



BEYOND BORDERS:

Unveiling the Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement

- Youth Recommendations & Call to Action

IMPORTANT NOTE:

In recognizing the importance of inclusive language, it is acknowledged that while the term "women and girls" is used throughout, it is understood to encompass and include gender-expansive individuals, ensuring a comprehensive approach that addresses the diverse experiences and needs within the broader spectrum of gender identities. Additionally, it is important to note that the content covered in this discussion includes gender-based violence (GBV), and it might be triggering for some readers. We encourage self-care and discretion while engaging with this sensitive subject matter.

MYCP:

The Migration Youth and Children Platform (MYCP) is a self-organised space for youth to participate in high level migration advocacy and a global network of thousands of individuals and youth-led organisations (up to 30 years old) representing all regions of the world. MYCP has led youth engagement in international migration governance and dialogue spaces, in part holds an official mandate at the Global Forum on Migration and Development. MYCP is part of the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), mandated by the UN General Assembly in the 1992 Agenda 21 and Resolution 67/290.

Politics4Her:

Politics4Her is an intersectional feminist youth-led digital platform & global movement advocating for the inclusive participation of young women and girls in politics, civil society, and decision-making processes. Politics4Her is a movement driven by the belief that young women and girls hold the power to create a more equitable and just world. The platform is a place where every girl and woman can be heard, valued and recognized as an agent of change.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Call For Action

02

Background

03

Forced Migration and Gender

04

Case Studies

12

Policy Recommendations

CALL FOR ACTION

In the face of the growing tendency of forced displacement and lack of protection, a blatant violation of international law, it becomes imperative to focus on safeguarding the rights of those forced to move. The right to seek refuge and, subsequently, asylum is a fundamental aspect of these rights, though its application varies based on existing immigration laws in different countries. While many nations recognize asylum on grounds such as race or religion, gender-based persecution is not uniformly acknowledged. Women, girls, and gender-expansive people worldwide often suffer persecution and violence based on their gender and/or sexual orientation, a situation exacerbated during forced migration.

As this brief has highlighted, GBV is pervasive before and during the journey to safety. To address this, a comprehensive approach is needed, and one key recommendation is the adoption of gender asylum. This policy would grant asylum to those who have faced persecution based on their gender, providing a vital foundation for the safety and well-being of women and girls in displacement.

BACKGROUND

This year presented significant challenges globally, marked by conflicts affecting nearly every continent and particularly disproportionately impacting women and girls. From assaults on education to threats to reproductive health, forced displacement emerged as a dire consequence. Unlike voluntary movement, forced displacement involves the expulsion of people with no alternative refuge.

In 2023, over 117.2 million people faced forced displacement due to global conflicts, including the war in Ukraine and crises in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, and the ongoing genocide in Palestine, compounded by issues like drought, floods, and insecurity in Somalia, as well as a prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

117.2 MILLION PEOPLE FACED FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN 2023



FORCED MIGRATION AND GENDER

Forced migration has emerged as a pressing global challenge, necessitating immediate attention and concerted efforts for prevention and mitigation. The experiences of women and girls within the context of forced migration are extremely concerning, as their vulnerabilities are exacerbated by intersecting factors such as gender, race, economic status, ethnicity, nationality, and immigration status. This intricate web of societal power structures places specific groups at heightened risk of sexual exploitation, abuse, discrimination, and various forms of violence. Notably, women and girls on the move, falling within the category of forcibly displaced individuals, demand an intersectional approach to effectively address the multifaceted violence they endure.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an annual campaign initiated in 1991, sheds light on the pervasive violation of women's rights worldwide. During the 16 Days of Activism, the [Migration Youth and Children Platform](#) (MYCP) has partnered with [Politics4Her](#) to emphasize eight cases of forced displacement and their repercussions on women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals. These issues encompass education, gender-based violence (GBV), climate justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), among others. Our call to action includes recommendations aimed at preventing and ultimately eliminating GBV in the context of forced displacement. These recommendations will provide a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders to adopt gender-responsive strategies, contributing to the reduction and eventual elimination of the distressing consequences of forced migration on women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals. By prioritizing this intersectional lens, we can collectively work towards a more equitable and just global landscape.

EDUCATION

Forced displacement has a profound and disproportionate impact on the access to education for women and girls. In times of conflict, crisis, or persecution, vulnerable populations are often uprooted from their homes, and displacement tends to exacerbate existing gender disparities, with women and girls facing unique challenges in accessing schools and learning environments.



Forcibly displaced may encounter increased risks of GBV, discrimination, and cultural barriers that impede their educational pursuits. Moreover, the loss of stable infrastructure and social support systems during displacement can further hinder girls' enrollment and attendance in schools.

In many cases, girls are compelled to drop out of school due to safety concerns, economic pressures, or cultural norms that prioritize their roles in caretaking or marriage over education. Efforts to address forced displacement must, therefore, prioritize strategies that specifically target the educational needs of displaced women and girls, and promote gender-transformative education while recognizing and rectifying the gender-based barriers that hinder their access to learning opportunities.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The heightened vulnerability of women and girls during forced displacement amplifies the risk of GBV) to alarming levels. In regions afflicted by conflict, such as Sudan, where over 3 million people have been compelled to flee, there is a disturbing surge in sexual violence directed at women and girls. Sexual violence is not only a consequence of the chaos but is also wielded as a deliberate weapon of war and punishment.



The perilous journey to safety exacerbates the threat, with the risk of abductions and trafficking increasing drastically. Displaced individuals, lacking resources and security, often turn to smugglers for assistance, unknowingly exposing themselves to criminal networks involved in human trafficking and kidnapping. Many girls and women, deceived by these smugglers, find themselves coerced into forced labor or subjected to sexual exploitation.

The plight of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh exemplifies this, as young girls are kidnapped and sold into forced labor, with reports from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicating that a significant portion of those seeking support were women and girls forced into labor, while others suffered sexual exploitation. It is imperative to recognize the gender-specific threats faced by women and girls during forced displacement and take decisive action to safeguard them from the pervasive violence that accompanies their involuntary journeys.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Forced displacement significantly jeopardizes women's sexual and reproductive health rights, encompassing challenges that extend beyond the ultimate destination to the journey itself. Menstruating individuals, in particular, face heightened difficulties as period poverty, a pervasive global issue, becomes exacerbated for those forcibly displaced.



The lack of access to menstrual products and access to privacy, sanitary stations, and water, not only compromises their comfort and hygiene but also subjects them to the stigma associated with menstruation. In refugee camps, where resources are often limited, addressing period poverty and dismantling associated stigmas becomes imperative. Many refugees resort to extreme measures to conceal their periods, fostering isolation and humiliation. Addressing menstrual hygiene and stigma should be a priority in refugee settings to ensure the dignity and well-being of displaced menstruators.

Moreover, the reproductive health of pregnant women demands special attention during forced migration. The tiring journey, often undertaken on foot for days, poses unique risks for pregnant individuals. In crisis regions like Sudan, where an estimated 53,000 pregnant women are fleeing, the risks are all-encompassing, and the challenges persist during childbirth. Limited access to lifesaving equipment puts both the mother and the unborn child at considerable risk, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to safeguard the sexual and reproductive health rights of displaced women.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Forced displacement triggered by climate disasters disproportionately impacts women and girls, intensifying existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. As climate-related events like hurricanes, floods, or droughts force communities to flee, women often bear a heavier burden due to traditional gender roles and responsibilities.



In the aftermath of climate-induced displacement, women often find themselves at the forefront of efforts to rebuild communities, yet their voices and needs are frequently marginalized. It is crucial to recognize the gender-specific impacts of climate-induced displacement and implement policies that address the unique challenges faced by women and girls in these situations, ensuring their protection, empowerment, and active participation in the recovery process. Fostering gender justice within the broader framework of climate justice is essential, especially in forced displacement.

CHILDREN

The rise in unaccompanied minors undergoing forced migration is alarming, with particular concerns regarding the heightened vulnerability of young girls. The perilous journeys that these children undertake alone expose them to significant risks, especially in terms of sexual violence and abductions.



Traffickers often target isolated children, subjecting them to exploitation such as forced labor, child marriage, and other forms of abuse. Disturbingly, child labor is on the rise, even in countries that prohibit such practices, as illustrated by instances in the United States where migrant children as young as young as 13 have been found working in industries like meatpacking. Another alarming consequence of forced migration is the surge in child marriages. Research conducted in a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon revealed that two-thirds of the 2,400 refugee women and girls had been married before turning 18. Before forced displacement, Syria had been making progress in reducing child marriages, but the conflict reversed this trend.

This underscores the critical role that forced migration and violence play in exacerbating child marriages. For children, especially girls, the intertwining of GBV and sexual and SRHR is particularly pronounced due to their age and inherent vulnerabilities. Further concerns on migrant girls emerged within the economic and development sector. Not only are migrant girls mostly employed in low-skilled and low-paid working conditions but also face incredible challenges when returning home and carrying responsibilities for both themselves and their families. A report published by UN Women identified a total number of almost twelve million migrant children, particularly girls, who are not tied to domestic protection mechanisms and are exceptionally prone to economic exploitation. Addressing these multifaceted challenges is imperative to safeguard the well-being of children affected by forced displacement.

MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of forced displacement on many individuals, including fear, stress, and anxiety, can have lasting effects on mental health. The stages of migration—pre-migration, transit, and integration into the host country—each present unique stressors, with GBV being distressingly common, particularly for women and girls.



The inherent risks and dangers during the migration journey contribute to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially for those who have faced violence. The third stage, arrival, and integration, introduces additional stressors due to stringent immigration policies in wealthy countries, leading to arrests, family separations, and indefinite detentions. The amalgamation of these stressors significantly impacts mental health, and for displaced individuals with pre-existing mental challenges, the journey becomes even more challenging. Mental disorders often carry a stigma, further complicating the experiences of those affected. Refugees with mental health issues may find the abrupt shift from their previous normalcy particularly stressful and confusing, exposing them to exploitation and abuse.

Women and girls with mental health concerns face a heightened risk of abandonment or violence, as the strains of migration may lead fellow refugees to lack the patience or resources to provide support. Recognizing the significance of mental health at both macro and micro levels within the context of migration is crucial. Informed trauma care and support systems are essential to address the unique challenges faced by women and girls, ensuring their well-being throughout the complex journey of forced displacement.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

For individuals with physical disabilities, forced displacement presents a challenging and stressful journey, compounded by the lack of time to prepare for evacuation. This heightened difficulty is particularly pronounced for disabled women and girls, who face an increased likelihood of abuse and exploitation.



Shockingly, they are twice as likely to experience sexual abuse, exploitation, or neglect. These risks are not only posed by external threats but also emerge within the very systems designed to assist. Disabled women and girls often find themselves excluded from aid programs and neglected in terms of care, with limited support for their movement during displacement, leaving them to navigate dangerous routes independently. Furthermore, the omission of disabled individuals from registration and data collection processes in refugee spaces results in their erasure, leading to a lack of protective measures and assistance.

This exclusion leaves little room for them to contribute to advocacy or initiate change, making them vulnerable to ostracization and abuse. Instances of appalling mistreatment, such as the tying up of Somali children with disabilities in a Kenyan refugee camp for others to throw stones at, underscore the urgent need to address the deplorable treatment of disabled refugees. It is imperative to ensure that the specific needs of disabled women and girls are not overlooked and that comprehensive measures are in place to protect and support them in the challenging context of forced displacement.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity are critical intersectional considerations in the context of forced displacement. LGBTQIA+ individuals confronting displacement often encounter distinctive challenges, marked by heightened levels of discrimination, violence, and exclusion.



These challenges can stem from both the host communities and, distressingly, from within forced displacement settings themselves. Policies and interventions must adopt a nuanced and inclusive approach that recognizes and addresses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ people forcibly displaced. This entails providing safe spaces, targeted support services, and training for humanitarian workers to ensure cultural competency and sensitivity.

By acknowledging and actively responding to the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in forced displacement, policies can contribute to fostering environments that promote dignity, respect, and equal access to protection and assistance for all.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following eight policy recommendations aim to contribute to the protection and empowerment of women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals during forced displacement, ensuring their rights are upheld and their unique needs are addressed.

- **Gender Asylum:** To address GBV during forced displacement, we recommend adopting a Gender Asylum policy. This initiative ensures that individuals, especially women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals, facing persecution based on their gender are eligible for asylum. This policy aligns with international human rights standards, providing targeted support for a more inclusive and equitable asylum process.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Prioritize the elimination of violence against women during forced displacement by ensuring the inclusion of women of all backgrounds in policy and decision-making processes in migration spaces. This intersectional feminist lens should encompass diverse experiences based on nationality, age, ethnicity, religion, and educational background.
- **Education Access:** Advocate for the establishment of education centers within refugee settings to ensure continued access to education for women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals, including Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). Recognize the transformative power of gender transformative education in providing opportunities and empowering marginalized groups.
- **Protection for Disabled Individuals:** Implement comprehensive protection measures for individuals with mental and physical disabilities during forced displacement. Include disabled women in decision-making forums to enable self-advocacy and ensure that their unique needs are considered in policy formulation.

- **Youth Mobilization:** Mobilize youth participation and create spaces for young girls to actively advocate for their futures. Recognize the agency and perspectives of young women and girls, allowing them to contribute to decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their communities.
- **Climate Protection and Inclusion:** Prioritize climate protection and incorporate climate-sensitive measures, ensuring the inclusion of women from the global south in decision-making processes. Acknowledge the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities and amplify the voices of those most affected.
- **Intersectional Approach:** Adopt and maintain an intersectional approach in policy development, recognizing and addressing the interconnected systems of oppression. Ensure representation of women of diverse backgrounds to create policies that are inclusive and considerate of varying experiences.
- **SRHR Services:** Dedicate specific spaces and resources to maintaining comprehensive reproductive health services, including menstrual care, STD treatment, pregnancy care, childbirth, and post-partum assistance. Prioritize the well-being of women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals in the provision of essential healthcare services during displacement.





NOVEMBER 2023

Co-authored by Deja Petty and Yasmina Benslimane
With contributions from Milena Franke

www.politics4her.com

<https://migrationyouthchildrenplatform.org/>