



LADDER CONSORTIUM JOINT STATEMENT

Women on the Move: The need for specific policy responses from the EU.

16 March 2017

After the celebration of women's rights last Wednesday 8th March and the European Council Meeting of the 9th and 10th March, whereby the EU pushed forward with its migration policy that focuses on securitisation and return as two key policy solutions, we the LADDER¹ Consortium feel compelled to place a spotlight on the situation of women and girl migrants.

According to research from UNHCR, in November 2015, out of the 950,469 refugees and migrants who had arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean, approximately 24 percent are children and 16 percent are women. These women on the move are faced with two of the strongest factors of discrimination in today's European societies being both women and migrants simultaneously. This places women in an extremely risky situation at every step of their journey. The fear of sexual assaults and exploitation faced by every woman becomes a tangible daily threat. Firstly, often in their countries of origin, they experience traumatising sexual assault and exploitation that have become a weapon of war and repressive control from which they often flee. In the phases of transit, their vulnerability and their contact with smugglers and traffickers increases the risk of them being sold into prostitution or slave labour networks. On their arrival in Europe, there are reports of abuse by guards at the borders and the lack of adequate shelters and basic necessities in the host countries increases their exposure to any type of aggression. As women try to set up and integrate into a new society, they will experience discrimination as a woman and as a migrant simultaneously. Moreover, the WRC recently published a report stating that 10% of refugee women arriving in Greece are pregnant, further adding to their specific vulnerabilities.

Reports by the European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW) and by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) highlight key challenges faced by women. The violation of women's rights has been emphasised with the closure of the Balkans route in March 2016, with migrants being less and less secure and more and more forced to live in squalid and unsafe conditions. The masculinization of the humanitarian sector is also given by the ENoMW as a leading factor to "re-victimization of women and re-traumatization for those who have experienced male violence". The reports of the organisations look at this situation as being difficult yet not as a deadlock. As such, there is an urgent

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need for policy makers to consider the specific situation of women on the move and find adequate tools and responses to protect them from the dangers they are exposed to.

First of all, it is of utmost importance that all European member states ratify, rely on and enforce the Istanbul Convention in order to ensure the security of women and children on the move against any form of gender-based violence and support a gender-sensitive interpretation of the 1951 refugee convention. While granting or not granting asylum, the right to family life should be taken into account and family reunification cases should be expedited.

According to the ENoMW, international, national and European decision-makers should “allocate funds and provide solid and secure shelters for displaced women and girls at every step of their journey”. These funds should also target Greece and Turkey - the first countries of arrival- in order to help them “fairly and expeditiously adjudicate legal claims and deliver needed humanitarian services”.

The LADDER consortium fully supports these recommendations and therefore implores Heads of State and responsible authorities to take the necessary actions and steps toward a better respect and endorsement of the rights of women on the move, as well as a better consideration of their needs. Women on the move should be seen as a vulnerable but strong population. They need to be protected yet empowered to move forward and make a new life for themselves and their families in their host countries.

Sources:

<http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/GENDER-BASED-DANGERS-FACING-MIGRANT-AND-REFUGEE-WOMEN-4.pdf>

<https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA-FACTSANDFIGURES-5%5B4%5D.pdf>

<https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/>

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