



Consultative Forum Thematic Meeting on Gender-related Persecution

Discussion Paper Workshop 1: Women and Girls in the EU Asylum System

Workshop leads: Sarah Martin, Women's Refugee Commission and Maria Margherita Maglietti, UNICEF

Background

The term "gender-based persecution" encompasses a range of different claims in which gender is a relevant consideration in the determination of asylum status. Although gender is not specifically referenced as one of the grounds on which an individual can be recognized as a refugee and given protection, it is widely accepted that gender can influence or dictate the reasons for persecution. Gender also impacts the asylum seekers experience. There is evidence that women and girls are sometimes unable to benefit equitably from protection including issues such as:

- Marginalization of women and girls' experiences in **asylum determination**. For example, political protest through conventional means such as involvement in political parties may be considered as a basis for political asylum, but less conventional forms of political resistance, such as refusal to abide by discriminatory laws or to follow prescribed rules of conduct are often wrongly categorised as 'personal conduct' rather than political protest.
- Procedural and evidential **barriers that prevent women and girls' access** to the asylum determination process including lack of understanding by asylum officials about cultural and social restrictions that women and girls face (for instance against travelling or living alone) and they may face greater risk of harassment, exploitation and violence.
- Gender discrimination and gender-based violence in the country of asylum.

Gender-specific forms of persecution that women seeking refuge in the EU include, but are not limited to: sexual violence, forced marriage, denial of access to contraception, marriage-related harm including intimate partner violence; forced abortion or sterilization, sex trafficking and female genital mutilation. These conditions do not always stop in the country of asylum.

There is scant research that focus specifically on the numbers, patterns and experiences of asylum seeking women and girls in Europe. Adolescent girls, in particular, are often subsumed under the term's 'children' and 'women and girls'.¹ These girls tend to be invisible compared to their male counterparts. Yet women and girls experience heightened risks and threats of gender-based violence (GBV) before, during and after migration, including sex trafficking.

This workshop intends to understand the specific gender related persecution that women and girls face that cause them to seek asylum, see how to identify and remove gender related barriers to how women and girls can access the EU asylum system, and discuss any promising practices to support asylum seeking women and girls in Europe.

Structure of the workshop

The two-hour workshop will be opened with a short overall presentation on the topic by the facilitator and a presentation on the specific challenges that adolescent girls face by UNICEF (20 minutes). There will be some questions and answers about the presentations with participants who will be encouraged to share their own experiences (15 minutes). The group will then be split into 2. Using the "ambassador



technique” – two “ambassadors” from the participants will be appointed to interview the two groups participants separately to determine the answers to four questions (listed below) (45 minutes). The group will then convene back in plenary setting and the ambassadors will report back the results of their findings and the group will discuss the outcomes of the group discussions facilitated by the Facilitator (15 minutes).

Key questions to be discussed:

- What are some of the gender related reasons women and girls have sought asylum in the EU?
- Are there services available to address these issues for asylum seekers?
- What are the barriers women and girls face with regards to seeking asylum in your context?
- Where are there gaps in response to address these barriers? What promising practices to address gaps have you seen in your context?

ⁱ European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) (2018) *Info sheet Meeting Needs of Migrant Girls On the Move* <http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/2018/12/04/girlsvoices-meeting-needs-of-migrant-girls-on-the-move/>