

## WOMEN ON THE MOVE

### REPORT FROM THE INAUGURAL REGIONAL WORKSHOP

MAY 16-18, 2016 | ISTANBUL



#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan producing the highest number of refugees in modern times, civil society organizations (CSOs), especially women's organizations, have been leading the way in providing displaced people with information and support, and advocating for the protection of refugee rights. They have stepped in when governments and multi-national organizations have been overwhelmed or failed. Across the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and Europe, CSO activists seek better recognition for their work and expertise, to be able to more effectively influence policy, and ensure that refugees' rights are protected and root causes of displacement are condemned and successfully tackled.

Over the past two years, CSOs have been taking up new responsibilities across the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and Europe. They provided desperately needed assistance when close to one million asylum seekers travelled to the European Union (EU) in 2015 along the Western Balkans route, and continue to do so in the first nine months of 2016 when more than half of the 168,000 trying to reach the EU via the Balkans are women and children. Despite this critical, cross-regional role, CSO representatives rarely have the chance to meet, exchange information, share best practices, and develop joint advocacy across the broad range of countries through which refugees are travelling.

To provide a platform for CSO networking, UN Women and Oxfam, on May 16-18, 2016 in Istanbul, brought together 60 representatives from some of the most active CSOs in MENA and Europe to discuss their experiences

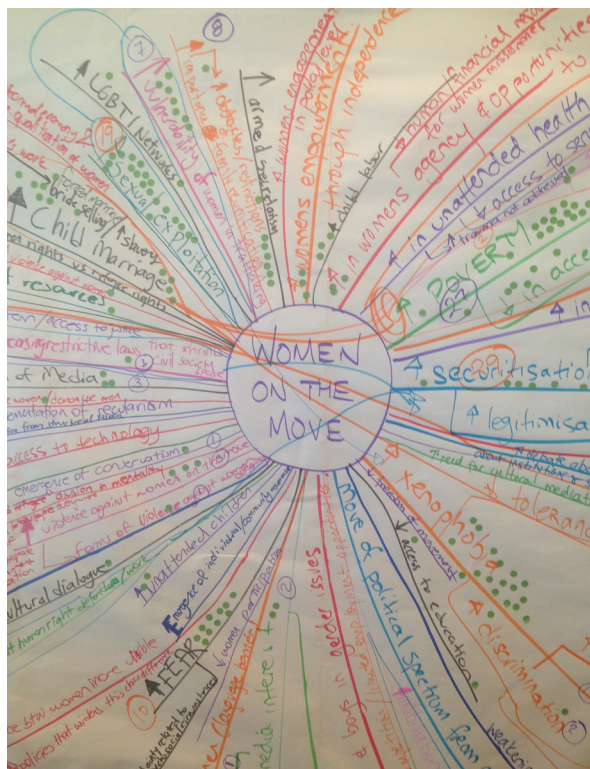
working with refugees. Several current and former refugees also attended.

The meeting concluded with the issuing of a joint statement by all participants ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit (May 23-24) calling on Summit attendees to "restore the safety, dignity and rights of people in crisis... in particular women and girls on the move from MENA to Europe." The statement produced seven recommendations (see the Annex), including eliminating the root causes of conflict, ensuring safe and legal passage for the forcibly displaced, improving refugee women's access to services and participation in decision-making about them, and focusing on the prevention of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). The statement was distributed at the Summit and various side events.

CSO representatives agreed that to respond more effectively to the common challenges arising from the ongoing conflicts, closure of borders in the EU, and failures of the traditional humanitarian system, they need to scale up information and experience sharing and create joint advocacy efforts through existing platforms (such as the AreYouSyrious? network) or creating a new Women on the Move initiative. Additionally, the CSO representatives began to plan the consultation process to prepare inputs for the UN General Assembly High Level Summit on the movement of migrants and refugees which took place in September 2016.

Participants started the three days together by mapping the regional landscape regarding the movement of people, as

representatives from UN agencies provided information on regional trends and challenges and CSO activists spoke about their activities in support of refugees and the dilemmas they face. In addition to analyzing the difficulties confronted by refugees and migrants, the participants also discussed how the refugee response so far has contributed to strengthening volunteer activism and the provision of social services for host communities. The output of the exercise was an illustrative map (pictured below) which demonstrated significant commonalities across countries and regions regarding the impact of forced migration.



After visualizing the regional dimension of their challenges, CSO representatives discussed their organizational efforts to influence state policies and service provision in order to address the wide range of identified challenges, including those related to human trafficking and SGBV as well as xenophobia, discrimination and tensions between host communities and refugees.

## MAIN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

56 participants from 42 organizations and 15 countries collectively produced the following policy recommendations at the end of the workshop with the aim to influence decision makers during and following the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). The participants urged WHS participants to:

- Eliminate the root causes of displacement, especially armed conflict and inequalities,
- Ensure the protection of women and girls living in conflict zones and ensure access of humanitarian aid to besieged and hard to reach areas,
- Secure safe and legal passage for forcibly displaced, speed up family reunification, and fully respect the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, especially the right to individual consideration of asylum claims,
- Ensure greater participation of women in conflict

prevention, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and the provision of assistance to refugees and migrants,

- Improve women and girls' access to education, work and other essential services, including health,
- Focus on the prevention of all forms of sexual and gender based violence and the protection and empowerment of survivors,
- Strengthen legal systems to end impunity, ensure access to justice and reduce the dangers of the proliferation of small arms.

## MAPPING THE REGIONAL LANDSCAPE: COMMON CHALLENGES

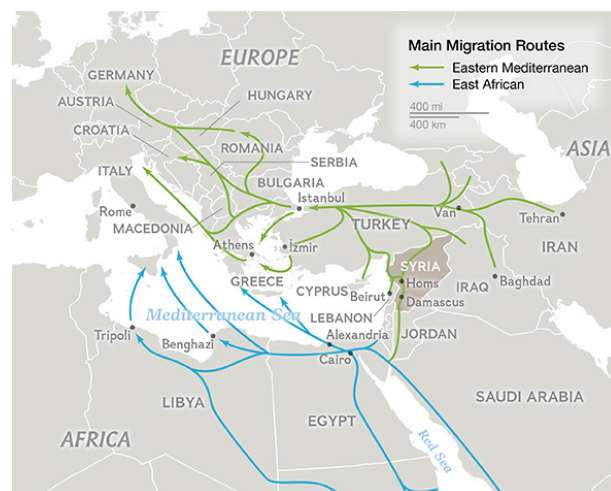


PHOTO CREDIT: One of "The World's Congested Human Migration Routes in 5 Maps," published by National Geographic on September 19, 2015.

According to UNHCR, the large and rapid increase in asylum seekers travelling through the Mediterranean and Balkans route in 2015 was unexpected, and therefore produced significant gaps in the response. Last year, some 90% of all crossing into Greece came from the world's top conflict countries; Syrians were the majority. Although the numbers this year have decreased significantly (due in part to the agreement made between Turkey and the EU in March 2016), for the majority of those travelling who are women and children (men are now 45%, women 20%, children 35% of the flow) this remains a major concern. In MENA, the magnitude and duration of the crisis has gone far beyond what anyone initially imagined. Many now expect that Syria will not be able to reconstruct itself for at least two decades. Lebanon needed many years to stabilize and now Iraq is facing another crisis. The lack of capacity and willingness to develop a comprehensive response will mean that the crisis will drag on. The international community has been late in responding, and is now unable to cope with the war's consequences within and outside Syria. Meanwhile, the Geneva meetings are not producing any results. This requires a far greater emphasis on both the immediate and long-term needs of refugees.

By definition, all those fleeing conflict in the region are at great risk and need urgent assistance, with the most vulnerable groups being children and single women who need special attention and support. Women face social pressure, sexual abuse, harassment and physical violence both during movement and in detention centers. A gender assessment conducted by UN Women in Macedonia and



Serbia in the fall of 2015 showed that women lack safe spaces where they can access services, information and a sense of dignity and security.

In times of crisis, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) generally increases. CSOs report that honor killings, trafficking and rape are on the rise, however data is scarce and incomplete as women fear stigma if they come forward. Response services are limited, and standard operating procedures, poorly developed in MENA and Europe, are needed to help SGBV survivors efficiently. Developing a SGBV approach requires having adequate reception facilities, systematically collected protection data, effective mechanisms to prevent SGBV, and measures to identify and care for SGBV survivors. The countries through which refugees are transiting may have some procedures to address SGBV, but they are not necessarily accessible to people in transit.

It is increasingly hard to prevent SGBV and access services in 2016 when countries are closing their borders, and people seeking asylum are meant to feel like criminals. Like men -- women are today increasingly finding their access to asylum curtailed. The closure of borders and the EU-Turkey agreement are already undermining the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, indicating a wholesale change in policies and mindsets in Europe. The focus on rights and individual liberties is being replaced with special emergency measures implemented with the stated aim of "restoring security."

Inter-state agreements and unilateral border closures are severely undermining important advances in the rights of refugee women that have been made in recent years. The **UNHCR** came out with the first guidelines on the protection of refugee women in 2002. In addition to this, countries that have signed the **Istanbul Convention** are obliged to interpret the Geneva Convention in a gender sensitive way. And on March 8, 2016, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling for a comprehensive set of new, **EU-wide gender guidelines** to be adopted as part of wider reforms to migration and asylum policies.

"Women are an entry to families and societies.

Once you gain their respect, you can reach their husbands and children. We provide a safe area for women; this encourages people to come and try our services."

- FADI HALLISSO, Basmeleh and Zeitooneh, Lebanon

Women are more vulnerable when they are on the move but some also gain new opportunities to exert more control over decision making inside and outside the household. New cross border experience sharing and cooperation may provide new forms of empowerment, but for this more close cooperation and collaboration between local, regional, and international actors is needed.

## VOICES FROM THE REGION: MAPPING THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

As participants from MENA and the Balkans shared their field experiences, common trends came to the surface, including issues that many international organizations or

public bodies sometimes fail to observe but are essential to understand for effective policies that will benefit the refugee population and the local community.

One participant, for example, shared her experience with empowerment programs for women refugees which seek to enhance women's vocational skills to support their integration into the labor market. She noted that by only targeting women, the programs fail to acknowledge the fine gender balance that exists within families and in some cases lead to increases in SGBV. To avoid this, it is important to engage families together, and design programs that seek to reduce tensions. Syrian men are also victims of patriarchal family structures. Raising awareness for both groups is vital because most refugees, particularly women, are unable to report on various psychological or physical abuses. Civil society organizations working with women refugees in Turkey highlighted how refugee women are prevented from reporting SGBV because they fear being separated from their families. Access to shelters for SGBV survivors is also in practice restricted for Syrians in Turkey due in part to language barriers.



Participants also noted how ever more restrictive border regulations and laws on asylum are making it more difficult to provide services and assist the most vulnerable. At the same time, countries in the western Balkans who used to only serve as transit corridors now have to begin considering how to provide more sustainable support to asylum seekers who have become stuck in their borders.

While states carry overarching responsibility for creating and implementing policies that respect and protect individuals within their borders, they can also benefit more from refugees' and migrants' advice and experience. To ensure the social and economic integration of refugees into society, it is important to create community and national level mechanisms to channel their voices to policy makers. Refugee women can play a key role in creating policy solutions but are almost never given the opportunity and instead reneged to their positions as "victims." Similarly civil society organizations often speak on behalf of refugees instead of allowing refugees to represent themselves. When providing services, CSOs should also create platforms for refugees to raise their concerns and share their ideas.

CSOs, in addition to providing space for refugees and migrants to actively influence decision makers, should also look for openings to partner with government bodies to develop policy alternatives. CSOs and governments tend to pursue competitive relationships. But more sustainable and cooperative relationships between civil society organizations (particularly women's organizations) and state actors are not

only important for the refugees and migrants, but are also essential for the development of long-term, inclusive, and transparent and consultative policy making.

Such cooperation is also needed to facilitate economic integration. While introducing measures to increase refugees' access to employment, it is important to look at and address various (political, social, economic) inequalities that exist within host communities. Accessing the labor market is a major challenge for most Syrians in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, and the inability to work is one of the push factors that drive them to the EU. Participating CSOs in the workshop underlined the importance of economic empowerment of women to reducing early marriages and stopping gender-based trafficking. It is imperative for public bodies, CSOs, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to include economic empowerment in their gender-based violence programs in order create an effective improvement in the lives of women and girl refugees.

"States do have responsibility to protect the rights of refugee women, children and men, just as strongly as they protect their economic and geopolitical interests."

- ASJA KORBAR, *Are YOU SYrious?*, Croatia

The lack of political will, racism, Islamophobia, insufficient services and information, and the lack of coherent planning were mentioned as serious impediments to improving the lives of migrants and refugees throughout the region. According to participants, possible solutions could draw from solidarity, mobilization of people and strengthening legal systems.



The participants, in the midst of all the tragedies that are affecting women and girl refugees, gave a clear message: perhaps, this crisis can be utilized as an opportunity to create better, equal, and inclusive systems for all people – in host and transit countries.

## TRENDS AND POLICY IMPACT

After discussing the regional challenges, workshop participants began identifying the most common trends brought about by the wars in MENA and subsequent displacement. Even though country specificities cannot be ignored, participants quickly identified significant commonalities. Below are the ways in which migration

has an impact on policies, social cohesion, gender, the economy and the overall landscape for civil society.

"Remember that a refugee is just like you and me."

- DR. ROUBA MHAISSEN,  
SAWA for Development and Aid, Lebanon

The **policy impact**: after the rapid rise of numbers of migrants and refugees, European policies in particular, changed quite radically. In addition to witnessing an increase in focus on "security," we are also observing a clear shift in the political spectrum from center to right, from more open policies vis-à-vis foreigners to more restrictive ones. Media is being heavily used to create the perception that there are "good" vs "bad" refugees. More restrictive laws are undermining the potential of civil society efforts and popular forms of solidarity. Human-centered policies are less attractive to politicians and access to social services (such as education, health, as well as legal status and employment opportunities) for refugees and migrants is not increasing enough to meet growing needs. Refugees and migrants' plight has become highly politicized, negatively affecting their chances for integration in some countries.

This is accompanied by **social impacts** which not only affect the rights of refugees and migrants, but also influence dynamics within the host communities and social integration outcomes. Civil society organizations throughout the region recognize the influence of negative political statements and media coverage, which is leading to an increase in xenophobic and discriminative attitudes within host communities and states, stereotyping of other cultures, and hostility towards refugees deriving from competition for employment and services. This all correlates with a decrease in solidarity and tolerance among communities, a limitation of freedom of movement and expression, as well as a reduction in social well-being and psychological health. But as crucial as it is to analyze the negative social trends, it is also important to acknowledge the emergence of a new dialogue, solidarity, and tolerance among some communities which should be further augmented throughout the region.

The **economic impact** of the migration flows should be carefully analyzed in order to avoid repeating the stereotypical narratives presented by some politicians and media outlets. While an increase in poverty and loss of economic well-being can be observed within the population in-transit, there are also changing economic trends and a redistribution of economic power within host communities. The actual impact of the migration flows needs to be objectively assessed through sound statistics and unbiased observations. As migrants and refugees have been unfairly associated with adverse economic impacts, rigorous research studies that present real facts can play a role in curbing negative stereotyping. The economic impacts of migration also need to be assessed from a gender-sensitive perspective, as it may be mainly women who are losing out economically.

The **gender impact** of migration should be taken into consideration in all social, economic, and political aspects of life. While women on the move have been subject to various types of violence (including physical, social and structural), forced marriages and bride selling have significantly increased across the region. Sexual exploitation



and human trafficking are increasing and require urgent attention by policy makers. Countries throughout the region are urged to create safe passages and safe zones for women refugees, including sexual and reproductive health services and security.

The **civil society sphere** has also been affected. Although there has been an emergence of stronger civil society organizations and human rights defenders in the field, there also have been cases of violence directed towards human rights activists throughout the region. One strong positive outcome that can be observed is the increase in youth organizations and their usage of technology. While this brings in young people to the policy discussion, it also means more diverse voices in the humanitarian system which is urgently needed.

## CHALLENGES AND CIVIL SOCIETY REACTION

Following the discussion on the policy impact of migration, participants had the chance to discuss the responses of their own organizations. Along with presenting their respective activities, participants assessed the extent to which their work could be considered successful and effective, and reflected on ways to advance these activities.

### Civil Society Response: Engaging with Government Policies and Service Provision

Organizations actively working on refugee policies have realized that to ensure real impact it is necessary to interact directly with policy makers, and they have established relationships with government institutions, organizing workshops and conducting one-to-one meetings with public bodies. They aim to shift official perceptions of the migration issue from a security-first framework, to a more human-centered and gender sensitive approach. CSOs are carrying out advocacy activities, proposing improvements in laws, and pressuring authorities to fully implement existing legislation that benefits refugees. Some organizations are conducting monitoring.

“We try to get governments to understand the specific needs of women on the move. These women have gone through a lot: at home before they left, conflict for many, on the road, on arrival. You have to understand what they’ve gone through to properly plan a response.”

- SALOME MUTUAL, ENoMW and WEZESHA, Ireland

Working closely with the government brings a number of benefits. It allows organizations to identify the most urgent needs of refugees, and fill gaps where state services are insufficient. Many INGOs and CSOs provide a range of services in camp and urban settings: essential information on protection and registration, technical assistance, needs assessment, safe spaces for women and children, health care and psychosocial support, education and vocational training, and actions to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

Yet the influence of civil society on the state level is not as significant as it should be. Establishing and maintaining

relationships with the government, and carrying out service provision for refugees, are both continuous processes that require remarkable energy, time and capacity. Organizations tend to become focused on rapid response and often cannot find time to focus on the root causes of the conflict, coordination, and policy work.

Civil society’s performance, effectiveness and capacity would increase if groups were engaged in more joint efforts through networking, coordination and collaboration. Many participants in the workshop believe that increased cooperation among civil society organizations is essential to having a stronger voice and influence over policy. By uniting multiple voices, civil society could strengthen its cooperation and dialogue with government institutions. With more robust forms of partnership, organizations could have access to more resources and thus provide better services to refugees, including in those areas that are difficult to operate in because of strict state security measures.

### Civil Society Response: Human Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Gender Based Violence

Many organizations in the workshop focus on the issues of trafficking and sexual and gender based violence, working on both the prevention and the aftermath of SGBV. For prevention, they carry out advocacy work both at national and international levels for gender sensitive policies and proper legislation that addresses the needs of women. They engage in the assessment of the needs of women refugees, awareness raising campaigns on these needs, and empowerment among the refugees and host communities. Many activities carried out by women organizations focus on strengthening the capacity of various communities living together.



Many of these organizations also support the survivors of SGBV, with systems that usually provide medical care, protection, psychological support and referral pathways. Efforts need to be conducted in a highly sensitive manner so as not to pave the way for re-victimization and re-traumatization, with great care taken in the approach and language with traumatized women.

“Delivering humanitarian assistance and programs in a fluid environment, a war zone where civilians, hospitals and service centers are being targeted and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are constantly moving is a big challenge.”

- SAMAH BASSAS, Syria Relief

The work carried out by women organizations or organizations working on gender issues have changed the lives of many women affected by the migration crisis. Nevertheless, institutions encounter major limitations and challenges including limitations in outreach, lack of resources and funding, and the inability to prevent SGBV cases and forced marriages.

Nevertheless, the participants believe that more intense and strong communication between organizations is needed, both at the national and cross-border levels. Regional cooperation for women on the move would be especially significant for broader outreach and effectiveness. Collaboration among CSOs would also strengthen advocacy campaigns for gender sensitive policies and women's empowerment.

### Civil Society Response: Xenophobia, Discrimination and Social Harmony

Xenophobia towards refugees in host communities is growing. Far right politicians are using nationalist and Islamophobic rhetoric, while media outlets are amplifying these messages. Discrimination is evident in state policies, institutional practices and wider society.

CSOs working with refugees have been addressing this by pursuing social cohesion projects, carrying out awareness raising initiatives and trying to create a positive image of refugees. They aim to portray refugees as empowered individuals instead of victims.

Exclusionist attitudes toward refugee children are keeping some from school. To address this, CSOs have been conducting activities in schools to curtail prejudices and stereotyping. They organize events and gatherings where refugees and the host community come together to improve communications, build relationships, and show the value added of inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation.



Civil society organizations working on integration and social cohesion, however, experience several common challenges. They often have difficulty in finding adequate resources, as donors usually do not prioritize integration programs. Organizations find it hard to conduct and sustain their projects mainly due to limited capacity. Participants agreed that organizations need to work together in voicing the importance of fighting against xenophobia and discrimination. They also underlined the importance of carrying out culturally sensitive programs that do not interfere with or impose upon the

norms of communities. All the activities conducted by the organizations should apply a conflict-sensitive approach while delivering services. But while it is important to pay attention to cultural differences, participants all agreed that cultural sensitivity should never override human rights protection.

Overall, participating CSOs underlined the need to focus on policy work, service provision, SGBV prevention and response, women's empowerment and social cohesion. Many organizations are proud that they are able to identify the needs of the communities and provide services to them. Many, in fact, believe that they have reached refugees faster than governments, and in so doing are able to fill gaps in state service provision.

The common challenges faced by civil society organizations working in the field include: lack of sufficient resources, restricted legal space, the increased securitization of state policies and insufficient collaboration between CSOs. Participants strongly agree that cooperation is needed to increase capacity and outreach, even if it may be difficult to build cross-regional links when conditions in the countries along the migration route are so varied, and when some CSOs are working in transit counties while others are operating in host states.

### UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

States, INGOS and CSOs have been taking the lead in responding to the migration crisis, but each capitalizing on its own strengths and hampered by its own weaknesses. To improve the effectiveness of the response, workshop participants reflected on *what ways different stakeholders are responding effectively to the migration crisis? And what would an ideal policy response to the migration crisis by different stakeholders look like?* Generally, participants agreed on the need to deepen collaboration between different duty bearers to improve effectiveness. More specifically, participants assessed that:

#### States and Governments

So far, states and governments have not collectively advocated for an end to the violence against civilians inside and outside of Syria. Many states have been reluctant to push for a genuine political solution to the Syrian War. Instead, they have, directly or indirectly, become part of the crisis, without acknowledging responsibility.

Failing to address the war's real causes has led to a failure in responding to the war's outcomes. Instead of demonstrating strong political will to protect those who have fled Syria, states are treating refugees as a burden to be avoided. Moreover, states have reneged on their international human rights commitments especially to respect asylum seekers' rights and freedoms. Government institutions along the migration route are not implementing existing protection and registration laws and regulations. Several participants nevertheless highlighted how even though all rights are not guaranteed, the Turkish government's efforts to accommodate and improve the situation for over 3 million refugees in the country should be acknowledged.

To end the large scale displacement of Syrians, participants felt that states should prioritize ending the war and protecting civilians escaping from conflict. They should guarantee legal and safe passage for those fleeing violence, and asylum to those who request it. They should establish safe zones inside and outside Syria to protect civilians. Governments should initiate programs to improve the security of refugees also in their host communities. Family reunification should take place speedily and effectively.

Many states will need to allocate more financial and human resources to ensure that they can meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. This is why solidarity within the EU and resettlement programs are so important. Some participants made a plea for governments to differentiate less between economic migrants and refugees and not to discriminate based on ethnic identity.

“Leaders must support women’s organisations  
as key players in the response to this catastrophe,  
as key players in dealing with victims.”

- SUSAN AREF, Women Empowerment Organization  
(WEO), Iraq

States are also increasingly challenged to find the most appropriate ways to integrate refugees and CSOs can assist. CSOs have experience addressing inter-community tensions, xenophobia and discrimination, and participants discussed how government institutions can develop joint programs with them to support integration and inclusion. CSOs can also share their expertise and experiences in developing policies that are sensitive to the needs of women, children and groups such as LGBTI.

### International Agencies, INGOs and CSOs

International agencies and non-governmental organizations not only fill gaps in service provision, they also invest significant time and resources to bring key issues to the attention of policy makers. They provide education and health services, as well as information on legal frameworks and registration procedures through one-to-one counseling, information sessions, publishing documents in Arabic and English, and linking refugees to official bodies to ensure access to legal protection.

Along the Balkans route many organizations who support refugees have already been cooperating across borders and built links with government institutions, the UN and large INGOs. Such cooperation has improved their ability to provide protection to refugees. Workshop participants felt that such forms of multi-stakeholder collaboration and cooperation could also be leveraged to create pressure to address the root causes of the conflict.

Although participants believed that establishing cross-sectoral cooperation was important in targeting and resolving obstacles, they underlined the necessity of creating stronger linkages and networks among civil society organizations at the local, national, regional, and international level.

## Refugees and Host Communities

Refugees themselves are the most crucial stakeholders, however they are often disempowered. International summits and discussions take place without giving them a chance to present their own challenges and showcase their strength and vision. States develop policies for migrants and refugees without consulting them. Civil society organizations, at times, have also overlooked the opportunity to build strong consultation mechanisms. An ideal approach would be to work hand-in-hand with refugees, incorporating their voices at all levels of decision making.

Host communities, where perceptions and approaches vary greatly, also need to be included more in discussions. While many communities have adopted a very positive attitude to help integrate refugees, some have been reluctant to share their resources. To address this, states and civil society organizations should do more to foster dialogue between refugees and host communities. Sharing of culture and art can help. Influential individuals and activists in both the refugee and host communities can help galvanize more engagement and dialogue.

## Media

Media is another powerful stakeholder which is influential in shaping the mainstream narrative about refugees, often representing them as weak victims rather than as individuals with agency. It can be used effectively for information sharing, coordination, advocacy and campaigns calling for more comprehensive refugee rights. As it has the power to increase public awareness, social media can also be a powerful tool to reach wider audiences to foster dialogue, but it can also trigger discrimination and xenophobia by circulating negative content and discourse.



## THE FUTURE: CONTINUING TO BUILD COLLABORATION

Analyzing common trends, issues, obstacles, as well as the role being played by various stakeholders, workshop participants focused on what could be their next steps cooperating in the following four priority areas:

- Emergency response in the Balkans
- Women’s economic empowerment
- SGBV prevention and gender equality
- Building an advocacy agenda and platform for future collaboration



## Emergency Response in the Balkans

With the closure of borders in the Western Balkans, asylum seekers are finding it far more difficult to reach Serbia and countries beyond. Some 200-300 are still arriving in Belgrade daily. Those who travel via Bulgaria are often beaten and robbed and there have been cases of people dying in Bulgarian and Serbian forests. With the borders now closed, many feel that there is little chance of obtaining asylum, and there is growing mistrust of legal procedures and CSOs. Although CSOs are desperately trying to dissuade asylum seekers from agreeing to pay for their services, smugglers (some of whom are asylum seekers themselves) are gaining the upper hand. Governmental authorities are doing little or nothing to protect asylum seekers' rights.

To address the dire situation in the region, the group agreed that it is imperative to advocate for the use of "humanitarian protection" - a temporary, limited rights protection system. CSOs can inform people of this option and monitor its use. The implementation of the Skopje Declaration and the Zagreb Protocol should be strengthened and regional monitoring of asylum cases in close cooperation with ombudspersons should be undertaken. A few test cases to challenge the current legal implementations could be identified for the ECtHR. UN and CSO protection services at borders (from social workers to translators) should be fully restored and supported through adequate funding. It is also important to share updated information on services and protection available in Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria to those in Arab states. Although this is hard to do through face-to-face contact (the method preferred by most refugees), mobile applications can be a good alternative for this.

## Women's Economic Empowerment

More than half of the refugee women both in Turkey and Jordan were not working in their home countries. Most refugee women in Istanbul are low income. Projects to increase women's economic empowerment are often developed without considering market factors. For example, there are many projects to support handicrafts as a tool of income generation, even though the market is completely saturated. Such programs do not generate any real income and are usually unsustainable. Microfinance is also often riskier than helpful. Coherent and well-researched programs should be implemented to enhance women's access to financial services as well as employment opportunities.

There is an urgent need to develop immediate solutions. These can be promoted through advocacy on the importance of women's economic empowerment. Entrepreneurship can be supported by addressing immediate needs, such as lack of language-knowledge and skills. Employment in non-traditional sectors can be encouraged. Early childcare services offered in the host communities would facilitate women's entry into the labor market. UN Women and Oxfam could facilitate the establishment of a platform to enable opportunities for CSOs, including Syrian organizations, to network with each other.

## SGBV Prevention and Gender Equality

Short-term responses for SGBV can be provided by government bodies, INGOs and CSOs include: psychosocial support, medical support, awareness raising, protection, financial and legal assistance, and documentation and data collection. But mid to long-term solutions to advance SGBV prevention are also needed. These include: awareness raising for survivors and communities, capacity building and training for service providers and CSOs, creating more effective advocacy strategies, establishing legal infrastructure, supporting better data collection and referral systems, and developing harmonized services for rape survivors.

## Building an Advocacy Agenda

The short-term goal of "Women On the Move - Move the World" was to present a statement at the World Humanitarian Summit (see Annex). The long-term aim is to build a sustainable information exchange network and advocacy coalition. Networking makes it possible to quickly obtain information from hard to reach areas like Syria, and from numerous sources along the transit route, to improve how organizations respond. It will be crucial to broaden alliances by identifying strategic partners and supporters, including progressive movements and national, regional and international platforms. Oxfam and UN Women will help create a space for dialogue to support the platform, which should be led by women on the move and facilitated by civil society organizations. Over time a secretariat could be created to support the platform. A more comprehensive "Women On the Move" conference could be organized next year, with the involvement of more countries, regions and more refugees.

At the same time participants agreed that more should be done at the local level, in cooperation with local authorities, to challenge stereotypes and increase dialogue between refugees and their hosts. Coherent and clear information and knowledge is needed to challenge discriminatory attitudes towards refugees. CSOs should also objectively assess their activities and impact to have more strategic interventions that are respected by their constituencies. More sustainable resource are needed the grassroots level to reduce social tensions.





## ANNEX: "WOMEN ON THE MOVE - MOVE THE WORLD"

### Statement for the World Humanitarian Summit

May 23-24, 2016

Istanbul, Turkey

Heads of state, government, international organizations, civil society and business will gather on 23-24 May for the first World Humanitarian Summit and agree to key commitments to restore the safety, dignity and rights of people in crisis. In view of this historical event, representatives of women's groups, volunteer and humanitarian initiatives from 15 countries spanning from the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) to Europe came together on 16-18 May in Istanbul to discuss how to empower and protect women and girl refugees and migrants.

Faced with the failure of states to resolve conflict and end war; the erosion of international humanitarian law and human rights; the lack of responses that ensure the dignity and well-being of the displaced, which effect in particular women and girls on the move from MENA to Europe, we call on WHS participants to:

- Strongly condemn violence against women and girls committed in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, and call for accountability and redress as well as effective remedies.
- Ensure the accelerated and effective use and implementation of all relevant sources of national, regional and international law, international guidelines and best practices regarding protection of victims and survivors to combat violence against refugee women and girls.
- Eliminate the root causes of displacement, especially armed conflict and inequalities.
- Ensure the protection of women and girls living in conflict zones and ensure access of humanitarian aid to besieged and hard to reach areas.
- Secure safe and legal passage for forcibly displaced, speed up family reunification, and fully respect the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, especially the right to individual consideration of asylum claims.
- Ensure greater participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, conflict resolution decision-making and the provision of assistance to refugees and migrants.
- Improve women and girls access to education, work and other essential services, including health.
- Focus on the prevention of all forms of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and the protection and empowerment of survivors.
- Strengthen legal systems to end impunity, insure access to justice and reduce the dangers of the proliferation of small arms.

We have agreed that will continue to work on these issues, monitor and cooperate across borders, within a new regional coalition of civil society and women's organizations, until women on the move have their rights and dignity restored.

### Signatories

AkiDwA & Wezesha, Ireland  
 Amnesty International, Turkey  
 Arab Women Organization, Jordan  
 ARDD – Legal Aid, Jordan  
 Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), Turkey  
 Basmeah and Zeitooneh - Relief & Development, Syria  
 Belgrade Center for Human Rights, Serbia  
 Bint Al Rafidain Organization (BROB), Iraq  
 Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby, Bulgaria  
 CEE Network for Gender Issues, Slovenia  
 European Women's Lobby-Coordination for Turkey  
 Foundation for Support of Women's Work (KEDV), Turkey  
 Greek Forum of Refugees, Greece  
 Health Education and Research Association (HERA), Macedonia  
 InfoPark, Serbia  
 International Supporting Women Association, Syria  
 Jordan Women's Union, Jordan  
 Kamer Foundation, Turkey  
 Keshmalek, Syria  
 Kvinna Till Kvinna, Sweden  
 Legis, Macedonia  
 Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, Macedonia  
 Mother and Child Education Foundation (ACEV), Turkey  
 NGO Atina, Serbia  
 NGO Praxis, Serbia  
 Open Gate/ La Strada, Macedonia  
 Oxfam  
 Praxis  
 Refugee Aid Miksaliste, Serbia  
 SAWA for Development and Aid, Syria  
 Section Terre d'asile Tunisia  
 Support to Life, Turkey  
 Supporting Women Association, Syria  
 Syria Relief and Development, Syria  
 Syria Relief Network, Syria  
 Women Empowerment Organisation, Iraq  
 Women for Women's Human Rights – New Solutions Association, Turkey  
 Women Now, Syria  
 Women Rehabilitation Organisation, Iraq  
 Women's Solidarity Foundation (KADAV), Turkey  
 Zemljani-Are You Syrious? Croatia