ADRA

Room for Women and Girls: Female Voices from Refugees and Migrants in Serbia

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IMPRESSUM

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Adventist Development and Relief Agency	**ADRA**
European Union	**EU**
Gender Based Violence	**GBV**
Non-Governmental Organisations	**NGO**
Sexual and Reproductive Health	**SRH**
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	**UNHCR**
United Nations Children's Fund	**UNICEF**

Contents

„ ...men think that women are just there to be in a room and not to go outside.”

Aisha, Pakistan

„...some men are just going around and asking, ’why are you going out, why didn’t you cover your hair, why you not taking care of the children, why, why, why’.”

Behnaz, Afghanistan

FOREWORD

The research in front of you is a testimony of 91 women and girls from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran about their stay in Serbia in 2018, more precisely in the Centre for Asylum in Krnjača, Belgrade. Throughout the five chapters of this publication, we see how their everyday life in this Centre looked like, how the education (or lack thereof) determined the perspective of their (stopped) lives, how migration and gender roles affected their health and the chances of obtaining health services, as well as their experiences with gender-based violence. ADRA activists and volunteers, through numerous activities, provided support to these women and girls, striving to make the days spent in the Centre easier and more useful, and to have their needs recognized.

Organized activities are part of the response of international organizations, state institutions and the non-governmental sector to the migrant crisis, which also hit Serbia as one of the countries on the so-called “Balkan Route.” The authors of the research, therefore, both at the beginning and at the end of the publication, state that one of the intentions and purpose of the research is to offer organizations (primarily to those which take part in the humanitarian response to the migrant crisis) a better understanding of the position of women and girls in a crisis situation, recognizing that gender roles and identities are the key factors that shape their experiences and that it is important to create responses/services that can respond to the specific needs of women and girls.

But I have to admit that, for me, the key value of this valuable research is that “as a platform for the voices of migrant women and refugees”[1] it brings before us the authentic testimony of women, the pictures of their days and months spent at the Asylum Centre, the interruption of their journey, and the vacuum in their lives. First, I thought that this whole study should be called “after that, after that ...” in reference to how one of the participants in the survey described her day, which showed how significant the days of those women in the Asylum Centre were constricted, confined to the same actions and repetitions, and how much frustration it brought to their (already difficult) life stories.

Reading this publication, I had a picture in front of my eyes of a woman who, in her same small room, every day for months, makes the beds, folds the little belongings she has, and feeds her children, looks

into the sky and the sun through the window, awaits news, awaits her husband or father, is pleased when her acquaintance or relatives come to the same room, cooks lunch in it, reprimands her children, prepares them for bed, and then at night, when all are asleep, quietly weeps in it. As I delved through this very interesting reading, I also thought of Virginia Woolf, who wrote that "a woman must have money and a room of her own" in order to be able to realize herself.[2] The room for these women in asylum is a temporary shelter for them and their families, but at the same time it is a ban, a limit of their freedom, a fenced space whose boundaries have been determined by others – by culture, husbands, fathers, humanitarian organizations, and the environment they came from. Ripped out of a community in which their lives resembled the lives of others (their relatives, friends, the environment) and (probably) on the most transformative path of their lives, they face a great challenge. They arrived in a new country, with different standards for women and men, with opportunities and obstacles, with more liberal life patterns[3], and on the other hand they are more than ever pressured to remain in the same well-known model. The room in the asylum is the place to safeguard this model, because making decisions about anything related to their lives, even if she may go for an afternoon walk, is exclusively a male privilege. "The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting, perhaps, than the story of women's emancipation itself," said Virginia Woolf.[4] In this research, it is widely recognized. It is visible how men use their own power and the power of the patriarchal community to set boundaries, to forbid, order, preserve the existing order in which "men do not like women to be outside."[5]

Many women and girls therefore testify that the violence they have endured has been perpetrated by men and boys from their own culture.[6] Husbands beat their wives, because they think that they have the right to do that, and that it is "the woman's right to be beaten"; young men are harassing girls, shouting comments to them, making fake profiles on social networks, threatening, gossiping... And now, it's not a new truth. Unfortunately, in all cultures and on all meridians, it's still similar. But the difference here is an extremely low willingness to report violence. Women in asylum are keeping quiet about violence. Some justify it with great stress that they all must survive, some justify it partly with their customs, some with enormous fear of the consequences of reporting. For all of us, and especially for those who work on supporting interventions, the key question is: how to change it? How can that room in which this woman is confined be a safer place for her and her children? Especially because the environment (often) is not friendly, so that many migrant women testify that they have been shouted at on the street, girls testify

how it is difficult to be the only female migrant in a school, and all together it is not easy to be covered in the outside world. It is hardest (as expected) for women traveling alone or for those traveling alone with their children, without the company of their husbands. The deviation from the dominant model in which a husband is responsible for a woman in every sense, has a great price. From knocking at the door in the middle of the night, through harassment, indecent proposals and insults, to concrete maltreatment.

The health situation is also not much better. Most migrant women have a problem to go to see a gynecologist (especially if the doctor is a man). Most of them have a problem to speak up and describe their problems ("I didn't want to say my problem out loud, so I wrote it on paper and my mother gave it to a doctor,"[7]), and only a few dare to seek help from a psychologist. Most of them are trying to solve their problems by relying on themselves, on relatives, or acquaintances in the environment. Access to health care, although provided, remains insufficient and inadequate for women in asylum.

The study also confirms that education is the most important strategy for improving the position of women around the world, and that it remains inaccessible to many girls and women. Namely, most of these women did not manage to finish school. Many of them are completely illiterate, while most of them finished their education as soon as they learned how to read and write. Educated women are shameful for most families. Although there is a difference from which country and culture migrants and refugees come, there is a clear link between the education and the vision of one's own future. Those who went to school want to work, learn, progress. Those who did not go to school, more often than others see themselves in traditional roles. There are numerous obstacles to education, ranging from lack of transportation, mixed classes in local schools, to fathers' and husbands' prohibition to continue education. Because, somehow, they know what Virginia Woolf once said, "Once she knows how to read, there's only one thing you can teach her to believe in and that is herself."[8]

And it is exactly that encouragement, that belief in self, that is offered at the Asylum Center through women's friendships, cooperation and solidarity. When it seems that there is no strength anymore, they encourage, help and nurture each other, preserving their faith in a good outcome. Solidarity among women is priceless and irreplaceable.

Therefore, the intervention support for women living in the Asylum Centre must be more than just responding to their needs. It is very important that the response to practical needs at the same time has a strategic component of the change in the position of women, and therefore the recommendations from this research are valuable. The authors, very systematically, show what needs to be done: firstly establish a safe space as a channel for female voices (not just access to services and protection, but also opportunity for informal education and support for female networks), then ensure participation of women and girls throughout the whole project cycle, supporting foregrounding girl's and women's voices in the refugee and migrant community in asylum, and use their voices in advocacy and advocate for spaces for these voices to be heard.

Finally, I want to point out two things:

First, to congratulate the authors on the great endeavor to make their contribution to the visibility of women's lives, because, as Rosalind Miles has noted when writing the "Women's History of the World," the need for women's history has increased over the years and "hundreds of thousands of spectacular stories still remain to be excavated from the sands of time, from the women rulers of Europe's "age of queens" to the sturdy female farmers, brewers, market traders who have held their communities together all over the world and, in so doing, kept the human race alive" to the present-day lives of migrant women and refugee women.[9]

Although it seems common or implied that international organisations, as well as state institutions and NGOs, consider the needs of women and integrate gender perspectives into their work, in reality, this most often is not the case. Regularly, programs and measures remain "gender neutral," without recognizing the different positions of men and women in the community, and therefore reproduce or/and deepen inequality. The participation of women is particularly lacking in the process of creating projects and programs aimed towards them. This undermines the potential for their empowerment by keeping them on the margins of decision-making.

Therefore, the second point I would like to stress is the suggestion that this research and subsequent recommendations (and research of this type in general) becomes a must read for international

organizations and domestic institutions, so that future interventions will not only respond to the needs of women and girls, but also give them the chance to finally take their lives in their own hands.

And that's not an easy task at all. We know this here in Serbia very well, because presently we are dealing with the fact that the level of women's rights in Serbia is significantly lower than it used to be. In the country that last week defended a report on the state of women's human rights before the Committee for the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in the United Nations in Geneva, in which civil society activists prepared twelve shadow reports documenting the challenges of life of different groups of woman, the key question is: can we, on top of all this, defend the rights of these women? I have no dilemma: we can and we must! Not only because "no one is free, as long as not all are free,"[10] but because the lives of each of the migrant women and the response of the state to their needs is the paradigm of our ability to make the state understand, respect and protect women's rights. Their lives and their stories "are an endless resource to help us keep our bravery muscles in good trim."[11]

Biljana Maletin[12], Women's Rights Activist
Belgrade, February 2019

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1 Authors in the part of the research explaining the scope of this study.
2 Woolf, V. (1929) *A room of one's own*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 7
3 "Many authors and reports recognize that migration can provide women with employment and income opportunities and consequently boost independence and self-esteem, decreasing the risk of gender based violence, authors of the research.
4 Woolf, V. (1929) *A room of one's own*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 72.
5 Qamar, Afghanistan
6 "Studies have shown that in emergencies, while violence against men is usually committed by strangers or acquaintances."
7 Ghazal, Afghanistan
8 Woolf, V. (1921) *Monday or Tuesday*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 99.
9 Majls, R. (2012) *Ko je spremio tajnu večeru?*, Geopoetika: Beograd, 21
10 Adapted according to the sentence of Fannie Lou Hammer's "Tell It Like It" speech held at the National Women's Political Caucus, Washington, DC, on 10th July 1971
11 Majls, R. (2012) *Ko je spremio tajnu večeru?*, Geopoetika: Belgrade, 21
12 Biljana Maletin has worked in the areas of gender equality and women's rights for more than twenty years. She is engaged in designing and delivering staff capacity building programs for institutions and organizations focused on gender mainstreaming in the public policies. She is particularly dedicated to subjects such as political participation of women, gender and safety, local development, and inclusive politics. She actively works with Women's Platform for the Development of Serbia on adapting laws, strategies and politics.

Acknowledgments

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Additional gratitude goes to UNICEF and its key role in supporting ADRA's Women Centre and GBV programs, which was crucial for the development of this research. Special thanks to UNICEF's GBV Specialist, Francesca Rivelli, for peer review and helpful insights in the research itself.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

Gender plays a significant role when it comes to experiencing forced migration. Whether in countries of origin, transit or destination, gender roles and power inequality especially affect the rights and opportunities of girls and women, disproportionately exposing them to gender-based violence. The experiences of refugee and migrant girls and women within the so called “European migration crisis” reflect these patterns, and the same goes for their stay in Serbia. Mapping these experiences is the focus of this research.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

With the research Room for Women and Girls: Female Voices from Refugees and Migrants in Serbia, ADRA Serbia decided to take a step back and leave the floor to women and girls themselves, who became the narrating voices of their own life and of such complex and diverse experiences. Building on the experience gained while working hand-in-hand with migrant and refugee girls and women in ADRA’s Women’s Centre, and with the goal to highlight the importance of qualitative research, in February 2018 ADRA started a year-long research project examining how gender models the experiences of female migrant and refugees in Serbia.

For this purpose, a series of extensive semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were facilitated together with 91 refugee and migrant girls and women accommodated in Krnjača Asylum Centre in Belgrade, Serbia. The results were valuable insights in their everyday lives and hardships, but also highlighted agency and strengths they demonstrated.

FINDINGS

Voices of refugee and migrant girls and women depicted the many ways that gender determines everyday life in an asylum centre, and how it restricts their rights and freedoms. They stated how gender roles that assigned household responsibilities and child care to women significantly decreased their free time in comparison to men. Moreover, they pointed out that gendered division of space is keeping the majority of girls and women in private places, while men and boys are occupying the public sphere, both in the asylum centre or outside of it. Both of these aspects significantly restricted women and girls’ ability to enjoy their leisure time, whether in accessing various activities, or developing friendships or support networks. Such circumstances, coupled with the fact that decision-making power is almost exclusively owned by male members of their family (husbands, fathers, brothers), in some cases resulted in serious violations of rights and freedoms, leaving some of the women and girls physically and socially isolated and confined to their rooms in the asylum centre.

When it comes to access to education, their words recount how negative attitudes about female education among migrants and refugees is enrooted in cultural beliefs. Major obstacles to enroll and support attendance of girls in school was reflected in the expectation of girls to obey gender roles: taking over household responsibilities, preparing for marriage, and the belief that they will not be the ones who provide for the family in the future, but their husbands. To this, an additional challenge for parents letting their daughters go to school was the mixed school system in Serbia. From their perspective, girls also mentioned discomfort with wearing the scarf among local children, lack of information about available services and schooling opportunities, but most importantly, bullying and harassment from their male peers from the refugee and migrant community, both in classes and in the asylum centre. Finally, adult women stressed the lack of free time to attend regular informal education, while for many, a lack of formal education and even illiteracy posed a major challenge in learning e.g. foreign languages they were interested in.

Refugee and migrant girls and women shared their hardships and distress in living in a transitory situation, negatively impacting their overall health and well-being. Women reported changes in behavior, both in themselves and their family members, as a result of constant feelings of uncertainty and stress.

Some noted that these feelings were more intense with women, given their responsibilities and lack of outlets compared to men. Others warned how heightened stress and anger deteriorated relationships in the family, which in some cases led to abusive behavior of husbands. Speaking of access to medical services, women and girls were not comfortable in sharing their health issues, especially when doctors and translators were male. Seeking services of gynecologists was described as even more unpleasant, with refugee and migrant girls and women giving up their appointments when no female staff was available, and deciding to "self-medicate" instead. Additionally, lack of knowledge on sexual and reproductive health care and issues was mapped by both adult women and adolescent girls.

Safety was a concern voiced throughout the research by women and girls, with particular emphasis on gender-based violence. Primarily, intimate partner violence was perceived as well-spread and culturally condoned and accepted. Mainly, girls and women reported harassment by other single men and boys, describing continuous unwanted gazing, cat calling, gossiping, etc. Other forms of harassment were denounced, such as cyberbullying that could seriously damage the reputation of girls and women, eventually leading to stigma and likely exposing them to physical violence. Certain groups of women were identified as especially vulnerable to harassment and violence, such as women and girls traveling without male family members, as well as ethnic minorities. Finally, experiences of direct GBV violence were rarely reported to relevant authorities. Respondents named multiple reasons for this: fear of retaliation (or revenge to their families in their countries of origin), shame, fear from staying alone in their migration route, fear that reporting might halt their departure from Serbia, lack of support and encouragement from their families or communities, to name some.

The migration experience was portrayed as an empowering opportunity for building resilience for some respondents. In spite of the different challenges, girls and women developed specific and valuable coping mechanisms and peer support informal networks. Help with cooking, child care, studying, information sharing, and support in accessing services was key to improving their daily lives. Some girls and women voiced that the challenging experiences associated with migration made them feel stronger and more independent. Additionally, some could attend education opportunities previously unconceivable, while others saw migration as an opportunity to enter the labor market and finally become breadwinners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Refugee and migrant girls' and women's needs, capacities and abilities can be easily overlooked when the voices of these girls and women are silenced. Additionally, their voices are not always heard, because they do not often raise their voices above others or because they are in their private spaces and less visible. In order for this to change, the following are their asks and what they are teaching us:

1. Establishing safe spaces with women and girls is needed for them to channel their voices, develop their skills and peer networks, and have a transformative purpose of creating a safer environment in which they can continue to grow and thrive.

2. Women's and girls' voices and perspectives need to be placed at the center of all our interventions, through targeted or mainstreamed programming.

3. Women's and girls' equal participation needs to be ensured in their daily lives through the establishment of, and their equal representation in committees and community-based structures.

4. Refugee and migrant girls' and women's voices are essential for advocacy and awareness raising, as well as ensuring durable solutions and safety for all members of their communities.

5. Continuous engagement in qualitative participatory research focused on refugee and migrant girls and women is crucial to deepen the understanding of their situations and support knowledge sharing.

This is a non-exhaustive list of recommendations focused on promoting female voices, as this is one of the main goals of this study. However, as this research maps the many challenges refugee and migrant girls and women face in their everyday lives, the whole study can serve as a basis for service providers to address some of the mentioned gaps in their work.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is one of the key factors that shapes experiences of both forced and voluntary migration. It can determine reasons and possibilities to migrate, conditions of migration and related risks, even integration in the country of destination. When it comes to forced migration and its causes, evidence shows that women are at a disproportionately higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) in wars: mass rapes, slavery, unwanted pregnancies and abortions are just some of the examples recorded in history.[1] In spite of that, it is often harder for women to flee from their countries and migrate, due to financial dependence, care for other family dependents. etc.[2] During their travels, especially through illegal channels, women and girls are at a higher risk of being abused, trafficked, or raped.[3] Furthermore, in the first country of asylum (refugee camps, asylum centres or reception centres), they are more vulnerable to various forms of harassment, transactional sex, intimate partner violence etc., and less likely to have access to the services they need.[4] Finally, research shows that, even in the countries of destination or host societies, women and girls face additional problems, such as high rates of unemployment and deskilling and are prone to engaging in the precarious labour market in grey economies much more than men.[5] These are just some of the examples that the influence of gender has on migration, which have previously been mapped by academia and the humanitarian sector. These challenges, as well as many more, have been identified within the current European humanitarian crisis as well.

Although the global humanitarian crisis was felt heavily by Europe starting in 2015, evidence of the crisis could have been predicted in the preceding years. The war in Syria was developing for several years and continuous unrest in other countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia, together with other regional conflicts, were producing more and more refugees. In 2014, the number of displaced persons globally had already skyrocketed to the highest number since World War II, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reporting roughly 59.9 million people of concern worldwide.[6] More than a million refugees and migrants entered Europe in 2015, traveling towards their desired countries of destinations, predominantly in Western Europe.[7] It was due to this mass influx and a significant increase of migrants travelling through the so-called Balkan Route that attracted the attention of European governments and the media. As Europe was left unprepared for an adequate humanitarian response, the number of deaths

in the Mediterranean grew, an increase in cases involving human rights violation were mapped, and harmonisation of asylum and reception policies among EU Members States deteriorated.[8] A combination of inadequate humanitarian infrastructure and an unwillingness of EU Member States to equally participate in burden sharing quickly led to an overload of the capacities of the countries promoting "open door" policies (primarily Germany). Consequently, in March 2016, as part of the EU-Turkey deal, the Balkan route – together with the EU borders – was closed. The consequences of these changes were felt by all countries along the Balkan route, particularly Serbia, due to its geographical proximity and shared borders with several EU countries (Hungary, Croatia, Romania). Although the borders were closed, refugees and migrants continued to arrive in Serbia with hope that they would eventually reach their preferred EU destination. Some would apply for the so-called waiting lists to legally cross the Hungarian border, while others tried to travel by themselves through illegal channels. In reality, this meant that Serbia had changed from a temporary transit country to a country where refugees and migrants had to stay for much longer. With increasingly restrictive asylum policies and fortified borders with EU Member States, more and more people were spending an extended period of time in Serbia while waiting to move forward with their journeys. In spite of long waiting times, the vast majority of refugees and migrants chose not to seek asylum in Serbia, therefore existing in a grey area between emergency response and durable solutions.

Although the migration journey affected the whole population on the move in different ways, reports from the Balkan route mapped a vast array of challenges and vulnerabilities experienced specifically by girls and women. Primarily, girls and women showed to be at a disproportionately higher risk of GBV, not only in their country of origin but throughout the whole migration journey, including in countries of transit and first asylum. Previous reports have shown how reception and detention centres, informal settlements, boat crossings, and the use of smugglers have greatly affected the safety of women and girls.[9] A significant number of protection risks have been identified, including the risk of transactional sex, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and physical assault, especially for girls and women travelling alone.[10] Moreover, inadequate or inaccessible services, lack of safe spaces, and lack of gender mainstreaming across different sectors has led to additional obstacles when responding to the needs of women and girls and GBV survivors among them.[11] Gender roles within family relations have shown to affect female experiences of migration even further. On the one hand, traditional female roles in the family additionally burden women with care for children and the elderly.[12] On the other hand, stress and trauma faced by refugees and migrants deteriorate pre-existing gender inequalities and cause an increase in domestic or intimate partner violence.[13] Serbia is not an exception when it comes to gendered experiences of migration. Research has shown that an alarming number of female refugees and migrants in Serbia have experienced physical and sexual violence, both in their countries of origin as well as during their respective journeys.[14] These girls and women, and the challenges they are coping with while staying in the county, are the focus of this study.

Context and Purpose of This Study

Throughout its work in Belgrade, specifically through its Women's Centre program, ADRA Serbia has been engaging with refugees and migrant girls and women as a specific target group since 2017. Working in direct contact with this population for the past two years has provided detailed insight regarding their cultures, experiences, as well as the various challenges they have dealt with throughout their migration journeys. The idea for mapping these findings first appeared with the goal of further tailoring ADRA's program to the needs of these girls and women. However, it soon developed into conversations worthy of documenting in a structured and methodologically sound study, which would not only be useful for ADRA, but for any actor interested in understanding the gendered experience of migration or in providing culturally, gender and age-sensitive humanitarian response.

Humanitarian actors often recognize the specific vulnerabilities of girls and women, especially when it comes to GBV and responding to such violence. However, it is also important to go beyond case mapping and response and attempt to understand how the gendered experience of migrants and refugees affects their everyday lives. This knowledge can help us improve and adapt our programs to the particular contexts we are working in, by ensuring our services are available, accessible and adequate for specific target groups. Furthermore, it might help us in GBV prevention and mitigation by better understanding behaviours and patterns that may exacerbate various forms of violence or prevent girls and women from seeking needed support. In order to acquire this kind of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the voices of girls and women who are at the centre of such efforts. Therefore, the aim of this study is to give insight into their experiences through their own testimonies and to equip readers with the knowledge necessary to better understand and respond to the needs of refugee and migrant girls and women in Serbia.

Given the geographical location of ADRA Serbia's work, this study focused on refugee and migrant girls and women accommodated in Asylum Centre Krnjača in Belgrade. Therefore, the described experiences of living in a government facility refer to this particular centre. This centre is under the management of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, a governmental body mandated to provide adequate shelter and basic living conditions to persons who express their intention to seek asylum in Serbia.[15] At the moment, Krnjača is the largest asylum centre in Serbia, with the capacity to accommodate 1000 people.[16] As per data collected during 2018, when the interviews for this study took place, the number of migrants and refugees accommodated in the centre ranged between approximately 400 and 500 people, while in the whole of Serbia the number was fluctuating between roughly 3000 and 4500.[17] Although ADRA's centre is in relatively close proximity to Asylum Centre Krnjača, and serves its population, the organization does not deliver any activities nor are actively present in the asylum centre itself. It should be highlighted that, although it is a designated asylum centre, Krnjača is not the typical facility of its type that might be seen in other European countries (especially destination countries). Unlike the latter, the overwhelming majority of people residing in Krnjača are not staying in the facility while their asylum claims are processed, but rather use the facility as a temporary space until they cross the border towards the EU. This has somewhat altered the traditional meaning of an asylum centre in the Serbian context, creating blurred lines between asylum, reception and transit centres (although all three types existed in Serbia). Additionally, this is reflected in the way migrants and refugees view these facilities. This was evident in the majority of interviews, where respondents often referred to Krnjača as "the camp," although refugee camps in Serbia do not exist.

Methodology

The central goal of this study is to examine how gender shapes the experiences of refugee and migrant girls and women in Serbia. It starts with the idea that, without taking their perspectives into account, it is impossible to fully understand their position and needs. It is therefore necessary to present, and not re-present, female voices. In doing so, the methodology of this research heavily relied on feminist perspectives, i.e. the notion that in order to gain knowledge, one needs to have in mind the specific context of research phenomena and place focus on the individual experience.[18] In that sense, when attempting to acquire knowledge about refugee women, rather than speaking about them and imposing our beliefs about their experiences, we need to speak *with* them and validate their voices as the best resource for understanding them.

Furthermore, many authors have referred to *double disadvantage* when researching refugee women, meaning that they cope with gender-based discrimination *and at the same time* the challenges brought by their identity as refugees or migrants.[19] Nevertheless, one can talk about multiple disadvantages related to religion, ethnicity, marital status and sexuality, among others. Understanding the experiences of refugee women means understanding how all of these identities intersect and shape their realities.[20] For example, women traveling alone might face greater protection challenges than ones traveling in families; experiences of adolescent girls would not only be shaped by their gender, but also their age; gender roles and responsibilities in the family will be experienced differently by someone coming from a heavily patriarchal culture than the rest of women etc. This study attempts to tackle this issue by giving a voice to different women from the community.

In achieving this, the study was based on qualitative research rooted in feminist grounded theory, which implies that the research process begins with the collected data from the field, without any preconceived knowledge of the subject.[21] Data collection for this study took place from February to December 2018 and included two main methods. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were used in order to map the major challenges women faced in their daily lives in Serbia. These in-depth interviews used the interview guide as a general framework for the aim of the study. However, the interviewees were able to go beyond the suggested topics and share any issues they found to be most relevant. Secondly, the study also included a series of separate focus groups: some with women, some with girls, to discuss some of the reoccurring topics mapped in individual interviews. As previously mentioned, the main goal of the study was to bring female voices and perceptions to the foreground. Therefore, the study provides a channel for their statements to be heard and quotes their testimonies wherever possible, without insisting on triangulation of collected data.

All the participants were informed of how the information would be used before they gave consent or assent to participate in the study. In order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of informants, certain identity-related data (e.g. names) has been changed. Furthermore, the safety and well-being of respondents were of primary importance when collecting data and the research adhered to the safety and ethical recommendations at all times.[22] Altogether, 91 women and girls (64 and 27 respectively) participated in the research, aged from 13 to 64, originating from Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. As mentioned, all of the interviews were conducted with females living in Krnjača Asylum Centre.

Study Limitations and Other Considerations

When reading this study, one should have in mind certain limitations and considerations.

First, since this type of qualitative research is not meant to provide generalized knowledge, but rather highlight individual experiences of a specific phenomenon, it should be stated that testimonies present in this study might not reflect the thoughts of all women and girls accommodated in Krnjača, or in other governmental facilities in Serbia. We can, nevertheless, assume that many of the presented challenges are occurring throughout the country, given the similar conditions of other centres, as well as the cultures and countries of origin of the majority of migrants and refugees in Serbia. These assumptions can be further made given the fact that many of the participants in the study previously resided in other centres in Serbia before coming to Belgrade. On the other hand, having in mind that this study is in the context of life in the asylum centre, it may not reflect the experiences and challenges faced by girls and women who are not staying in official governmental facilities.

It is also important to keep in mind that, in spite of the blanket term “refugees and migrants” used throughout this study, there are many differences between respondents’ cultures and countries of origins that must be acknowledged. Moreover, further differences appear within these groups, which are reflected throughout the text. Nevertheless, the reader should be aware that the sample chosen for the study reflects the demography of this community in Serbia, as it has the largest number of respondents originating from Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the study focuses specifically on *gendered* experiences, which in this case are the experiences specific only for girls and women. Although there undoubtedly are challenges shared by both females and males (e.g. inability to cross the EU border through legal channels), these were not focused on in the study. Moreover, the methodology used in this study allowed for mapping of issues found to be most important and comfortable to talk about by respondents; they do not necessarily reflect all of the challenges present in their respective lives.

Additionally, as the primary focus of this study is to provide a platform for the voices of refugee and migrant girls and women, scrutinizing their testimonies and assessing the quality of existing services are not amongst its goals. The aim was to collect respondents' perceptions, and as a result no triangulation of the primary data was undertaken. While the findings presented here might be of use for service providers to mainstream gender and evaluate their services, the intent of this publication is primarily to give insight to the female perspective of life in Serbia.

Structure

Data analysis in this study is organized into four major chapters, which appeared as a result of sampling the collected data. The first chapter, Everyday Life in an Asylum Centre, is related to the gendered experiences of life in the asylum centre and aims to present the everyday life of refugee and migrant girls and women. The chapter discusses daily tasks, socializing, and gendered experiences of space, amongst other topics. The second chapter, Access to Education, focuses on the challenges girls and women meet when it comes to education, both formal and informal. Furthermore, this section analyses some cultural root causes that inhibit girls and women from attending school, as well as other challenges occurring specifically in Serbia. The third chapter, Health and Well-being, explores the health challenges and various obstacles girls and women face in accessing important and much-needed medical services. It includes testimonies on both physical and mental well-being and their implications on the lives of girls and women, as well as their families. Although gender inequalities and certain forms of GBV appear throughout the previous chapters, the fourth chapter, Safety and Gender-Based Violence, provides an insight in the major protection concerns experienced by refugees and migrant girls and women, focusing mainly on physical and sexual violence. Normalisation of violence, particularly vulnerable groups among girls and women, as well as a hesitation to report violence and seek out help, are also discussed here. An alternative view on migration as an opportunity for empowerment and resilience building is introduced in chapter five, Resilience and Empowerment, mapping the experiences of migration women detected as beneficial to their lives. Finally, the conclusion highlights the lessons learned from this study through an examination of the respondents' testimonies, while calling for involved actors to prioritize the voices of refugee and migrant girls and women when creating gender sensitive programs.

THE VOICES

I. EVERYDAY LIFE IN AN ASYLUM CENTRE

While the everyday life of migrants and refugees in refugee settlements, asylum centres and reception centres is a subject that can often be found in academic papers, it only recently started to occupy some space in the literature used in humanitarian work. As these facilities are viewed as temporary places of waiting – for resettlement, for granting asylum, or as in the case of Serbia, for the chance to continue one's migration journey - the time spent in them is often marked by uncertainty, confusion and growing dependence on the humanitarian system.[23] Moreover, from the perspective of refugees and migrants, in such "*non-spaces*" devoid of stability, history or sense of belonging, "where the planet's refugees are parked,"[24] there is no life, progress, development, nor future planning.[25]

However, experiences of such facilities are different for males and females. This is visible in every aspect of their lives, given the specific needs and roles girls and women have. Their realities are shaped by numerous factors, such as the heightened risk of GBV, the need for additional services for childcare, places of accommodation, among numerous others.[26] The gendered experience of the space itself often appears as an overarching issue, as women's freedom of movement tends to decrease in refugee camps or asylum centres.[27] While the humanitarian practice primarily focuses on protection from GBV, mostly through a response to already experienced violence, evidence shows that focusing on characteristics of everyday life, such as various social aspects, participation in quality activities that support asset development and emancipation, and female-only spaces are equally relevant in ensuring the well-being, dignity and safety of refugee and migrant girls and women.[28] Therefore, it is important to draw attention and attempt to understand the daily lives of women and girls in such situations, in order to map their hardships and act to prevent the possible harmful consequences of such lives.

A Typical Day

Girls and women included in this study were spending a significant part of their day within the asylum centre. Even when leaving the facility to engage in some other activities, most managed to return by the time lunch was being distributed, while all were obliged to be back in the facility by the evening hours. Therefore, this study begins by examining what a regular day in the centre looked like for girls and women and how these experiences differed from their male counterparts.

Generally, women that participated in these interviews, especially those with children, described their days in the same way. Activities traditioally prescribed to the role of women such as taking care of the children, preparing meals, cleaning etc., prevailed in these conversations. This is how Aisha (22) from Pakistan recounted her day: "I am waking up in the morning at 6 o'clock to pray. After that I am preparing myself and my baby [for the day]. We are taking breakfast at 8 AM and eating together. After that, I am cleaning the room and then I am going with the baby to the baby corner here in the camp. Basically, [I do] some housewife jobs: taking the lunch and dinner, cleaning, taking care of the baby. Every day it is like that." Safia (29) from Afghanistan continued in the same manner: "When I wake up, I change the clothes of my kids, go to get breakfast and feed the baby and the family. After that, I am cleaning the table and room, and then collecting laundry. When I come back it is time for lunch so I take food, feed the kids, clean the room, then put [the children] for a nap. The same is for dinner - I go there to take dinner and feed the family and kids, after that I am cleaning the room. Then [officers] are coming to check the rooms and after that we are sleeping. Tomorrow again it is the same." For her husband, as she claimed, the days looked different. "My husband is so lazy and he is not helping me with

anything. He is lazier than others. It doesn't bother him at all that I am doing everything. I am working a lot during the day and when I ask him to do something for us he just says 'what did you do the whole day? Go and do it by yourself.' Everything depends on the family they came from. If parents teach them that it is fine to help your wife then they will - otherwise they won't."

While a number of women mentioned different educational or recreational activities they liked to participate in, a significant number reported that they spent all or most of their time in their rooms. Ziba (26) from Iran described her experience: "It's the same every day; I am staying at home almost all day doing basically nothing." In the narratives provided, many of the women mentioned things that kept them occupied while staying in their rooms, such as internet browsing, painting, etc. Outdoor, or out-of-room activities, were presented as rare events. Such was the experience of Delbar (22) from Afghanistan: "Sometimes I am going to the sewing room where I can do some things for myself or for the camp. Sometimes after lunch I take my kids outside for a walk, but most of the time we just stay in the room." For the vast majority, however, participating in activities on an everyday basis was not possible and the time they were absent from the centre was limited, in comparison with their husbands. "Men have so much freedom and women don't, even here in Serbia," explained Ziba. "There's a lot of couples in the camp where a man is not giving permission for his woman to go out. For example, when I gave birth to my child, my husband started going to German classes without asking me if I need him or if I want to go. After arguing, he agreed that I can go as well. After attending only two classes he decided I could not go anymore, because he concluded that I cannot learn anything. He is not appreciating me for taking care of the children while he is taking classes, and he was blaming me for leaving the children, claiming that I could not learn anything even if he would let me go." Lack of support by the husband in everyday activities was noted by Safia as well, who stated: "My husband's day looks different because he is mostly out. When he is at home he is just lying in bed and watching movies." She also stated that, even when he wanted to help her with the everyday tasks, the community shamed him for it. "When I gave birth to my baby, my husband started helping me, but his friends were mocking him because of that, so he stopped. They said, 'look how many kids your wife brought to you, why are you acting like that'. So most of them are not helping because they know they will be mocked otherwise. It might be a [women's] habit or it may be that they see that you don't have anyone to support you, so they are getting used to that behaviour."

However, even if a husband would support his wife in the household duties, almost all of the women in the study agreed that there was a significant difference between the regular day of men and women in the centre. Freedom of movement, engaging in leisure activities and socializing were some of the examples women used to describe these differences, which will be discussed in the following section.

Social Networks and the Space Division

Given the distress of lack of occupation or meaningful organisation of time that migrants and refugees are facing in these situations, engaging in leisure activities and socializing can have a tremendous role in maintaining psychosocial well-being.[29] Moreover, social networks can be very helpful for coping with different challenges or troubles, one of which could be survived violence. This is why it is important to look further into how women and girls in the asylum centre are taking part in these activities, and how it differs from the men in the centre.

When asked about having a circle of friends, or being able to befriend other women whom they could rely on if in need, the answers varied among respondents. Some claimed that they managed to relate with one or two women, some claimed not to interact with other women at all. For those who did interact with other female inhabitants of the centre, places of socialization reappeared in different conversations. Many women mentioned that they met their friends because they were accommodated in the same barrack and their meeting place would primarily be in their respective rooms. "I have two or three friends that I can lean on. I made those friendships because we were in the same barrack, so we started communicating. We see each other every day and that is how we develop trust between us," stated Safia (29) from Afghanistan. Behnaz agreed: "I have two close friends - Safia and Maheen. Whenever I feel upset or sad I am visiting them in their room to have tea or coffee, so we are talking all together." When these and many other women were asked why are they only using their rooms as a meeting place, many agreed that it is "normal" that women are spending time in their rooms and the men are spending their time outside.

Aisha explained one of the reasons for this: "I noticed that women are spending time together,

For the men it is really easy; they come to a room, take their stuff and go next to the river where they are spending the day together having fun. For women it is not like that. (...) Spending the day by the river is not family time, it is time for a couple of the guys to hang out.

but they are not together outside because there are too many [unaccompanied] minors and single man here in the camp. For example, I am not wearing the scarf and they are speaking bad about me because of that." However, most of the other respondents, although agreeing that some safety concerns could be the cause of this, placed the focus on gender roles and the different spaces ascribed to men and women in their cultures. "Women are busy during the day working in the room and around the kids," Safia explained. "Afterwards, control comes to check our rooms and maybe only after that do we have some time to spend together if we are not too tired. For the men it is really easy; they come to a room, take their stuff and go next to the river where they are spending the day together having fun. For women it is not like that. We need to stay home and maybe we will have time to sit and talk. Spending the day by the river is not family time, it is time for a couple of the guys to hang out." Ziba also recognized the public-private division of spaces between genders. "It is true that [men] are outside more than women, but I think that is because we are shy and they think it is not nice for us to get together. (...) It is because of the society that has this stereotype that women should stay at home and take care of it and men should be outside."

Aisha confirmed that the gendered division of space is the same in Pakistani culture as well. "If a woman wants to have a man as a friend, it will not be good. Even if I call him brother and treat him like that, they will look at us as if we are a couple. Pakistani culture is not open-minded. Men think that women are just there to be in a room and not to go outside. Of course, it is easier for men to make friendships." In similar words, Qamar described the culture of Afghanistan in the same manner. "In Afghan society [men] don't like women to be outside, otherwise there will be rumours and most of the people will believe in them. Men are more free to make friendships than women because they have many ways and can go outside. (...) Even when I was a girl, a single one, most of the time I didn't have permission to visit neighbours and make new friends. After I got married, I had a little bit more freedom; I could talk to the neighbours. Men don't like their wives to be seen outside of the house and hanging out. That's just how it goes in Afghanistan."

The gendered division of space affected other aspects of girls and women in everyday life as well. One of the issue women often brought up was the small and overcrowded rooms with many children, that particularly bothered them given the amount of the time they spend there. One example is the way this living situation affected

those who were attending educational activities. "Before, I was learning English and mathematics, but since we are sharing a room with too many people I have lack of sleep and no space to learn and I cannot concentrate on learning anything," said Qamar. "Also, we live in the room with eight people and after a long day with the children I need my own space and time, but I don't have it," she added. Delbar experienced the same challenge: "I had problems because [the room] was so crowded and we lived with another family; I didn't have my own privacy."

Finally, the cultural norms of space division were too often linked with control and isolation of some girls and women. An issue that was commonly brought up during interviews was the tendency of some men to restrict the freedom of movement of their wives and daughters, and consequently, socializing with people outside of their nuclear family. This was explained by the traditional role of women to only "wake up, give tea, clean the room and take care of the baby all the time; if she wants to go outside, it can be only with her husband," as Aisha described it. "Most of the husbands are limiting their wives in terms of how often they go out and who they meet. If they go out at all, their husband will tell them not to go out too much," Behnaz explained. "Some men are just going around and asking, 'why are you going out, why didn't you cover your hair, why are you not taking care of the children, why, why, why.'" Safia shared the similar observation: "There is a woman here in the centre and after she finishes her [domestic work] she sometimes wants to go out and sit with her neighbours and friends, but her husband is not allowing her to go out of the room. He is forcing her to stay in the room and does not allow her to speak to anyone. She is in the room all the time looking after her husband." For Ghazal (16) from Afghanistan, limitations came from her father: "I am not participating in activities outside of the centre only because of my father. He doesn't like it. He says it is too far from the camp, even though there is transportation. He says, 'men work there, Afghan translators work there.'" The problem with such restrictions echoed in the girls' access to school, which will be discussed later in this study, as some parents (mainly fathers) did not find it appropriate for girls to leave their sight and go to school alone. The isolation of girls and women, especially those who are not allowed to leave their room, is particularly alarming, as experiences showed that, in such cases, other forms of violence were generally involved. Moreover, preventing women from leaving their rooms can also result in preventing them to seek help or report the violence they are experiencing. These issues will be further discussed in chapter four.

Decision-Making

Not only when it comes to freedom of movement, but in almost all aspects of life, decision-making processes came to the foreground in discussions about gender (in)equality and everyday life. For heavily patriarchal cultures, as those in question here, the decision-maker is (usually the oldest) man in the family, according to Nousha (34) from Iran. "Women in Islamic countries don't have the right to make decisions. In the first part of their life, decisions are made by the father and then later on by the husband." Aside from everyday choices, decision makers can be an enabling or disabling factor for other members to reach out for available services. This is very significant when thinking about gender relations, especially when GBV is understood as a manifestation of the unequal power relations between men and women.[30] In this sense, misusing the power to make decisions for the family can be a source of intimate partner or domestic violence. Women and girls might deal with many restrictions, including freedom of movement, access to education or financial resources, participation in family planning and access to protection and response to survived violence. Therefore, decision-making processes and associated relations in the family were also the subject of the discussion with many women, as they explained many behaviours and phenomena appearing in Serbia as well.

All girls and unmarried women in this study spoke about their fathers when asked about decision-making in the family. The father would have the last word on decisions regarding their education, future husbands, socializing etc. The girls would have to obey these decisions even if they didn't agree with them, out of respect to their fathers. In general, listening to the wishes of parents, most notably the father, was described as being imperative in the family. However, respondents described how girls and boys are differently affected by this and why.

Ghazal experienced such an upbringing. "My father always has the last word. (…) If he thinks that something is bad for me, he won't ask me for anything, but will only forbid it. If I totally disagree, I cannot do anything about it. I would like to be included in this process a bit more. But in our culture, it is very important for a girl to respect her parents and I accept everything they say." Tanaz (18) from Afghanistan described a similar situation in her family: "If I want something different than [my father] wants, probably that will make him angry, but I would never do something against his will. When we

speak about this, expectations to listen to your parents are much higher for girls than they are for boys." As she explained, the reason for this was the attitude that one day girls will become wives who should listen to their husbands, while boys will become decision makers. For both boys and girls, respecting male authority was imposed from early on. Regardless of how harmful these decisions may be, the vast majority of the girls sincerely believe that their father knows what is the best for them. The only alternative to a father's authority in the family could be another male member, according to Shefta (35) from Afghanistan. "In my primary family, my parents were deciding together, but the one who could have the last word as well was my oldest brother. My parents believed that he was smarter than the rest of the children. Even if I disagreed with him, I would have to listen to him and accept his decision," she stated.

For married women, the decision maker would generally be the husband, who would often make decisions independently for the whole family. "In my family, my husband is the one who is making decisions. Even though he asks me about my opinion, if I disagree with his opinion he will do whatever he wants," explained Qamar. "This way of making decisions is very common in Afghanistan; everything there needs to be how a man wants. With my parents, it was basically the same." From the perspective of Aisha, there was not much difference: "Maybe I can say my opinion, but [my husband] always has the last word. Because he is a husband and I am his wife, I don't have a problem with that. I am adjusting to that. It is the culture of my grandmother, my mother, and I am now doing the same. In my primary family, my father was the boss. In Pakistan it is like this - what your husband says it is like God has said that." Just as the community normalized these behaviours and the power asymmetry within the family, so did many of the women in the study, by accepting a subordinate role and obeying anything that their husbands said, as in the case of Aisha.

In isolated cases, women claimed that decisions in their family were made together through consultation between husband and wife. For the women who stated that their decision has equal power as their spouse's, it is interesting to note that, in these cases, both the man and woman came from a family where the mother had a decision-maker role. For the family of Safia, decisions were always made together: "We are consulting each other and we are making final decisions together. I lost my father when I was young, so my mother was in charge for everything. She was making decisions. If my husband and I don't agree, it depends on who will be more persistent. If I really disagree, he will give up. Likewise, if he really disagrees, I will give up. It depends on who will be stronger." However, according to Bahar, her word is final when making decisions with her husband.
"If we are speaking who has the last word in making decisions, it will be me. My husband respects me a lot and he thinks that I have more conservative ways to make decisions than him. I am making more careful decisions than others. In my primary family, my mother was in charge for making decisions. If I would disagree with my father, for example, he would tell me to ask my mother about permission or advice because he didn't want to make decisions without her. Even if I disagree with my mother, I will listen to her anyway. Until now I didn't have problems with my husband regarding disagreeing about something, and since my mother is a wise woman and my husband knows that, we can always consult her when we need to make some decision." Having these testimonies in mind, it can be concluded that one of the main factors not only in decision making, but also in gender relations and roles, is the heritage from the family. However, it remains unclear as to whether this shared decision-making applies to important matters in all spheres of life, or only those within the household context.

Conclusion

As shown above, the days of refugee and migrant men and women in the centre look significantly different. First, respondents' testimonies showed how responsibility for childcare and household duties, as one of the consequences of the traditional gender roles division, diminished the free time of women in comparison to men.

Based on these accounts, it also becomes clear how experiencing space becomes central to everyday social life: all as a product of gender norms. Spaces are occupied differently by different genders. Traditionally, women are confined in private and men are present more frequently in the public sphere. This division appeared to be common in all countries of origin of women included in the study and as such was replicated in the spaces of the asylum centre as well. For women, such restrictions contributed to feelings of isolation, given the constraints life as a refugee and migrant brings and the fact that some family and social ties are broken and left behind once the migration journey begins. As a consequence, it was much easier for men to meet friends and develop social and support networks than for the women in this study.

Finally, decision-making in the family showed to be an overarching issue when it comes to freedom and access to various activities for girls and women, since it was most often placed in the hands of male members of the family (presumably husbands or fathers). Many of these challenges will reappear in other parts of this study, one of which is access to formal and informal education, which will be discussed it the following chapter.

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“It’s the same every day; I am staying at home almost all day doing basically nothing.”

II. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Globally, when it comes to education of refugees, girls are notably disadvantaged in comparison to boys. About 70% of refugee children in the world are enrolled in elementary schools and half of that number in high school.[31] Among them, girls attend elementary schools up to 50% less than boys, while in the context of high schools the number of enrolled girls can go down to as low as 1%.[32] In Serbia, elementary schools welcome migrant and refugee children, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion. However, the discrepancy between the number of girls and boys attending school is clear when it comes to this population. While the differences occur in lower grades, they increase dramatically with the children's age. Such differences can be understood only when taking into account the cultures of the countries of origin and the subsequent gender norms inherent to them.

Understanding the Cultural Context

In cultures and traditions with emphasized patriarchal norms, girls' access to education can be especially challenging.[33] Even for those girls who initially have the opportunity to attend school, entering adolescence often leads to

complete withdrawal from education. This is usually because by this age, girls are expected to adopt female gender roles and start focusing more on the household, as well as get married and start a family. Once they enter child marriages and become pregnant at an early age, the majority of girls drop out of school.[34]

Among respondents, Aisha (22) was one of many women who had to leave the school because of for these reasons. "When I turned ten years old, my father told me that I could not go [to school] anymore because I needed to get married. He told me that I was not a good girl just because I went to school for so long. In Pakistan, they say that if girls are going to school they become spoiled; if they don't go to school they become good wives. (...) I really liked going to school, but in Pakistani culture it's like that. If you are ten to fifteen years old, you need to marry. If you are not married, it will be a shame for the family." Having a daughter attend school in her older age is also perceived as a shame for some families. Qamar argued that, by letting their daughters go to school, parents believe that they are putting their reputation at stake. "[Some people] have a problem with girls going to school. They don't want them to be seen in society, talk to the teacher if he is a male or talk to the boys. They don't want to expose their daughters to this. Another reason is that the community can easily make some rumours and families don't want to be disgraced because of that. (...) In Afghanistan, boys are making fun of the girls a lot when they are in the same school – that's why they don't like to have mixed classes. Even if parents don't have a problem with that, society will speak about them behind their back."

While it is viewed as problematic for a girl to continue her education, the same family can treat the son differently. As sons are expected to be the ones who will support the current nuclear family and provide for their future family, their education is welcomed.[35] "My society doesn't like when girls are going to school," explained Aisha. "Maybe only when they are really young. When they learn to write and read, their family will tell them not to go anymore because [they believe] that is enough for a girl. They don't see the point of a girl going to school because they will get married, take care of the baby and stay home with her husband. But they think it's really important for boys to go to school." Maheen (22) from Afghanistan also explained why there is a preference for boys and not girls to attend education. "Priority is given to boys because parents have this thought that girls will go to some other family, and boys will stay to build the family and provide money for them. (...). I also witnessed situations where girls stopped

with their education because the family thought it was enough for them just to know how to read and write."

Although these negative attitudes towards female education were often interpreted trough Islamic principles, a number of women stressed that this is not the case. Instead, they related these oppressive norms to the culture, family and upbringing. "I've heard people say that women should stay at home, take care of the kids and do their household jobs, but even in Islam it is not written that a girl should not get education," explained Delbar. "And those people who don't let their daughters to be educated are basically a disgrace to Islam, the same as ISIS and Taliban are!" Nousha went further in explaining the religion-education nexus: "I think [women] have to learn a lot of things before they realize their rights. This begins from their birth, as they are growing up with a lot of wrong information about life, even with wrong information about religion. My religion is a beautiful religion, but [men] changed it to what they wanted it to be. Men wanted to show themselves as strong and powerful, as if the religion gives them the right to do whatever they want with their wives. But that is not the truth. Therefore, if women would study anything, even religion, and would learn how to read and write, they would understand this world better and realize they have rights."

Finally, the specific socio-political context of a country of origin can significantly affect accessibility to education. The case of Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban is a prime example of how major safety and security issues can decrease access to school. The Taliban's radical beliefs hold that the educating of girls is against Islamic values, and female pupils, their teachers and schools were often targeted in their attacks.[36] "In my time [education of girls] was bad because of the Taliban. Our parents were afraid to send us to school because a lot of bad things might happen to a girl. The Taliban would kidnap girls and take them to Pakistan, where God knows what happened to them," Behnaz explained. Safia shared similar memories. "People didn't like [educating the girls] because it was not safe for the girls to go to school. You were going to school and explosions could happen at any moment. Boys were going to school because the Taliban were bombing only female schools." All of these factors have led to Afghanistan becoming one of the most restrictive environments when it comes to female education, where in certain regions the percent of girls enrolled (not counting dropouts) in school is as low as 15%.[37] Additionally, among adolescent girls, only 37% are literate in comparison with 66% of boys, while the ratio of literacy between women and men is 19% to 49%, respectively.[38] [39]

On the other hand, Iran presents quite a different cultural context. Women who were born or lived there claimed that access to education for girls is generally a common thing, even at the level of university. Statistics show that there are slight differences in numbers of girls and boys when it comes to literacy or school participation. However, gender norms are heavily present in the fields of studies deemed acceptable for males and females.[40] Moreover, strict physical segregation between men and women within education still exists. "[In Iran] they support the education of girls," Bahar stated, "but as Iran is Islamic and a strict country, high schools for girls and boys are separated. Now they are all together in universities, but before many thought that they should be separated there as well. In Iran, girls and boys are not allowed to speak to each other that freely, and if they want or need to do it, they do it in secret."

However, women from all countries included in this study agreed that there are significant differences in this matter, when it comes to people from the cities compared with people form smaller and more isolated environments. Shefta explained how there are exceptions to education restrictions in Afghanistan as well: "People who are living in big cities and coming from educated families are supporting girls to go to school. But the people who live in small villages don't like it. They think it is not good for them to go to school, and that school is not a good place for girls because they would have the opportunity to speak with boys." Additionally, women claimed that the crucial condition for girls to become well-educated is for their parents to be wealthy.

Education in Serbia

Cultural norms and attitudes towards female education were reflected in refugee and migrant girls' access to education while staying in Serbia as well. Such attitudes mostly affected adolescent girls, whose absence from the education system was noticeable. Certain women claimed that perspectives on education are slowly changing, with fathers becoming more flexible and aware of the lifestyle they will have to accept in Europe. Qamar explained how the situation is significantly different than in her home country. "In Afghanistan this is a problem and girls are not going to school; my father

never let me to go to school. But here, some girls are going to school and that is really good."

However, the resistance to allow their daughters to participate in formal education remained strong. Other major challenges exacerbated the situation even further, including the reality that Serbian schools mix genders in the classroom. "Sometimes [the parents] don't have problem with it, but most of them don't let their daughters go to school because the classes are mixed," stated Safia. "It depends on the decision of the father. I think that girls would like to go to school, but their fathers are not letting them." The women shared the opinion that one of the biggest concerns for fathers is that, by sending their daughters to the schools, they risk bringing shame to the family. They explained that if girls start spending more time with boys, or rumours start indicating so, this would be detrimental to the family. "The people who came from Afghanistan have really bad opinions about mixed classes," explained Ziba. "They are saying that girls and boys should not be together in the same place. They are concerned that [boys and girls] will become friends and that's not good. It is not good because they will fall in love and have sexual relations before marriage." As a result, families would rather choose to send boys to school and leave their daughters home.

"I know a family who has two boys who go to school [in Serbia] and two girls who don't go to school," said Nousha. "Those girls even speak Serbian; they learned it by themselves and are very smart. I asked the mother, 'why don't you send them to the school when they are so smart and talented?' She said they don't send them there because of the mixed classes. That's how Afghans think." On the other hand, there were isolated instances where fathers would see mixed classes as beneficial. Nima claimed that this was the case with her husband. "Both my husband and I are supporting that. My husband went to mixed class [in school] and he believes that this is the way for children to learn to respect and accept everyone. I agree with that. When my son is playing with girls from class, other Afghan boys are making fun of him, and saying that he fell in love and has a girlfriend now. I am telling him all the time that those things should not bother him, that they should continue to play because they are friends. For my daughter it is the same. She has an older brother and most of the time she is spending with him and his friends and I can see that she is stronger now than most of the other girls." Nima's testimony again brought to light how parents' own education reflects their attitudes towards educating their children. Moreover, it highlighted another important issue: the reaction

> When I turned ten years old, my father told me that I could not go [to school] anymore because I needed to get married. He told me that I was not a good girl just because I went to school for so long.

of boys to their female peers in school, which will be further discussed in the following section.

Adolescent Girls' Voices

In order to better understand the various challenges faced by adolescent girls, as those who appeared to be most troubled when it comes to education, documenting their opinions on the issue was crucial.

About half of teenage girls included in the study were not attending schools in Belgrade at the moment of data collecting, one of which had never went to school in her life. Of those who did attend school in their country of origin, only half finished their respective education. When it came to girls who participated in the formal educational system in Serbia, they were enrolled in higher grades of either regular elementary schools or those for adults with no prior formal education. On average, girls were out of school for 3 years, due to their migration journey. Regardless of their current status, they all agreed that school is very useful for them, both for knowledge and personal well-being. As Tanaz said: "I think that education is very important. What I liked [in Serbia] is that teachers were so nice to us. (…) And of course, that [education] will help me in the future. When I began going to school I got a lot of self-esteem; before I didn't have it at all. Before I didn't know how to deal with some challenges. Now I know and that is giving me more confidence." When asked what were the biggest challenges they met when going to school, none of the girls complained about school staff or programs. Rather, respondents stated that they experienced problems with other children, both in school and the asylum centre, as well as with their parents.

Previously discussed topics such as the gender role expectations upon entering adolescence, and parent dissatisfaction about mixed gender classes, also appeared in the conversations with girls. However, some additional challenges were mapped as well. In discussing the importance of age when it comes to education, Forozan (15) from Afghanistan stated: "For younger girls it is easier than it is for us, because they know Serbian better and they don't think about the clothes they will wear; they can go to any class and it is not a problem for them." For Forozan, the significant difference between adolescent and young girls was that the latter don't need to wear a scarf, which was one of the main challenges she described. "My biggest problem is that other

children are looking down on me because of my scarf. I can feel it. There is one other migrant girl in the school, but she is not wearing the scarf how she should; she wears it loose. Or maybe it is because I am now [a grown] girl, and she is not. (…) That's why I don't like to go to school in Serbia because they look at me badly and I am always alone." For Ghazal, the fear of being judged because of the scarf was reason enough not to go to school at all. "I don't want to go to school here. I think that the children will make fun of me because of the scarf. I've never gone to school here, but I asked the girl who did. She is 12 years old and she is going there with the scarf and they laugh at her because of that. In [another asylum centre] there was a woman that really pushed me to go to school, but that wasn't common there for migrant girls to go to school. I decided not to go and I didn't ask my parents to send me to school. They didn't tell me anything, but I know that even if I asked them to send me to school my father wouldn't let me." Ghazal also added that she doesn't believe that mixing boys and girls is necessarily a good idea: "I love how in Iran girls and boys are segregated, but it is not like that here. I know that 'when in Rome, act Roman' and when you are in some country you need to accept the rules, but I think that if the girls and boys would be segregated they would like the school better."

For others, the behaviour of the boys from the refugee and migrant community was the biggest obstacle. "Last year I went to school but I stopped because of [a boy]," Taherah (19) explained. "He lived in my barrack and he was mean to me. He was spreading rumours and bad words about me so I stopped going to school. In the end I regret it because I don't have a certificate that I finished any school in Serbia." For others, the fact that there were no other female peers from the community made attending the school too hard. "I was going to school, but not anymore," explained Tanaz. "I was the only girl and the rest were boys. It was not enough for me to stay. I asked [the school] to include more girls but that didn't happen. I would love to go to school again. I wanted to continue this year, but no one supported me. I didn't have any learning background so everything was challenging and hard for me." Respondents stated that for girls above 15 years old, there were not many choices when it comes to schooling. As Afarin (20) from Afghanistan stated: "There is only one option and one school we can go to and it is this [school for the education of adults]. That school is full of boys from the camp. They are saying bad words to girls and it is not pleasant to be with them in classes. That's why older girls don't want to go to school." Regarding high school, the girls reported that they did not know any females from the

centre who were attending, as the only girls who previously attended high school in Serbia had left. The girls confirmed that they had heard about the possibility to attend higher education, but they were informed that there were no conditions for them to go, such as transportation, translation and other services. Instead, most of the girls who were high school aged were either repeating the same classes (7th and 8th) in regular elementary schools, or going to the school for adults. Additionally, fear of being the only girl in the school again appeared to be a major obstacle. "I am not going to the high school because I would need to go alone with the bus," explained Ilham (15) from Afghanistan. "I would go with the bus, it's not a problem, but only if I had company. Otherwise, I would be the only girl there and they said that [the high school] is not a good place for girls. (…) I don't have special conditions under which I want to go to school. If my classmates were good, I would go. But people told me not to go there also because I am a migrant and I might have some problems because of it." Nevertheless, the majority of girls stated that, even if these challenges wouldn't exist, many fathers wouldn't let their daughters to continue with higher education due to the gender roles previously discussed above.

Adult Women and Education

The deprivation of education affects womanhood as well, given the consequent inability for labour market integration. In the refugee context, low levels of or no education is just one of many obstacles for women to improve their livelihoods.[41] Many women included in this study had not completed or had never attended school, and some were illiterate. As they were too old for any formal education system in Serbia, many women were participating in informal education. However, there were still many obstacles to regularly attend - or attend at all – such activities.

A lack of previous education prevented many women to continue learning. One of the biggest issues for some women was illiteracy. "I can read, but writing is hard for me. I think some classes might help me a lot with that," said Behnaz. "Here they have English classes, but we cannot read or write even in our mother language, nor do we have native speakers to teach us. If we learn our own language, it will help us to learn English also." For these reasons, many expressed the wish for some alternative types of education, which do not require the skills that they have not yet developed. Maheen concluded that learning some crafts could be a preferred solution. "Activities [for developing practical skills] will help us for sure. This is better than formal education because in those classes we have an interpreter who will explain us everything and we can actually learn something." In her opinion, such knowledge would be much more useful for women, primarily because of the language barrier, and secondly because it can be accessible to all, regardless of a person's educational background.

Household commitments and the role in the family discussed in the first chapter can present additional barriers when it comes to accessing educational activities by women. Even globally, studies show that time devoted to caring for dependant members of the family restricts access to educational activities for many refugee women.[42] Similarly, many of the women included in this study agreed that it is not possible to participate in such activities because they don't have enough time to finish all of their daily tasks in their household, as well as attend classes. Ziba was one of these women. "If I didn't have children I would attend everything until the night: sports, guitar lessons, languages." Additionally, many women have no one to leave their children to for the duration of activities. "There are a lot of activities, but because of the children, women cannot participate, even if they really want," Bahar explained. "I was attending many workshops earlier, but my children were annoying, so I stopped." The responsibilities associated with raising children was also used as an argument by some husbands who were against their wives socializing in such ways. "Even when there are female-only workshops, you can see that some women are not coming because their husbands are telling them 'you have children, family, me, you have to cook and wash the clothes.' Women are like possession for men and they don't let them join these classes," said Nousha.

Finally, not attending classes had to do with a general lack of motivation as well. On the one hand, attempts to cross the border, leading to subsequent absence from classes, was a primary reason that some women mentioned for avoiding such activities. On the other, motivation was lacking because the most important thing for them was crossing the border – which was not happening. This was the feeling that Delbar shared: "We tried to cross the border and when I returned I didn't go to classes because I had already missed some. I made the decision not to attend classes anymore because my goal is to cross the border and I don't want to start things because I want to go. Also, I cannot focus on the

content when I am only thinking about how I will reunite with my family." Additionally, none of the women expressed the wish to work in Serbia, even if they would meet the criteria needed for a work permit, as they didn't see this country as their final destination.

And, while some women saw the migration as an opportunity to change this situation, those deprived of education, and in most cases illiterate, did not show hope or motivation to be included in education or the labour market even after leaving Serbia. They either stated that this is not something that they are thinking about at all, or highlighted their role in the family as their primary responsibility. "First I want to have more children and after that I might go to study," stated Qamar, the mother of two, who had never attended the school and was illiterate. "Only after I give birth to them I will think about myself." Such statements only go to prove the extent of the relationship between education, (in)dependence and gender norms reproduction, and how challenging it is for the least educated women to overcome their family role and norms imposed on them, even in more liberal surroundings.

Conclusion

Access to education emerged as complex issue in the study. The challenges were partly rooted in the countries of origin, as it was not possible for many of the girls and women to go to school, whether due to cultural norms or security reasons. This, coupled with the fact that schools in Serbia do not engage in gender segregation of students, made the possibility of education for some girls (adolescents primarily) quite difficult. Teasing and bullying by other boys from the community was also marked as a significant obstacle by girls during their testimonies. On the other hand, the lack of adequate information on available education and related services was also prominent among many girls.

Moreover, adult women, in some cases those without any formal education, found it difficult to attend informal education in Serbia. Some of the primary reasons for this were lack of free time given their household activities, lack of support for child care and illiteracy.

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III. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Disasters and subsequent migration have a tremendous impact on the health of people on the move. Lack of security, movement constraints, living conditions and climate change are all factors that can pose a threat to psychological and physical health.[43] For this reason, health care provision is an important pillar in humanitarian response. However, many refugees and migrants may experience significant obstacles in accessing these services, even once they reach refugee settlements, asylum centres or reception centres.[44] These may include (in)appropriateness of services, language barriers, lack of transportation and many others.[45]

Due to their specific needs and vulnerabilities, as well as cultural differences and roles ascribed to them, girls and women are affected by these challenges differently than the male population. The following section will analyse the experiences of female refugees and migrants in Serbia in regards to their health and well-being, as well as some common hardships they are dealing with in this regard.

Mental Health

Difficulties of everyday life in refugee settlements and asylum or reception centres were touched upon at the very beginning of this study. Research has shown that living in such environments often leads to feelings of precariousness, powerlessness, and degradation.[46] Individuals are experiencing an utter feeling of passiveness and not only because they are spending time in uncertainty. In order to be qualified for humanitarian aid, refugees and migrants must first be recognized and treated as vulnerable and helpless by the humanitarian system, which contributes to feelings of dependence and a loss of control over their own future.[47] In other words, the humanitarian system itself can make people in need passive.

Additionally, evidence has shown that emergencies deteriorate individual, family and community relations and structures, which disrupts existing protection support and intensifies existing problems of social injustice and in (in)equality.[48] On the other hand, outlets for leisure or occupational and educational activates, which are crucial for maintaining well-being, are not equally accessible for men and women in the community. Having all this in mind, it is no wonder that these situations negatively affect the psychological well-being of people on the move, and more specifically women.

Many respondents disclosed their concerns with behavioural changes observed in both themselves as well as other family members, due to heightened stress. Mainly, they claimed that their exacerbated mental state was a consequence of the inability to realize their primary goal: reaching their EU country of destination. “We need to find a way to take care of our psychological state, so we can avoid overthinking,” said Tanaz. “I feel that I have also changed. The future is not predictable and I am sad because of that. In general, I am not a person who worries too much; I am a happy person. If we would have this conversation in Germany, words like sadness and depression would never come to my mind.” Moreover, a number of interviewees stated that they did not imagine that their migration experience would be so hard, from the travel itself, to the living conditions. Some, like Ghazal, even mentioned the unexpected challenges of dealing with different cultures. “It is not how I expected it, it is not pleasant here. When I just think of wearing a scarf it is not pleasant. (...) Here you are just thinking about problems, and there is no end. One problem ends and there is the next one already.”

However, when describing their mental state, most attention was given to the feeling of “in-betweenness,” the sense of being trapped in

place and time without the chance to break out from the routine and endless waiting, or as Maheen described it, “floating in life.” Bahar’s experience was very illustrative on this subject. “I am sick of the routine life here. Nobody is happy; depression is everywhere. They are just talking about leaving Serbia, complaining. The lifestyle here is a problem; this routine life it is really not good. (…) I am just overthinking how I will stay here forever, and how without any education I will be useless for society. I will have to stay here for the rest of my life just eating and sleeping.” The sense of repetitiveness was shared by Safia as well. “Everything is the same every day. It looks like the same day is repeating every day. Today I was telling my neighbour, ‘Look how the days are passing, we are just waking up, going to take food, coming back to feed the kids and struggle with them like: do this, don’t do that.’ We are spending every day like that.” While the feeling of being trapped is something that affected all of the migrant and refugee population in question, some women stressed that it is much easier for their husbands, as they have more freedom to fill their time, socialize, etc. “My husband has never asked for help; he feels much better than me,” said Maheen. “He has time to go out with his friends and have some fun and I am taking care of our child. That’s why he feels better than me.”

Another common topic when talking about mental health was anger. Whether describing themselves, the behaviour of their husbands, or even children, the accounts of different types of aggression and anger outbursts were reoccurring among respondents. These kinds of mood changes not only affected individuals, but were portrayed as behaviours that reflected on relationships within the family: from husband to wife, mother to child, etc. Some of the women recognized a clear relationship between their stress and the anger they manifest. “I lost all of my patience and sometimes I cannot control my anger at all,” said Delbar. “When my children are playing and making a lot of noise, I am shouting at them, but then instantly regret it because I should not treat them like that. I cry a lot and I am trying not to cry in front of them, because they will start asking questions. But when they fall asleep, I cry alone and sometimes I just want to go somewhere to have some privacy, but I cannot do that.”

“I noticed changes, I don’t have any nerves for the kids anymore,” Behnaz disclosed during her interview. “Whatever they say, I just shout at them. My husband as well. He doesn’t have any patience any more, he is always thinking about the future, what will we do, how long this journey will take...We are all tired from this

situation and conditions. We are so worried about our children’s future. It has been two years and four months that we are on the road and we don’t have any happiness, just worries about the future.” Safia continued with referring to her husband’s behaviour. “My husband is getting angry faster; he is quickly losing this temper. He is not speaking to anyone when he is angry. Maybe two or three hours later he speaks with me or his friends.” Bahar stressed how anger issues can lead to domestic violence and harm women in particular. “I realized that women are being mistreated, because men are having a lot of pressure here. They’re stuck here and they don’t have any patience anymore, so they are just fighting and yelling at their wives. For example, [that’s why] a husband punched one of my friends and her eye was blue, black and swollen. I have seen lot of those things here.”

When dealing with or overcoming mental hardships, accessing services that provide psychological aid was not frequently mentioned among interviewed women. Nevertheless, it should be stated that, among those who did visit the psychologist, the vast majority found it helpful. Nousha, for example, viewed the use of psychological services as a normal way of coping with stress and depression. “If I hit rock bottom and I cannot cope with things by myself anymore, I ask for the help of a psychologist, which I also did in Iran. When I came here, I asked an organization to provide me help because I thought I might hurt myself, and it helped.” Qamar reported a positive experience as well, but also disclosed the obstacles in accessing such services. “When I arrived in Serbia, I was home sick and depressed, so I visited a psychologist in the asylum centre and it helped me.” However, Qamar, as well as a number of other women, claimed that her “housewife” duties prevented her from using this service over an extended period of time, explaining how she became “busy with [her] children and couldn’t find time to continue going there.” Another common obstacle in seeking specialized services was the stigma attached to those who visit psychologists and a belief that only “insane” or “silly” people should seek therapy. “I am not crazy to go to the psychologist,” replied Nasreen (27) from Afghanistan, when asked if she would ever use such a service. “I’ve never had such problems to need them. If I feel bad, sad or worried I am just making myself busy.”

Many respondents did not demonstrate a negative attitude towards psychological services, but stated that such interventions would not help them. For many, crossing the border was seen as the only solution for their mental well-

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being. Since psychologists could not help them with this, they did not see it worthwhile to visit them. "I don't think that [a psychologist] can help me with this," stated Delbar, when describing her desperation for not managing to cross the border. "That is, I don't know exactly because actually I have never tried [visiting psychologist]. But this is about our future." Finally, some didn't change their opinion even after trying to seek for professional support, as in the case of Maheen. "I asked for help and went to talk to a psychologist. I did not find it very useful and after that I went to visit a psychiatrist and he prescribed me some medicine. However, I felt much better when I stop taking [the medicines] and started participating in different activities organizations offer. That felt much better." Many women confirmed that, instead of talking about their problems, they found it helpful to be engaged in different occupational or recreational activities. "Jogging would be helpful," Safia stated. "Also, different educational classes can make you feel better, and some of them were available in the centre before." "If you attend some sports your health will be better for sure; sports are really good because you can lower your stress through exercising," added Qamar.

Certain women who acknowledged the importance of psychological support still reported that they felt more comfortable seeking support elsewhere. "One hundred percent it is better to speak with a psychologist," said Sanaz (32). "But if there is no psychologist in that moment it is good to speak with friends or family in order to release stress and sadness. Sometimes it is easier to speak with friends because they know your entire story and you don't need to repeat yourself." Marzia (27) from Afghanistan, agreed with Sanaz. "I feel more comfortable to speak with my friends because there are some things that you cannot say to someone else. Maybe someone has more trust in friends than a psychologist, or maybe they are just lazy to ask for help."

This proved to be a common attitude, since most of the women reported that it was important and helpful to share their troubles with someone, preferably a friend or a family member. "I am asking my sister for help. She calms me down and that is enough for me, or sometimes I am speaking with my brothers and they make me feel better," explained Tanaz. Some chose to turn to their mothers for help, as stated by Ghazal. "I am not asking any [organisation] for help. When I am sad I am taking long walks with my mother and that is it. Sometimes I am speaking with my teacher, which means a lot to me." Confiding in employees

of institutions or organizations who are not engaged in provision of the specialized services, but are recognized as persons of trust, was brought up frequently when talking about coping with stress and hardship. Aside from teachers, these individuals were humanitarian workers that the women and girls were familiar of and felt comfortable with. The workers were always females, and in many cases were those with whom they could communicate easily with - notably translators and cultural mediators. Nevertheless, although they reported that it was always a relief for them to share their troubles with these workers, in most of the cases they would be hesitant to ask for further specialized help and be referred to an adequate service provider.

Physical Well-Being

When speaking about physical health, cultural norms and beliefs came to the foreground during the conversations with girls and women. Visiting a general practitioner, and especially a gynaecologist, was viewed as a very unpleasant experience by most of the participants. Awareness and knowledge about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) was usually at a low level and notions of stigma for visiting the doctor was also present in some cases. On the other hand, a perception of lack of gender and culturally appropriate services of certain providers also reoccurred in conversations, which only added to hesitations to visit health service providers all together.

As cultural differences are recognised as a common obstacle in accessing health care services by migrants and refugees globally, studies have shown that cultural mediators can make a substantial contribution in overcoming the gaps between these communities and existing local health systems.[49] Nevertheless, women included in this study reported that, even with the existence of cultural mediators, they still experienced problems. This was mostly due to the fact that, in many cases, cultural mediators, as well as doctors, were male. As Safia stated, “The problem is that there is no female interpreter, or the doctor is a male. For most of the females, this is a problem, because they don’t feel comfortable to speak about their problems when the doctor or interpreter is male. (…) It all depends on the shift. When I went for a check-up, I went without the presence of an interpreter, but the doctor was female. But in the next shift, the doctor was male, so all the women gave up on check-ups in that shift.” Some women claimed that the gender of the service provider is crucial only with the interpreter, as doctors are seen as “professionals.”

Ziba claimed that women are “shy to tell [their problems] to the male interpreter, but not to the male doctor.” Understanding of culture intersected with the issue of gender, with many women suggesting that having female cultural mediators from the country of their origin, instead of the local population familiar with their language, would be the best solution for using the medical services.

However, most of the women reported discomfort with having both cultural mediators and doctors being male. Moreover, a number of women reported feeling uncomfortable asking assistance from male doctors in general – e.g. general practitioners, or any other doctor that is not necessarily focused on sexual and reproductive health. “It is difficult to tell your problem if a man is listening and it is even harder if you need a medical check-up,” explained Ghazal. “If doctor is a woman, I would go. I don’t like a man to be my doctor in general. We were raised like that, that is how they taught us, if you are sick you should tell that to a woman.” Tanaz shared this attitude as well: “I don’t like to go to the doctor at all. Recently, I needed to go to get a blood test and I needed some time to convince myself to do it. The doctor asked me how long I was sick and I told him two weeks. He asked me why I didn’t come before and I said I don’t like [doctors] and he laughed. And I only had problems with my stomach.”

The subject of SRH showed to be even bigger taboo amongst the majority of girls and women. Even asking for hygiene kits was often halted due to embarrassment, while taking care of one’s own body during the menstrual cycle was reported as inadequate, either due to a lack of hygienic items or lack of knowledge. Some women stated that they did not have adequate underwear, or not enough of it, while others noted that they were lacking hygienic pads, but were too embarrassed to ask for additional ones. Bahar described many ways in which women felt their dignity was affected by this situation. “A few days ago, my friend had her period and while she was walking, because she didn’t have enough pads, all the blood ended up on the floor. That is really embarrassing and it happens to us all the time because we don’t have enough pads that can make us safe.” On the other hand, as she noted, not all women are aware of these needs, adding that “someone needs to teach them how to take care of their hygiene because some of them don’t know how to do that.”

The matter of personal hygiene and health during the menstrual cycle was perceived differently by various women, mainly because of superstition

and some traditional beliefs. Turan (33) from Afghanistan explained how some women in Afghanistan believe that they shouldn't shower during the cycle. "We were taught that we must not shower when we have our period. We were told not to do so, because otherwise we would not be able to give birth to a child later on." A large portion of interviewed women were familiar with this belief. Since the fear of not being able to have children – perceived to be "a female duty" or "purpose" as respondents reported - many women did not question these assumptions, in spite of any health repercussions they experienced. The lack of reproductive health-related knowledge partly explains such attitudes. For example, the vast majority of girls included in this study did not have knowledge of their menstrual cycle and puberty changes. They stated that they didn't feel like they had anyone to ask or to talk about it with, except maybe older sisters. "We don't speak about this with our mothers. Even if we would try they would tell us it's shameful to talk about it," Diba (19) said. She also mentioned shame when describing her own experience: "When I got my period I was so scared. I was afraid that I lost my virginity, and I was afraid to tell this to my mother, so I confided in my friend. She told me what is actually going on, and she was the one to tell the news to my mother."

Seeking out the services of a gynaecologist was viewed as an especially awkward experience. "Because of the way we were brought up, we are hesitant when we are going to a doctor, especially a gynaecologist, to say what hurt us, where we have a rash, and so on," explained Nousha. "In that regard, we are shy to talk about that." Ghazal mentioned similar discomfort she felt when she was about to disclose her concerns to a gynaecologist. "I didn't want to say my problem out loud, so I wrote it on paper and my mother gave it to a doctor who knew English. They understood and gave me medicine. But, in general, I don't like people to know I have some problem of this kind." How uncomfortable the idea of visiting the gynaecologist was to some women shows the relief of one of them, Tanaz, that she never had to visit one. "Thank God I didn't need to go to the gynaecologist! It is terrifying me to go there. I don't like doctors at all; that is really embarrassing for me. Not embarrassing, but bad. I don't like it. Everything that has connection with gynaecologist is disgusting for me. My sister is working as a nurse in the maternity hospital and I always ask her how can she eat with the same hands with which earlier she was holding a baby that came from inside of a woman. I am taking care of myself, just not to go [to the gynaecologist]."

Talking to a man only added to this discomfort, and the majority of respondents insisted on the importance of a female doctor. Many women shared how they gave up their appointments several times upon realizing that the gynaecologist was male, while others chose to "cure themselves" when they had these kinds of health issues. Even among women who were practicing regular check-ups in their countries of origin, some stopped doing so in Serbia, risking their health. Behnaz described how she decided to leave her appointment when she realized that the doctor was male. "Now, I am using some medicines at home or boiled water so I can cure myself at home. When I was pregnant in Serbia, I didn't go to the gynaecologist like I did in Afghanistan. Even when I moved to Iran I was going to check-ups from time to time."

Qamar remembered how she refused to go to a medical exam from a male gynaecologist, and only chose to take therapy instead. "They gave me some tablets and it didn't help, so an infection returned after a while. I am aware that [the regular gynaecological check-up] is important; you can see I didn't go for check-ups and now I have problem." Similar to Qamar, most of the women recognized the importance of regular check-ups, but none of them visited the gynaecologist unless they already had a problem. An Afghan woman explained, "Here we don't have access to go to such check-ups and Afghan women, they really don't take care of prevention."

Conclusion

Testimonies showed that girls and women shared many difficulties in relation to personal health. Their psychological well-being was impaired by the instability and uncertainty of life in refuge. Feelings of sadness, depression, but also anger influenced not only the mental health of the women and girls, but family relations as well. In certain cases, it stimulated the aggressive behaviour of their husbands.

Furthermore, many challenges were experienced when it came to physical and especially sexual and reproductive health. Embarrassment to talk with male doctors and translators, the taboo nature of reproductive health and a lack of adequate knowledge on this subject were just some of the hardships brought up in interviews and focus groups.

IV. SAFETY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GBV is one of the biggest challenges in the context of crisis response and has been documented in every recent humanitarian emergency, regardless of the region, culture or type of emergency in question.[50] Many factors contribute to the increase of GBV in such settings, such as unstable institutions, displacement, inadequate accommodation, lack of basic resources, disrupted relationships in the family and community etc., and they can be present both in refugee settlements and asylum or reception centres. Nevertheless, understanding the scope and magnitude of this problem remains challenging, given the fact that the vast majority of GBV cases remain unreported.

On the other hand, emergencies showed to intensify already existing structures that deepen gender inequalities, where attitudes, beliefs and norms on gender differences and inherent power imbalances only come to the foreground.[51] There are many forms of violence that girls and women can experience as a product of these changes. One such form which has become increasingly recognised in the humanitarian sector recently is intimate partner violence. Studies have shown that in emergencies, while violence against men is usually committed by strangers or acquaintances, violence against women and girls is most often committed by an individual well-

known to the survivor, such as a family member or intimate partner.[52] This proved to be correct in the Serbian context as well, where most of the respondents reported intimate partner violence as a common problem in asylum centres.

All of the previous chapters have shown the many ways in which gender roles shape the female experience of exile and how it restricts them from accessing various services. All of these conditions produce an environment which enables GBV to take place. Accordingly, while women and girls included in this study acknowledged the influence of their current migratory situation on violence that they have either experienced or witnessed, they also reiterated links of violence with pre-existing gender norms from their cultures.

Intimate Partner Violence in Asylum Centres

According to the interviewed women, one of the major enabling factors for GBV occurrence in asylum centres is its wide acceptance and normalization, a characteristic common of all the cultures involved in this study. This is especially the case for intimate partner violence, where the subordinated position of women in society and the request for their obedience comes to the foreground.

Ziba explained the connection of GBV with gender norms and the power inequalities inherent to them. “If your wife disagrees with you, [men think] you have to beat her up. Also, other men are telling to new husbands that they need to beat their wives from time to time. Because they believe they are smarter and that they can organize life better than women, they think they have a right to beat them.” Moreover, many women commented on the tendency of the community to always blame women for the disputes within the family. Aisha explained how, in general, the community in the centre will approve domestic violence: “if [the husband] beats [the wife] everyone will think that for sure she deserves it, because otherwise he would not beat her. [They think] that she made a problem and she deserves to be beaten and that the problem is with the women all the time.” Such behaviour was explained mainly in relation to tradition and the way generations and generations have acted throughout the past, which has made it difficult to change it in the present day.

Being in Serbia (and generally, in Europe) affected this violent behaviour to some extent, given the existing legal framework on violence against women. According to Behnaz, "People in Afghanistan are saying that it is a *women's right to be beaten*, but here they are trying to be better here because they are afraid of the law. Because [a husband] knows that if someone notices this, they will separate him and his wife and send her to another camp or place." Nevertheless, the problem of violence in this community was strongly present in the interviews. Many women reported witnessing violence against women in the centre. Some heard fighting from other rooms and others noticed bruises on women. "It happens that women are mistreated. We are in our room and we can hear women screaming from the other room," stated Maheen. Aisha mentioned that alcoholism and substance abuse often lead to violence as well. "I saw so many times that husbands are coming drunk to the barrack and mistreating their wives. One woman showed me bruises from when her husband kicked her. He did that because she was begging him not to go to gamble." Aisha also recognised the mental state and psychological pressure related to migration as a cause of violence. However, she herself viewed this as justification for the violence she might experience. "Sometimes my husband speaks badly to me as well and we are fighting, but it is normal; this is because we are in trouble here."

Forced Marriage, Girls and GBV

Girls are also suffering from violence resulting from prescribed gender divisions and roles. As they are entering into adolescence, their freedom decreases and their capacities often remain unfulfilled, while their physical and mental well-being is often deteriorating.[53] Many respondents stated they are aware of this behaviour and that it is present in the asylum centre as well. Unlike boys, very young girls are commonly forced to help in households. Shefta described such a case in her neighbourhood in the centre. "There is a family, they have a fourteen-year-old daughter. They force her to do everything around home and are beating her even if she is listening to them and doing whatever they want." Aside from the violence and isolation this brings to girls, forced engagement in household work often presents a major obstacle in accessing education, as it was discussed earlier.

Another alarming barrier to girls' well-being and development has already been brought up in this study when discussing obstacles to education: the early marriage, a widespread practice in the cultures of refugees and migrants residing in Serbia. Many interviewed women described how their marriages had been arranged by their parents since their childhood. Consequently, they didn't really know the person they were marrying, nor were they in the position to choose their husband. Early marriage is commonly perceived as a solution for many problems, especially in situations where a family lives in poverty and struggles to survive and to feed all their children. Marrying off girls is seen as a way to unburden the domestic budget and earn from the dowry.[54] "I had to get married when I was 16 years old," Iman stated. "My father passed away and there was no one to support us financially, so they married me to make it easier for the family." As several women explained, girls can face early and forced marriage from their early teen years, where they often end up surviving physical and sexual violence as well. Serious health complications resulting from early pregnancies, such as depression, and even suicide, are just some of the consequences women mentioned in interviews. Moreover, many agreed that one of the most damaging factors of early marriage is that they are left isolated and have no one to turn to. Once they enter the marriage, the relationship with the husband is considered to be something that should stay within the new nuclear family. Therefore, a girl's parents do not want to intervene if violence is present in the marriage. "Some families forget about their daughters as soon as they get married," Maheen explained. "It's as if she is not their daughter anymore. She belongs to her husband and he can do whatever he wants and she will not have support from her family. If he wants to kill her, he can do that. Women don't have any power to decide in their names."

Although some respondents survived early marriages themselves in their childhood, while others faced the danger of such practices even while in Serbia, women reported that no similar practices were made in this country to their knowledge. "We didn't have such arrangements in the camp, because no one would have a good opinion about getting married here; they would think it's bad," said Shefta. "[The family] didn't even reach their destination and they have already given away their daughter!" Moreover, Shefta believed that migration could bring positive changes when it comes to attitudes towards early marriage. "I think that most of the people have changed their opinion about marriages. I think that when we reach our destination [country] girls will be able to choose [husbands] for themselves. It won't be strict like in Afghanistan. When my older son was born, I promised him to my first cousin's daughter

because she was born the same year. But last year I talked to her and told her that I am not sure if I will respect the agreement because my son needs to grow up, get an education, a job and then we need to see if they want to get married to each other." Boosah shared this attitude: "I think that it is possible to change opinions about this harmful practice. When we were living in Iran, one of my relatives promised her daughter to her first cousin. She said that for sure they will get married, no matter where we are. But after that they moved to Europe and she changed her mind. Her daughter also said that she is living in Europe now and that she doesn't want to get married in Afghanistan to her first cousin. So I believe it is possible to change your attitude."

Unlike arranged marriages, the women explained the concept of "love marriage" as one that arises out of the free choice and mutual love between future spouses. However, among the cultures included in this study, "love marriage" was very uncommon, and mainly the result of rebellion against the will of the parents. Aisha is one of the women who experienced threats and violence upon deciding to marry the man she chose for herself. "Me and my husband we have love marriage and my father doesn't like my husband," said Maria. "I have been engaged since I was born. My father promised me to my cousin and I grew up and fell in love with another man, my husband, and told to my father that I will not do the marriage that he planned. My father was so angry that he beat me and my mother because of it. Everyone hates me now. In Pakistan, love marriage is a problem, but here it is easier and is not a problem. In Pakistan, if you say that you want love marriage it is like a bomb, a scandal." While it seemed that in the asylum centre girls are not commonly threatened by early marriage, women reported to have heard about many cases where fathers would beat their daughters for choosing their partners themselves. "Both in my previous camp and here I heard that girls were beaten for choosing boys that their father didn't approve of," Aisha stated. "I even remember how once a girl was punished to stay in the room for weeks for not agreeing with her father about this."

Safety and Life in the Centre

Migration itself served as a catalyst for an increase of GBV as mapped in this study, with several girls and women linking concern for their safety with accommodations in the asylum centre. As a place that accommodates hundreds of different people in a restricted

> If [the husband] beats [the wife] everyone will think that for sure she deserves it, because otherwise he would not beat her.

space, combined with a lack of privacy and inability to control their behaviour at all times, the asylum centre setting contributed to feelings of unease and discomfort among respondents. Some women saw the problem in the space of the centre itself and stressed that they felt particularly uncomfortable in certain parts of the facility. Two areas were highlighted specifically – the centre's entrance and the showers. "The worst part is between the camp and the bus station, it's very bad when its dark there," said Nousha. "I even noticed some beaten women there." Boosah agreed with this problem: "The way to the camp is not safe during the night; I am afraid to go alone there when it is dark." Another challenge was showering. While women claimed to be satisfied with the bathroom, accessibility of hot water and cleaning service, they did not feel comfortable when they or their daughters were taking showers. "When my daughters go to take shower I go with them, to take care of them." said Roshan. "I have heard that sometimes unaccompanied minors are coming to watch women while they are taking showers."

Most of women however saw reasons for concern in the inhabitants of the centre themselves, particularly single men and minors who are travelling alone. "Since we have changed barracks I feel safe; before we were here with unaccompanied minors," explained Tanaz. "They were fighting all the time and stabbing each other with knives. But then the police came and displaced all the smugglers and troubled ones from the centre. Now, my barrack is a barrack for families; it is quiet and in front of the Commissariat offices." However, even when living with families, some women felt discomfort. "It is safe, but I don't feel comfortable. I noticed that husbands are beating their wives all the time and we can hear it," Ziba reported.

However, even if they were sleeping in separate dorms and barracks, some women reported that they were worried about their safety even in their own rooms, or for the safety of their children if they were not with them. "I don't feel safe here and when I want to leave the room I have to lock the door," said Shefta. "Once I went out of the camp and when I came back I saw that someone had stolen my blanket. Also, when my daughter is going to kindergarten I need to go to check on her, to see if she is there or not. I need to watch her all the time because of these minors. They are stabbing each other, fighting and no one cares." Bahar explained how she is sometimes scared at night as well, knowing that someone might break in. "During the night some men are entering the camp and are sleeping here, even if they are not registered." Because of this fear, she stated that, if she had to choose between an abusing husband or being alone, she would always choose the former, because the single women and female heads of household were especially vulnerable to attacks by the men in the centre. "Of course, I don't agree with [violent] behaviour, but I prefer to have a man next to me because I don't want others to see me unprotected. They could bother me, hurt me or anything else. It doesn't matter if my husband is bad, there is a man in the house so nobody else can hurt me or say something bad to me." The issue of unsafety of the centre for single women was brought up by other women as well, and will be discussed in the following section in more detail.

GBV and Intersectionality

Different girls and women are affected by GBV differently. As we have seen, being a woman *and* a migrant or refugee adds an additional layer of risk of exposure to violence. However, numerous other aspects can further negatively affect the safety of women, including their marital and living status, ethnicity, different health conditions, sexuality etc.

Single women travelling alone, or female headed households were commonly described as some of the most vulnerable groups by many respondents. As a woman travelling on her own, Nousha described the stigma and social exclusion she experienced: "I am traveling alone, without my family, and my daughter is in Iran. Men are approaching me because they think I am single and available. A man approaches me three or four times and everyone thinks there is something more between him and I. For the married women, their husbands are upset even if they are talking to me because I don't always wear a hijab and that's outrageous for them. If I don't wear a hijab, it means I am a bad woman. This is very difficult for me. Also, because I am 34 years old, they ask me why I am not married, where is my child, if I have it why is it not with me, etc. They have a very bad opinion about me." A number of cases of harassment were described, targeting this specific group. "There was a woman traveling alone; she was terrified here," Boosah disclosed. "She said that during the night, men were always knocking on her door. I think that is a signal that men are wanting her. If she opens the door that means that a man can come inside of her room and have her. Security is walking around the camp during the night, but these things are still happening." Roshan shared another case. "There was a single mother with

six daughters and unaccompanied minors were drawing hearts and writing sexual messages in front of their door. They took pictures of one of the daughters and made a fake account on Facebook to mock her. For them, if a woman is traveling alone that means she is available. It doesn't matter if she maybe has a husband somewhere else. They don't care about her status as long she is single [in the camp]. If she doesn't have anyone next to her, she is available."

Being an ethnic minority also showed to have a negative impact on girl's and women's safety. One of such cases was Taherah, a young girl traveling without her father, who was also a member of an ethnic minority present in the centre. She shared her own experience:

"In Iran, people were telling me that I am Afghan and here [Afghans] are telling me that I am Tajik. Since I came to Serbia, I have had problems with unaccompanied minors. They are looking at the other girls like they are looking at me, but they are more violent towards me. Tajiks and Pashtuns don't like each other. They are fighting all the time and maybe that is why I have more problems with those boys than the other girls have. I have had problems with all Afghans, but mostly with Pashtun boys. Afghans just verbally abused me, they never did more than that. It would be easier if I am not Tajik. Pashtun people say to others that they are not humans if they are not Pashtuns.

(...) They did terrible things to me. They were sending me terrible messages like 'I cannot wait to ruin your vagina and after that to cut your head off.' Once, when I was outside with my mother, a group of them attacked us. They were touching my private parts and they pushed away my mother so she couldn't protect me. I called a translator to call the police because I couldn't. I didn't know Serbian or English in that moment well enough to make that call. Then [the boys] made a profile on Instagram with my picture and wrote that I am lesbian and that I like women. They took my photos from my Viber account. It would be different if we are not traveling alone. If we had some man with us, they wouldn't do those things to me.

Today I have problems as well. They are calling me 'plum' because I have a round face. That's making me sad. When I am in the bus traveling to school they are searching for pictures of plums on the internet and then showing me and telling me that's how [Tajiks] look like. They are telling those things to other boys, so now everyone can make fun of me."

Those are just some of examples of vulnerabilities different identities and circumstances can bring to girls and women in an asylum centre. However, although these groups are certainly in higher risk of more violent form of violence, it is important to acknowledge that harassment in the centre is experienced by other women as well.

Sexual Harassment and Non-Partner Violence

Regardless of their identity layers, a number of women described the simple act of leaving their room to be a threatening experience. Many described the various forms of harassment they experienced in the asylum centre: name calling, unwelcome comments and jokes, sexual gestures or staring, spreading rumours about their personal morals and sex life etc. In some cases, this was enough reason not to leave their room at all.

Bahar described how this unwelcomed behaviour affected women in the asylum centre, especially when they are walking alone. "Myself, I am not even wearing the clothes I want to wear. If I go out, I really need to take care to cover my body properly. For example, if I go out and one of the minors says something to me and my husband wants to defend me afterwards, a fight could happen, and I don't want that. That's why I prefer to stay at home because I don't want to cause a fight. We are also afraid because sometimes they are putting masks on their faces and entering the rooms through windows; it happened to two of my friends. That's why I don't like to go outside, so they cannot remember me and then try to find me and enter my room. For example, today I went out in [t-shirt and trousers] and everybody were staring at me like they saw something weird. I need to look homeless in order not to draw attention to myself. In Iran we are all wearing the same clothes - you can say we have a dress code - but here if I wear a scarf they will stare nonetheless because they try to imagine what is under that scarf or wide dress. They think that women are free here, so if they are covering themselves men become even more 'thirsty' to discover what is under."

Nima dealt with similar challenges when it comes to appearance, clothes and unwanted attention. "If I were a man it would be easier for me. I would wear pants and a t-shirt and that would be enough. Then no one would look at my thighs, breasts or which colour of lipstick I'm wearing. But like this, I need to take care to have some

suitable clothes which are covering my thighs and everything else; it needs to be long enough. During the winter it is easy because you are wearing a long jacket. For summer, I hope I will not be in Serbia. If I stay here, then I will need to sew or buy long dresses." She added that gossip within the community demotivates her to go and meet people around the camp all together. "For us it is hard. You are hesitating to go out of the room and make connection with someone because then people can start talking. Men don't worry about that. Me, I am not wearing a scarf, so people can speak about me and spread rumours. The problem here is that people in the camp are not open-minded." Girls also face these issues when they leave their room alone, although they are not married yet. According to Ghazal, "If you go out alone [men] will say 'Look at that girl, she went out without her mother.' In this camp this is always bad; they are talking behind your back. They will say, for example 'I saw this girl downtown with that boy,' so they will start rumours. They can do that and it is something that people will believe in. Yes, men can do whatever they want, but women can't."

A recurring issue, briefly mentioned in the testimonies above, was cyber bullying. Certain men, or adolescent boys from the community, would create fake accounts on social media, with the intention to harass or humiliate a woman or a girl by writing inappropriate content that could reflect poorly on their morals and dignity. Alternatively, they would steal or take photos of the girls and women and publish them on their accounts, claiming they are their lovers or girlfriends. Although this kind of bullying is damaging for anyone, regardless of their culture and origin, in the context of the community in question it can have particularly harmful consequences. Girls and women may deal with sigma, exclusion and even violence, both from the community and family members. Iman was one of the women who had to deal with this situation: "About 80-90% of women have a social media account. For us, this means maintaining contact with our family. During our travels, we lose our phones and contacts, but when we have a Facebook account we can maintain the contact with family nevertheless. That's how most of the people think. When it comes to content, women usually post pictures of themselves where their faces are not visible, or flowers, nature, proverbs, etc. I personally don't post anything; I just use it to speak with my brother. I had one really bad experience with the internet. Luckily, I didn't have problems with my husband, but he himself experienced big problems, together with myself, because of it. What happened was that he fought with some man and before [the man] left for Germany, he took my photo and made a fake account for me [on Facebook]. The bigger problem was the description of the photo, rather than the photo itself: the indication that I was his lover." Iman described herself as "lucky" to have support from her husband and family who travelled with her. They trusted her and helped her find the man who did it. However, others in the asylum centre were gossiping about it and the dignity of the family in Belgrade was put into question. Furthermore, this could have damaged and shamed her family that had already reached Germany, which would have significantly deteriorated her relationship with them. "The biggest problem was the fact that we are living in the camp," Iman explained. "Here, there are a lot of different people with different beliefs, behaviours, families etc. Bad words are spreading too fast. Boys do that often to the married women, to tease their husbands. They tell husbands that their wife has another boyfriend and then a husband gets angry and beats his wife. Or they do that to take revenge on each other. Women don't do these things to each other. So that's why women don't even put their name on their account, let alone their picture. Usually they put the pictures of their sons or other male members of their family. I don't even have my real name in my account, because when I had it, friends of my brothers wanted to contact me."

Not everyone saw the problem of harassment as related to gender differences, however. Although the normalization of violence and harassment negatively affected women, as described in many ways, it is noteworthy that these values were not only shared by the male population in the centre. The victim-blaming attitude occurred in female respondents as well. "I haven't had such experiences in the camp," stated Boosah, referring to the harassment testimonies of other girls and women. "I believe that it depends on the woman. If she is giving [men] signals or something, they will do those things; she is giving them a green light. But the rest of us they respect and know, so I haven't experienced those things." Such attitudes are particularly harmful because they prevent women who have survived any type of GBV to disclose their problems, not only to community or service providers, but to their close female friends and family members as well. This and other obstacles in reporting violence will be discussed in the following section.

Asking for Help

For almost all of the testimonies on GBV, hesitation to report violence or seek any services for help appeared to be an overarching issue. The reasons ranged from stigma, fear, shame

and isolation - to mention just a few. Nousha described this common tendency: “A couple of days ago, I saw that a man had beaten his wife. Her whole face was blue and her blood vessels were broken. I told her to go to the doctor because it might get worse and she might lose her sight. I saw that she was scared to go to the doctor because the doctor would ask her what happened and she would have to answer. Then the doctor would report it to the commissariat and they would call the police. Because of this, women are scared. Even today in Islamic countries they don’t have the right to protect themselves, because there is a chance they will lose the children or family and that their husband might beat them again. I know some women who are constantly beaten by their husband; they are bruised all over their bodies. When you ask them what happened, they just say ‘thank you’ and that they don’t need anyone’s help, because they don’t want anyone in the camp to find out. Then I ask them why they are afraid, because this is not Afghanistan or Iran. Here you have the right to ask for help from the police. But they reply that if they do so here, their families in Afghanistan would be in danger, because they would be threatened by the husband’s family, so they ‘cannot think only about themselves.’ So that’s why they have to be quiet and unprotected. If I bring you a woman now and you see she has a black eye and you ask what happened, she’ll tell you she fell and hit herself. She won’t tell you the truth that her husband beat her.”

It was previously mentioned that some respondents believed that, even if they were in an abusive marriage, it was safer for them not to report it and to stay with their husband than to be alone in the asylum centre, or in the migration process in general. “Here I saw women who are in a better position [than in Iran] and that if something happens to them, they are separating them [from the husband] immediately,” said Bahar while discussing the reporting of GBV. “I think, since they know that they will be separated from their husbands, refugee women are not complaining if something like that is happening to them. I think that all of them prefer to have a bad man next to them than to be alone, because something worse can happen to them if they are alone. People have bad opinions about single women; being single is kind of shameful. For example, if something bad happened to me I would not report it because I would rather have my man next to me. Even if he is bad, he will support me. It is shameful to be a single woman.” Not only did women speak about the embarrassment of being a single woman, but additional judgement and stigma from the community played an important role as well. To be a survivor, or decide to end a marriage, was “a shame” as well. Shefta explained that women are hesitant to get separation because they come from cultures where it is believed that doing so is wrong. “[Women] are not asking for help because they came from villages or small places where they learned that if they report abuse to police it will be a disgrace to the family; it is embarrassing for everyone. They are not even telling to their parents or family that they have problems.”

Moreover, testimonies showed that the community accommodated in asylum centres is hesitant to interfere and report violence when they are aware of it. This is not only because such violence is common and normalized in their culture, but also because they find that “it is not their job to be included in those things,” as explained by Aisha. “Even if they see something is happening, they will not speak because they think that is a problem of that family and not their problem.” In many cases, when members of the community do decide to get involved, rather than protecting the survivors, they try to mediate and to reconcile the couple, defending what they believe to be traditional norms and values. Safia testified on one occasion where a woman reported her husband for abuse. The responsible authorities and organisations offered to separate the couple, which the wife agreed to. However, intervention by her neighbours changed her decision. “When the moment of separation came, neighbours spoke with both of them, so she gave up. Also, [the couple] were just thinking that they are on the list [for crossing Hungarian border] together, and one of them might go and the other might stay [if they got separated]. So, they decided it is better to stay together and cross the border together. This was another reason in this case.” The importance of crossing borders appeared in other testimonies as well, as lengthy legal procedures for reporting violence and separation from the family they initially registered with, were seen as obstacles for leaving Serbia.

Finally, a significant number of women admitted that one of the biggest challenges they met when it came to reporting instances of GBV is that they did not feel like they could talk about it with others, nor did they feel encouraged to seek help or any legal remedy. “[Women] are not sharing those problems with anybody. They are trying to find solution themselves,” Qamar explained. According to her, if women do decide to speak about their problems, it might be confined to someone who they can trust to keep the confession as a secret. “If something really bad happens, women might consult their mothers, and if a mother doesn’t have a phone they will maybe speak with

friends. But I've never seen anyone go to the police or somewhere else to report a problem." In closing, lack of encouragement and a sense of powerlessness prevented many women to speak up. "Whoever wants to do something against [GBV] needs someone to lean on, but we don't have that support," Safia concluded. "For men it is acceptable - they are happy about it because they are feeling like they are kings. And we are quiet because we don't have any power to rise against them".

Conclusion

Many of the testimonies of girls and women in the study stressed the numerous safety concerns and GBV risks and incidents facing them in Serbia, especially those related to physical and sexual violence. Deteriorated mental health due to migration related stress, which intensified the already existing gender inequalities and oppressive cultural norms, together with conditions of living in the centre, all contributed to protection challenges raised in the study.

Respondents most often reported the reoccurrence of intimate partner violence in their testimonies, a phenomenon described as widespread in scope, but largely normalized. Furthermore, life in the centre exposed girls and women to sexual harassment by strangers, most notably by single men and adolescent boys. Women traveling alone, girls and ethnic minorities were among those who were particularly vulnerable and insecure in the centre. Additionally, new and underexplored forms of sexual violence, such as online sexual harassment, appeared in several testimonies and showed a potential to cause physical violence, as well as social stigma.

Alarmingly, the vast majority of respondents agreed that girls and women are hesitant to report cases of violence in general. Many wouldn't share their experiences, even with their friends and family. Consequently, many girls and women find themselves isolated and without any support when experiencing such violence.

"Whoever wants to do something against [GBV] needs someone to lean on, but we don't have that support.

V. RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT

Refugee and migrant girls and women should not be seen as only as passive victims of migration, in spite of the considerably higher degree of trouble they face in comparison to the male population. It should be kept in mind that migration can also be viewed as a positive change for girls and women in the long run. Changing surroundings and meeting other cultures can lead to questioning of traditional gender roles and can be a useful tool in breaking oppressive relations. Many authors and reports recognize that migration can provide women with employment and income opportunities and consequently boost independence and self-esteem, decreasing the risk of GBV.[55]

On the other hand, resilience of refugees and migrants, and women amongst them, increasingly attracts the attention of scholars. Resilience is often described through building protective factors and processes, or "bouncing back" and coping with traumatic experiences and threats.[56] It describes coping capacities people develop when facing stress, hardship, challenges, traumas - the adverse experiences many refugees and migrants have. Some perspective on resilience place additional focus on the role of refugee communities and mutual support when it comes to resilience, deflecting from the individual's ability to "bend" more or less in the face of challenge or trauma.[57] As women and girls suffer from additional levels of vulnerability in migration, it is significant to take into account how they manage to develop certain mechanisms to "bounce back" from describe challenges, and support each other in overcoming their everyday problems.

Having this is mind, it is important to shed some light on resilience and empowerment aspects of migration in this research, some of which the respondents recognized as well.

Female Networks and Support in the Asylum Centre

Although they face a lot of mentioned challenges when it comes to their socializing, there are some examples of network-based resilience among women in the asylum centre. This kind of networking and mutual support is recognized by a number of women as a way of survival. As Aisha pointed out, "in the camp, everybody needs to be like family. We are all in same [situation] and we cannot be selfish."

These networks were described in different ways. Many women explained that the shared experience of hardship brought them together and that developing such friendships played a significant role in their present lives. Qamar had such an experience during her journey to Serbia. "[Me and my friends] were in Bulgaria together, so we have been travelling together for a long time. We went through a lot together, so we became friends. I have them, and they make me feel better." Bahar (23) from Iran also stressed the importance of having a friend in this situation. "I have two [female friends] and I can call them if I need some support. I am spending time with them often, since we are in the same barrack. If we didn't have one another we would all be really depressed." The importance of such networks for well-being was highlighted by Turan as well: "When we are sitting together we are sharing the news or speaking about differences in our cultures, Iranian and Afghani - for example how we are celebrating something in Iran or Afghanistan. We are trying to make ourselves busy and to entertain ourselves so we cannot think about problems. For example, talking to each other, walking, cooking coming to [different activities]. We are trying to distract ourselves so we cannot be alone in room. If you stay alone, you start to think about your problems." Other women stressed the importance of knowing

other women, not only for leisure time, but also for exchanging advices. “We are talking about our situation. We are comforting each other and encouraging that everything will be fine,” Iman explained. “Good friendship is helping you to solve and deal with problems. Someone is giving you support or positive feedback that everything is going to be fine,” added Rabia.

Although gathering was not always easy given the mentioned restrictions, certain forms of support still existed. Help with traditionally “female” responsibilities was often brought up by respondents as one of the most significant forms of support in the centre. Taking care of children of friends and neighbours when they have some other responsibilities or want to attend certain activities was one of the examples. Ziba described some of the situations where she assisted her female neighbours in this way: “When my neighbour wants to go to the market and she cannot go with her children, she is leaving them at my place. When our neighbours are not at home during the food distribution we are taking [meal] for them so they are not missing the meal.” Support for women who experience additional difficulties was another reoccurring subject. “We have one Syrian woman and her daughter is sick she had heart surgery and most of the time she cannot leave her alone to do other stuff,” said Turan. “So, we are bringing her food, laundry and whenever she needs to go somewhere she is leaving her daughter with us.” Other forms of mutual support amongst women were reported as well, such as material support with necessary items. “I have some friends in the barrack, and they are helping me with whatever I need - if I need some food, clothes, anything,” Nadereh (38) from Iran explained. “If I need some food, if I miss some potatoes, tomatoes [other women] are giving them to me,” Parivash added. “When my friend doesn’t know how to make some specific food and I do, I am helping her to prepare all the things and to cook them,” she added.

Support in accessing different activities and gaining knowledge was also recorded. Aside of helping with taking care of children of their friends who want to engage in different classes, information dissemination and knowledge sharing also stood out as a practice of many women. Rabia brought up this subject: “I inform [other women] about workshop or distribution, or whatever is happening. I am trying to inform them about workshops so they can participate, but if they cannot I am telling them what I have learned. For example, there was some workshop about reproductive health, after which I talked about it with women that didn’t participated in it.” Women are also engaged in teaching languages to each other. As noted above, many of them might speak their mother language, but are illiterate. Informal meetings in the Krnjača asylum centre where women teach each other how to read and write started occurring more and more. “We had a friend in the camp. She was really kind and nice and she taught us to read and write in our own language,” Qamar said. “She had some free time and she was sad because we are illiterate. So, she took a group of women in her room and we started studying together. I didn’t go regularly because of my children, but nevertheless I felt so good because I knew how to read and to write just a little bit. Better than nothing! It is my language and I didn’t know it, and after I started learning I felt more worthy.” Moreover, those fluent in English either teach their peers or help them with translation in everyday life. This was described by Ziba as well: “For example, Nima is in my barrack and she is always helping me. If I don’t understand something from English classes, she will help me. Also, the other day [two of my friends] needed help with English and I helped them. Whenever they need something from the office and they need a translator I am going there to help them.” Afrin was helping her friend in similar way: “I have a friend, she is an Afghan and she left Afghanistan when she was really young. She didn’t know to read or to write so I was helping her with it. Now she knows Farsi and English.” Finally, sharing some practical skills and knowledge that could be useful both for everyday life and possible income generation took place among women as well. Aside of other skills, many women noted that they either provided or received help with learning how to tailor from their friends. Iman described how when women experienced in tailoring make their clothes they are “[cutting the clothes] in front of each other so everyone can see and learn.” Afarin, on the other hand, described how she helped her friend with her basic needs, but also in developing her skills: “My friend is now in Hungary in a closed camp and when we spoke she told me that she doesn’t have any summer cloths. I got the idea to send her clothes. I knew her size and style, so I bought things and gave to one family which is transferred in the camp in Subotica to give to her when they cross border. She received it and liked it so much. Now, I got another idea. She is really good in sewing and I want to surprise her and send her fabric so she can make something for herself. It will be good for her. I know that when she is making clothes she is happy, and I want her to be happy.”

Migration as an Empowering Experience

Amidst all of the problems and uncertainty this population was dealing with, there were some individuals who saw their journey as an empowering process, and managed to stress the strengths they have developed from it. Many women recognized that overcoming challenges of migration and being forced to deal with unpreceded problems made them stronger. “I travel by myself, so I make decisions by myself,” said Nousha. “First it was very hard to start making decisions alone, but actually it empowered me that I had to do things by myself. There are always two sides: first it was hard, but in the end it actually helped me to be more mature and stronger.” A growing sense of independence prevailed among this group of women. They described how leaving their countries, and mixing with other people and cultures significantly altered their freedoms, as well as their perception of themselves. “When I came here I met a lot people - Iranian, Afghans, Africans, so many different cultures, ages, languages. Before, in my country, I only spoke with my family,” Aisha said. “Now I have met a lot of other people and I have learned so many different lessons. (...) I am not naive anymore. Now I am able to judge who is good and who is not. I am more mature and braver.” Safia described her experience as gaining more freedom, but also more strength to stand for herself: “After I left the country I became more of an independent person: to go to classes, to go to shopping, to do everything by myself. Emotionally, I was more patient; now when I need something I ask for it.” Interacting with men also changed. Some women described how they stopped being shy to talk with them if they have some problem to address, while others described themselves more liberated than in their country of origin where they “couldn’t go outside without brothers or mother,” as Ziba explained.

On the other hand, the process of migration opened new expectations and opportunities when it comes to education and employment – for some in Serbia, for others in the countries of destination. Even when this might be opposing to traditional norms of their respective cultures, many respondents saw migration as a chance for gaining education and skills. In explaining the benefits of her migration experience, Elham said: “I can tell you at least 10 reasons how [migration] made me stronger. I wouldn’t be a person I am now if I didn’t have this journey. [In Afghanistan] I didn’t have so many opportunities

> In the camp, everybody needs to be like family. We are all in same [situation] and we cannot be selfish.

as I have now. My English wouldn't be as good as it is now. I didn't know anything about the outside world, and now I do. I don't feel bad because I went through this because it is for the greater good. And of course, I think I am stronger than I was." Her sister, Shokoh (13) agreed: "I grew up on this journey. I left my country when I was 10 years old. If I had stayed in Afghanistan, I wouldn't speak English like I do now. I feel more comfortable to speak with other people now." Certain adult respondents who had some educational background stressed their wish to continue gaining new knowledge and skills upon arriving in the EU countries, regardless of their age. Roshan (43) from Afghanistan was among the most motivated women for that. "I believe that I am not too old to start learning something new and continue my education. For example, I would like to be a chef, but I want to master it through academic education of 3 or 4 years and to start to work after." Sima (29) from Afghanistan was interested in developing her competencies as well. "I will learn some skills that I know will help me plan for the future. Other women need to find out what they are interested in so they can start learning and making money from it." Contrary to their situation in their countries of origin, a number of women viewed employment in the EU as a necessity for both genders. "Of course women should work because the money is not falling from the sky," explained Parivash (52) from Afghanistan. Many developed more detailed strategies to enter the labour market, first by learning the language, but also by volunteering as well. Sanaz (31) from Iran shared her thorough plan. "The first step is to learn the language and after that I can start working in some kitchen or in some grocery market. But ultimately, I want to be a teacher in a kindergarten. I have a licence and experience for that as well. My plan is to translate [the licence] and then to start as a volunteer to get to know the job and language. When I master the language then I would like to start working." These women explained how they also saw these opportunities as a motivation and a "pull factor" for reaching the desired countries of destination.

Conclusion

For some girls and women, their migration experience developed their ability to "bounce back" from hardship, using their personal strengths, but also the support of the community. Shared experiences and mutual "female" challenges of life in refuge did, in a way, strengthen the network of women and girls in the asylum centre, used as a source of help in certain situations. On the other hand, the whole migration process was recognized by some respondents as an opportunity to develop capacities, skills and abilities, that would have otherwise stayed underdeveloped or undermined in their countries of origin. New roles and responsibilities that migration brought served as an empowering push for girls and women to take steps to, or start thinking about, future independence or self-determination, mostly in terms of education and integration in the labour market.

However, one should be careful not to generalize these conclusions. Efforts toward empowerment of refugee girls and women from more conservative cultures can also bring resentment of men, as it can challenge the "status quo" of the traditional gender imbalances in the family and society.

CONCLUSION

In previous chapters, refugee and migrant girls and women residing in Krnjača Asylum Centre illustrated their experiences of life in Serbia. They described how their gender affected their lives in various spheres, together with the multiple challenges they often faced. Moreover, they showed how different circumstances and roles in their lives could lead to GBV. Throughout this study, the unequal power relations between genders were slowly introduced and culminated in testimonies about physical and sexual violence towards its end.

The study began with reflecting on gender roles and their effects on limited freedom of movement, hindered power to make decisions, and how these create an environment for controlling behaviour and psychological violence. Traditional attitudes against women and girls participating in education, combined with the many other obstacles faced both during the migration process as well as within the cultural context of Serbia, pointed to further violations of their rights. Firstly, they outlined economical violence in the form of restricted access to education. Secondly, they showed how girls can often be victims of bullying by their male peers. Finally, as a lack of education can often be an obstacle when engaging in income-generating activities (as perceived by the respondents as well), it could result in the inability to break out from the circle of violence, given the women's economic dependence on their husbands. The study also presented how traditional beliefs and attitudes affected females in accessing medical services, but also the potential for domestic violence caused by stress and insecurity of life in refuge. Finally, as the culmination of all of the previously described preconditions - escalation of harmful consequences of gender norms, additional challenges brought by migration, etc. – the emergence of physical and sexual violence were outlined in the last chapter.

On the other hand, the study gave some insight into views on migration experience as an opportunity for building resilience and empowerment among girls and women, highlighting the fact that this group must not be seen as passive and agentless, but instead as individuals with strengths and capacities. From tendencies to form support networks of women despite existing challenges, over striving of certain girls and women for more education or planning their employment strategy upon reaching their final destination, to perceiving themselves as stronger and more self-determinate – the sense of empowerment and growing independence did appear among certain respondents.

However, mapped capacities, resilience and abilities can be easily overlooked when the voices of these girls and women are silenced. Additionally, the voices of refugee and migrant girls and women are not always heard, because they do not often raise their voices above others or because they are in their private spaces and less visible. In order for this to change, the following are their asks and what they are teaching us:

1. Establishing safe spaces with women and girls is needed for them to channel their voices, develop their skills and peer networks, and have a transformative purpose of creating a safer environment in which they can continue to grow and thrive. Safe spaces for girls and women not only facilitate access to services and protection, create an opportunity for informal education and operate as info points for girls and women, they also contribute to the development of female support networks and create safe and supporting environments which enable women and girls to speak out without the fear of being judged. Such spaces should be established whenever possible and be used for encouraging every individual to speak, creating an arena for the plurality of female voices.

2. Women's and girls' voices and perspectives need to be placed at the center of all our interventions, though targeted or mainstreamed programming. Whether delivering program for girls and women exclusively, or for the whole refugee and migrant population, service providers should include female perspective. Girls' and women's feedback should be present throughout the whole project cycle, from assessment and design, through implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. Their voices will ensure that service providers are aware of the challenges and gaps they meet in everyday life, and enable them to design the programs that will help girls and women to overcome these hardships where possible. Moreover, the voices will help to implement programs that are culturally, age and gender appropriate.

3. Women's and girls' equal participation needs to be ensured in their daily lives through the establishment of, and their equal representation in committees and community-based structures. Female voices in the governmental accommodation facilities could be crucial for mapping challenges in the community and drawing attention to protection issues occurring in the centres. Service providers should support women's leadership (or identify female community leaders), or facilitate organizing community protection groups with an equal number of male and female representatives. This would not only help service providers to act in a timely and effective manner, but would empower women and girls to advocate for their needs.

4. Refugee and migrant girls' and women's voices are essential for advocacy and awareness raising, as well as ensuring durable solutions and safety for all members of their communities. Conversely, opening more spaces and platforms for these voices to be heard, not only among relevant stakeholders, but the general public as well, will work towards shifting the discourse of women and girls from this population as passive victims to self-determined individuals able to stand for their rights.

5. Continuous engagement in qualitative participatory research focused on refugee and migrant girls and women is crucial to deepen the understanding of their situations and support knowledge sharing. Moreover, with focusing on presentation, instead of re-presentation of refugee and migrant women and girls, qualitative research will allow stakeholders to avoid dangers of "muting" female voices or imposing their own beliefs and ideas of the challenges and needs of this population.

This is a non-exhaustive list of recommendations focused on promoting female voices, as this is one of the main goals of this study. However, as this research maps many challenges refugee and migrant girls and women meet in their everyday life, the whole study can serve as a basis for service providers to address some of the mentioned gaps in their work. Hopefully, it will trigger some future research as well.

Nevertheless, the issues mapped in this study present just a fragment of the existing problem on a much bigger scale. Despite present media fatigue on this topic and a decreasing number of asylum requests being made within the EU, the present crisis in Europe is far from over. There are no existing solutions for the continued large number of migrants and refugees residing on the periphery of the EU, waiting to enter its borders in order to continue their journeys to their desired destination. This situation continues to affect Serbia. Although there have been no significant increases in arrivals, the number of people residing in the country is still substantial. For many refugees and migrants, it means that the waiting time in Serbia will only increase.

Moreover, given the poor crisis management of EU Member States, and the lack of political will to improve the situation, it is reasonable to suggest that the EU will be once again unprepared should some subsequent mass migration to Europe happen (a possible scenario given the ongoing unrests and conflicts throughout parts of Asia and Africa). In any case, girls and women in the migratory process will continue to meet challenges and risks of violence, which further adds to the importance of learning about, and improving responses to their needs.

Today, there is increasing acknowledgment that migration is not a gender-neutral phenomenon and that men and women face different risks, challenges and opportunities during their journeys.[58] However, keeping in mind the ongoing challenges girls and women will continue to cope with in emergencies, there is a need to move away from simply reflecting on their situations through research and study, towards the implementation of adequate practices of crisis management and humanitarian service provision in *all* sectors. In these efforts, we must not allow for the voices of refugee and women to be muted; instead we must listen when they speak.

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ABOUT ADRA

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is the global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through an international network, ADRA delivers relief and development assistance to individuals in more than 130 countries—regardless of their ethnicity, political affiliation, or religious association.

ADRA in Serbia has been active since 1990, both in relief and development programs. By partnering with local communities, organizations and governments, ADRA Serbia is able to influence the quality of life of many people through several impact areas: response to disasters (both natural and man-made), access to education for all and economic empowerment through employment assistance. In each of them, mental health and gender equality are mainstreamed.

ADRA puts a special focus on women and girls because they are the most vulnerable to the devastating effects of poverty and crisis. ADRA believes that, with investing in education and livelihoods for women, everyone benefits. Families are healthier, communities are stronger, and economies are improved.

ADRA's programs are community-based and involve the entire family, so that its efforts effectively increase knowledge, change behaviour, and are sustainable. ADRA considers gender equity and shifting negative sociocultural norms as a cross-cutting intervention for all our programs.

More on ADRA`s programs can be found at https://adra.org.rs, and on ADRA International at https://adra.org.