, the UNFPA report proposes that the recent large numbers of both men and

women international migrants contribute to the current migration population. It further highlights that the percentage increase in mobile women has been evidenced to be quite *'modest'* (2.9 percent increase (UNFPA, 2006: 3). While this, for sure, has contributed largely to the gender balance in the 21st century, it should also be questioned that why did scientists and scholars pay such great attention to the feminization of migration despite such a low upward shift worldwide? One argument is that sociologists, historians, and theorists were too late to pick this up than demographers and statisticians. Gender for a long time was invisible in academic research on forced migration and refugees. Indra, for example, stated that early academic research on refugees gender was either not mentioned at all or was considered as *'just another variable like age or occupation. . . . Women's issues were still not well- publicized "refugee problems", and so little academic research on women was produced'* (Indra, 1989).

SYRIAN MIGRANTS

Following the footsteps of the feminization of international migration, many have resonated with the concepts of gender inequality within Syrian migrants as well. According to the UNHCR (2016), women and children account for 78.6 percent of Syrian refugees. This makes around 22 percent of the Syrian refugees to be men between the age of 18 and 59 while the rest of the 52.7 percent is dominated by women and children (under the age of 17). Firstly, reviewing the statistics of Syrian refugees immediately cancels out the concurrent misconceptions that the majority of refugees leaving Syria are young male migrants of fighting age. Secondly, it directs us towards the reality that the majority of Syrian refugees, women, and children, are the most vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. These forms of violence are found, both, within Syria as well as outside of Syria while on their journeys to the host countries. According to the UN Commission of Inquiry, the increased forms of SGBV had become one of the major reasons for family displacements by stating that *'fear of rape is a driving motivation for families fleeing the violence'* (UNHRC 2013: 91). Thirdly, as discussed earlier, it is important to note that not a lot of data and its analysis is available regarding the number of Syrian women that have been displaced, both, nationally and internationally. While Syrian women displaced within Syria are part of the internally displaced people (IDPs), Syrian women migrating outside of Syria are defined

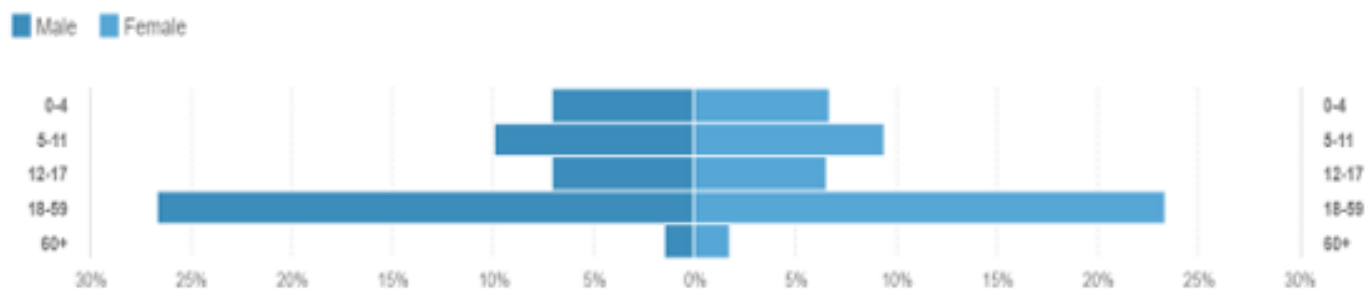
as Syrian refugees. In order to better understand the dynamics of the SGBV amid Syria, it is quite essential to know exactly how many an approximate number of women as well as an approximate number of children are being struck in hostile situations. Having said this, clearly, statements such as that made by the UNHCR, combining women and children under the same percentage, are clearly not enough.

In the case of Syrian female refugees, the UNHCR has been able to identify them out of the 5 million registered Syrian refugees. According to Figure 3, below, 47.6 percent of the registered Syrian refugees are female and the majority of them are between the ages of 18 and 59. Though looking at these statistics, it can clearly be understood that Syrian male refugees outnumber Syrian female refugees. However, the difference is only 2.4 percent. This makes the gender composition of Syrian refugees more close to a gender balance than a '*male predominant*' one (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015: 9).

According to Donato and Gabaccia, the terms '*female predominant*' and '*male predominant*' help portray more numeric implications to the composition so as to avoid any unintentional assumptions that greater numbers exhibit more power. The terms are used so as not to say that gender relations include power as the study of how and why relative numbers of male and female migrants empower one another is a completely different and complicated assessment of its own. And so, the term '*predominant*' helps keep the focus of the analysis numeric. Additionally, by keeping the terms '*male predominant*' and '*female predominant*' in mind, feminization can be defined '*as a shift from the first to the second category and masculinization—which is almost never discussed—a shift from the second to the first category* (2015: 9). Analyzing the composition of the registered Syrian refugees as gender-balanced also goes hand in hand with the conceptions of Donato and Gabaccia. This is because the focus of their findings is influenced by a feminine perspective. '*We also define male-predominant migrations as less than 47 percent female and female-predominant migrations as greater than 53 percent female*' (2015: 9). As the registered Syrian female refugees account for 47.6 percent of the total registered Syrian refugees, it is safe to say that this is a gender-balanced migration scenario. Moreover, It is also important to note that refugees who are not registered with the UNHCR, or who presumably have lost their registration and rather have become irregular residents in the neighboring countries are even more so marginalized and vulnerable. Syrian women refugees with irregular status

are more susceptible to SGBV as they are not able to rely on any of the authorities or organizations for protection.

Figure 3: Registered Syrian Refugees (Total urban, Peri urban, and Rural population)



SOURCE: UNHCR, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

As with other refugee situations such as the Syrian IDPs, there is a lack of sex-disaggregated data. Firstly, the reason is partly due to the fact that the circumstances within Syria are very complicated, making the process of data collection difficult. However, during the initial stages of registration in several countries, data was collected by a conversation with the presumed head of household who was often a man (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014). In the case of data gathering in the Za'atari refugee camps in Jordan, it was reported that data gathering and passing of information was organized through a structure of 'street leaders' who were mostly men. Thus, the women were excluded from the entire flow of data gathering and information sharing (Freedman et al, 2017). Though the UNHCR and other international organizations, as well as NGOs, have made various intentions to take gendered needs in the Syrian crisis under consideration while arranging for the Syrian refugees, in reality not enough efforts have been made in achieving this pledge. Gendered needs within the Syrian crisis are yet to be fully addressed. For instance, a study by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) pointed out that '*certain populations receive less attention and less access to programs, including the elderly, women and girls living outside the camps, people with disabilities and sexual minorities*' (WRC, 2014: 1). And so, though the UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations have done a remarkable job in demonstrating gender mainstreaming for the whole crisis, however, in reality, this demonstration has only been found, either, as rhetoric or in common policy-making, while being mostly absent in real implementations on the ground (2014:3).

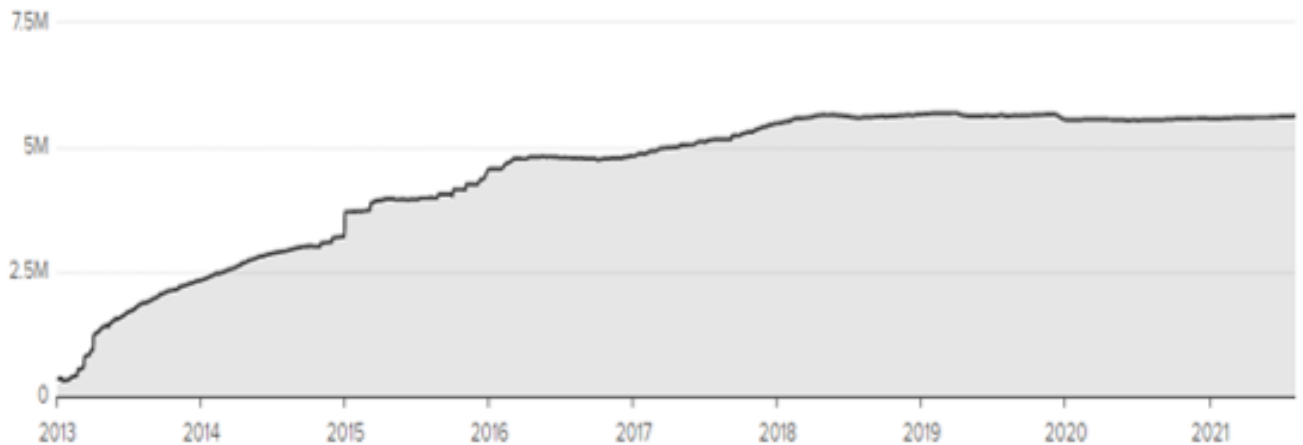
The gender composition of Syrian refugees is not the only source indicating the high number of Syrian women refugees. After reviewing the rising curve of Syrian displacement, over the years, it can again be made certain that the number of female Syrian refugees is steadily increasing over the years. According to Figure 4, below, as the Syrian conflict began in 2011, an alarming number of Syrian refugees was only made visible at the beginning of 2013 when it reached one million. In July 2012, the popular Za'atari refugee camp was established in Jordan and by March 2013 it was found providing for up to one million Syrian refugees escaping Syria. By August 2013, the total number of Syrian refugees was 1.9 million among which just over 1 million were accounted as children that had fled Syria. At the same time, *'spike in arrivals of Syrian Kurd refugees in northern Iraq, including almost 50,000 in a two-week period'*¹². Up until 2018, this alarming number of Syrian refugees was foreseen steadily increasing to a mountainous size and reaching approximately 5.5 million. Ever since 2018 to date, this substantial number of Syrian refugees has remained approximately 5.5 million. As millions of Syrians had been fleeing Syria over these years, the situation within Syria had been disintegrating continuously as well. According to the UNDP, about 80% of Syrians were living under poverty in 2015 while the life expectancy had hit a major low by declining to about 20 years (Ferris and Kirisci, 2016: 26). In addition, as of September 2017, approximately six million have been found internally displaced inside their own country - also defined as the internally displaced people (IDP)¹³. Of this number, only 12% of the people are residing in last resort sites which includes planned camps, informal settlements, transit centers as well as collective centers (schools, warehouses, and residential buildings). Due to this large influx of displacement within the country, almost all communities in Syria have taken in displaced people, exhausting the economy of the whole country and reducing all these communities to poverty levels. Simultaneously, a lot of strain has been put into the limited resources, infrastructure, as well as economic opportunities. This can be supported by the fact that in 2016 *'unemployment rate increased from 49% to 57% (compared to 10% in 2011)'*.¹⁴

¹² <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/5245a72e6.pdf>

¹³ https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/books/2017-2018/20180601_101_facts_and_figures_on_syrian_refugee_crisis.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/library/UNDP_SYRIA_ANNUAL_REPORT_2016.html

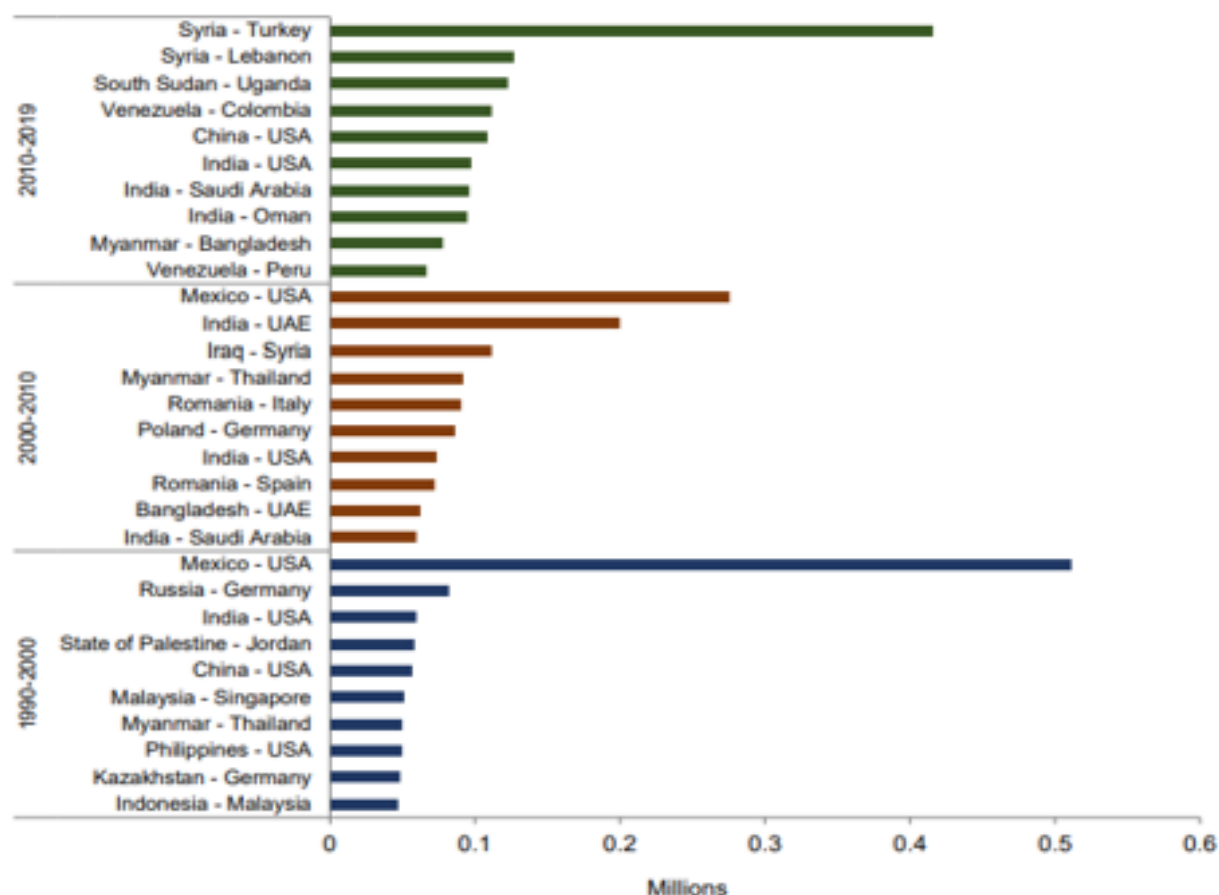
Figure 4: Rising number of Syrian refugees (2013-2021)



Source: UNHCR, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

According to the 2019 International Migration Report, the top ten bilateral migration corridors with the largest increase consisted of refugee movements between the years 2010-2019. The Syrian Arab Republic plays a major role in this trend as so many refugees (or people) are leaving the country. After reviewing data from Figure 5, below, it can clearly be noted that the bilateral migrations between Syria-Turkey as well as Syria-Lebanon are the greatest contributions to the annual increase of international migrants between 2010-2019. This points out the fact that the humanitarian crisis resulting from the Syrian war has entailed serious devastations that clearly need to be addressed as a priority. It can also be assessed that prior to the Syrian Crisis of 2011, the Syrian Arab Republic was rather one of the top ten immigrant countries, hosting migrants from Iraq in its territory. The huge shift from one of the top immigrant countries for Iraqi migrants (2000-2010) to the top emigrant country (2010-2019) of refugees demonstrates that the Syrian crisis has resulted in drastic economic and humanitarian situations for the country.

Figure 5: Ten bilateral migration corridors with largest annual increase in the number of international migrants (millions)



Source: International Migration Report, 2019: 12

THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

Prior to the Syrian crisis (before 2011), many countries in the Middle East as well as other regions have received substantial amounts of Syrian immigrants in different periods of time (Chalcraft, 2009; Gualteri, 2004; Hourani and Shehadi, 1992). Both political and economic motivations have influenced these emigration decisions from Syria. In regards to political environment of Syria, many people chose to move out of the country as they felt political oppression and insecurity (Beitin, 2012; Fargues and Fandrich, 2012). According to Pinar Yazgan et al. (2015), the country had been unstable ever since its foundation due to the many military coups it has experienced. Since its first ever coup d'état in 1949, Syria had experienced more than 20 military interventions making the political environment of the country unstable and insecure (Beshara, 2013: 21).

With regards to the economic motivations, there were strong opportunities for the Syrians to mark a new start to other regions. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, most emigrations from Arab countries was mainly towards Europe and USA and in the case of emigrating to the Middle Eastern region, Lebanon was already quite a popular choice for Syrians (Yazgan et al., 2015: 185). This is because the Lebanon's close proximity to Syria always made the visa process easier for Syrian workers to emigrate (Winckler, 1997: 109). Also, in the 1970s, as the job opportunities in the Middle Eastern oil producing countries increased, the intra-regional migration was also strengthened. Due to a labor shortage in Lebanon as a result of the 1975-1989 civil, the highest influx of Syrian workers was found here (MPC Team, 2013). Following Lebanon, the Gulf countries had also become a major attraction due to the vast economic opportunities. According to the Syrian government source, in 2007 Syria had received two billion dollars of remittance from Syrian expatriates signifying that remittance had become a significant part of the Syrian economy (Seeberg, 2012: 10).

Foreseeing these events, many have argued that up until 2011, the primary reason for Syrian emigration had been economic motivations (Yazgan et al., 2015: 185). However, the advent of 2011 considerably shifted both, the volume as well as the nature of migration from Syria. The popular uprising against the dictatorship of Bashar Al-Assad had many Syrians coming to the streets to protest. The political tensions had come to a breaking point and the response of the government is what lead to the start of the Syrian conflict.

Essentially, the focus of this paper is not about the internal Syrian conflict, and neither is it about the politics of the conflict. However, it is still paramount to understand the conflict through which the concurrent Syrian displacement has transpired. Thus, this section intends to give a brief overview of the Syrian conflict.

Escalating in March 2011, the Syrian civil war began with peaceful protests against the government of the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2011, many revolutionaries had risen all across the Middle East. The enthusiasm for revolution began in Tunisia, once the president, Zein El Abidine Ben Ali, fled the country. While the president surely had left, this regime was still intact. However, over time, the regime had intertwined with many radical Islamist supporters. Once known as the most liberal Islamic state in the Middle

East, the rotation in Tunisia had led women to wear headscarves as a way of portraying conservative and traditional values. Very soon, these anti-governmental protests had spread from Tunisia to what famously became known as the 'Arab Spring' – a wave of protests and uprising spreading in Arab-speaking countries in, both, Middle East and North Africa regions. It gave hope for women to raise their voice and improve their status.

In response to the peaceful demonstrations in Syria, the government of Syria, the Bashar Al-Assad regime violently attacked and oppressed the demonstrations. By 2012, the conflict had turned into a civil war between the government and rebel forces. In addition, amidst this civil war there arose many sectarian differences as well. These include the Sunni, Shia and Alawite sects as well as Jihadist groups. Today, the war in Syria includes even more actors, inclining towards a kind of proxy war. Now, the actors in the Syrian crisis include Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah who are directly supporting the regime of Al-Assad. Russia has also been involved militarily on the grounds of Syria by the end of 2015. On the other hand, the supporters of some Sunni rebel groups include the USA, UK, France, other Western states, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan.

While China and Russia have blocked all efforts of the UN Security Council to sanction Assad's regime, all efforts on peace talks have presumably failed and the only somewhat progress made has been on limiting Syria's chemical weapons and allowing cross-border aid. The IS had been an active actor in the Syrian conflict ever since 2014. At this point in time, Al Qaeda decided to serve ties with the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) as ISIS had successfully seized vast distances of territories in Syria and Iraq. By June 2014, the group changed its name to IS, had declared a caliphate, and Raqqa became their capital.

According to Ferris and Kirisci, *'The war is metastasizing in ways that draw in regional and other international actors, erase boundaries and give rise to a single, transnational arc of crisis. The opposition increasingly resembles a Sunni coalition in which a radicalized Sunni street, Islamist networks, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Gulf states and Turkey take leading roles. The pro-regime camp encompassing Iran, Hezbollah, Iraq and Iraqi Shiite militants, likewise appears to be a quasi-confessional alliance'* (2016:28).

In 2017, the Astana process (peace talks sponsored by Russia, Iran, and Turkey) took place between the Syrian government and the opposition forces. The US officials had viewed these peace talks as good strategy to avoid the ongoing UN-sponsored talks at Geneva. However, the efforts of these initiated peace talks easily failed as, in April, a sarin gas attack was initiated by the Syrian forces on the town of Khan Sheikhoun, killing approximately 80-100 people (CRS, 2021: 2). The US, in response to this attack, launched cruise missile strikes on a Syrian military airfield. Even though the approval of this counter-attack had not been authorized by the Congress, Donald Trump in his defense stated that he had acted *'pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive'* (CRS, 2021). Later on, in October, the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) managed to capture the Islamic State (IS) capital; Raqqa, while the US officials announced that around 2,000 US personnel were operating in Syria (CRS, 2021).

The following year, 2018, also went by without any luck in terms of banning the use of chemical weapons. This time, Turkey and its Syrian opposition allies launched Operation Olive Branch. This was the second time a military operation had been launched in North-West Syrian and its aim was to target the Kurdish forces. The attack also led to a manpower drain from the SDF forces that were engaged in countering the IS operations in Eastern Syria. At this point, US had declared the Syrian conflict to have fallen under the Syrian regime's favor (CRS, 2021). This is presumably because in April, a chlorine gas attack by the Syrian military forces took place, instigating British, French, and US missile strikes on three chemical weapon storage and research sites. However, their counter attack failed as, by the end of 2018, the Syrian government had recaptured most areas that were previously taken by the opposition forces.

In the case of the SDF capturing the IS territories, the final territory was taken over by March 2019. Along with the seizure, the SDF forces took 12,000 IS fighters in custody as well as well over 60,000 IS family members (CRS, 2021). While the IS fighters were placed in temporary prisons, their families had been held in camps organized for the internally displaced persons (IDPs). Following this, in October, the US attack also killed the IS leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. However, even after the defeat of the IS, the US troops still remained concerned over the group stating that these IS detainees are *'one of the most significant risks to the success of the [defeat-ISIS] mission'* (CRS, 2021). As

for the Turkish-led forces, in October 2019, Operation Peace Spring had begun. Its intention was to expel the US-backed Kurdish forces from North-central Syria so to term the area as a 'safe zone'. The trump administration after withdrawing US forces from this area, repositioned them to the Eastern Syria Security Area (ESSA) with 600 troops left in Syria (CRS, 2021).

As of 2021, the Turkish-led forces still remain in the 'safe zone' as well as the other borders areas they have previously seized. The IS remains as a low-level insurgency in Syria and Iraq while the US troops still remain in the ESSA region as well as the At-Tanf Garrison in the south-east. The US forces remain in Syria so as to counter any possible IS fragments by supporting their local Syrian partners (such as SDF). They believe their absence would lead the SDF to, eventually, seek protection from the Syrian regime (US's opponent) from any possible Turkish-backed offenses.

REFUGEE CRISIS

Upon the start of the civil war, Syrians began to escape the sites of the bombing and repression. In March 2012, the first group of Syrian refugees migrated to the impoverished Belka Valley in Lebanon. By July 2012, the infamous Za'atari refugee camp was established in Jordan near the Syrian border. Though, initially, it was designed as a temporary refugee camp, the area has now become home for tens of thousands of Syrian refugees over the past eleven years. Ultimately, in August 2012, the UN announced the Syrian government and its opposition forces to be responsible for war crimes in Syria. The war crimes included murder, extra judicial killings and torture, and blatant violations of the international human rights such as unlawful killing, sexual and gender-based violence, and attacks against the civilians. At this point, approximately 17,000 Syrians, mostly civilians, had been killed and the rival actors were also found responsible for the killing of 100 civilians in the town of Houla (half of which were children).¹⁵ As a result of such tragic incidents, at the end of 2012, the first Regional Response Plan (RRP) for Syrian refugees was initiated by the UNHCR and its partners. This allowed neighboring countries of Syria (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt) to host 500,000 Syrian refugees.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/08/417632-syrian-government-and-opposition-forces-responsible-war-crimes-un-panel>

¹⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-refugees-idUKBRE8BA09O20121211>

Throughout 2013, the Syrian conflict was found only to further escalate. The violation of international human rights had risen to alarming levels, and by March 2013 Syrian refugees had totaled one million. In addition to this, by August 2013, approximately over 20,000 Syrian refugees were found fleeing to the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq while Germany and Sweden become the first countries in the EU to resettle Syrian refugees. While Germany hosted approximately 5000 refugees into its state¹⁷, Sweden offered to provide them permanent residency. Ultimately, the huge influx to all these countries resulted in the total number of Syrian refugees reaching another million. 2013 ended its years with a total of two million Syrian refugees while Bulgaria began to build a barbed wire fence across its border with Turkey to control the entry of Syrian refugees into Europe. *'More than 18,000 refugees, mainly from Syria's civil war, have crossed the border from Turkey to seek asylum in Bulgaria in the past two years. The impact was dramatic. The number of known illegal crossings fell to about 4,000 in 2014 from 11,000 the previous year'*.¹⁸

Since the beginning of this civil war, war crimes, use of chemical weapons, and war tactics such as starvation as well as SGBV have emerged and intensified. In the case of the humanitarian crisis, the humanitarian needs keep increasing to substantial levels, but simultaneously, access to the people in need also becomes difficult for aid groups. By April 2014, Lebanon was found hosting one million Syrian refugees within its states, accounting as one sixth of the country's population.¹⁹ At this point, one in four people in Lebanon were refugees.²⁰ Jihadist groups such as ISIS have also uprooted within Syria. Even more so, in June 2014, the so-called Islamic State capitalized on the chaos and took large regions of Syria and Iraq, proclaiming the creation of a 'caliphate'. The many foreign fighters of ISIS became involved in a 'war within a war' in Syria, battling, both, the Jihadist rebels from the Al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusraa Front as well as the government and Kurdish forces.²¹ Assessing the 'war within a war' situation it is important to note that a lot of the Syrian minorities are a part of this conflict. *'Syria has been one of the most religiously diverse countries in the Middle East, and the increasingly sectarian tone of the civil war, combined with military gains by ISIS and al-Nusra, sparked growing fears for the fate of Syria's minorities'* (Ferris and Kirisci, 2016:

¹⁷ <https://www.iom.int/news/germany-offers-temporary-stay-5000-syrian-refugees>

¹⁸ <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/bg-border-fence.htm>

¹⁹ <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/syrians-lebanon-border-controls-un-refugee>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

1). It is noted that 65 percent of the Syrian population were Arab Sunni Muslims. The rest are Christians, Alawites, Druze, Ismailis and most of these groups support the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. The largest Syrian minority is the Sunni Muslim Kurds and they too, just like the Sunni majority, are in favor of overthrowing the Syrian government. As ISIS takes over parts of Syria, again many Syrians flee the country. Exhausted by the existing numbers of Syrian refugees within its territory, Jordan now refuses entry to refugees. While entry to Jordan is banned, 400,000 Syrian refugees flee to Turkey for safety. In March 2015, exhausted by this huge influx of Syrian refugees, Turkey too closed its border for incoming refugees.

The year 2015 was faced with a 'refugee crisis' in Europe. EU member states found themselves 'pressured' by Syrian refugees and migrants entering EU borders. Famously known as the year of Europe's 'refugee crisis', hundreds of thousands of people had fled across the Mediterranean Sea to escape war and persecution. In April 2015, approximately 700 of these migrants were found presumably dead in the Mediterranean shipwreck.²² With strict travel restrictions while entering the EU and the reinstated 'refugee crisis' in Europe, the most common option for Syrian refugees to enter EU states was through smuggling. However, the informal migration processes always left these Syrian refugees under serious dangers. Italian coastguards had found 28 survivors and about 20 bodies, while the rest of the 700 people are believed to have drowned in the journey just after leaving Libyan waters.²³ Following this tragic month, the Lebanese government, in May 2015, condemned the UNHCR from registering incoming Syrian refugees and only permitted entry through visas.²⁴ The main route had now shifted from the lethal Mediterranean crossing from Libya to Turkey to an even deadlier route; Turkey to the Greek Island of Lesbos. With the large numbers of refugees entering Lesbos, Greece demanded immediate EU assistance as financial aid is no longer enough and rather other resources such as man power, transport buses, border guard support on its Aegean Island shores, as well as equipment for registration centres is also essential to register the incoming Syrian refugees.²⁵

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/19/700-migrants-feared-dead-mediterranean-shipwreck-worst-yet>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/syrians-lebanon-border-controls-un-refugee>

²⁵ <https://democracychronicles.org/the-refugee-crisis/>

With the huge numbers of Syrian refugees found entering Europe, Hungary begins to build razor-wire fences along its border with Serbia. As of July 2015, Syrian refugees have totaled to four million. As 50,000 Syrian refugees enter the economically troubled Greece,²⁶ it becomes undesirable for migrants to refuge in for long terms. Upon the move of 39,000 refugees from Greece to Macedonia, a state of emergency is declared. Once in Macedonia, they either take trains or partner up with people to be smuggled to Serbia from where entry to Hungary becomes a good chance.²⁷

Meanwhile, Austria was faced with the refrigeration truck incident. 71 bodies were found abandoned in a truck near the Austrian border with Hungary.²⁸ This is a good example of how the informal tactic of smuggling refugees is not always a reliable source for Syrian refugees to migrate, although most times it is the only option left to seek refuge in any of the EU member states. According to UNHCR's Melissa Fleming, *'this tragedy also highlights the desperation of people seeking protection or a new life in Europe. UNHCR hopes this incident will result in strong cooperation among European police forces, intelligence agencies and international organisations to crack down on the smuggling trade while putting in place measures to protect and care for victims'*.²⁹ Following this tragedy, the UNHCR also urged EU member states to look past calling the influx of Syrian refugees as Europe's 'refugee crisis' and, rather, approach Syria's refugee crisis with cooperation by providing those seeking refuge with safer and legal migration options rather than the one just witnessed.

In response to the tragic aftermaths of refugee journeys to Europe, Germany and Austria finally opened borders for refugees especially after the shocking images of the little boy, Aylan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach stirred people worldwide. In September 2015, Hungary closed its border with Serbia after completing the fence while groups of Syrian refugees, unhappy with the poor quality conditions in the Hungarian camps, fled to Austria on foot. However, upon opening the border to Syrian refugees, Germany also introduced emergency border controls with Austria and temporarily suspended its Schengen obligations. At this point, Germany was expecting one million

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/08/21/how-macedonia-became-the-latest-front-in-europes-migrant-crisis/>

²⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/8/55e06ff46/bodies-found-dead-truck-near-border-asylum-seekers-flow-hungary.html>

²⁹ Ibid.

asylum seekers.³⁰ At the end of 2015, approximately 490,280 Syrians had arrived Europe by sea.³¹

The EU has always made it difficult to enter through controlled borders, as a result, many refugees arriving through sea lost their lives in the process. As discussed earlier, after the huge number of arrivals on the coasts of Italy and Greece (just like in many other nations neighboring Syria) Europe was quick to label this a 'migration crisis'. Apparently, the influx of migrants in 2015 is not the first time that the European leaders have identified migration as a crisis. This is because the term 'crisis' was already employed in 2011, when migration increased following the Arab Spring uprisings (Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, 2014). While the use of the term 'crisis' may sound banal, it is important to note that the labelling is still setting a very strong political and symbolic stance to the entire situation. This signals the situation to be '*different from the political and social issues we routinely confront*' and gives the implication that it came about for reasons outside of the control of political leaders (Edelman, 1977: 44).

Following this, EU leaders have repeatedly stressed upon the 'unusual nature' of the flow of refugees reaching Europe and declared the causes of migration to be out of their hands. By invoking the situation as a crisis, they have appropriately justified their exceptional measures (such as the closing of borders as well as the mass returns of migrants) which can be seen contrary to what the international and European law entails. With the crisis, the EU has been continuously imposing stricter security on European migrations and, at the same time, focusing on humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict rather than a political one. Due to such enforcements, many have criticized the EU for not doing enough to support the neighboring states of Syria, and to offer protection to those seeking refuge in Europe. Along with closing borders, the EU has also not made enough success in its regional resettlement agreements. For instance, in Hungary the refugees were trapped in a train station under substandard conditions.³² The situation made for such devastating living conditions that many refugees protested and tried to walk to Austria instead. Most importantly, in April 2015, the European Council had also held a special meeting in response to the crisis situation in the Mediterranean. Under this meeting, they acknowledged the situation to be a

³⁰ <https://hazards.colorado.edu/article/timeline-refugee-crisis-from-may-2011-february-2016>

³¹ <https://www.unicef.ie/stories/timeline-syrian-war-refugee-crisis/>

tragedy and promised to take immediate measures by strengthening the EU's presence at sea, fighting against traffickers, preventing illegal migration (smuggling), and reinforcing international solidarity and responsibility.³³

Entering 2016, the 'refugee crisis' in Europe continued. In March, in order to prevent more refugees from entering Europe, the EU agreed on a deal with Turkey. Under this EU-Turkey deal, all irregular migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey were sent back. Asylum seekers arriving in Europe from a 'safe country' where they have claimed protection were also ordered to return. The EU agreed, in return, that every Syrian returning to Turkey from Greece another Syrian would be resettled from Turkey to the EU.

By March 2017, more than 6 million Syrians were estimated to be displaced within Syria (IDPs), with no further data on the basis of age and gender (Freedman et al, 2017: 2). Between January and September 2017, 6550 Syrians were internally displaced every day.³⁴ Hostilities remained the root cause of constant displacements within the country. These sudden movements often lead Syrian families to leave behind most of their valuable belongings. With little available resources and opportunities, Syrian IDPs have no other choice but to downgrade their standard of living by living in cheap and often overcrowded shelters and settlements. After being denied entry on borders with neighboring countries, many IDPs have been displaced two or three times. This has left many stranded in inhumane conditions, susceptible to sexual and gender-based violence, and even forced to move back to unsafe areas back in Syria. In addition, *'721,000 IDPs have reportedly returned to their areas of origin as of November 2017, representing around 90% of individual spontaneous returns during 2017'*.³⁵ Foreseeing how the situation in Syria has not yet improved, this number is believed to have further increased over the years. In addition, there has been continuous destruction of shelter, services and livelihood opportunities across the country. Due to these incidents, it has become imperative for the UNHCR to work towards the foundational reintegration of

³² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/01/migrant-crisis-hungary-closes-main-budapest-station>

³³ European Council Statement, 23 April 2015, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/pressreleases/2015/04/23-special-euco-stat

³⁴ UN OCHA. (2017). 2018 humanitarian needs overview: Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved from reliefweb: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2018_syr_hno_english.pdf

³⁵ UNHCR. (2017, June). Flash update: Syrian refugee & IDP returns. Retrieved from [data.unhcr.org: data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=13658](http://data.unhcr.org/data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=13658)

IDPs by further expanding capacities, promoting community-based initiatives, supporting shelter and livelihood programs, and rehabilitating infrastructures.

Most importantly, in January 2016, The Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB) was put forth by special UN Envoy for Syria; Staffan de Mistura. In partnership with UN Women and UN and with the support of the UN Department of Political Affairs, the board participated in the Geneva III peace talks of 2016 to show their support in the first long awaited pause on the Syrian war – a truce. The pause meant for a hope that *'Syrians will wake up with the hope of resuming their lives among their families and loved ones without the threat of death hanging over them'*.³⁶ The board is seen to be the first of its kind – representing all women from Syria. While many women in the past have persistently fought for seats in the negotiation tables discussing the future of Syria, it is the first time that the group of women were actually appointed to delegate in one.

Following the discussions during the talks, the pause in the fight was organized by the US and Russia, in February 2016, mainly due to the desperate needs of humanitarian aid channels in the region. The conditions of the truce included the Syrian government forces as well as Russia to stop aerial bombardments against rebel groups. On the other hand, the rebel groups were conditioned to stop launching of rockets and mortar attacks as well as other on the ground weapons. The negotiations to the truce lie within the High Negotiations Committee. This committee was formed in December 2015, composed of members from the National Coalition, alliance of exiled Syrian politicians, Free Syrian Army factions, as well as independent rebels. Within this committee, only two women were appointed. However, the negotiation did not agree to stopping airstrikes by government forces, Russians and American-led coalitions against forces like the Al-Nusra Front as well as the other terrorist organisations as stated by the United Nations Security Council. It is important to note that the other terrorist organisations were generic terms with no particular list to make things clear. This was proved by one Security Council member Venezuela who told reporters, *'immediately*

*after the Council approved a resolution outlining the truce, that he did not know who was included in the list of terrorists’.*³⁷

Moving towards Mistura, while the negotiations were set forth on a ceasefire, he expressed this decision to be highly precarious and most likely to collapse. He further elaborated that *‘I have consulted and will continue to consult civil society and women, Syrian women. They are a remarkable contribution and they need to be a remarkable contribution to our work, and I will continue this practice’.*³⁸ The WAB, on the other hand, made their first statement after the truce had been implemented, *‘We, Syrian women, urge all parties to implement the terms of the agreement and exercise utmost constraint as this is the first step towards a sustainable and comprehensive cease fire. Every day we lose without achieving peace is another day of suffering’.*³⁹ It should also be pointed out how the women within this committee had no choice but to keep hidden due to security precautions. While a few of these anonymous women live within Syria, many even had to flee out of the country to ensure their safety. Unlike other Syrian representatives participating in the peace talks through the current Syrian conflict, such was the condition of the Syrian women representatives upon taking an active stand.

Despite international agreements for de-escalation, fighting continues in Syria. As many regions in Syria are a war-zone humanitarian access within these hard to reach areas is limited. As of September 2017, approximately, 2.98 million people were estimated living in these UN-declared besieged and hard to reach areas in Syria (UNOCHA , 2017). As an effort to respond to the conflict, the international community prepares for the Brussels II Conference on supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. Upon discussions, humanitarian adversaries such as sexual exploitation, and abuse, and gender-based violence were finally acknowledged and discussed. It is also acknowledged that *‘nearly 13.1 million people, almost of half of which are women and*

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https://d.docs.live.net/a8f4e2e920d864c9/Desktop/thesis/A%20Gendered%20Approach%20on%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis.docx#_ftn8

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https://d.docs.live.net/a8f4e2e920d864c9/Desktop/thesis/A%20Gendered%20Approach%20on%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis.docx#_ftn9

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https://d.docs.live.net/a8f4e2e920d864c9/Desktop/thesis/A%20Gendered%20Approach%20on%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis.docx#_ftn10

*children, urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection inside the country’.*⁴⁰ In addition to this, the conference also mentioned the critical need to support job creation and integration into labour markets, for both refugees and host countries, especially when it came to vulnerable groups such as women and girls. It took nine years into the conflict for the international community to recognize the gender inequalities pervading the lives of Syrian women and girls.

Following the 2017-2018 Regional Refugee Resilience Programme (3RP), by June 2019 more than 150,000 work permits had been allocated to Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan. With the total number of Syrian refugees being at an all-time high, the Brussels III Conference (March 2019) renewed and strengthened the humanitarian, and financial commitments of the international community towards the Syrian conflict and the neighboring countries. This time, a special emphasis was placed on the Syrian women as well as organizations representing them. Thus, Syrian WAB was able to hold a closed-door session with HR/VP Mogherini and UN Envoy Pedersen and provide insights on how to advance women’s participation and ensure that the women’s rights agenda is at the core of political processes. However, the renewed airstrikes and bombings on December 2019 make it difficult to believe that any of the previous talks and efforts made in the year have had a improve impact on the whole Syrian conflict and refugee crisis. As a result of the recent airstrikes in Northwest Syria, 961,000 Syrians were forced to flee over the span of three months, recorded as the largest displacement to have taken place since the beginning of the Syrian conflict.⁴¹

After foreseeing the Regional Strategic Overview 2020-2021, it is certain that, so far, not much improvement has been made in terms of battling SGBV in the region despite the many efforts of reinforcing gender and conflict-sensitive, employment and income support programs. While gender-based violence continues to soar all across the region, competition over scarce resources and limited livelihood opportunities has increased tensions between and within communities. According to the report, *‘the increasing socioeconomic vulnerability among the refugee and host community households, resulting in resort to harmful coping strategies further heightened the protection risks of especially women and girls, as well as older persons and persons living with disabilities.*

⁴⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/04/25/brussels-ii-conference-on-supporting-the-future-of-syria-and-the-region-co-chairs-declaration/>

In order to address their protection risks, specialized protection programming is critical. Furthermore, the inclusion of age, gender and diversity and integration of GBV prevention, mitigation and response into programming across all sectors remain crucial' (3RP 2021: 10). They also claimed that for Lebanon, the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) has reported an increase in different forms of GBV, out of which 99% of GBV victims are women (2021: 8).

In addition, the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic has played a major role in exacerbating challenges for Syrian refugees. In Jordan, it has been estimated that over 69 percent survey respondents have felt that GBV has increased since the beginning of the pandemic (2021: 8). *'Over 50% of adolescent girls reported that they are doing more household chores as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown measures'* (UNFPA 2020). Gender has been critical to a holistic solution for Syrian refugees, especially amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Tackling women's social and economic empowerment and participation has finally been acknowledged and rather become key in host countries. Governments and humanitarian organisations have stressed upon expanding formal employment opportunities for Syrian refugees through access to work permits and social security coverage to those self-employed or even informal enterprises so as to increase long-term self-sufficiency. However, it can be overlooked that the concurrent Covid-19 crisis has induced unemployment and underemployment among many economies and industries, especially in informal sectors where most Syrian refugees ought to be employed. At the same point, the most vulnerable again are hardly advantaged by the policies and strategies proposed. In the transition from dependence to self-reliance, certain graduation programmes become vital to achieve. However, most assistance programs are too focused on providing basic needs rather than active labor policies, and so not much luck is left for the low-skilled or most vulnerable (mostly women) when it comes to entering the labour market.

Eleven years into the war and as of September 2021, 6.7 million Syrians are internally displaced while 5.5 million have been registered as Syrian refugees in host countries.⁴² While the crisis makes it to international headlines, and policymakers from Washington D.C., the United Nations, and the rest of the world gather together to negotiate the

⁴¹ <https://europe.mercycorps.org/fr/blog/quick-facts-syria-crisis>

⁴² <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

future of Syria, those who are suffering in the crossfire are unfairly overlooked or forgotten. The conflict has killed thousands of people in the past eleven years. The Regional Response Plan (RRP) has been set forth by the UNHCR to strategize the efforts of UN agencies and non-governmental organisations together in response to the Syrian conflict. However, with the current scale of displacement, stressful implications in countries due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the pre-existing political and economic tensions in the regions has limited the efficiency of the RRP response.

As Zetter and Ruaudel explain: 'The overall picture, then, is one of chronic vulnerability which is both deepening and becoming more entrenched' (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2014: 7). Only in around 2016, six years later to the conflict, was the Western public opinion able to recognize the global impacts of the crisis, and its consequences on the Syrian population, their neighbors, and on Europe. This leads us to the realization of how much at risk the entire discourse of gender equality within the Syrian crisis is. Several crucial issues which needed to be discussed and improved during this entire time period had been highly underestimated or categorized as secondary importance. All the EU policies, assessed over the past years, regarding the international migration of Syrian refugees have been demonstrated as a failure to provide safety and protection to the Syrian refugees fleeing the crossfire, let alone focus on the gender unequal dynamics of the migration process. Hence, it can be convincingly concluded that the focus of the EU member states has been on finding ways to halt entry of Syrian refugees into the Union as much as possible, in regards to prioritizing security and political interests of the EU itself by investing heavily on border control.

Other critics have also pointed out how gender issues might have never been integrated in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its performance in multiple host countries, thus those claiming protection on the basis of gender-related persecutions may or may not be able to be possible (Spijkerboer, 2000, 2013; Crawley, 2001; Freedman, 2008, 2010, 2015; Arbel et al., 2014).

In terms of neighboring host countries, Turkey has the largest intake of Syrian refugees totaling to 3.7 million. While the country has a developed economy and capacity to afford such a large influx of refugees, the recent plans of the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on having a firmer grip on 'Turkishness' is bound to lead many

refugees to either onward migration or assimilation. Additionally, many also presume that Turkey has used the refugees for their own political and economic advantage by negotiating concessions with Europe. The country has no long term intentions to allow anyone but the most economically productive to live in Turkey as Turks, so as not to repeat the history again with the Kurds. In the case of Jordan, the most immediate challenge for the host state has been to appoint refugees to work. The country has the second largest number of refugees relative to its population size with 72 refugees per 1000 inhabitants (Hanmer et al; 2020: 209). It hosts 750,195 registered Syrian refugees, majority of whom live outside refugee camps (80 percent).⁴³ Regarding these numbers, many have reported a series of hardships and human rights violations experienced by refugees, highlighting women and children to be the most vulnerable. Dependency ratios are higher among refugees than their host communities. This is because, in 2014, 40 percent of Jordanian household members were either below or above working age, compared to 45 percent of Syrian refugee household members (Stave & Hillensund, 2015). Refugees receiving assistance from the UNHCR had even higher dependency ratios. These challenges ignited refugee women's ability to contribute in the community so as to provide for their families. Many women took on work and engaged themselves with income-generating activities (CARE, 2016). However, at the same time, Jordan had insufficient economic opportunities for the most of these refugee women, leaving most of these refugees to rely on, either, their running down savings, or on the humanitarian assistance provided by international organizations. It has been recorded that in 2014, out of the 630,000 registered Syrian refugees only 5,700 people were legally working in Jordan.⁴⁴

Lebanon has hosted over a million Syrian refugees, which makes over 20 percent of the native 4.5 million population. While a large intake of refugees is already a big task to maintain, this huge most likely Sunni addition into the country has also threatened a sectarian balance among the total 18 recognized religious (largest being Sunni, Shia, and Christians). Under these tensions, the Hezbollah-backed president, Michel Aoun, has taken an anti-refugee stance prompting many Syrian refugees to either, return back to conflict-ridden Syria, or migrate elsewhere.

⁴³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/79166>

⁴⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_422478.pdf

Significant to note is that the primary instigators and funders of the Syrian revolt, against the Al-Assad regime, are US, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. However, the oil dependent states and US have showed insufficient action or responsibility towards the Syrian refugees. This is to say that 'taking responsibility' requires a lot more than just submitting financial aid to the UN and other international organizations to administer the refugee settlements. Being the primary actors in the Syrian conflict, especially US with its troops still settled in the conflict area, its is high time for these countries to also take initiative in opening their borders for Syrian refugee resettlement. While living in a Wahhabi Kingdom like Qatar and Saudi Arabia might look unattractive to many people coming from a secular state (Syria), however, with such a huge humanitarian crisis at stake, these countries can still provide an easier settlement to Syrian refugees. This is to say that the option to migrate onwards is better than staying put in UN funded refugee camps.

FEMALE REFUGEES OF SYRIA

To better understand how women are surviving the conflict, it is imperative for us to understand what exactly the challenges are as a women refugee. In addition, we should also be aware of the gender-specific challenges of surviving the Syrian conflict, so as to justify why it is inescapable for women to be on the negotiating table. Simply, for us (the international spectators) the roots of gender-armed conflict need to be explored to formulate better long-term conflict/post-conflict resolution policies, a major part of which involves international migration. Advocating possible solutions to the systemic discrimination of women during the armed conflict requires analyzing patterns of violence, and understanding how they work as well. So far, as reviewed earlier, the inclusion of gender inequality and women in general into the Syrian conflict and the Syrian refugee crisis was acknowledged far too late. And even after this acknowledgment, there still remains a lack of data and analysis on gender violence.

It has already been understood that Syrian women and children constitute most of the internally displaced within Syria as well as refugees. Also, one in four Syrian families have women as the sole providers (UNHCR, 2014: 15). And so, in addition to the GBV in the form of harassment and humiliation, the Syrian women are also struggling to keep their families together and provide food and shelter to their children. They have the

constant pressure of losing family members, lack appropriate subsistence, and along with these challenges they also have to face daily threats to their safety and usually are being forced into isolation (Atassi 2014b).

In the case of registered refugees living in camps of host countries, essentials such as food, shelter, sanitation facilities, and healthcare are still much more easily accessible though not always sufficient. However, in the case of unregistered refugees, the scenario is far more dangerous. Under the unfortunate circumstance of not being registered, for one reason or the other, they live under deplorable conditions along with the constant fright of getting deported back to Syria. *'These unregistered Syrian refugees, especially women, find it difficult to get jobs, access to healthcare, face increased exploitation in the absence of legal protection including sexual exploitation and bonded labor'* (Al Jazeera News, 2015).

The journeys taken by Syrian refugees, via land or sea, towards neighboring countries and the EU have faced deplorable conditions on their way. The GBV is found not only within the conflict-prone Syria but even on the many escape routes to host countries in hopes of seeking 'support' and 'shelter'. Testimonies of Syrian refugee women escaping Syria to seek shelter and refuge have found themselves questioning the humanity amidst them. *'Finding a shelter is a mammoth of a task for these women'* (Freedman, 2017: 125). Their statements have reported many policemen and local security guards sexually harassing them on their way to a new country. Many have even reported having to give people sexual favors in return for their help (Human Rights Watch Report, 2017). In the absence of any formal arrangements provided to these Syrian women refugees, many are forced to spend nights in the open sky with their belongings and children. In circumstances like these, women are even more susceptible to sexual violence, exploitation, and sex trade in return of basic aid. Many refugee camps, in Lebanon and in European countries, have been unsuccessful in providing safety and security to a number of refugees. The risks are identified due to the lack of privacy and bad lighting. It has been reported that camps in Europe generally lack lighting, locks on showers and toilets, as well as separate sleeping sections.⁴⁵ In situations where men and women are forced to sleep in the same tent, many women choose the option of

⁴⁵ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/syrian-refugee-women-increasingly-serving-as-main-breadwinners_n_57d6b033e4b03d2d459b40e0

sleeping outside in poor weather conditions in order to feel safe (Asaf, 2017). Furthermore, it has also been found that many humanitarian organisations provide fewer resources and supplies to women, especially during shortages, as many humanitarian aid workers use their power to discriminate against women (UNHCR 2012).

While identifying SBV, discrimination, and exploitation faced by refugee women in camps, it should also be remembered that the percentage of women refugees who travel through Europe has also risen over the years (Asaf, 2017). Hence, gender inequality has become more and more critical over time. The UNHCR has reported 48.5 percent of the refugee population to be women, in which around 30 percent belong to the age group of 18 to 59 (UNHCR, 2017b). According to Amnesty International's Crisis Response Director, Tirana Hassan, *'After living through the horrors of the war in Iraq and Syria these women have risked everything to find safety for themselves and their children. But from the moment they begin this journey they are again exposed to violence and exploitation, with little support or protection'* (Noack, 2016).

1.1 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

In Syria, women were and still are perceived as representatives of their families' honor, and any form of extramarital affair (even that by force) is deemed as a shame on the family. Gender binaries are quite persistent in the region and women are seen as properties of their male guardians. Simultaneously, just like in any war, sexual violence has been treated as a war tactic in the Syrian conflict to instill fear and horror among civilians. Although the tactic of gender-based violence has been used as a weapon of war ever since the beginning of the conflict, the factor has still been widely under-reported and much less talked about over time (Freedman, 2016). Rape and sexual violence have been identified as the most common form of violence faced by women and girls in Syria. Women became victims of sexual violence as it was frequently performed either within their homes or in detention centers. Regime affiliates often used threats of rape against women in opposition areas, leading many to leave areas out of concern for the safety and security of their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers. In addition, SGBV was coupled with other forms of torture, physical assault, kidnapping, and sometimes murder as well which was usually attempted in the presence of a male family member (Human Rights Watch Report, 2014).

While the Arab Spring induced a dismantling of the neopatriarchal structures in the Middle East, for Syria the revolution was still unsuccessful in disintegrating the gender binaries prevalent. A major reason for this failure, again, was the increased stigmatization that women had to experience within their communities while recovering from the trauma of sexual violence. For instance, one interview with a former detainee in prison who had not been a victim of sexual violence mentioned that *'when I go out of prison, I brought the Quran and swore that no one dared to touch me. My father did not say anything in the beginning, but when I swore I could see relief in his eyes'* (Freedman et al, 2017: 22).

Another result of the deep-rooted gender binaries is the lack of acknowledgment given to women's roles in protecting and providing for their families. Just as men's vulnerabilities towards forced migration and recruitment are not acknowledged, women's rights to actively participate in providing for their families and community (especially in cases of mass displacement) are also overlooked. Within Syria, not a lot of international organizations are found on the ground, providing aid to the millions displaced. Due to this limitation, women have no other choice to provide their active participation in distributing medical assistance, emergency assistance, and food (Haddad, 2014). In fact, many women IDPs have become the head of their households, departing from their traditional gender binary roles, coming out of their houses in search of food as well as engaging in community activities to generate income for their family and dependents. The change into these roles has transformed the lives of a lot of IDP women, bringing in real impacts and making it difficult for many to return to their previous traditional roles and patterns. One interviewee of Haddad stated that the conflict has, *'turned everything on its head... I can never go back to doing what I did before; I can never be so meek and ordinary'* (2014: 46).

Despite what the quantitative analysis says regarding gender parity in Syria, such is the reality of the women. Research on SGBV to date is limited, proving that works on gender equality are still a secondary concern while maintenance of the status quo of gender binaries through inaccurate statistics is a greater priority. An increase in domestic violence and intimate partners among refugees is a common norm. These intimate affairs and domestic violence at homes are particularly targeted at women and girls. While the behavior is becoming a usual norm, reporting it is still a challenge. Such

kinds of violence are usually aggravated by the fact that these households are usually socially isolated, suffering from tremendous financial difficulties, and lacking privacy due to overcrowding. All the factors, combined together, lead to increasing tensions culminating in violence, often pulled by a male head of the household (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014: 12). Other researchers have even argued that these instances are a result of women showing empathy to the men for losing control of their traditional gender roles. Some women have also stated that a major reason why they do not report their husbands is that they have been threatened to be sent back to Syria (Masterson, 2012). According to Charles and Denman, such fears create the intersectionality of violence which is a product of individual acts and institutes. They further elaborated that under the Syrian social structure (pre-conflict Syria), women were not even allowed to travel outside the country without their husband's permission, and *'this law now feeds into the patriarchal control and fear for women of being sent back by their husbands'* (Charles and Denman, 2013: 105). Due to such fears and social constructs, women are in constant fear of reporting against their husbands and even if they do so, not many counseling services are available to help them cope with the entire process.

Again, the situation is even worse for women living outside of refugee camps. According to an assessment done on urban refugees in Jordan, it was shown that nearly half of the female-headed households had no earnings and were dependent on donations (Usta and Masterson, 2013). Such women faced harassment which included offers of transactional sex and marriage (Sami et al, 2013). Furthermore, the Turkish Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), one of the main institutions dealing with Syrian refugees in Turkey, indicated that almost one-third of Syrian refugee households in Turkey are headed by women or children⁴⁶ while 80 percent of the women refugees living outside camps experienced extreme poverty and had insufficient amounts of food for the next week.⁴⁷ Survival sex, a consequence of women's and girl's desperate need to get some income to as to cover the basic costs of

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https://d.docs.live.net/a8f4e2e920d864c9/Desktop/thesis/A%20Gendered%20Approach%20on%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis.docx#_ftn1

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https://d.docs.live.net/a8f4e2e920d864c9/Desktop/thesis/A%20Gendered%20Approach%20on%20Syrian%20Refugee%20Crisis.docx#_ftn2

living, is a type of violence frequently experienced by Syrian women and girls, inside and outside camps (O'Sullivan and Steven, 2017).

Many women and girls that were forcibly displaced have also been victims of rape and sexual violence. A report from the Women Under Siege Project claimed that *'rape has been reportedly used widely as a tool of control, intimidation, and humiliation throughout the conflict. And its effects, while not always fatal, are creating a nation of traumatized survivors'* (Wolfe, 2013: 1). The report went into further detail showing that approximately 8 percent of the reports included female victims, ages ranging from seven to forty-six. Of those women, 85 percent reported rape; 10 percent sexual assault without penetration; and 10 percent mentioned detention that appears to have been for the purposes of sexualized violence or enslavement for a period of longer than 24 hours (2013: 1).

It has been made very clear that obtaining accurate data on levels of sexual violence in the Syrian conflict is virtually impossible to determine. The challenges with reporting and accessing information are too difficult as the fear of stigma and marginalization in the region is widely prevalent. However, it is important to mention that such reports are vital to raising awareness against the unfortunate reality of SGBV in this conflict. According to a researcher's account after visiting the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to assess their healthcare standards, *'Here, there are no viable comprehensive medical options for survivors of rape. Considered taboo and seen as a family issue, rape survivors are left with nowhere to go to seek clinical care. Life-saving treatments to prevent HIV, unwanted pregnancy, or sexually transmitted infections require immediate action, such as the limited window of 72 h for HIV post-exposure prophylaxis. This lack of access to care has emerged as a humanitarian crisis all of its own'* (Ouyang, 2013: 2165).

Another point worth mentioning while discussing SGBV prevalent in the conflict is that men have also experienced sexual violence as a war tactic in Syria. This aspect of gender-based violence has also gone unnoticed for a very long time, making men suffer in silence (Sivakumaran, 2007: 255). There have been many cases of Syrian men being sexually assaulted by their regime members under detention (Meger, 2016: 59). In addition to this, unlike women, young men are far more vulnerable to forced recruitment. Forced recruitment is often understood as a form of forced migration/ displacement that

is mostly overlooked. In this case, young men are constantly battling challenges adapting to their forced recruitment along with being identified as refugees. Due to the enactment of this system, in March 2012, the Syrian government had banned traveling for all men between the age of 18 and 42 without prior authorization (Davis et al., 2014). Although this ban has not prevented men from fleeing, however, when they do escape it is harder for them to find protection as they are viewed as a threat to other governments and organizations. Due to this, some governments have even placed a discriminatory ban on the entry of Syrian men unaccompanied by their family members. *'This discrimination against men travelling alone derives from the premise that single men and boys visibly detached from a family unit pose a threat to security, whereas men who function as fathers, sons, brothers and/or husbands do not'* (Davis et al., 2014). What they do not realize, or maybe risk to overlook, is that such bans put young men into vulnerable positions. It leads them to become illegal residents in host countries or puts them last on the list for access to humanitarian aid. Single men are also least likely to find housing camps as they are not posed as a priority. Such division between men being 'combatants' and women being 'civilians' has once again reinforced the many gender binaries and gender inequalities persistent within the whole Syrian conflict, risking the lives of thousands of refugee men and women (Carpenter, 2005).

Ultimately, in order to meet the protection needs and basic human rights of both men and women within the Syrian conflict, it has become imperative to disintegrate the dichotomous representations that have been socially constructed as well as to recognize the complexities of all refugees and IDPs.

1.2 State feminism

To better understand the gender dynamics in Syria it is better to understand the gender dynamics in the whole of the region and post-revolution Iran. The aim is to compare and contrast so as to provide meaningful parallels with the change in the gender dynamics that has been taking place in the whole region. From 2011 onwards, a number of feminist movements (that existed under oppressive regimes in the Middle East and North African region) were perceived as oppressive to women themselves as well as to certain minority groups that felt marginalized by their regimes (Freedman et al., 2017: 16). The changes in the gender patterns in Syria are not alien to the overall changes in the Middle East and North African region (MENA). *'The rejection of feminist movements is more of a rejection of the oppressive regimes themselves, which used feminist dis-*

courses in order to present a positive picture of themselves to the international community' (2017:16).

Ultimately, state feminism was appointed by the government of Syria. While it was coined by Helga Hernes (1987), in regards to the government supporting liberal-feminism in Norway, this institution has also found itself useful in many developing nations (like Syria) but unfortunately for reasons that are quite opposite to its origin. Hernes had started the feminist movement in a 1970s to fight for two things; to enable women to enter the labor market and to legalize abortion.⁴⁸ Over time, movements and actions as such in Norway led her to establish, 'state feminism'. She defined it as starting from the bottom (by the people and by the feminist movements) to be directed at the people at the top (the decision-makers). In Syria, instead of the government promoting liberal feminism into society, state feminism has been used as a fair tactic to drive away from the persistent gender unequal circumstances in the state. This means that the government has used the term to authorize a form of feminism so as to easily get away with any non-governmental institutions forming or advocating for any other/new feminist-related programs or concerns.

During the Ba'ath regime, social research in Syria was vastly limited. And so, as well mentioned many times, insights into gender relations were from slim to none. Most of the research, just like everywhere else in the MENA region, was focused on quantitative indicators of gender equality as well as the status of women's rights. However, the analysis by state feminism has portrayed wrong messages as (besides the promotion of gender equality) the challenges faced by women remained obsolete. The regime was able to demonstrate its contributions to maintaining gender equality in the economy through state feminism. Women were largely depicted as '*represented in most professions. Syrian women have been encouraged to take up medicine, pharmacy, and engineering*' (Rabo, 1996: 163). By advocating such statements, the Ba'ath regime, to an extent, promoted women's engagement in economic activities as well as the labor force. There were also a few women appointed in powerful positions within the government as well. However, in reality, they were actually trying to hide the fact that these women were basically 'handpicked' (1996: 163). They were not intended to represent the womankind of Syria. In actuality, they were simply displaying a physical

⁴⁸ <https://kjonnsforskning.no/en/2015/12/helga-hernes-mother-state-feminism-and-gender-quotas>

appearance of a gender-equal economic society under the Ba'ath regime. Most of these handpicked women were, in fact, based in urban areas of elite backgrounds making them absolutely unaware and incapable of supporting and representing the views of women from the rural areas. They are incapacitated in demonstrating the daily lives of the rural women in Syria, or even the gender-based violence, physical abuse, or patriarchal norms they have to face on a regular basis.

Another alarming target of state feminism employed by the government was to further create women divisions in Syria through forming feminist movements. This was successfully implemented as the majority of the women in Syria then felt silenced by these feminist movements (Freedman et al., 2017: 17). Assessing these aims, state feminism can be termed as the *'state's push for and encouragement of women's participation in public life, while committing atrocities towards other groups, in an attempt to cover up other forms of discrimination that exist within the bounds of the state and oppressive regimes'* (2017: 17). This clearly indicates that the system of state feminism embodied by the Ba'ath regime was deeply rooted in patriarchy and women's oppression (Badran, 2009). For instance, those women in Syria that were handpicked by the state to participate 'equally' in the public sphere were also increased by the institution to fulfill, both, their responsibilities at the workplace as well as their responsibilities of traditional domestic roles. What they lacked to demonstrate was that gender equality does not only mean integrating women into the labor market, that by no means is the connotation of women's rights. Yes, it is definitely true that participation in economic activities is empowering for women, however, what the structure failed to advocate is that economic activities do not necessarily disintegrate the gender binaries or change general stereotypes about women.

The Syrian Women's Advisory Board (WAB), as mentioned earlier, is another great example of institutions advocated by state feminism. The committee was able to participate in the Geneva III peace talks (2016) to discuss the situation of the women within the conflict and stress upon their support for a truce. After all, they were the first of their kind to represent all Syrian women. While the aim of this committee was to include women from diverse backgrounds in the peace talks, ensuring all were noticed and acknowledged, the delegation failed to satisfy the demands of the civil society. Heavily criticized as promoting state feminism by the opposition, they have been

massively attacked by opposition activists and accused of being regime sympathizers that have disrupted the '*spirit of revolution*' in Syria (Freedman et al., 2017: 26).

Remarks like these can clearly be perceived as reactions to the oppressive regime's state feminism which has been using women's rights issues to cover up their acts of violence as well as behaviors of patriarchy prevalent.

Numerous arguments have been put forward to elaborate on the failure of the WAB in achieving the demands of civil society and, rather, stemming the structure of state feminism further.⁴⁹ Firstly, the human rights activists have criticized the selection process due to its lack of transparency and clarity.⁵⁰ Many notable Syrian women had been left out of the board as the UN chose to select only a few women that were already a member of the Syrian political groups, allegedly defending the government-sponsored violence. These groups are believed to have had links to extremism, and who had worked for organisations that assisted with government-led human rights violations. While the Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) is not in the appropriate position to give firm confirmations or refusal regarding these allegations, it is still suggested that Staffan de Mistura's team was unsuccessful in selecting an inclusive team for the board. This factor has angered many Syrians tremendously, including the women's rights and humanitarian rights activists.

Secondly, the WAB's final demands indicated that they have been pressing for political negotiations instead for principles of women's rights. The best example to reflect on this assumption is the Board's demand to lift sanctions so food and medical assistance can be accessed.⁵¹ It is important to note that while sanctions affect many Syrians by creating challenges in securing goods from abroad, they are not the major reason why there is lack of food and medical access in many parts of Syria. The inability to access humanitarian support in Madaya and other barricaded towns is, rather, the fault of the military's deliberate policy to starve out and repress the opposition dominant towns. The arguments suggest that the statement set forth by the WAB was clearly of a political kind which reflects the entire structure and climate of the board.

⁴⁹ <https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2016/04/07/the-controversy-over-the-syrian-womens-advisory-board/>

⁵⁰ <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/566794-dont-misrepresent-syrian-women-again>

⁵¹ <http://webtv.un.org/media/press-conferences/watch/syrian-womens-advisory-board-media-stakeout-geneva-22-march-2016/4812065293001>

Thirdly, the Syrian civil society has also found itself concerned with doubts about whether the WAB will be effective in making meaningful contributions to the negotiation process as there are '*not enough women at the peace table say arab activists*'.⁵² It argues that civil society has barely been discussed in the Geneva talks and, rather, the Syrian negotiators are often sidelined while high-level talks between the USA and Russia are taking place. It is unknown how the Special UN Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, would supply the information provided by the WAB into the discussions occurring between the opposition and the government or, even, between the Secretary Kohn Kerry and the Foreign Minister Sergey Lavov. Ultimately, it is believed that the WAB is not enough to represent the Syrian women among the civil society, and one session is also not enough to discuss the challenges and future of the civil society. It would only have been effective if the engagement coincided with the final deal proposed.

The SJAC has always favored the UN's attempt to strengthen inclusivity in the Syrian peace talks. It is vital to have women as part of the negotiation process so as to effectively put forward their specific challenges, making the final deal to have a lasting impact for the conflict. Unfortunately, the WAB had failed to gain popularity among the Syrians, reflecting upon the lack of gender equality present among state feminism.

Under the Ba'ath regime, the challenges of Sunni Muslims have been observed to be deteriorating as well. Pre-2011 Syria is believed to have been better for women and gender relations. However, there is no quantitative evidence to support this claim. It has only been concluded after observing the socio-economic structure as well as the religious structure of the country. During the Ba'ath regime, unlike Shiite and Alawis, Sunni Muslims were a political minority. Being in a condition like this, the circumstances and challenges faced by the minority (especially as a woman) were tremendous. While the Alawis (family background of Assad), and the Shiites are given numerous privileges by the regime, the Sunni Muslims are on the opposite side. In the context of women, many Alawi women have stated Sunni women to be oppressed and submissive. They are portrayed to be '*conservative, traditional, and backward thinking*' (Freedman et al., 2017: 18). The views of other communities towards Sunni Muslims has been quite different from reality. It showed how the Sunni minority was portrayed by the rest of the

⁵² <http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/03/not-enough-women-at-the-peace-table-say-arab-activists/>

country as well as the ruling state. The headscarf was a major argument to this discourse as the entire country deemed itself to be a 'secular state' while the headscarf was implementing a negative impression to that agenda.

The arguments between 'secular' and 'religious' have also created another division within the state. The minority groups have been demonstrating principles of secularism, against the majority in Syria, to support their so-called 'backwardness'. This division has played an important role in determining gender relations among different communities by enforcing stereotypical perceptions towards one another. The intention is mainly to build up their boundaries, differences, or maybe even to mark up their superiority? The argument proclaims that *'ideologies, stereotypes and practices employed to underline the specificity of an ethnic group, signal its superiority. . . . Ideas of shared ethnicity mean that members of a group take pains to signal through appearance and conduct their closeness to one another while at the same time stressing their difference from others'* (Wilson and Frederiksen, 1995: 4). The interviews, held by Abu-Abbas, have even provided further proof to the stereotypical statements made by the Al-Awaites and Shiites, considering the Sunni Muslims as backwards and submissive. One such interview, with a Sunni Muslim women, made it clear that these women were widely discriminated by others. *"I fell in love with an Alawi guy at university. His family rejected me completely, and refused to marry me to their son, because they thought I come from a lower class background. It was my hijab, but I did not want to succumb to their ideals."* (Freedman et., 2017: 18). Another interview also stated the discrimination faced in the economic and labor market of the country. *'I did not get a job in the public sector, because of my confession. They used to recruit Alawi women only, and they left us to manage our affairs on our own. I felt discriminated against because of my confession.'* (2017: 19). A third interview portrayed the most obvious discriminations and divisions state feminism had created within the country. Most importantly, these discriminations have still not been addressed within the community or the international organisations. *'I have a problem with feminists arguing for gender equality. Those feminists are the same people that oppress other women. My sisters were bullied by feminists under [the] Ba'ath regime for wearing the hijab and they were discriminated against in the public sector'* (2017: 19).

After analyzing the influence of state feminism, and, through it, the first ever appointment of an all-women's delegation, and the obvious criticism the board received from the opposition, as well as the increased violent circumstances of Sunni women, it can be concluded that the issue of women rights and representation is vastly divided and discombobulated. Instead of focusing research on the gender unequal causes and proposing solutions towards increased gender parity, the state has succeeded in forming further divisions between women within Syria. They can either be witnessed through government represented feminist organization versus non-governmental feminist organisations, or between urban and rural women, and even among the Sunni women and Shiite women.

1.3 Early marriages

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that, '*men and women of full age... have the right to marry and to found a family*' and that '*marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses*'. Later, this treaty was followed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as by the Women's Convention, stressing upon the fact that the right to marry free from coercion or force is a basic human right. And so, naturally, child marriages are a violation of rights against gender stereotyping, to life and security of one self, to protection from violence, and to one's health and education.

Under international agreements and in many countries, child marriages are considered to be forced as a person under the age of 18 is deemed incapable of consenting to marriage, mainly due to their lack of full maturity to fulfill the important responsibilities required in a marriage. Article 16 of the Women's Convention proclaims that the marriage of a child would have no legal effect, and they have pushed all governments to take all the necessary actions to specify a minimum age for marriage, and to enforce official registration of marriage at government offices.⁵³ While most nations have established the minimum age of consent to marriage to be 18, following the Child Rights Convention, many other nations still have proposed a different age of consent (lowest going to 16 and highest to 21) and it also depends on the sex of the individual as well (Pew Research Centre, 2016).

⁵³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/MinimumAgeForMarriage.aspx>

Gender stereotyping and sex discrimination is the main driver for as to why girls, and not boys, fall victim to the majority of child marriages. In Syria, ever since 2011, a drastic rise has been observed in child marriages. This norm is observed as families either sell their daughters off to more financially stable men through 'marriage', insinuating that it will ensure their daughter's 'protection' in the future. These long-standing patriarchal notions about a girl's worth being linked to her virginity, her ability to reproduce, and her ability to contribute to the domestic labor of the household clearly proves that the system is settled to give men control over the women and girls (WHO, 2018; Girls Not Brides, 2016). It has been researched that girls who are married early are more easily able to adapt traditional gender roles and stereotypical notions, later transferring the same concepts onto their children (Asadullah and Wahhaj, 2019).

Fear of sexual violence and stigma is another driver of early/ child marriages. As it ruins a girl's virginity marrying her off early is a good way to save her from rape. In Syria, a woman interviewee was recorded stating that, *'child brides are not new to Syria. In our neighborhood in Homs, I knew many families that used to marry their daughters off to rich old men from other countries such as Jordan and the Gulf'* (Freedman et al., 2017: 22). This further elaborates the trends of child marriages even after migration to neighboring countries. It should also be noted that the trend of Syrian women being submissive, obedient, and capable of making a man 'happy' was common even before the events of 2011. However, the 2011 crisis further exacerbated the norm of submissiveness and obedience of women towards marriage and men in their community, so much to the extent of turning it into matters of serious gender-based violence. In addition, as thousands of Syrian women have lost male members in their families, either due to fighting in Syria or being missing from displacement, they are left with the decision to marry off their daughters (even those 13 and 15 years of age) in hopes of providing them with protection and a shelter. However, these decisions have left the girls vulnerable to domestic abuse, poverty, and even health problems. 48 percent of these girls have been married off to men at least 10 years older their age (Sweis, 2014). These child brides are left with no future opportunities to go to school or participate in the labor market to make an income of their own. They are rather stuck in a toxic cycle of poverty and domestic abuse.

International organizations have been reporting instances of child marriages within Syria for years. Traditionally, it is the responsibility of the husband to financially provide for his wife. For families that are unable to pay rent or provide for their all members, marrying off their daughters seems a good decision to take off the financial burdens. Such financial dependencies, along with traditional family structures have given a lot of decision-making power to male heads of the family, leaving refugee women unable to make decisions of their own.

In one focus group interview, Nour, a 40-year-old Syrian woman explained how she was unable to prevent her 16-year-old daughter from getting married. *'One day, my husband went out to the shops and never came back. That was in May 2013. I don't know if he was taken by gangsters or detained [by the Syrian government]. Some people called me from my husband's phone and said he was with them and asked for money. It was very stressful; they would call from time to time, very early morning or late at night. I would have paid them but they would tell me a date and then turn off my husband's phone so I couldn't do anything. After a few months I didn't hear from them again. I've been living in Lebanon since 2013. I don't have any qualifications so it was very difficult for me to get employment. It was also very difficult for me to even rent a tent. At first my daughter, son and I were living with my brother and his family. My daughter had to get married because we were under pressure. I didn't approve of this but circumstances pressured us – economically, financially and psychologically.*

When we came to Lebanon my children couldn't continue their education. My brother wouldn't let my daughter work. Since she was a young girl and a stranger, young men would harass her verbally even when she was with me or her uncle. We couldn't protect her from this sort of harassment. She wanted to get a job but my brother refused and he beat her. As a reaction to this beating, when my brother's wife said that she knew of an old man who wanted to get married, my daughter agreed. My daughter was 16 years old when she got married to a man 20 years older than her. Now she suffers a lot of problems because of this.

Since I left my house in Syria I lost every sort of freedom and liberty, my freedom of opinion. I couldn't prevent the marriage because I didn't have any sort of freedom financially or emotionally because of my dependency on other people. Now I rent a

small place for just my son, who is 14, and I. An NGO helped me get a job teaching sewing. They pay me US\$100 a month but it costs me US\$40 per month for the transport to go to work and the rent costs me US\$150 a month. My daughter lives in Beirut with her husband. Her husband was married before and already has children and his elderly mother also lives with them.

My daughter is now 19 and has a baby. She's a child raising a child. My daughter hasn't visited me here since her marriage. She was going to visit once but she was stopped at a checkpoint and threatened with arrest because her residence permit is invalid. A Lebanese man vouched for her so the officer let her go. Now she's too scared to travel. I can't go to Beirut for the same reason. I've seen photos of her baby though. We mainly communicate through WhatsApp' (Amnesty International, 2016: 50).

According to the Women's Refugee Committee (WRC), many women, in hopes of escaping from the hardships present in inside and outside camps, marry non-Syrian men at a very early age as well. In rural areas of Syria, early marriages are a cultural practice. Studies from the UN have also shown that about half of the Syrian refugees accept early marriages for girls aged between 15 and 17, and rather regard this to be customary as well⁵⁴. While the act seems as a means to escape misery, in reality, it is also another tool to further control vulnerable girls who have no other option.

Child marriages are still in need of a tailor-made multisectoral integrated response with a gender dimension. Long-term and sustainable interventions are still to be implemented on the prevention and risk mitigation of child marriages. However, this initiative can only be implemented once the entire discourse of gender inequality has been advocated, both, qualitatively and quantitatively by the civil society of Syria, the international organizations supporting Syrian refugees, as well as the host countries and their governments. Though a number of international, local, and non-governmental organizations have been playing a significant role in women's empowerment since 2011, what they yet have failed to achieve is a long-term fix by teaching these women soft skills such as public speaking, dialogue, and engagement. Having said this, influence has been observed in providing women a quick fix where women are saved from drastic economic deprivation by focusing on training such as nursing, hairdressing,

tailoring, or embroidery. More menial work to get by, rather, than social improvements to achieve empowerment.

CASE STUDIES

These case studies are intended to acquaint with the voice of the Syrian female refugees (women and girls) by demonstrating their experiences, challenges and perceptions while living in Turkey as refugees under a temporary protection status. The identification of their challenges in Turkey is intended to help expand knowledge regarding gender inequality among international organisations as well as people in general, and also to map the needs of Syrian refugee women and girls in migration policies and programmes so as to make them resilient and self-reliant. The case study will also demonstrate how these refugee women are adapting to the challenges encountered, thus changing the traditional gender roles and gender binaries created within the community of their host country as well as their community of origin.

Turkey

As of November 2021, Turkey has hosted around 3,728,612 Syrians (55 percent men and 45 percent women) under temporary protection (SuTP),⁵⁵ most of whom have settled around in host communities and cities while a very small percentage of the total have access to the five temporary shelter centers located in provinces close to the Syrian border. With such a huge number of Syrian refugees, Turkey hosts the highest number of SuTP than any other host country. Syrian refugees in Turkey are provided with the status; 'temporary protection', which helps distinguish them from other non-European refugees residing in Turkey. The status aims to give SuTP access to opportunities that are not awarded to any of the other non-European refugees such as work permits, freedom of movement, refugee protection, access to healthcare and social services as well as education (Bellamy et al, 2017:40; ECRE, 2017:108-150). The Government of Turkey provides this status which is in accordance with law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection of 4/4/2013.⁵⁶ In addition, the Director of General Migration Management (DGMM) is the particular governmental body in charge of all the refugee and asylum procedures in Turkey, which includes temporary protection.

⁵⁴ <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/gender-based-issues-plague-syrian-women-refugees/>

⁵⁵ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113>

⁵⁶ https://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/goc_kanun.pdf

Additionally, according to Article 3 of the Temporary Protection Regulation, *‘unaccompanied minors, persons with disability, elderly, pregnant women, single parents with accompanying children, victims of torture, sexual assault or other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence’* categorised as *‘persons with special needs’* (ECRE, 2017:144). *‘Being identified and registered as a “person with special needs” entitles beneficiaries to additional safeguards and prioritised access to rights and services’* and the responsibility for them lies with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (ECRE, 2017:144). However, as far as mitigation, prevention and development strategies are concerned, the *‘law fails to create structures that will adequately mitigate or prevent abuses’* against people with special needs (Kivilcim, 2016: 200).

Women refugees as well as Syrian refugees in general face numerous challenges while settling in Turkey. Challenges can arise from language barriers, lack of access to information, social tension between the refugees and the locals, hurdles with registration, and in turn, seeking access to health and education, as well as livelihoods and employment (3RP, 2018:6). While numerous reports have been published, over the years, to describe and analyse the needs of the SuTP in Turkey, only a few have focused on the particular needs of women and girls. This includes their challenges, opportunities, access to services and the general relationship with the local communities. One of these few reports include, *‘Needs Assessment of Syrian women and girls under temporary protection status in Turkey’* published by UN Women (2018); *‘Syrian Women in Turkey’* published by Prime Minister Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) (2014). These reports have provided insights into Syrian refugee women’s specific needs and living conditions in Turkey.

Poverty is quite prevalent among the SuTP which is widely due to an uncertain access to incomes as well as high costs of living, especially when it comes to residing in urban cities (FAO, 2017: 3). This proves that despite the generosity provided by the government, poverty still remains prevalent among many SuTP. Assessments found that, in 2017, approximately 67 percent of the SuTP live below the poverty line, while those accommodated in shelters have lack of access to sufficient water, sanitation, as well as hygiene facilities (UNICEF, 2018b: 16; IOM, 2017). In addition, around 23.8 percent of SuTP were living below the *‘extreme’* poverty line according to preliminary findings of a pre-assessment baseline conducted for the Emergency Social Safety Net (World Bank/WFP, 2017). However, another assessment revealed that around 18.4 percent of

the SuTP were found living below the 'extreme' poverty line where they could not even afford the most basic food needs (3RP, 2018: 6). Inconsistent data like this puts a huge scepticism as to the accuracy of quantitative data as well as accuracy to perceptions and understandings from given data.

Nevertheless, one can still conclude that many SuTP residing in Turkey are struggling under the poverty line which can lead many to negative coping mechanisms as well as increased vulnerability. Not to forget, poverty leads women and girls into dire vulnerable conditions, especially when it comes to accessing decent housing, access to services, and minimum income levels for food security and income security. Significance of income security and accommodation security is essential when discussing the needs and opportunities of Syrian refugee women in Turkey. This is due to the fact that only 15 percent of Syrian women work in income-generating jobs (UN Women, 2018:6; FAO, 2020: 7), while as of 2012 the government of Turkey no longer prioritizes in camp accommodations and majority of the SuTP live in private accommodations. In terms of negative coping mechanisms, failure to meet the minimum standards of living pushes refugees to reduce the quality as well as quantity food consumption, accommodation standards, as well as spending on health and education. Such measures have significant impacts on the well-being of children, people with disabilities, the elderly and women. Challenges to women and girls also include child marriages, polygamous marriages, and informal employment. Female refugees also have the disadvantage of facing SGBV (child marriages, polygamous marriages, domestic violence) as well as gender based barriers in regards to access to employment and education. Other forms of SGBV would include coercion, sexual attacks, as well as extortion in camps or by the authorities (such as employers or during the migratory process). In worst cases, there are chances of forced prostitution as well (Ordek, 2017: 31).

2.1. Provinces of settlement

While discussing the distribution of Syrian refugees in various provinces of Turkey, it is important to note the distribution of camps in the provinces as well as the number of Syrian refugees being hosted. According to Figure 6, below, it can be demonstrated that only 51,969 out of 3,669,088 registered Syrian refugees have access to the seven shelter centres present in five provinces. It is also interesting to note that the camps are lo-

cated in provinces closest to the Turco-Syrian border. While Adana, with 17,197 people, is hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees in just one shelter centre. On the other hand, Hatay with three shelter centres established in its province has hosted only 8,443 people.

In the case of the total number of Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey, it can be demonstrated that the highest number of these registered Syrian refugees are found residing in Istanbul with a total of 533,242 people⁵⁷. However, the province has no shelter centres present to accommodate any of their temporary protection guests. The province with the second highest registered refugees, Gaziantep, is under the same situation of providing no camps to the Syrian refugees⁵⁸. Hatay comes as the province with the third highest number of Syrian refugees, 436,980 people⁵⁹. As discussed earlier, in Figure 9, the province has three established shelter centres but out of the total number of registered Syrian refugees, only 8,443 people have been accommodated.

In conclusion to these statistics, the following points can easily be confirmed. Most of the Turkish provinces (especially the shelter centres) hosting the incoming Syrian refugees are either at the Turco-Syrian border or close to it. While the total number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey is 3,669,088 only 51,969 people have access to shelter centres. And so, 98 percent of Syrians under temporary protection (SuTP) live outside of temporary accommodation centres. This proves that the most of the SuTPs residing in Turkey are living in private accommodations. However, due to the existing legislation, it is also difficult for these refugees to purchase housing⁶⁰. While the majority of these SuTPs live in southeast Turkey (Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, and Hatay), there are still a substantial number of refugees living in urban cities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir, and Konya.

⁵⁷ <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Omar Kadkoy, "You Shall not Buy: Syrians and real estate ownership in Turkey," Hurriyet Daily News, 21 November 2016. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/you-shall-not-buy-syrians-and-real-estate-ownership-in-turkey-106353>. Article 35 Clause 2 of Turkey's Law on Property No. 2644, issued in 1934, references other regulations and notes certain limitations with respect to foreigners acquiring property in the country

Figure 9: Number of camps and distribution of Syrian refugees

PROVINCE	NAME OF TEMPORARY SHELTER CENTERS	TOTAL	GRAND TOTAL
ADANA (1)	Sarıçam	17.183	17.183
HATAY (3)	Altınözü	2.465	8.443
	Yayladağı	3.339	
	Apaydın	2.639	
KAHRAMANMARAŞ (1)	Merkez	9.758	9.758
KİLİS (1)	Elbeyli	8.286	8.286
OSMANİYE (1)	Cevdetiye	8.299	8.299
TOTAL		51.969	
NUMBER OF SYRIANS UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION THAT NOT IN THE SCOPE OF SHELTER CENTERS			3.669.088

Source: Ministry Interior of Turkey - Director General of migration management
<https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

2.2. Language barrier

It has popularly been stated that a major challenge for Syrian refugees is finding access to housing, speaking Turkish, and also seeking employment (UN Women, 2018).

'Based on structured and in-depth interviews with 1291 Syrian women and girls across seven cities, the assessment reveals that many are satisfied with their access to services, especially medical, but they also lack information on the full range of assistance that is available to them' (2018: 6). This is mostly because of the refugees inability to understand the language, holding them back from accessing the many services and opportunities. And, although Syrians are allowed to be enrolled in free state supported Turkish language courses, the study found that 70 percent of Syrian women do not speak any Turkish (2018: 6).

Language barrier has clearly become a major challenge for Syrian female refugees in many aspects, and it could also be a possible reason for why only 15 percent Syrian women work in income-generating jobs (2018: 6). According to a report in 2017, *'almost half of all widowed women surveyed therefore survive with monthly incomes around \$160 (700 TRY), as do 36% of divorced women and 32% of single women. These women fall far below Turkey's poverty and hunger thresholds (4,979 TRY and 1,518 TRY for a family of four) and make no more than half of the country's minimum wage (1400 TRY).'*⁶¹

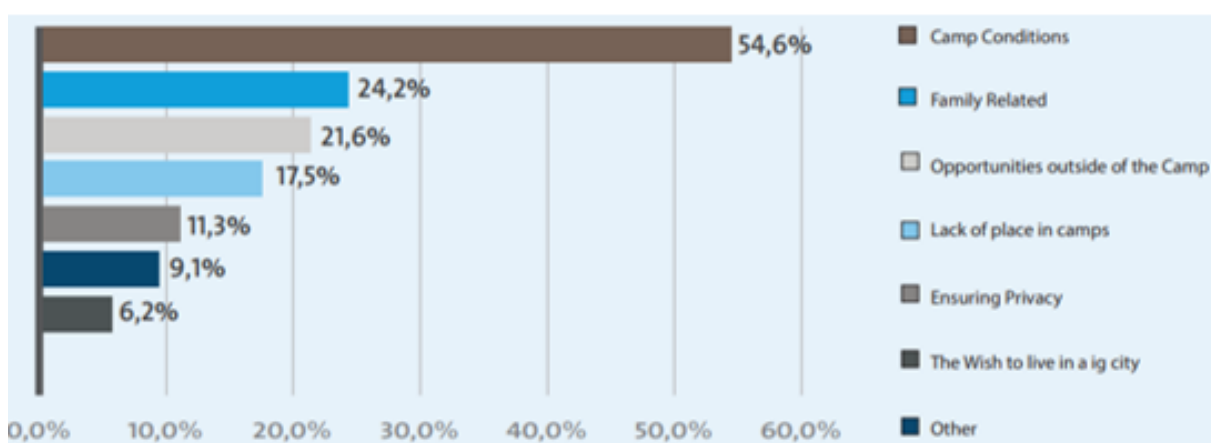
⁶¹ "Poverty line in Turkey increases 11.8 percent in a year, hits nearly TRY 5000," Daily Sabah, 25 May 2017

2.3. Accommodation and Shelter

Accommodation is a fundamental basic need and gender-related issues persistent within accommodations should be acknowledged and mitigated. The majority of the Syrian female refugees are living outside camps in cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Hatay, Izmir, Konya and Adana. According to UN Women, the main areas of concern for women with respect to accommodation are; availability and condition of housing, cost of living, crowdedness and lack of privacy, and frequent moving (2018: 21). In the case of shelter centres, the majority of the women preferred to move out due to shortage of basic needs as well as security. Conditions of tents and container camps have different effects on women than men. Privacy is the most important requirement for women within Syrian culture. *'Around 42 percent of female Syrian household heads specified that they preferred living in the camps due to economic conditions. Furthermore, 27 percent stated that they preferred the camps due to security reasons. And 54 percent of our female guests responded "yes" to the question of "Would you like to live outside the camps?"* (AFAD, 2017:47). The AFAD, under their report, acknowledged that while they tried their best to provide Syrian women with adequate privacy, it still was found to be quite insufficient in actuality (2017: 46).

UN Women also underwent a similar survey in finding the reasons why women left camps. Figure 11, below, illustrates that 54.6 percent of the women were unhappy with the living conditions provided to them in the camp, to the point that they chose to leave. 17 percent complained about insufficient space available in the camps, violating their privacy. 21.6 percent of the women left the camps in search of better opportunities. This statistic corresponds to the fact that living outside camps does provide refugees a better opportunity to integrate with the Turkish communities and their daily lives. It has been pointed out that many coffee shops and restaurants have been opened for Syrians while the more financially secure Syrian refugees were even able to open their own businesses in partnership with either relatives or Turkish citizens (AFAD, 2017: 41). In conclusion, the majority of Syrian women preferred to live outside camps, and rather in urban cities. This observance directly negates the argument that refugees living in camps have better living conditions due to access to nutritional food, shelter, health care and educational services.

Figure 7: Reasons why female Syrian refugees left camp.



Source: UN Women, 2017: 21

Though conditions within camps do not suffice for women refugees, finding a private accommodation is also a huge challenge, especially with the lack of public support provided to Syrian refugees. Firstly, SuTP are not authorised to acquire real estate in Turkey under the Land Register Law no. 2644. This leaves the refugees with only one possibility, living in rented accommodation. According to UN Women, more than 82 percent of the women lived in acceptable conditions, however, many of these buildings were considered to have a physically poor condition. In addition, 36 percent described their places to be in either bad or very bad conditions, 62 percent described them as acceptable, and only 2.2 percent claimed it to be very good (2018: 22). Poor housing conditions can become a lot more risky for women than men. This is due to the fact Syrian women also have to deal with patriarchal cultures, less freedom of movement, and/or, long confinement in unhealthy conditions.

In terms of expenditure, private accommodations and the additional bills can become quite expensive for most of the Syrian refugees, especially female lead households. *'87% of the participants stated that their monthly income is not sufficient and does not meet their basic needs. 52% have incomes of less than TRY 1,000, 30% have incomes between TRY 1,000 and TRY 1,600, and 18% have more than TRY 1,601. These rates*

indicate that participants are living below the absolute poverty line (UN Women, 2018: 24). It was further found that among the cities, the highest shortage of monthly incomes versus expenses was in Hatay, Sanliurfa, and Izmir (2018: 25). The mentioned cities are the top ten provinces to host the highest number of SuTP⁶². Though this finding does not correlate to how expensive these individual cities are or high rental costs, it can still be concluded that the livelihoods and employment are a great factor to focus on, especially in the case of Syrian women refugees.

UN Women further elaborated that, *'paying the rent and the other costs of a house (electricity, water, etc.) are issues that women find most troubling. E. (40 years old, married with nine children, living in Hatay for two years) says: "I lose sleep over how I will pay the rent and bills' (2018:25).* Other testimonies by interviewees also indicated that the ability to pay rent is a major struggle. *'I. (50 years old, married with nine children, living in Izmir for three years) said: "We are well, except for the rent. Those who are issued a Red Crescent card pay their rents with their cards. We have to pay by our own and are having difficulty.' (2018: 25).*

In addition, relationships with the landlord factor in a lot of instances as well. While this is a good opportunity for Syrian women refugees to interact with the Turkish host communities, an exploitative relationship with the landlord can leave women refugees vulnerable. *'E. (32 years old, married with two children, living in Izmir for five years) says that she was left by her husband, and as a means of paying rent, she was asked to care for her landlord: "My landlord is old, and I look after him since his sons are in Germany. I do the laundry, cooking, get his medicine, nursing him. I am living upstairs as a tenant. I earn 1,200 TRY, but after deducting the rent, they give me 700 TRY. This money is not sufficient for me and my two children's subsistence, but I cannot find work somewhere else. I must be thrifty. My children are so young' (2018:25).*

Overcrowded accommodations also have a risk of leaving women in vulnerable conditions. In addition to lack of privacy, kitchens and bathrooms being huge by a big number of people can lead to serious health hazards as well. However, without an inclusive accommodation policy for SuTP in Turkey and high monthly rents, many refugees have no choice but to move in with family and relatives (UN Women, 2018). It is common among

⁶² <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

refugees to settle in provinces where their relatives reside. Usually they live in the same house, with two or three rooms on average while almost 48.7 percent of the refugees are living in households of seven people or more (2018: 26). In the case of women refugees, most women have a sense of estrangement around the host communities they are residing in. Due to this factor, preference is made on living in Syrian populated neighbourhoods. However, living in a house with more people also leaves women vulnerable to GBV, such as sexual abuse and high chances of child marriages. And so, with crowded accommodations start further multiple gender based issues. *'F. (23 years old, married with one child, living in Izmir) married to escape a crowded living situation and remembered: "Initially, we could not get a tent, so we moved in to our relatives' tent. There were 15 of us, the women and children, in one tent, and the men were staying in another tent. I stayed with my father, stepmother and sibling for about one year at the camp. The conditions were terrible, and I could not get along with my stepmother although I loved her. To me, marriage was sort of an escape from there. Then I started to live with the family of my husband' (2018: 27).*

2.4. SGBV

Syrian women refugees have reported to be facing a wide variety of violence: domestic, forced marriages, and harassment. Upon arrival to Turkey, many women and girls have reported sexual proposals by men (Healy, 2015: 16). Interviews held with Syrian women refugees further elaborated that, *'Turkish men feel less restricted about their behaviour when they realise that a woman is Syrian... Syrian women who wear the hijab do so differently than Turkish women, which makes them more easily recognisable, and thus an easier target for harassment' (Herwig, 2017:186).*

Syrian women at risk of domestic violence are able to benefit from the measures formed by Turkish law on Protection of the Family and Prevention Violence (ECRE, 2017:146). However, Kivilcim argues that the 'Temporary Protection Regulation and the Law on Foreigners and International Protection that govern the legal status of refugees in Turkey inflict legal violence on Syrian female refugees', as it prevents their access to international refugee protection and 'enables violence against female refugees by leaving them exposed to various forms of abuse by different actors' through legal inaction (2016: 193-194).

While some Syrian refugee women, especially those from the LGBTI community, have also resorted to sex work due to economic adversities (Ordek, 2017:263), others are victims of human trafficking (2017: 33). According to a study on SuTP and sex work, it was found that entry into this profession differed; while some were forced into it by violence by their husbands, others had escaped from child marriages or domestic violence, and some had been exploited during their migration to or within Turkey (Ordek, 2017: 63; Healy, 2015: 143). Syrian sex workers are also found to be stigmatised not just by the sex work but also due to their nationality. Both, Syrian and Turkish individuals faced, these problems. The interviewed sex workers from the study were also found to be unaware of sexual health and as well as the available health services (Ordek, 2017: 66-69).

According to UN Women, it is hard to elaborately discuss the matters of GBV as the situation is still widely hushed down by the lack of cultural acceptance. On a focused group discussion with Syrian men emphasizing on the importance of information while fighting different forms of GBV it was noted by a 39 year old Syrian man (married with six children, living in Konya for three and half years) that *'Most importantly, we do not talk about sexual life to our daughters and sons because we are embarrassed. When girls who marry early experience something bad about their marriage, they become depressed because nobody has talked to them about such matters before, and they cannot tell about the bad things that have befallen them because of fear and embarrassment. They should be trained on this matter. We can minimize incidents of rape or divorce with training courses'* (2018:35).

2.5. Early and polygamous marriages

As stated in many reports, child and polygamous marriages are a frequent occurrence among SuTP in Turkey⁶³. Unofficial polygamous marriages are found to be a major issue for Syrian women (ECRE, 2017:147; Herwig, 2017:187; Kivilcim, 2016:201; Healy, 2015:113). Although there is insufficient data present to deduce how many, it is proclaimed that hundreds of Syrian women have been taken as second and third wives at

⁶³ April 2013 – Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility – gbvaor.net

Turkish provinces close to the Syrian border (Kivilcim, 2016: 203). At the same time, polygamous marriages are criminalised under Turkish law. However, such is not the case under Syrian law. It is often argued that while some women are not fully aware of different laws persistent in the two countries, others are fully aware of the legal frameworks and still opt to do so (ECRE, 2017: 147). In the circumstances of living in Turkey, due to the illegality of the polygamous marriage these women often find themselves unable to access financial and custodial rights for themselves and their children as one usually does in marriage. Still, many women see this as a strategy to survive, as these husbands tend to provide a lot of money as well as protection for the woman's family (Herwig, 2017: 188). While in some cases, polygamous marriages do tend to provide financial aid and security to the women refugees and their families, at the same time, it can also lead to negative and violent circumstances. For instance, unregistered marriages have also become a part of the sex industry where short-term marriage contracts are being created to 'legitimise' sex (CTDC, 2015: 2). Kivilcim has also criticized the Turkish government in this respect mentioning that little to no work has been done to mitigate the issues of sexual violence of Syrian female refugees (2016:203).

In the case of child marriages, even though the exact numbers among SuTP are not mentioned, migration and displacement has increased the chances of child marriages in Turkey (Kivilcim, 2016: 203). And this prevalence has been observed even despite the fact that the legal age of marriage in Turkey is 17 years (3RP, 2018: 6; Ordek, 2017:102). The commonality of child marriages is not only inspired by the Syrian cultural and traditional practices, but also due to the lack of livelihood and self-reliance opportunities available to SuTP in Turkey. A combination of the two always pushes family to take child marriage as the only way to solve financial and social hurdles encountered (3RP, 2018: 6).

As a result of these child marriages, ensuring that all Syrian children attend school has also become a major issue in Turkey. According to UN Women, *'40% of Syrian school aged children and adolescents remain out of school despite significant efforts by the Government of Turkey to increase enrollment and retention'* (2018: 7). As a result, the national Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programme was expanded to include vulnerable Syrian children as well. The programme incentivised girl attendance in schools to mitigate dropout rates of Syrian girls from schools. However, complete

eradication of the norm is yet to be announced. According to the survey, *'60% of those aged 12 to 14 are attending school, compared to only 23% of those aged 15 to 17. The main reasons for the drop are child marriage, family pressure, work, household and care responsibilities'* (2017: 8).

2.6. Employment

While sufficient jobs are available, the Syrian workforce is always labelled cheap and flexible. This leads to long working hours with low wages, especially for Syrian women who are more susceptible to exploitation and abuse. Between 2016 and 2019, approximately 132,497 work permits have been issued to SuTP in Turkey (including renewals of already existing work permits)⁶⁴. It has also been estimated that around one million Syrian refugees have been working informally (without legal protection and rights). While Turkey has notably provided some access to the Turkish labour market for SuTP, only 15 percent women are found engaging in income generating activities. According to FAO, agricultural labour has become a major source of income for many SuTP (2020:7). While Syrian women are also widely employed in the food and agricultural industry, the employment type is still mostly informal. In addition, it is also found that most Syrian women did not work as labourers when they lived in their country of origin, but only began casual labour work once displaced to Turkey (2020: 7). Due to their lack of experience with labour employment, they are easily hired with long working hours and wages lower than those of men. And so, while only 15 percent of the Syrian women are found engaged in income generation, the majority of these are also likely to be admitted to informal employment due to shortage of formal employment opportunities present. *'15% of Syrian women are working in either regular or irregular/seasonal work, especially in agriculture, textiles and service provision, though the fields vary among cities'* (UN Women, 2018:8). According to the survey by UN Women, more than half of the working women were found satisfied with their work, while the rest were unhappy with the long working hours and low salaries. It was also found that many Syrian women lack basic knowledge of labour rights and 92 percent of the Syrian women refugees are unfamiliar with work permits (2018:8).

2.7. Opportunities

⁶⁴ UNHCR Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter -2021/2022. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85061>

The first women-only centre was set up by UNWomen and the national NGO ASAM in Gaziantep with a goal to support Syrian women refugees as well as local women with livelihoods and provide them with vocational and technical training courses as well as basic skills (ILO, 2018:8). Attendees of vocational training courses are provided with competition certificates to boost motivation as well. In turn, exhibitions are also held for the items produced in the courses. This contributes to social cohesion among the Syrian women as well as a small benefit of selling items and earning income for some period. As of March 2018, 1756 women and 790 girls had registered themselves into this women-only institution to benefit from social consultations, cohesion activities, vocational training, as well as Turkish language courses (UN Women, 2018). As a result, 767 women have participated in courses on hairdressing, skin care, computer programmes, packaging, as well as marketing (UNHCR, 2017:14). FAO, through its Syrian Refugee Resilience Plan, has also been making developments to help women refugees enhance their resilience through working in the agriculture and food industry (FAO, 2017:14). In addition to this, they have also been working with other partners to provide childcare, transportation, as well as other gender based issues that women face with regards to accessing work (2017:14).

The daily lives of most Syrian women are influenced by traditional gender based division of labour; men being the breadwinners and women being domestic. And so, for those women that are active in the labour market as well in Turkey, they are obliged to multitask both the roles; breadwinners as well as domestic work. Nevertheless, settling in Turkey has surely allowed Syrian women to question the traditional gender based outlooks such as towards women working in the labour market, child marriages, as well as education. According to UN Women, *'H. (30 years old, married with four children, living in Gaziantep) stated that she did not approve of young marriages anymore: "We used to believe that girls had to marry when they reached a certain age. We didn't care whether they would go to school or whether the persons they would marry were bad. But now whenever someone speaks of marriage at early age, I get pissed off. I say it is impossible."* (2018: 56). Changing attitudes of Syrian women has also been acknowledged by Syrian men. *'In a focus group discussion with men in Izmir, a participant stated: "Syrian women that has a profession go out more often, making them freer here, which brings about both good and bad things'* (2018: 56).

Increased cohesion of Syrian women in the public sphere has improved ever since women and girls have learnt Turkish as well as joined the labour force. Further improvement can only depend on self-confidence, access to educational opportunities as well as economic resources. *'The narrative of H (30 years old, married with four children, living in Gaziantep) shows that social services help women improve their self-confidence and support the education of their daughters: "I used to have no purpose, but after I started to come to ASAM, I feel I have more self-confidence. I would never want my daughters to marry early like me under any circumstances. I want them to receive education and obtain a diploma. Diploma brings meaning to a woman's life'* 2018:56). Being involved in public spheres can bring both new opportunities as well as new risks. In order to make the best of the situation, it is imperative to implement safety policies and awareness raising activities for both Syrian men and women.

LEBANON

As of October 2021, Lebanon has hosted 844,056 registered Syrian refugees (52 percent female and 48 percent male)⁶⁵. The total of these registered refugees have been displaced into four provinces; Bekaa (39 percent), North Lebanon (27 percent), Beirut (23 percent), and South Lebanon (10.8 percent). The majority of these Syrian refugees in Lebanon are female (52 percent), and the highest number of these refugees belong to the age group; 18-59 years ⁶⁶. A total of 189,225 Syrian households have been registered, however no further data has been mentioned with regards to these households⁶⁷. However, according to UN Women, the percentage of female headed households is increasing (2019: 8). This is because an increase in female-headed households was observed from 17 percent in 2016 to 19 percent 2017 (WFP, 2016: 68).

The government of Lebanon has announced itself to be going through a situation of mass influx and has chosen to reserve its sovereign right to determine the status of the temporarily displaced Syrians according to Lebanese laws and regulations (LCRP, 2021: 4). The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan has used terms like 'persons displaced from Syria', 'displaced Syrians', 'persons registered as refugees by UNHCR', and 'Palestinian refugees from Syria' (2021: 4). Syrian population estimates in Lebanon are giv-

⁶⁵ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

en by the UNHCR while Lebanon has also already stopped the registration of refugees in 2015, at approximately one million. *'In April 2015 the government of Lebanon instructed UNHCR to deregister all refugees who had entered Lebanon after 5 January 2015, the date when new government regulations that restricted the number of Syrians entering Lebanon came into force. On 4 May 2015 the government of Lebanon instructed UNHCR to stop all new registrations of Syrian refugees'* (Amnesty International, 2016: 11).

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 refugee convention. And so, the host country has no formal refugee camps established for the registered Syrian refugees (who are deemed as 'displaced populations' instead of refugees by the government). Informal camps have been provided to these refugees, not sponsored by the government, and these are usually termed as 'informal settlements' which are demobilized on a regular basis forcing regular displacement for the refugees in Lebanon to find shelter.⁶⁸ The rights and legal status for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is complicated. Prior to 2015, in order to remain legally within Lebanon, Syrians had to register with the Lebanon General Security Office. According to a survey held by UN Women, the process was both expensive and time consuming (2019: 9). The completion of the registration process required the refugees to submit valid identification documents, official entry slip for Lebanon, housing contract to confirm their places of residence, and a \$200 USD fee (for registration and annual renewal)⁶⁹. As of 2015, upon the government order, the UNHCR had to suspend any new registration, leading to approximately 500,000 people living in Lebanon without necessary documents from the government or the UN-lead services⁷⁰.

The influx of Syrian refugees into the country has caused some serious economic impacts. Lebanon had a loss of \$13.1 billion USD between 2012 and 2015, and an additional 170,000 Lebanese individuals had been pushed down to the poverty line while worsening situations for those already existing in poverty (Le Borgne et al, 2016). A major reason for this economic downfall arose because the Syrian workforce in Lebanon

⁶⁸ Barrett Limoges, "Thousands of Syrians face eviction from Lebanon camps," Al-Jazeera News, April 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/thousands-syrians-face-eviction-lebanon-camps-170415042553730.html>.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Residency Rules Put Syrians at Risk," January 12, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/lebanon-residency-rules-put-syrians-risk>.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: New Refugee Policy a Step Forward," February 14, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward>.

became a threat to the Lebanese workforce. This is primarily because Lebanon's employment rate had almost doubled post-2011 to 20 percent, and, simultaneously, the Syrian workforce had reached 384,000 people, which may have dis-employed about 270,000 Lebanese labourers (Chebir and Mikhael 2018: 2). *'Lebanese unskilled workers find themselves unable to compete with Syrians willing to work for lower wages, and the increase in Syrian workers has caused a 60% reduction in wages'* (FAO, 2013).

According to LCRP, the poverty rate for the Lebanese has increased from 28 percent in 2019 to 55 percent in 2020 and the extreme poverty rate has increased from 8 percent in 2019 to 23 percent in 2020 (2021: 15). In the case of Syrians, in 2019, 55 percent of the 'displaced Syrians' were living in extreme poverty, living below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (SMEB) and increasing to 89 percent by 2020 (2021: 15). Such an economic crisis has exacerbated vulnerabilities for both the Lebanese as well as the Syrian refugees, especially in terms of food, health, rent, rehabilitation, and specific needs for the disabled. For the Syrian refugees, households living in extreme poverty are susceptible to many forms of negative coping mechanisms and vulnerability. These households are the most likely to host a big number of family members, especially dependent members such as children and disability persons. *'For parents, living in poverty impacts their capacity to provide adequate care and protection for their children and increases psychosocial distress, domestic violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of girls and boys'* (2021: 16). However, data findings have proposed that female-headed households are less likely affected by poverty (89 percent) as compared to male-headed households (92 percent) (2021: 16). This is even after the fact that the income of female-headed families is eight percent less than the income of male-headed families while women are also most likely to have lower forms of education (2021: 16).

The unfortunate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic can also be foreseen as the UNFPA, WHO and UN Women published 'Gender Alert: Covid-19 Series' for Lebanon⁷¹. The publication pinpointed how men and women are being affected by the pandemic crisis in terms of health, economic prospects, as well as the role both men and women are playing in Lebanon's healthcare systems. The report has been able to share some issues that need instant attention. First, sex and gender have played a major role in fatality and infection of COVID-19 in Lebanon. This statement is noted due to the fact that,

both, infection and fatality rates from Covid-19 have consistently been higher among men than women. Out of the total positive cases in the country, the majority had been men (57 percent)⁷². In terms of the fatalities, by July 2020, it was estimated that 69 percent of the recorded 36 Covid-19 related deaths had been men⁷³. This difference among men and women fatalities due to Covid-19 can be, both, biological and social. It is widely suggested that sex differences between men and women bodies lead to different impacts from the Covid-19 infection. The differences can occur from the entry of the virus, virus sensing, innate immune response, and adaptive immune response⁷⁴. In terms of the social aspect, an increase in male fatalities can be reasoned by the fact that there are higher rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, chronic illnesses, heart diseases, and strokes among men than women⁷⁵. Though there are these social and biological arguments to justify the higher number of male fatalities than female, still the gendered patterns in Lebanon's Covid-19 data have been increasingly becoming visible and the present two arguments are no longer sufficient enough to explain how sex/gender is influencing the health outcomes of those people diagnosed with the virus.

Sexual and reproductive health (including maternal health and contraception access) has suffered immensely during the pandemic. '25 percent of refugee and Lebanese respondents reported that a key impact of COVID-19 on their household is the inability to procure essential medicine; women were more likely to raise concerns regarding the inability to procure essential medicines, often related to their reproductive and maternal health needs and their traditional caregiving roles'⁷⁶. In addition to this, a 45 percent decrease was also reported in the number of women accessing reproductive health services at MoPH PHCs between March and May 2020 as compared to the same months back in 2019⁷⁷. Period poverty was also found on the rise, in Lebanon, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and Lebanon's economic crisis⁷⁸. A report by Plan international was able to find out that 53 percent of female caregivers, and 66 percent of adolescent

⁷¹ <https://www2.unwomen.org//media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/07/ga%20lebanon%20no4/gender%20alert%20on%20covidlebanon%20issue%204.pdf?la=en&vs=4317>

⁷² MoPH Lebanon Data, July 6, 2020

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Global Health 50-50, "Sex, Gender and COVID," May 2020, <https://globalhealth5050.org/covid19/age-and-sex-data/>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ UK Aid, IRC, NRC, HI, "Worsening access to healthcare in crisis hit Lebanon," May 2020

⁷⁷ MoPH Lebanon Data, June 2020

⁷⁸ Lewis, Emily, "Period poverty in Lebanon rising amid unprecedented economic crisis" Al-Arabyia, July 3, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/07/03/Period-poverty-in-Lebanon-rising-amid-unprecedented-economic-crisis>.

Lebanese and Syrian refugee girls do not have financial means to procure menstrual pad on a monthly basis⁷⁹.

3.1. Accommodation and Shelter

According to a survey by the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), the average household size is five persons per household where 43 percent (majority of the households) have four members, 33 percent have five to six members, 23 percent have seven members or more (UNHCR ODP, 2019:25). It also found that 18 percent of the Syrian refugee households were headed by women. While the highest share of these women-led households were found in Bekaa, the lowest was in Beirut. Among these women-led households, some refugee women are widows, some divorced, while others have husbands who either stayed in Syria, sought asylum in another country, or even went missing (forcibly disappeared or detained in Syria) (Amnesty International, 2016: 13).

In the four provinces hosting Syrian refugees population, most of these people live either in cities or villages due to the government's clear prohibition of authorizing refugee camps. A small fraction of the Syrian refugees are also living in temporary tents set up throughout the country. Through the VASyR, three key findings have been published regarding the places of residence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Firstly, *'In 2019, the distribution of Syrian refugee households across the main shelter types remained mostly stable with the majority (69%) living in residential structures, 20% in non-permanent shelters and 11% in non-residential structures'*. Secondly, *'rent costs in residential and non-residential shelters remained similar to last year at US\$ 213 and US\$ 149, respectively. Rent in non-permanent structures increased to US\$ 61'*. And thirdly, *'over half of Syrian refugee households were living in shelter conditions that were either overcrowded, below standards or in dangerous condition'* (UNHCR ODP, 2019: 46).

Under the majority residential category, refugees are found living in either apartments, concierge rooms in residential buildings, or hotel rooms. In the case of non-residential shelters, refugees are found residing in factories, workshops, farms, shops, active

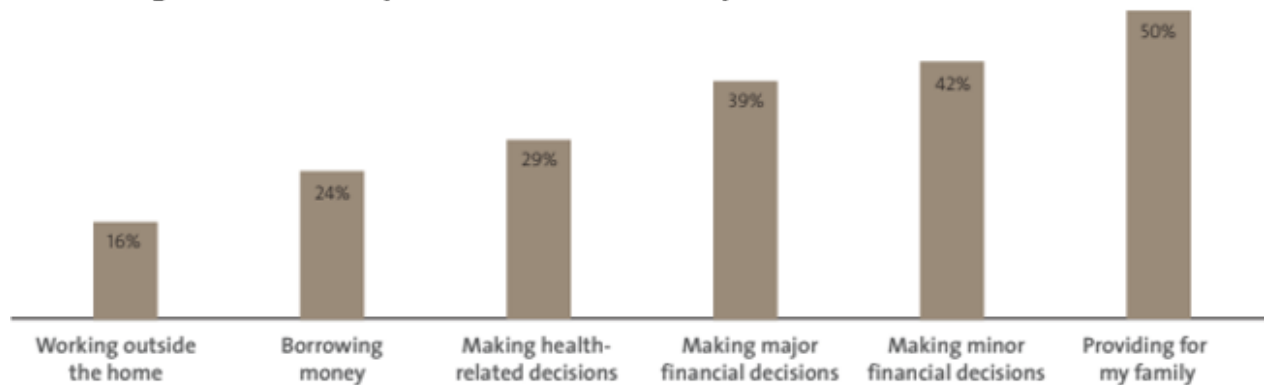
⁷⁹ Plan International Lebanon, "Covid-19 Needs Assessment," April 2020, <https://plan-international.org/publications/covid-19-multi-sectoral-needs-assessment>.

construction sites, agriculture/engine/pump rooms, warehouses, and/or schools. And then a small percentage of refugees are found scattered all around the country living in tents (2019: 46). In the case of choosing residential and non-residential shelters, reason to opt for such accommodations was given to be rental costs, close proximity to relatives, close proximity to livelihood/work. In the case of non-permanent shelters the reason was given to be rental costs as well as close proximity to relatives. Although most of these Syrian refugees lived in residential and non-residential shelters, overcrowding is still a huge problem as well. This is to say that shelter conditions have not yet improved well enough for the refugee families. According to VASyR findings, 57 percent of the Syrian refugee families are living in overcrowded shelters, or in shelters below the humanitarian standards, and/or in shelter that are bound to collapse eventually (2019: 11). And so even if these refugee families are able to manage living in a residential space, the conditions are still substantially affected by overcrowding. This puts women and children in quite a vulnerable position, making them susceptible to domestic and GBV.

According to UN Women, when Syrian women refugees were asked about their roles in the households most of them (52 percent) have stated that they play no role in the financial decisions of the household. On the other hand, 19 percent mentioned that they are solely responsible for financial decisions of their household while 29 percent stated that they made financial decisions together with their husbands (2019: 17). Additionally, the women refugees elaborated that most of their authority lies on family related and non-financial aspects of the household. On the contrary, the women who head their own households are found to be on top of both the financial and family related decisions of their family as compared to women who are headed by their male counterparts. Upon an interview undertaken by UN Women in Lebanon, a Syrian refugee women (Tala) mentioned, *'Previously, in Syria, I was a housewife and nothing more. I never used to leave the house, maybe only once a week. I never worried about anything because my husband took care of everything. But here in Lebanon things have changed... I have to work. It is not easy'* (2019: 19). Figure 12, below, also mentions the widespread responsibilities that refugee women had to take over ever since they migrated from Syria to Lebanon. Though these new set of responsibilities have a chance to pave the way towards empowerment for the women-led Syrian households in Lebanon, at the same time, having sole responsibility for yourself and the family can leave Syrian

refugee women under great distress and negative coping mechanisms as well. And so, a need of government sponsored and/or UN sponsored educational and livelihood initiatives to help empower women with respect to their financial responsibilities has become quite essential to make sustainable growth possible.

Figure 8: New responsibilities women report to have taken in Lebanon



Source: UN Women, 2019: 19

According to studies undertaken by Amnesty International, many refugee women have reported numerous challenges with respect to paying monthly rent on time. For instance, they were informed upon a focus group interview with a 50 year old Syrian women, Rajaa, who lives in Bekaa Valley that, *‘Every 15th of the month I have to pay the rent for my tent. The landlord won’t wait for us [to pay] so sometimes I have to go out and beg for the money in order to pay the rent’* (2016: 37). The woman also mentioned that she and her family live with other families in their accommodation to make ends meet. *‘I live in a tent with 10 other people. The tent leaks. We asked for a cover to cover the tent where the water gets in but no one helped us. We are three widows and our children living together’* (2016: 37).

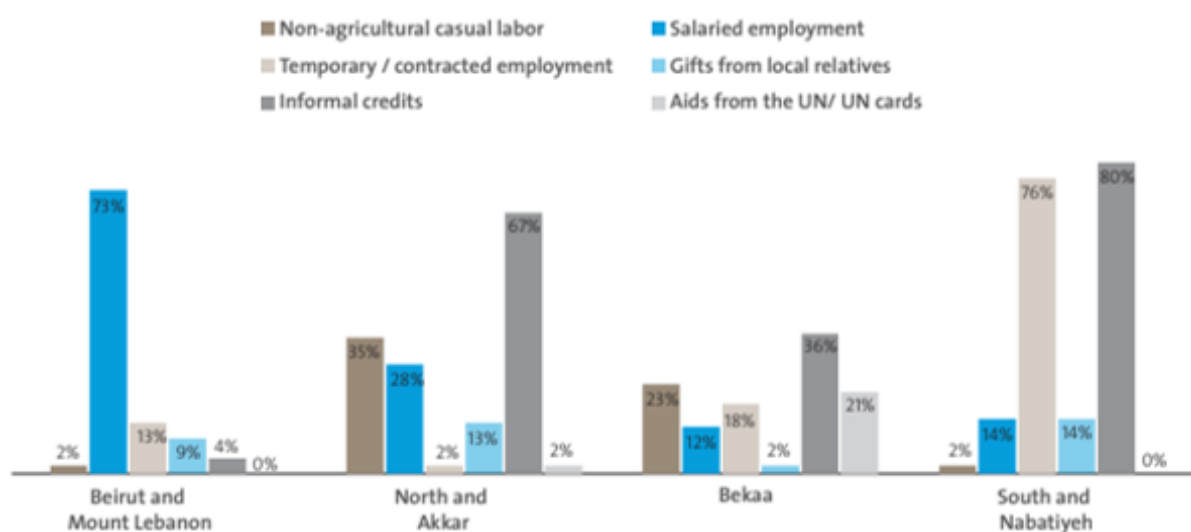
Other living conditions, despite overcrowding, are also a serious issues within these residential shelters. According to another interview, with *“Manara”, a 43- year-old Syrian woman living in Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley, said: “At the entrance of my building there are lots of mice and rats. One of my daughters got really frightened when she saw them, especially because there is no sunlight there”. Another woman, “Nour”, said of the place she rents for her and her son: “it hardly qualifies for living – it only has one lamp and one pipe for water. Even though we only have one lamp, it costs LBP 20-25,000 [US\$13-\$16] per month for electricity”* (2016: 38).

3.2. Livelihoods and Economic Security

According to UN Women, *‘More than three-quarters (79%) of female Syrian refugees in Lebanon reported that they are unable to meet the basic needs of themselves, their households, or both. All of the women who participated in qualitative interviews stated a desire to work to support their families, as they often had to make sacrifices or borrow money to survive’* (2019: 11). The study also found that only one percent of the Syrian women were acquainted with work permits. At the same time, 13 percent of women confirmed that they were working full time or part time (2019: 11).

The minimum working wage in Lebanon is \$450 USD per month, and around 68 percent of the refugee women had claimed their monthly salaries to be less than \$500 USD (2019:11). According to Figure 9, below, incomes varied considerably depending on the province. While in South Lebanon and Nabatiyeh as well as Bekaa more women lived under \$500 USD per month, women refugees in Beirut and Mount Lebanon as well as North Lebanon and Akkar had more opportunities with respect to salaried employment. And so, despite an obvious desire by many refugee women for great work opportunities, only 15 percent were aware of the employment assistance services while only 3 percent had actually accessed these services (2019: 12).

Figure 9: Top income sources



Source: UN Women, 2019: 12

Though there are a few salaried as well as contractual employment opportunities available for Syrian refugee women which helps them meet up there expenditures to a certain level, the issue of exploitation in employment is another serious factor. Due to

lack of women refugees awareness regarding work permit, their irregular status in the host country, as well as insufficient salaried employments in most provinces, the most common option Syrian refugees resort to is informal employment. In addition, occupations in agriculture, hygiene, and construction are the only ones that the Lebanese government has prohibited for Syrian refugees (Amnesty International, 2016: 33). This means that most jobs are low paid with no job security. The ILO also reported that, *'Syrian refugee women earn on average LBP 248,000 (US\$165) per month, lower than the average earnings of Syrian refugee men, which is LBP 432,000 (US\$288) and significantly below the minimum wage level of 675,000 (US\$450)'* (2014: 27-28). They also reported that 75 percent of the women refugees complained of back or joint pains due to unhealthy work conditions and additionally also faced low incomes, long working hours, working without breaks, and late payment of wages (2014: 31-32).

One of the interviewees, Hanan, from Beirut mentioned that *'there is exploitation by employers. They know we will agree to whatever low wage they offer because we are in need. They will offer a job for a very low wage and you wouldn't agree if you weren't in need. If you protest about the wage, they say 'instead of having you I will bring two other Syrians on the same wage'* (Amnesty International, 2016: 34). Upon another interview with a refugee, it was found that employers really took unfair advantage of Syrian workforce. *'My sister is 25 years old. She's a graduate of a pharmacy institute in Syria and she wanted to work in a pharmacy here in Lebanon. The employer wanted to exploit her. He offered her \$1 an hour'*. (2016:34-35).

In addition to low wages and economic exploitation, refugee women have also encountered SGBV in context of employment. As a result, many families and women also chose to sacrifice income in order to avoid chances of potential violence and harassment. *"Asmaa" is a 56-year-old Palestinian refugee from Syria. Her husband is dead and she lives in Shatila, Beirut, with three of her daughters and her son. She said: "My daughter worked in a store. The manager harassed her and touched her. That is why I don't let my daughters work now". Her son, who was 14 when they arrived in Lebanon and is now 17 years old, is the only member of the family who is working'* (2016: 35). Another woman, Mouna (30 years old who lives with three kids and her brother's family while her husband had died) had said, *'There is a big difficulty living here in Lebanon because of the society and the men. If I want to search for a job, a man would always ask for something – an exchange. I went to one place to apply for a job*

there. It was a clothes shop. The employer asked to have a coffee with me but I refused. I had doubts because of the way he was looking at me and I thought he wanted something beyond coffee' (2016: 35).

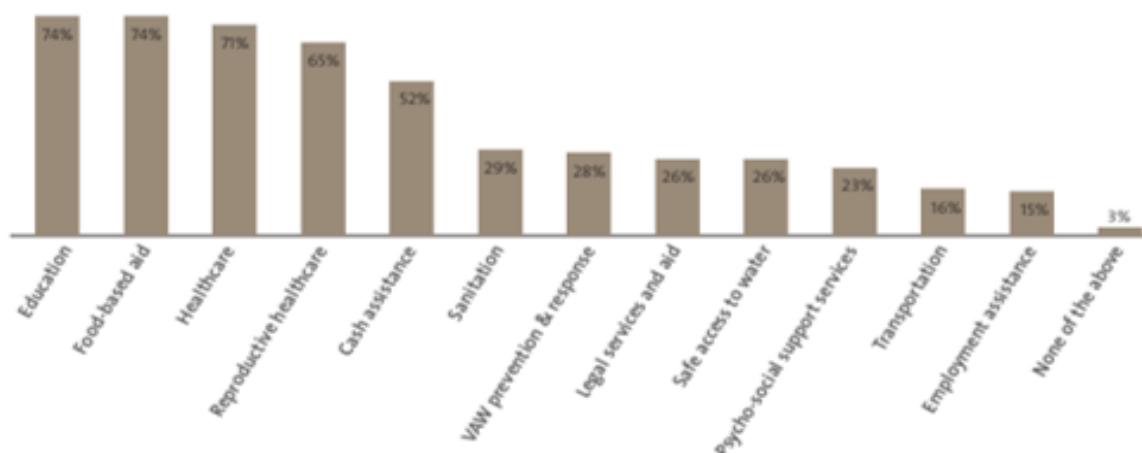
3.3. Empowerment

Despite many gender based issues and challenges, some Syrian refugee women living in Lebanon have used their skills and abilities to monitor the human rights violations being committed around their communities as well, especially against other refugees. For instance, Maha, a 28 year old Palestinian human rights defender reported that, *'I am an activist in [one of the] Palestinian refugee camps. I work with a friend. We are known in the camp as activists. A few months ago I got a phone call asking me and my friend to help because people were being detained. We were told that over three days seven young women, 12 young men and an old man had been detained at an army checkpoint for having invalid residence permits. My friend and I tried to contact the police station to investigate if the number we were told about was true. The police said "no we didn't detain anyone but in the first place we take into consideration the [validity of] residence permits". In order to confirm the number [of detainees] we had to visit each house to investigate and find family members to speak to. From this we were able to deduce the number. When we asked families about the names of those detained, the families wouldn't give the names of girls who were detained because they were worried about their reputations. I was able to meet one of the girls who had been released [from detention] and I asked her about who was still detained. So I came to know that six girls were released after three days and another remained detained for 10 days and while they were detained they were distributed across several police stations. The leaders at the camp started a protest to call for release [of the detainees]. Since then I have been receiving threatening phone calls. The calls come from an unknown or withheld number. In one call threatening me – they said "you and your friend stop working or else"' (Amnesty International, 2016: 28).*

It is initiatives like these that have helped and will continue to help Syrian refugee women on their fight towards livelihoods and employability as well as authority over household financial decisions. While not enough government sponsored programs have been provided to help the women in better social cohesion with the host communities, the employment opportunities from the three sectors (agriculture, hygiene, and construction) are a good start to lead their lives towards better independence and

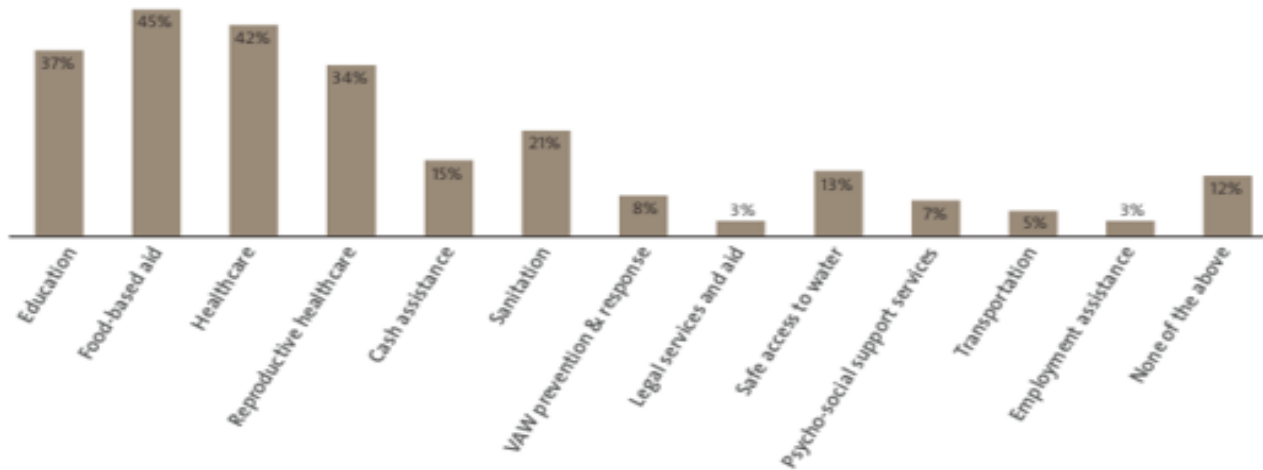
empowerment. Additionally, services and assistance have been widely provided by the UN-led agencies. According to UN Women, the majority of the refugee women (97 percent) admitted that they are aware of at least one service they were asked about in the study (2019: 28). However, the levels of usage of these services were still comparatively low among women refugees. According to Figure 10 and Figure 11, while most of the women were well aware of healthcare services (71 percent), food-based aid (74 percent), and education services (74 percent) among many others, comparatively lower percentages of woman were found actually accessing these services. Through Figure 11, we can deduce that the percentage of refugee women using the services provided, 37 percent took education, 45 percent went with food based aid, and only 42 percent accessed healthcare.

Figure 10: Total awareness of services



Source: UN Women, 2019: 28

Figure 11: Total usage of services



Source: UN Women, 2019: 29

GERMANY

At the end of 2019, Germany has been reported to have approximately 1.15 million refugees (of which 309 000 are asylum seekers) and half of these refugees were Syrian.⁸⁰ While up-to-date data is still not yet available to distinguish between the proportion of male and female Syrian refugees residing in Germany, it has been reported that between 2012 and 2016 more than 500,000 girls and women have sought refuge in this host country (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 1). In addition, these female refugees are mostly of young age and the most important countries of origin for these female refugees is Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Another report has stated that by the end 2016, approximately 550,000 Syrian asylum seekers had have had arrived to Germany since the conflict were male (Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018: 5). The lack of sufficient as well as imbalanced data between gender compositions highlights a lack of sufficient knowledge in regards to the experiences of Syrian women refugees in Germany.

Additionally, it has also been argued that many dangerous flight routes undertaken by Syrians to Germany as well as the high costs of the smugglers is another substantial reason as to why this gender imbalance is so obvious (2018: 5). As women and girls are

most likely to be vulnerable to such illegal and dangerous migration routes and the high costs of this risky journey, most Syrian families prefer to send their male members to reach Germany first. They do so hoping to seek their rights of family reunification in the near future to make it safer for the rest of the family members to migrate. However, these plans of family reunification do not always prove advantageous to Syrian families as the long bureaucratic procedures, shifting German asylum policies and regulations has prolonged separation of families for two to three years or even longer. In fact, as of 2019, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has made decisions of putting the asylum for Syrians on hold⁸¹. The postponement has reported to taken place for to reassess the security situation in Syria. But many refugee organizations in Germany worry that this new take on Syrian asylum seekers by the migration office could make process for new applicants as well as those who recently qualified for subsidiary protection quite tough. *‘Subsidiary protection under paragraph four of the asylum law applies when neither refugee protection nor an entitlement to asylum can be granted and serious harm is threatened in the country of origin. Paragraph four defines this serious threat as a death sentence, human rights abuses, or conflict. In 2018 over 17,411 people were granted this type of subsidiary protection under paragraph four of the asylum law’*⁸².

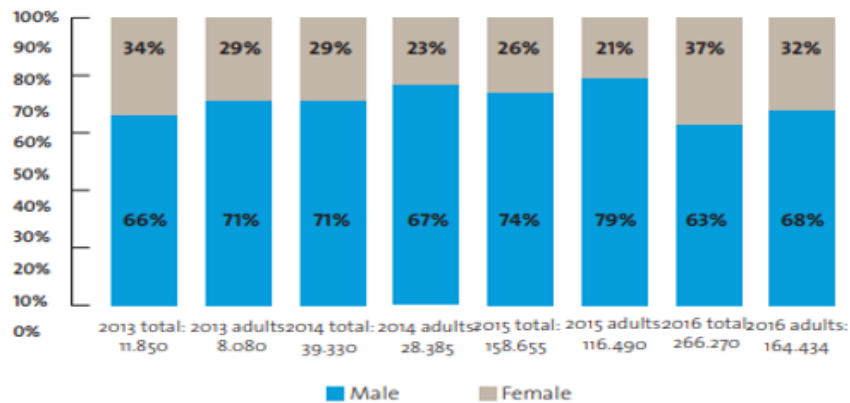
According to Figure 12, below, it can also be noted that the rate of asylum granted to Syrian women dropped between 2013 (34 percent) and 2015 (21 percent); after which it rose again to 32 percent by 2016. It was also reported that the number of children and minors had also increased between 2015 (27 percent) and 2016 (37 percent) (Eurostat, 2017). While it is hard to say whether the women and children entered Germany through family reunification or on their own, because it was too difficult to try the former option, or even through family groups with their husbands, it is still obvious that Syrian women and children are most likely to have taken the risky route to Germany as well for international protection and safety (UNHCR, 2016d, section 3,2).

⁸⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/germany.html>

⁸¹ <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/16579/germany-puts-decisions-about-syrian-asylum-on-hold>

⁸² Ibid.

Figure 12: Gendered breakdown of Syrian's first time asylum applications (2013-2016)



Source: EUROSTAT, 2017 [migr_asyappctza]

In 2015, when one million refugees had migrated to the EU seeking refugee status (most of whom had arrived through sea, many losing lives), EU member states, its media, and its politicians referred to the event as a 'refugee crisis'. The scenario of Syrians seeking refuge from war in conflict was portrayed as illegal migration creating grave economic and security risks within the EU and advocating member states to tighten border controls into the EU (Freedman et al, 2017: 5-9).

Although the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) pushed all EU member states to take gender issues into consideration when dealing with refugee applications and refugee status, the institution is believed to still lack strategies to improve women's access to protection in national asylum systems as well as reception centres (Freedman 2016a: 20). This is an important aspect as many women refugees are noted to have faced unfair disadvantage when making claims for asylum for insufficient protection from gender based violence in these centres. The common gender constructions of women being more vulnerable asylum seekers than men also disadvantage women by portraying them with the status of 'passive victimhood'. In the case of young men, the common gender construction usually constructs them as threatening while the possible forms of vulnerability among men (physical or emotional trauma) is overlooked (Freedman, 2015: 17).

The reunification process, as mentioned, is quite a long and bureaucratic process creating many complications for family members. In order to apply for this particular visa

from abroad, families are required to apply online for an appointment to submit their own application and have a personal interview as well at the German embassy. As the German embassy in Damascus has already been shut down as of 2012, Syrians are now instructed to cross the border to either Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon in order to present themselves to their nearest German embassy. However, basic requirement of attending the appointment has already become a challenging task as movement to these neighboring countries of Syria require a valid visa.

Another major obstacle when attempting to access the legal right of family reunification in Germany is the immensely long waiting period for the interviews in the neighboring countries. *'In autumn 2015, Syrians had to wait for up to 16 months for their interview with the German embassy in Beirut'* (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016). After the submission of the necessary documents families have to wait for another eight months or even more. As a result, many families had to wait for up to four years for their reunification. Upon interviews by UN Women it was that, *'Ahmad, a 43-year-old former university lecturer, arrived in Germany in 2014. His wife's interview with the German embassy in Beirut was scheduled for summer 2017, which means that her reunification visa should be issued some time in 2018. In some cases, the interview appointment comes too late. Ahmad's friend Jabbar, for example, who arrived in Germany in 2015 and has not yet been recognized as a refugee, learnt in August 2016 that his wife and two children had been killed by an airstrike in Aleppo'* (Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018: 13).

Family reunifications after two to three years undergo quite a lot of emotional and psychological challenges. Usually the family members have grown out to be different from the separate experiences they have had in life. Many refugees struggle to revive the past as they find it difficult to believe that time has brought them into radically different circumstances. Some times people, after reunification in Germany even find it difficult to adjust to the new lifestyle while their partner/family member has already made quite a few connection and contacts in the community that the new family members are not acquainted to. Women, at many times, have also sought quite a lot of self-confidence and independence over the time period from the male members of their family (husband, father, or brother). This is mostly because of the fact that during the whole long time period of separation, women had to step up as the breadwinners of the family while the male members had left for Germany. While for some families the oldest

son would be found responsible to take over of the family responsibilities, for others the oldest daughters would be taking over.

After arriving in Germany, most women and girls are found to feel distressed over the changes they have to face in their lifestyles as it is considerably different from before (Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018: 19). While they are trying to go back to their 'normal' way of living, the possibility that this will happen is not quite high. While many get overwhelmed by the lengthy bureaucratic procedures, others find their living conditions not quite the same as they expected. *'Everything is difficult and slow'*, stated Fatema, a 32-year-old mother of four children. *'It took us half a year to place my teenage daughter in a school and one year to find a kindergarten place for the 4-year-old twins. I have to care for them and have no time to learn German'* (2018:19).

4.1. Accommodation and Shelter

Often times there is also a shortage of proper housing facilities that has pushed many reunited refugee families to live in mass crowded shelter centres. *'Housam (39) and Mariam (29), a couple from Qamishli, arrived in Germany in 2015 and were placed with their three children (2, 3 and 5 years old) in a sports hall, where they could hardly bear the noise and lack of privacy'* (2018: 19). Just like that, many refugee families are made to live in such reception centres and sometimes are displaced around to different reception centres for weeks and months as well.

The majority of the refugees allocated to sports halls are male. This is because men tend to dominate their space while women are left with no specific spaces for retreat. Also while showers are gender segregated, many times they don't have a lock on them to ensure privacy and security for the refugee men and women (Rabee, 2015: 10). Lack of privacy is a huge concern for women refugees residing in reception camps as this way they are the most susceptible to SGBV. Many reports of sexual harassment have been reported to the counselling office, especially of newly arrived single women refugees (2015: 10). *'In 2014, only around half of the 16 German federal states had minimum standards for the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees, and even in states where these exist, many of them are voluntary and not rigorously monitored'* (2015: 12).

Due to lack of privacy and common instances of harassment, women refugees have no choice but to wear their headscarves all the time in the centres while pregnant women are made to sleep for months on camp beds. Upon a focus group interview with volunteers working at the reception centres it was stated that, *'Most women I met who arrived pregnant appear depressed and apathetic; some cry the entire day. In most cases, this changes after giving birth and the housing office manages to offer them a flat or at least a separate room in another accommodation when they leave the hospital. But sometimes, they have to return to the sports hall, which is a nightmare for them. One fell ill immediately and had to return to hospital for two more weeks. It is also very difficult to organize the preparations for delivery. In the hospital there is not always a translator. Since it is not common in Syria that husbands accompany their wives to hospital to give birth, many women without an extended family come alone. Even if the husband would like to join her, he is often unable to do so because he has to take care of smaller children that he cannot leave with extended family members'* (Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018: 20).

In many cases, women also feel isolated (2018: 20). Upon another interview with one of the Syrian female refugees, Zein, she stated that she and her husband had been living in a shared accommodation for their first six months with wooden walls between family beds. After that, they were transferred to a three bedroom flat shared with two other couples. The lack of privacy was distressing for Zein as she claimed that, *'Since one year my husband and I have never been alone in a house and I find it hard that I never can be alone in a room'* (2018: 20). She also claimed that it was hard to find social compatibility with the other couples. While one of the two couples was found very religious, often criticizing her for not praying or wearing a veil, the other was found to be Assad regime supporters. *'They represent exactly what made me flee and now I have to live with them without any privacy. I try not to have confrontations, only hello and good-bye. When the man enters the kitchen, I go out'* (2018: 20-21). In addition, since Zein is only entitled to attend a language courses after her recognition as refugee, but no such courses are available at the village she lives in and so she and her husband have nothing much left to do but wait. *'It's like you escaped from a prison and come to be in another prison. It's just a more sophisticated prison'* (2018: 21).

There are not many reports available to discuss the experiences and challenges of Syrian refugee women in Germany in particular, however, BAMF have published a few reports regarding refugees in Germany as well as some specific to women refugees in Germany. And so, while the proportion of Syrian refugees and Syrian women refugees are not detailed within these reports, it is understood that the findings and discussions within these reports are related to Syrian refugees in Germany. According to report on the Housing Situation of Refugees in Germany, men are less likely to live in a single accommodation than women (Baier and Siegert, 2018: 5). The chances of this becoming even less likely increases when there are children/minors living with the women. This is also mostly due to the fact that federal states recommend families with minor children to be provided single accommodation (Müller 2013: 22; Wendel 2014: 55 et seqq.; BBSR 2017: 41, 74). It has already been noted that the security and privacy is the utmost priority for women refugees to ensure security in accommodations. According to the survey carried out by BAMF, 93 percent of the refugees rated their residential area as very or fairly safe (Baier and Siegert, 2018: 8). While 91 percent living in shared accommodations rated their residence as safe, it was 96 percent for people living in single accommodation that rated their residence as safe (2018: 8). Men and women were found to have rated the shared accommodations approximately similarly (86 percent and 87 percent) (2018: 8).

In 2016, 52 percent of the refugees interviewed were living in single accommodations after one or three years of living in Germany, while the other 48 percent was still found living in shared accommodations (2018: 9). The likeliness of living in a single accommodation rather than a shared one depends on the refugee status, family situation, as well as the federal state the refugees are living in. And so, housing allocations are strictly regulated by the law and through institutional processes.

4.2. Gender-related Effects

Though much of these reports and research is in regards to women refugees in general and not Syrian women refugees, it is still found that the majority of these women refugees are from Syria. According to Table 2, below, between 2012 and 2016 the highest number of women refugees in Germany were Syrians. In addition, the data also shows that majority of the female refugees entering Germany are asylum seekers.

Table 2: Female first-time asylum applicants and cumulated percentage of women by country of origin, 2012-2016

Country of origin	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total 2012-2016	Cumulated percentage of women, 2012-2016
All countries	24,670	40,109	57,891	136,315	247,804	506,789	33,5%
including: TOP 10 countries							
Syria	2,348	4,075	11,419	41,527	96,817	156,186	32.4%
Afghanistan	2,447	2,282	2,740	8,459	40,379	56,307	30.8%
Iraq	2,502	1,859	2,261	8,675	37,051	52,348	37.2%
Iran	1,779	1,961	1,335	1,767	7,630	14,472	33.1%
Albania	107	534	3,432	21,339	6,102	31,514	40.4%
Eritrea	282	951	2,673	2,649	5,720	12,275	26.0%
Russian Federation	1,533	7,304	2,114	2,727	5,436	19,114	49.1%
Nigeria	418	848	1,619	1,856	4,582	9,323	37.8%
Somalia	404	1,015	1,486	1,476	3,282	7,663	30.0%
Serbia	4,212	5,661	8,342	8,188	3,113	29,516	49.0%

Source: Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 3

A noteworthy argument is that *‘gender relations become more egalitarian as a result of (forced) migration because women’s economic power tends to increase while men’s financial contributions to the family income are often reduced as a result of unemployment or low-paid jobs (Pease 2009: 80). As men lose their ability of complete control over the decision-making of the family, they are gradually pushed to become more responsible of the daily domestic tasks in the family. Some women refugees have claimed to have experienced an improvement in their gender status. For instance, ‘Nadine (25), who was the first in the family to be offered a language course. Her husband is now taking care of the children while she is at school. Mariam, who had been living with her husband and children in a sports hall, decided to get a divorce when she realized that the monthly allowances for her and her children are independent from those of her husband and that living alone with children in Germany is much easier than in Syria’ (Damir-Geilsdorf and Sabra, 2018: 31).*

At the same time, some refugee women have also found themselves feeling isolated and even more restricted in their freedom of movement than in Syria. This is most likely due to great environmental and cultural adjustments that the newcomers have to face upon arrival in a country whose language they also do not speak. Most certainly these refugees have to make their connections and contacts from the very beginning. It also

depends on what kind of ideologies their families hold with regards to gender. Are some husbands or other male counterparts enforcing more cultural and traditional norms upon their families in Germany or are they enforcing more of equal powers and equal work undergone within their household? *'Ubayda (49), for example, is a rather conservative woman and so is her husband. In Syria, she frequently visited kin and neighbours. In Germany, she often feels lonely and complains that her husband does not take her out of the house. The radically different social environment is difficult to adapt to for many women and may produce both empowering and disempowering effect'* (2018: 32).

In other cases, some women have also had mixed feelings about their new experience in Germany. This is usually due to the immense uncertainty and randomness that prolongs the refugee status and procedures. While the prolonged isolation from their families has made women more independent, however the status of a refugee too brings in quite a lot of restrictions. According to an interview with a refugee, Rihab, she expressed that, *'When I need to go out, I do not have to ask anyone for permission'*. However, at the same time, *'For months, I did not know whether I would be sent to Italy. I am a recognized asylum seeker now, but I have been separated from my daughters for more than two years. This has all been extremely exhausting. Sometimes I feel sad and depressed and so guilty that I fall ill. I cannot sleep and I am unable to follow up on my German. This is a big problem, because I feel extremely powerless when I do not understand the language. I have been here for two years and I still depend on other people's goodwill when I have to deal with papers and documents. Each time when they ask me about what I want to do in the future, I think about the life that I lost. I loved my work, to earn my own money and to support the family. Now I depend on social aid, and I find it is against my dignity'* (2018: 32).

To overcome depression and other negative feelings it has become essential for Rihab and many other women like her to build a new network of friendships as well as participate in different educational activities/courses. Women refugees are just as enthusiastic and motivated to participate in German societies as men. This is even after the fact that many refugee women lack educational qualifications and/or any other forms of vocational training. They even have little experience regarding paid work in their countries of origin (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 1). Syrian women also have weaker German language skills than their male counterparts. A possible reason for this could

also be that they have fewer opportunities to speak the language than men do. This factor takes us straight to the employment scenario of women refugees in Germany. The employment participation of women refugees in Germany is quite low as compared to men as well as to other population groups (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017). It is often argued that major reasons for refugee women's lack of participation in the labor market are lack of qualifications, less experience in employment, delayed participation in German language courses, as well as family/ domestic obligations. While the number of women refugees is low in the German labor market, this does not correspond with low motivation for participation by the women. On the contrary, the majority of the women wants to have an employment.

In 2015 and 2016, refugees were provided with a wide range of opportunities for language acquisition. The BAMF designed and funded integration courses for asylum applicants with good chances of staying in Germany. The Federal Employment Agency as well as many other institutions (municipality, volunteers and welfare associations) provided entry level language courses . While these opportunities have been widely taken care for, no gender specific data were created to find out how many women refugees were using these resources. However, according to the BAMF's integration course statistics, women were slightly overrepresented among the course attendants in 2015 (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 6). While migrants from other EU members states were the majority in these courses, refugees were represented by two countries, Syria and Iraq. Though the statistics showed a positive result regarding women refugees participating in integration courses, the dynamics had completely changed in 2016. The percentage of Syrian women involved in these courses dropped from 25 percent (2015) to 19 percent (2016) (2017: 7). Ultimately, these results demonstrate that Syrian women refugees have not yet accessed integration courses the same way as Syrian men had, as they percentage of male refugees was clearly higher (75 percent in 2015 and 80 percent in 2016).

Women refugees' integration into the labor market is directly and adversely affected by the lack of language proficiency and other qualifications. *'Analyses by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) of earlier cohorts of female refugees in Germany show that they had significantly less work experience than men'* (Liebau/Salikutluk 2016: 735). Additionally, the data from the first asylum seekers in 2015 and the first

quarter of 2016 was also able to find that, *'the percentage of female refugees who have no formal school education or only primary school education is higher than that of males'* (Neske/Rich 2016: 7; Rich 2016: 6). However, just like integration courses, when women participate in other professional training courses they are as likely to succeed as men attaining the same qualification (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 9).

Delving further into the labor participation of women refugees, it is understood that women are found less likely to be working and, at the same time, more frequently employed in part time jobs. *'Working women in the BAMF Refugee Study 2014 are far more frequently only employed in part-time or marginal jobs than male refugees (67% vs. 43%)'* (Worbs and Baraulina, 2017: 11). Also, it should be pointed out that forced migration is not always driven with prospects of participation in the labor market at the host country. This factor is important to highlight as there are many other migrants entering Germany (usually from other EU member states) with the intention of employment. However, a highly prominent and controversial reason for lack of Syrian women participation is due to the low acceptance of the headscarf. What does it mean to be German? This is the abstract question that has become quite prevalent in regards to migrants' integration into the German culture.⁸³ Even after the integration courses provided to asylum seekers, women are finding it difficult to integrate into the economy partly because they are not yet quite integrated into the German culture in the eyes of the employers as well as colleagues. Headscarves have even gained popularity in the political sphere of Germany as in 2017 the Christian Democratic Union indicated opposition to full face Islamic veils. *'We are not Burqa'*, said the interior minister Thomas de Maiziere while Merkel openly backed him supporting a ban *'where ever legally possible'*.⁸⁴ Additionally, while many Germans agree that the hijab should not be banned everywhere, they are still divided in the argument of whether it is culturally acceptable.⁸⁵ This popular criticism towards the Syrian refugee women's choice of clothing makes it harder for them to participate in employment opportunities, or as a matter of fact, social cohesion in the German culture as well.

In terms of empowerment, Syrian women in Germany have taken an advantage from their new lives in the western culture by asking for divorce from their abusive husbands

⁸³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/12/women-with-headscarves-need-not-apply-in-germany/>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

whom they had to marry at a young age. *'They had not been forced to marry the men for religious reasons but often because they came from rural backgrounds where patriarchy (and patriarchal interpretations of Islam) were predominant'*.⁸⁶ In Syria, the concept of shame instilled within women as well as the social pressure usually stops them from taking such measures of freedom. However, this is not the case once residing in Germany. A woman Arabic speaking lawyer who helps Syrian women with their divorces in Germany stated that, *'I have never seen so many people from one nationality want to get divorced,'* adding, *"I've never seen a social structure break down like it has among Syrians"*.⁸⁷ Such observations show that women are taking advantages of the laws that grant them equal rights and social norms instead of blaming them for a divorce or portraying a bad image of them for leaving their husbands.

Though reports on Syrian women refugees in Germany are not common, an understanding of the dynamics as asylum seekers in an EU country is usually found through BAMF reports on refugees in Germany. However, more nation based and gender specific reports on the matter, especially more recent statistical data (both on Syrian refugees as well as their gender compositions) is quite essential to fully understand refugee integration and gender based inequalities prevalent.

CONCLUSION

With eleven years gone by and several peace process conferences to resolve the Syrian conflict, the Syrian women are still found fighting to be heard in decision-making platforms that impact their social, political, economic lives, both, within Syria as well as the studied host countries. At the ongoing peace process, Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva (2019 - present), the Syrian women representatives urged for the full, equal, and meaningful participation within the Syrian conflict and the Refugee Crisis. Violence is not only a source of trauma to the victims, in the case of women, it heavily marginalizes their access to public spaces as well as their contribution in sustainable peace. International organizations such as the United Nations and the International Organization of Migration have taken numerous steps to improve,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ <https://theconversation.com/why-so-many-syrian-women-get-divorced-when-they-move-to-western-countries-151501>

⁸⁷ Ibid.

especially women-led initiatives, to address the continuous violence and discrimination that Syrian refugee women have been experiencing throughout their migration process. They have also made efforts to ensure that women participation is kept as a necessary condition under all ongoing peace processes.

However, despite these efforts, majority of the Syrian women are still found with unequal access to opportunities, both, inside (as IDPs) and outside Syria (as refugees). They are still outnumbered by men in peace processes, while at the Astana process they were not even present. In the case of SGBV, the Syrian conflict has heightened the plight of Syrian women as compared to that of men. In many cases, avoidance of SGBV has led many Syrian families to negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage as well as polygamous marriages, in hopes that it will 'protect' and 'shelter' their girl/women family members. On the other hand, while host countries; Turkey, Lebanon, and Germany, have provided many Syrian's with refuge, their host communities and government policies have fashioned many differential challenges for Syrian refugees. And, in the case of Syrian refugee women in these host countries, access to opportunities and resources, so far, has been disproportionate as well.

By reviewing all these challenges and experiences, this thesis paper believes that it has become imperative for all responsible authorities to take action in mitigating the gender-based differences that are prevalent within the whole migration dynamics of the Syrian refugees, especially through gendering human security during migration. The purpose of this 'gendered human security' approach is not to place Syrian refugee women into victimized and marginalized groups, but, rather to understand that women needs and experiences are different as they are constantly dealing with discriminatory insecurities in migration. In addition, they should see increased women participation as an opportunity that will bring better creative ways in promoting peace and empowerment within their societies, enabling all Syrians to be resilient.

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