



“ I raise up my voice,  
other women'd  
better do the same ”

Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:  
Syrian Women Living in Ankara



**“I raise up my voice, other women’d better do the same” \***  
**Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:**  
**Syrian Women Living in Ankara**

*For a free and equal world free from violence...*

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\* The statement presented by Fairuz, a 35-year-old woman, in the interview we conducted

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research report: “*I raise up my voice, other women’d better do the same*”, aiming to highlight the experiences of Syrian Women who fled their country because of the war and armed conflicts in Syria and who were forced to migrate to Turkey living in Ankara, was produced by The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity; within the scope of the Project “Understanding Needs, Building Solidarity: Capacity Development of the Women’s Counseling Centre for Providing Support for Syrian Women” which was conducted with the support of The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands - Human Rights Fund Program.

The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity has been active in the field for combatting violence against women and gender inequality since 1993. The Women’s Counseling Center of The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity provides free social, legal and psychological support to women who are exposed to violence and who may need such a support while combating this violence. Based on “solidarity” and feminist principles; this support is provided by the voluntary social workers, lawyers and psychologists to the women, survivors of violence, without bearing the burden of proof in their testimonies.

After this research was conducted, the Women’s Counseling Center has provided social and legal support to Syrian women with Arabic interpreters and established a solidarity relationship inbetween in July 2019. This report, in which the data obtained within the scope of the research were evaluated, addresses the experiences of refugee women and the violence they are exposed to during their migration process. The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity, which has experience in a similar field, operated the shelter for combatting against the women trafficking between 2005 and 2016 and provided social, legal and psychological support to women through its Women’s Counseling Center.

The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity continues to conduct its studies in order for ensuring an equal and free world where women are not exposed to gender-based violence and discrimination. This research, which is

one of these studies, has provided us with a process in which we were able to build a sense of solidarity with/among the refugee women we encountered and to learn together. We would like to express our profound gratitude to The Embassy of Netherlands, which made this study possible while we were conducting research with refugee women, and to Deniz Bezirgan, who provided us with a full support in that regard; to Esmâ Nur Kaşram, who implemented this study as the project coordinator and who edited this report for its publication; to N. Ceren Salmanoğlu and Burçin Kalkın Kızıldaş, who prepared the survey questions, conducted in-depth interviews, undertook the writing of the report; to Dicle Paşa, Rahaf Asvid and Vidat Bakır, who provided Arabic interpretation support throughout the research. In addition to that, we would like to thank Ayfer Say, who implemented the numerical analysis of the research data by importing the data of questionnaire database into the SPSS program and prepared the drafts of the tables used throughout this report. We also would like to thank our volunteer Büşra Süneci and also Leyla Topal, Nihan Damarlı and Sibel Güneş, who show solidarity with us by providing their experiences, opinions and contributions in the process of conducting the research and of production of the report. Last but not least, we would like to thank İlgi Kahraman for allocating time and providing assistance in editing the report as one of the volunteers of the Foundation.

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With this research, we hope to provide a contribution to the studies to be made by public institutions, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, experts and activists working in this field, while making visible the violence and gender inequality experienced by refugee women on account of their gender as “woman”.

### **The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity**

# INTRODUCTION

The persons, who have been forced to leave their homes, countries, their loved ones as a result of war and violence eliminating even the minimum conditions of being human, who were subjected to forced displacement and who are refugees,<sup>1</sup> constitute one of the most vulnerable communities in the world. Women and girls are almost half of the Syrian population who were forced to migrate to Turkey due to the armed conflicts that became more intense especially after 2011. As we can observe from feminist research studies on migration, the vulnerability caused by fleeing to other countries is intermingled with and aggravated by the double bind of being women refugees. That is to say, women have to deal with the issues caused by gender inequality as well as the insecurity and vulnerability caused by being a refugee. Unlike refugee men, refugee women have been subjected to violence and discrimination due to gender inequality during and after the migration process; however, this process itself also includes an empowerment process built by the strategies of women for resisting and combating.

Thanks to the Syrian refugees who were forced to flee to Turkey due to the war, it can be said that the asylum and migration studies are diversified, and the number of such studies is increased. However, we have still just a few numbers of data obtained on the violence experienced by Syrian refugee women, which is limited to local or regional research studies or the reports published by refugee organizations. The research studies and reports in this field have identified that Syrian refugee women face a wide range of problems after migration. MAZLUM-DER's (2014) report, focusing on the issues experienced by Syrian refugee women due to their gender and regarding their living conditions in Turkey, highlights the gender

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1 Even though the legal status of the Syrians in Turkey, who are forced to flee their country owing to the fear and threat of "persecution", is not "refugee", we in this study, have chosen to mention them as "refugee", since it represents a legal status and protection of rights. However, it should be noted that the Syrians are facing serious obstacles in accessing even the existing legal rights under Temporary Protection Status of Syrian Nationals in Turkey and they cannot enjoy the rights afforded to those granted "refugee" status.



based discrimination and gender based violence that refugee women are exposed to or witnessed to during the armed conflicts in Syria, while crossing the border and thereafter. The research conducted by Kivilcim & Özgür in 2015 reveals that due to the fact that temporary protection status of Syrian refugees is open to interpretation and to revocation, Syrian refugee women and LGBTI+ refugee communities may not enjoy a de facto protection and this has made these groups more vulnerable to gender-based violence. Similarly, in The Association of Bridging Peoples' report, published in 2017 called as Turkey Refugee Report, it is stated that Syrian girls are being forced into early marriages, Syrian women are being sold into marriages as second or third wives or are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation by illegal organizations. In addition, almost all of these studies recommend that the measures against gender-based violence against refugee women should be taken and the laws should be transformed into a gender responsive one. Recently, the research study of Coşkun & Eski (2019), which, from a gender perspective, addresses the living conditions of refugee women and LGBTI+'s and the forms of gender-based violence they are exposed to, highlights that there is no such a gender responsive asylum system in Turkey. The study conducted by Cankurtaran & Albayrak named as "From Syria to Turkey: Being a Woman" is the other comprehensive study made in this field. As it has been identified by these studies and many others, the refugees suffer from lack of socio-economic support, lack of social networks, unemployment, poverty, lack of knowledge regarding the local environment and laws, unhealthy and unsafe housing conditions, limited access to public services such as healthcare and education and most importantly the lack of legal protection and as we know from international migration studies that these facts increases the risk of violence against refugee women.<sup>2</sup> However, the experiences of migrant and asylum seeker women and especially Syrian refugee women regarding gender based issues in Turkey are addressed by limited number of research studies. The fact that there is limited number of studies focusing on how gender-based violence is experienced by women, in other words, the insufficient data on refugee women, reinforces the invisibility of refugee women and makes it difficult to understand their needs. In this respect, unlike the

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2 Keygnaert et al. states that the risk of violence against asylum seekers and refugees is aggravated by a list of factors such as unemployment, poverty, lack of information on local physical environment, unhealthy and unsafe housing conditions, restricted access to healthcare services, higher education and lack of legal protection (2012:520).



other hegemonic narrative, our research constitutes a step taken towards the empowerment of the combat against violence against women by trying to identify the forms of gender-based violence faced by Syrian refugee women during and after their migration to Turkey.

In this study, we aim to make the issues, and gender-based violence<sup>3</sup> in particular, faced by Syrian refugee women due to xenophobia and their strategies to deal with these issues, visible by focusing on their experiences regarding migration. The data of the study are based on in-depth interviews and 50 surveys conducted with twelve Syrian refugee women within the scope of the project: *“Understanding Needs, Building Solidarity: Capacity Development of the Women’s Counseling Center for Providing Support for Syrian Women”* implemented by The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity in April 2019. These interviews were made between March 2019 and April 2019, these mostly lasted between two and three hours, sometimes up to four hours. During these interviews, we asked semi-structured questions to refugee women about general information regarding demographic and socio-economic structure as well as basic standards of living conditions, discriminatory practices they face in daily life, possible gender-based inequalities and their future expectations. Within the framework of these questions, we tried to understand how Syrian refugee women define and perceive the violence and discrimination caused by the gender inequality and how they develop strategies for combatting against these.

While evaluating the vulnerabilities of refugee women in this study, we tried to highlight the efforts of women and their authentic initiatives for transforming their conditions from a feminist perspective. In other words, within the scope of this study, we tried to get involved in understanding, which is “portraying the women as individuals who play an active role in building strong societies rather than being victims of war”. At the same time, we aim to ensure this study, which has a nature of exploratory research, to constitute a preliminary information regarding the needs of women in line with the experiences of Syrian refugee women on gender based violence and we aim to strengthen their mechanisms to combat the violence.

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3 Gender-based violence is defined by the “Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee)” as a violence directed against an individual because of their sex or gender.

## Methodology of the Research and Limitations

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In this study, we aim to make, the experiences of refugee women while deciding to flee, during and after migration as well as their experiences and opinions on gender-based violence, visible and to ensure those to be comprehended. For this purpose, we implemented this study from a feminist perspective, which aims at eliminating gender inequalities by lifting the barriers to the empowerment of women. In feminist research studies, although qualitative methods and techniques are used predominantly in order to understand social reality sophisticatedly and deeply, it is also possible to use both qualitative and quantitative techniques together. Especially in cases where the main patterns of the field of inquiry are not known, techniques such as surveys/questionnaires can be used alongside with the other qualitative techniques. It is significant “to reevaluate the main concepts inquired in the methods and techniques used in traditional research and to investigate them using gender analysis” (Öztaş, 2015: 287-288). For this reason, we conducted surveys and in-depth interview techniques in order to understand how Syrian refugee women define and perceive the violence and discrimination caused by gender inequality and how they develop strategies for combatting these. In the qualitative part of our research, we conducted in-depth interviews with twelve Syrian refugee women living in Ankara within the framework of semi-structured questions. Semi-structured interview and survey questions were prepared in a way to understand the experiences of Syrian women before the war, while deciding to flee, during and after the migration. Both in surveys and in-depth interviews, the questions on the acts of violence were asked by identifying certain violent behaviors. In addition, the questions were formed in a way to investigate when the acts of violence are faced (before, during and after the migration), in where those were faced (camp, school, workplace, home), who the perpetrators of violence are (husband, ex-husband, male relatives, security guards etc.), what kind of forms of violence are faced. We made sure that the questions were not judgmental and we conducted the interviews with a positive approach in a way that can strengthen the ways women cope with the violence they face, while reminding the women that how important the information they share are and how those will be used to help other women.<sup>4</sup>

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4 The study: “Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Aile İçi Şiddet Araştırması” conducted by the

In the studies made in this field, the snowball sampling method is used because the participants of the research can easily be selected through other participants. The data of questionnaires conducted are imported into SPSS program and the numerical analysis of the research data is implemented. We would like to state that while conducting the survey, we were already aware that this technique is not sufficient to understand the experiences that harm these women. The inadequacy of this technique becomes even more complicated when the refugee women are in question. It can be difficult for researchers to build the trust for conducting the surveys with Syrian refugees, since they are often subjected to the discriminatory practices in Turkey at the hand of the locals. This issue of trust becomes even more visible when it comes to share a sentimental experience like surviving the violence. In order to overcome this issue, the survey is ended with an open-ended question. In this last question, we asked the women who participated in the survey to write down their opinions on the violence against women. In one in every two surveys, the respondent participants provided an answer to this question. In that regard, we will evaluate the survey data under the headings that were identified in line with the in-depth interviews. In other words, we will share the results of the in-depth interviews while referring to these surveys.

At the same time, the questions aiming to reveal the experiences of Syrian women in dealing with post-war difficulties, especially in combating violence against women, were asked. Prior to the research, a pilot study was carried out both for in-depth interviews and for the survey study in order to identify the comprehensibility of the problems and the questions that should be added. During the research period, we worked with interpreters who can speak Arabic well, and we conducted short-term studies with them before the study, regarding the concepts such as “violence against women and the forms of it” and “gender-based discrimination”, by taking into account the vulnerabilities ascertained by the research topic as a whole. We continued to do these when needed during the research process. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis at the office of The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity on the available time of the participants

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Hacettepe University in 2015 and the study: “Türkiye’de Kadına Yönelik Şiddet” conducted by Ayşegül Altınay and Yeşim Arat in 2008, guided us in designing our research and in formulating our questions.

by meeting the needs of them regarding their transportation. Prior to the interview, information was provided to the participant regarding the content- purpose- duration of the study and regarding how the results of the research will be shared and the consents of participants were obtained. Information was also provided to refugee women on the content of legal and social support that will be provided by The Foundation for Women's Solidarity. During the interviews, the participants were informed that they have a right to decline to answer the questions asked by the project team and to end the interview without making any excuse. In addition, women's consents to be audiotaped for this research were obtained which is required for the further analysis of the interviews, and then the interviews were conducted. We have used alias names in order to avoid causing any harm to the participants and due to ethical concerns while their testimonies were utilized. The socio-demographic information of 12 women, with whom interviews were conducted and of 50 women, who participated in the survey study were also presented.

The most important limitation related to this research study is that Syrian LGBTI+s were not included in the study. It is a fact identified by some studies conducted in this field (Baklacioğlu & Kivilcim, 2015) that the state, humanitarian aid organizations and NGOs prioritize the women who are married, who are with children and who are pregnant in accordance with the heteronormative order in their studies while making single women invisible. These studies often disregard diverse sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions that the women can identify with. The women, with whom the interviews were made within the scope of this study, were reached with the snowball technique, which led to a limitation in the diversity of this cohort included in the research. From this standpoint, Baklacioğlu & Kivilcim's study conducted in 2015 and Coşkun & Eski's (2019) recent study, focusing on the experiences of non-Syrian refugee women and LGBTI+s who applied for international protection and were referred to the satellite cities, provide the important data in that regard. "Turkey's Challenge with LGBTI Refugees" Report of Kaos GL Association is also focused on the experience of LGBTI+ refugees in Turkey. This report aims to document the obstacles faced by LGBTI Refugees in Turkey in enjoying and accessing the fundamental rights and services in various areas and in social life as well as the discrimination and violence they encountered

on account of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristic/intersex status. This report, which is shaped by in depth-interviews made with LGBTI+ refugees to whom Kaos GL provided counseling via e-mail and phone, highlights that LGBTI+ refugees, who fled their countries owing to the discrimination and persecution they were exposed to, are experiencing the same persecution in Turkey on account of their SOGIESC in addition to the xenophobia against refugees.<sup>5</sup>

## Our Experiences as Researchers

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Keeping in mind that this research is part of a solidarity process that will be built with refugee women by The Foundation for Women's Solidarity, at the beginning of the research, our background knowledge about our research topic led us to ask the following question, while the interviews have not yet been conducted: "What will happen to the persons with whom we generate the knowledge together?"

"A person or a group of persons get involved in the lives of others, keep a record of the lives, and collect data about persons that they do not know. In this process, what happens to persons whose lives are under the scope, about whom the records are kept, and the data are gathered? How is the contact made with them? How are they involved in this process? What kind of a relation is developed between the researcher and the participants of the research? How are both sides of the research affected by the research?" (Selek, 2009: 115).

These questions and subsequent concerns are closely related to the claim that the emotional tensions evoked by the reminiscence and the sufferings revoked during the research studies may be doubling the victimization of the participants of the research, especially during the interviews addressing the vulnerable, sensitive issues (especially in the case of women) and (as cited in Kümbetoğlu, 2011: 484) addressing losses, failures, deficiencies.

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5 Link to Kaos GL's relevant report is: ([http://www.kaosgldernegi.org/resim/yayin/dl/lgbti\\_multecilereng\\_web.pdf](http://www.kaosgldernegi.org/resim/yayin/dl/lgbti_multecilereng_web.pdf))

Another report in the field considering the issue in terms of racism was published by the Hevi LGBTI+ Association in 2019 (<http://hevilgbti.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/heviraporu-1.pdf>)

We tried to deal with this process by utilizing some form of women's solidarity by following the analysis process built by the feminist perspective, by reading the studies of different researchers regarding their experiences in the field. While the feminist method reminds us that women's daily life knowledge and personal experiences are important, it draws attention to the necessity of conducting an interaction-based research process in order to minimize the hierarchy between the researcher and the respondent/participant of the research. However, we cannot say that we could completely eliminate this hierarchy in this research process. Considering our position as researchers, we were aware that our position was more advantageous than the women we make an interview with; we were also aware that the fact that the interviews were held at the place we planned, and that we had control over the process of the interview and these would create a feeling of disadvantage and weakness for the interviewees. By questioning the privileges and opportunities of us, which we have due to being a Turkish national or which occur due to power differences such as class, ethnicity and race, in every stage of the research study we tried to eliminate these differences on behalf of the women we make an interview with. However, many of the refugee women we make an interview with are economically and socially unprotected. There were women who could not find money to pay the electricity bill or who could not afford their children's school expenses. At the beginning of the interviews, as researchers, we realized at this point how important it is to express ourselves and to express the purpose of the research correctly. The fact that the city in which we conducted the research is the location surrounded by the bureaucracy, and that many non-governmental organizations have established "aid-based" relation networks with the refugee communities rather than a "rights-based" approach and most importantly, the fact that we have not been able to share the daily life experiences of refugee women even for a certain period of time, made it difficult for us to establish an equal relation with the participants during the research.

In this context, we came across the following question: Can we claim that only the point of view of the researcher can create a sense of equality during the research? As Hatice Şule Oğuz states: Does this claim theoretically deliver the power to the researcher (which should be eliminated)? (2012: 72). At this point, we have tried to overcome these differences emerging

throughout the research process by trying to develop an “insight from inside”. While realizing this effort, the position of us was so significant since we were not the newbies in the field of research. Thus, although the research is experienced as a process in which the hierarchy between the researcher-the respondent participant felt as little as possible; we cannot say that we can realize the feminist method’s claim to eliminate the hierarchy of the researcher as a whole. This claim is based on an approach that involves a mutual exchange of information and production between the research participants and the researcher (as cited in Kümbetoğlu 2008: 58). We cannot state that we could establish such an interaction, because our main disadvantage in the research process was that we, as researchers, conducted the interviews with the help of the interpreters, that is to say, we did not know their “language”. The inability to speak in a common language made it difficult for us to establish a mutual and interactive relationship. Not knowing the language of the participants becomes an even more indicative problem in terms of such interviews, where sentimental narratives took the center. For all these reasons, we chose to position our research not as feminist field research, but as research fostered by a feminist method perspective.

However, we must state that during the long interviews, while sharing the space, asking questions and listening, at the end of each phase that we look into each other’s eyes, an interaction and a sense of a relation was able to be built between the research team and the participants. At this point, we can say that we could establish a relation of trust with the participants based on long negotiations and interactions. The positive feedback we received from the respondent participants, and the fact that they continued these interviews voluntarily, and their willingness to talk about their problems were the most important indicators of this mutual trust and sharing process. The interviews that last two or three hours contributed to the deepening of this bond in-between. The guidance and support of The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity, which has been in solidarity with women who have been subjected to violence for many years and has a significant accumulation of knowledge and experience in this regard, was also very important. We observed that the most important achievement of this research study was that we got stronger together.



## Information Regarding the Participants of the Interviews

Name	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Age of First Marriage	Level of Education	Work Experience in Syria	Work Experience in Turkey
Fairuz	35	Long time no hear from her husband	3	23	University Graduate	Healthcare Technician	Temporary Employment
Safire	32	Religious Marriage	4	16	Secondary School Graduate	No Profession	Unemployed
Amber	25	Divorced	2	18	Had to drop out of secondary school	No Profession	Unemployed
Ahla	32	Married	6	15	Drop out of primary school	No Profession	Paper Collector
Nisa	26	Religious Marriage	1	22	Secondary School Graduate	No Profession	Unemployed
Amile	28	Religious Marriage	2	23	Secondary School Graduate	No Profession	Unemployed
Duha	40	First marriage in Syria (the husband died in the war) Second Marriage in Turkey	8	14	Not received an education	Rural Worker	Unemployed
Nora	31	Married	2	18	Drop out of secondary school (for economic reasons)	No Profession	Unemployed
Maysa	44	Divorced	7	18	Primary School Graduate	Worked in Residential care	Unemployed
Şedia	46	Her husband died in war	1	21	Not received an education	No Profession	Unemployed
Fatma	21	Married	3	16	Secondary School Graduate	Worked in Healthcare Sector	Unemployed
Nur	30	Married	4	18	Primary School Graduate	No Profession	Unemployed

Information regarding the respondent participants of the survey can be seen in the tables below. 40% of the 50 Syrian refugee women participating in the survey are between the ages of 28 and 37. 52% of them got married by official wedding. 9% of them got married by both official wedding and religious ceremony (See Table-1 and Table-2 below).

How old are you?	Number of Persons	Percentage
18-27	16	32.0%
28-37	20	40.0%
38-47	5	10.0%
48-59	8	16.0%
60 and above	1	2.0%
Total	50	100.0%

Table-1 Age Distribution of the Respondents

What is your current marital status?	Number of Persons	Percentage
I have never married	11	20.0%
I am married by official marriage	29	52.7%
I am married by religious marriage	6	10.9%
I got divorced	1	1.8%
Long time no hear from my husband	3	5.5%
My husband died	5	9.1%
Total	55	100.0%

Table-2 Marital Status \* It is a multiple-choice question. The 5 women who participated in the survey responded by checking both official marriage and religious marriage.

When we look at the findings about the age of first marriage, it is seen that more than half of the women/69.2% of them, got married for the first time after the age of 18.

How old were you in your first marriage?	Number of Persons	Percentage
15 and below	2	5.1%
16-17	10	25.6%
18 and above	27	69.2%
Total	39	100.0%

Table-3 Age of First Marriage (11 women, who responded by checking "I have never married", did not answer this question.)

How many children do you have?	Number of Persons
I have only one child	2
I have 2 children.	10
I have 3 children.	7
I have four children.	6
I have 5 children.	5
I have 6 children.	2
I have 7 children.	2
I have 8 children.	1
I have 9 children.	2
Total	37

Table- 4 Number of Own Children Per Respondent

26% of the women participating in the survey stated that they are primary school graduates and 20% of them are secondary school graduates. 10 of the respondents continue their education in Turkey.

What is your education level?	Number of Persons	Percentage
Not received an education	5	10.0%
Primary School	13	26.0%
Secondary School	10	20.0%
High School	7	14.0%
Vocational school (Technical)	0	0.0%
University (Bachelor Degree)	12	24
Post-Graduate (Master, Doctorate)	3	6.0%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	50	100.0%

Table- 5 Education Level

43 of the women who participated in the survey answered this question. 53.5% of the women who answered the question stated that they did not work in Syria.

Did you have a job before coming to Turkey?	Number of Persons	Percentage
I have never worked.	23	53.5%
I was working in a public institution	3	7.0%
I was working in the healthcare sector	0	0.0%
I was working in the private sector	5	11.6%
I was a student	8	18.6%
Other	4	9.3%
Total	43	100.0%

Table 6- Work Experience in Syria

We see that the percentage of women working outside the houses decreases in Turkey after the migration. In evaluating this data, it should be taken into consideration that Syrian refugee women are unable to find a job because of the language barrier when they want to work in Turkey, more importantly, they cannot participate actively in the social life due to the discriminatory practices. 56% of the women participating in the study stated that they do not have a job and 12% of them stated that they are searching for a job. Women stated that they would like to work due to economic problems and inadequate protection they face after migration.

The Percentage of Women Reporting Some Gainful Employment	Number of Persons	Percentage
I am not working	28	56.0%
I am unemployed (searching for a job)	6	12.0%
I am a student	8	16.0%
Registered employment	2	4.0%
I am a student and I have a job	2	4.0%
Unregistered employment	4	8.0%
I am retired	0	0.0%
Total	50	100.0%

Table 7- Employment in Turkey

Three of the respondents who stated that they are not working did not answer this question. The fact that 37.8% of the women stated that they do not have a job due to the fact that they are laid the burden of taking care of their children at home is an indicator of gender-based discrimination they face.

If you are not working currently, what is the main reason behind this?	Number of Persons	Percentage
I take care of my children	14	37.8%
I am searching for a job but I cannot find any.	6	16.2%
My husband / my family does not allow me to work	0	0.0%
I do not need it	0	0.0%
I cannot work because I am sick and I am a person with disability	7	18.9%
I am a student	10	27.1%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	37	100.0%

Table-8 Obstacles to Women Regarding the Employment

\*Participants stating that they have a job did not answer this question.

Can you spend the money you earn as you wish?	Number of Persons
Yes, I decide how I spend it myself	5
I share some of it with my family/husband	1
No, I have to give all of it to my family/husband	2
Total	8

Table-9 Percentage of Women in Gainful Employment

# BEING A REFUGEE AND WOMAN

## The Lives Being Changed Due to the War: “Where I am...”

All the refugee women we made interviewed with mentioned primarily the longing, unrest, distress caused by leaving their homes because of the war. Safire, a Syrian woman came to Turkey 4 years ago, first mentioned on how she feels longing to return back to the pre-war period:

“I missed my family very much, our psychology was better when we were in Syria, but daily life was more difficult. Our life was good before the war, but it was not good after the war. We lived in Aleppo. When there was no home for us there anymore, we migrated to Turkey due to security reasons and economic reasons. We were very poor in Syria. Now I am still poor. But it has been 4 years since we came here, and we got used to live here under very difficult conditions. I was thinking how we reside here, where I am, am I in Syria or in Turkey, all the time” (Ahla, 32 years old, having 6 children).

Undoubtedly, the difficulties and problems brought by the war are not limited to the longing felt. While many people lost their lives in the destructive war, women have to cope with these losses as well as the poverty and attacks and continue to live.

“We were not free before the war, but life was simple, easier. However, the life changed drastically after the war. The school was hard, the economic situation was also bad, and I had to drop out of the school. During the war, our situation was bad, I gave birth to a premature baby because of the fear due to the war, and it was so scary” (Nora, 31 years old, having 2 children).

“When the war started, we all experienced and suffered from fear and anxiety. Our husbands were going to find food and bread, but we did not know if they would be able to return back. We always lived in constant fear. We were trying to warm up by burning our clothes. We had nothing to burn for warming up the house. Whenever a bomb fell out of the sky, we were thinking when we would die. I hate war I

did not understand why people are not afraid. I am grateful that my children were not there at that time. Even my mother sent my brother to Turkey by seeking out the blessings from God. We were afraid that the army would come and force him to join the army, but we did not know if he would be able to cross the border. The water supply was cut off. We have only been getting the water once in a week. I was trying to please my new family when I dropped out of school and got married. Our neighbors were killed, and the young people were killed by bombing attacks while they were praying in the mosque. These affected me deeply” (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

According to the testimonies of the women, they tried to rebuild their daily lives that changed with the civil war in Syria and they stated that they had to migrate due to various situations caused by war such as they lost their relatives or there was a risk in that regard, bombing attacks around where their houses were located, they suffered from the limited access to housing, food, security, healthcare, education, etc.

“There were lots of bombings in the city we live in. I could not send the children to school; I could not go to work myself. Because of the bombings we had to change our residence frequently. There was no access, no milk, no bread, no electricity, nothing” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

The three short sentences below presented by Amber in her testimony highlight the vulnerabilities of girls and women caused by war or the patriarchal oppression caused by war.

“The reason I dropped out of the school was the war, the bombings and bullets were everywhere. So, my family was not willing to let me go to school, so I left school. My brother’s university was closed down because of the bombings” (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

The women we made an interview with mentioned on the oppression on the women and girls in the war environment and stated that without hijab a woman can be detained at the very first moment she goes out. In this respect, Duha’s story shows that the war, which brings directly and indirectly the destructive experiences surrounded by violence, fear and losses, causes different and brutal experiences for women and men.



“The war turned our life from heaven to hell, it brought fear and feel of insecurity... ISIS was there, ISIS was the biggest challenge. We were staying at the camp in Cerablus. ISIS was disturbing us extremely. They were interfering with our private life... They wanted us to wear jet-black burqa; they wanted us to be covered from head to toe. We cannot visit another tent. If we want, we visit others by being accompanied by a man. After my husband died, I started smoking, but ISIS had a ban, they caught me; I spent 10 days in prison. I begged to get out of jail, at least for my children. They made me take an oath that I will never smoke again and I got out of jail ...My brother was killed in the war after my brother was killed, my family did not want to stay in Syria anymore. When I was preparing lunch, a bomb flattened our house, then we were forced to immigrate into Turkey” (Duha, 40 years old, having 8 children).

It can be observed from the testimonies of almost all the women we made an interview with that the women became impoverished and had losses due to the war and they became vulnerable to gender-based violence. In other words, we can say that gender-based violence has become widespread as a continuation of violence arising from ethnic, cultural and political conflicts in society. In particular, it was clearly stated in the interviews that ISIS’ heavy and destructive attacks on women and girls became the reason behind forcing the women to quit their education and to get married. The story of Maysa, who had to get married for the second time because of the war and who coped with the threat of the ISIS after trying to start a new life with her children following her divorce, is a typical path waiting for Syrian women:

“After I divorced from my husband, I worked everywhere, I cleaned houses, I changed the adult diapers of patient persons, and I studied for two years for a nursing certificate. Then the war started, I could not get a certificate, nor could I work. Some associations gave us money, my condition was good, and the money I received was enough for me to live. My 6 children were with me. Bombings were all around Selahaddin; the situation was so bad so my relatives said that you cannot live alone. We found shelter at a school. They gave us a room; I was helping the doctor. The bombings started there as well. We went to my brother, my brother told me to marry to my cousin because of ISIS threat because ISIS was taking women as a concubine” (Maysa, 44 years old, having 7 children).

Nisa's testimony shows that one of the main reasons behind the forced marriage of women and girls in the war environment and behind their application for asylum in neighboring countries is "the fear of being kidnapped".

"I did not want much, but I got married. There was war, we were 6 daughters, my father was worrying about us, he was very concerned about us, and I should have got married. I could not take the final examination for external high school due to the fact that ISIS was kidnapping girls ... I left the house to get married as if I was a widow, ISIS was there, I got married without any joy, any ululations, I could not feel that I was a bride" (Nisa, 26 years old, having a child).

Duha stated that she did not want to marry off her daughters at an early age, but she had to marry off them in order to protect them during the conflict environment in Syria:

"When I was in Syria, I married off my daughters at an early age, one of them was 16 years old and the other was 14 years old, I never wanted to do that but there was war and the life was so hard for us. ISIS set the eyes on my daughters; I had to marry off my daughters to their cousins in order not to give them to ISIS. Otherwise, I really did not want to marry off them. Now you are saying that the legal age of marriage in Turkey is 18, but I say that it should be at least 20" (Duha, 40 years old, having 8 children).

### **Experiences During Migration: "It was the deadliest migration route..."**

The respondent women in the interviews told that they decided to migrate due to the reasons such as being unable to meet their basic needs regarding healthcare, housing, loss of a safe environment and loss of relatives after being forced to "move from one house to another by changing the habitual residence frequently due to the bombings" (Fairuz, 35 years old).

"We were running away from the bombings; we were escaping without paying attention to what we were wearing. But ISIS was asking why we were not wearing gloves. People could not help the injured one, because they were afraid of ISIS. ISIS arrested my husband as an opponent. I waited until the evening I was waiting for getting any news from him.

I tried hard to get information about him. I was not in love with him those days as well, but I just wanted to hear something about him, in order to learn if he was alive. 2 days later, ISIS allowed him to go. He had been threatened to kill by being hanged. Then they had sent him to Akkaya for religious training. I did not want him and my daughters to be harmed by ISIS, so due to this and due to bombing attacks, we migrated to Turkey” (Amile, 28 years old, having 2 children).

“My brother was killed in the war after my brother was killed, my family did not want to stay in Syria anymore. When I was preparing lunch, a bomb flattened our house; we were forced to migrate to Turkey since there was no house for us there. In fact, before our migration, we were fine in the camp in Cerablus, but after ISIS came, we escaped to Turkey. ISIS did not allow us to migrate to Turkey. When ISIS was coping with the bombings against them, we fled Syria. I went to Hadi Binbir town, and then I came to Turkey” (Duha, 40 years old, having 8 children).

In terms of the reasons of the women in fleeing their country, we observed that they fled primarily to ensure the safety of their children in the environment of war and violence. 77.1% of the women who participated in the survey stated that they migrated to Turkey due to security reasons and conflicts, while 4.2% of them (two women) stated that they migrated due to physical abuse, harassment and sexual assault they faced in the conflict environment. Both in the survey and in in-depth interviews, women firstly emphasized the conflict environment while explaining how they decided to migrate. However, in in-depth interviews, we see at every stage of their testimonies, women have faced the risk of gender-based violence or they actually were exposed to these violence practices, from the first moment they decided to flee till their post-migration process. This situation, which can be read as a limitation to the study through the survey, maybe an indicator that the relation of trust with women has been established more deeply. It can be said that this relation of trust provides a safe environment for women to express their experiences of violence. The women who checked the option of other stated that they decided to migrate due to the economic problems and security reasons that emerged with the conflict environment.

What was your reason to migrate to Turkey?	Number of Persons	Percentage
Because I was subjected to physical abuse, harassment, and sexual assault in the conflict environment	2	4.2%
I migrated due to security reasons and conflicts	37	77.1%
Due to economic conditions	4	8.3%
Due to education	1	2.1%
Other	4	8.3%
Total	48	100.0%

Table- 10 Reasons for Migration to Turkey

The gender-based persecution, faced during the migration by the women we made an interview with, cannot be regarded in general differently from the “persecution” defined by the Geneva Convention as it is emphasized by feminist researchers and as it can be observed in the interviews, this persecution is often a continuation of other persecutions. Gender-based persecution may also involve escaping from gender-based violence, such as escaping from strict gender roles or forced marriage. Or as can be observed in our interviews, the escape of women may result from responsibilities such as providing care or safety for their children (Freedman, 2017). After the decision to flee the country, moving to another location they find safer or traveling to another country can turn into a traumatic experience, especially for women and children. This can be seen from the testimony of Fairuz below on the incidents she faced before she decided to come to Turkey with her children and after the migration process, as an example.

“It was the deadliest migration route. We tried hard to come to Turkey for months. We came illegally, we walked for 8 hours. We took only our backpacks loaded with spare clothes, medicine, milk, date, and dry food. There was no light, anything, as if we were passing through the dead bodies. The children were 4 and 8 years old, we crossed with a Syrian group. When we came to the border, Turkish gendarmerie detained us, it was like a prison. They noted our names, kept us there for 4 hours and sent us back. I tried to come here for 6 times. I once witnessed the ill treatment of Turkish soldiers. They harassed the people. They touched the people, their bodies under their clothes for body searching. They unloaded a woman’s suitcase and showed her underwear to the men around. In my sixth attempt, I was able to stay in Turkey. We came from the Asi River. We used the bins and we built crude boats, we crossed into Turkey at night. We got so scared. We gave smugglers \$5000. After our journey over the river for 15 minutes, we walked through

the swamps. My child's boots came off, but I did not even have time to shoe. Otherwise, we could be lost. An old woman left behind and got lost because she could not keep up with us. The young ones carried the children on their shoulders. My son was very supportive. They were so important to me; my presence was not so important. The safety and education of the children were important, but I was successful in that regard" (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

As it can be observed in Fairuz's story above, women and girls face many dangerous situations and sexual violence during migration. This issue, which can be the topic for another research in itself, is addressed as part of the violence process by the international instruments on refugees.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees describes the forms and practices of sex and gender based violence to which women can be subjected to and how and when this violence may target them during the 5 "different phases of the refugee cycle:

- I. During the conflict, Prior to flight:** Abuse by persons in power; sexual bartering of women; sexual assault, rape, abduction by armed members of parties in conflict, including security forces; mass rape and forced pregnancies.
- II. During the flight:** Sexual attack by bandits, border guards, pirates; capture for trafficking by smugglers, slave traders.
- III. In the country of asylum:** Sexual attack, coercion, extortion by persons in authority; sexual abuse of separated children in foster care; domestic violence; sexual assault when in transit facilities, collecting wood, water, etc.; sex for survival/forced prostitution; sexual exploitation of persons seeking legal status in asylum country or access to assistance and resources, resumption of harmful traditional practices.
- IV. During repatriation:** Sexual abuse of women and children who have been separated from their families; sexual abuse by persons in power; sexual attacks, rape by bandits, border guards, forced/coerced repatriation.
- V. During Reintegration:** Sexual abuse against returnees as a form of retribution; sexual extortion in order to regularize legal status, exclusion from decision-making processes; denial of or obstructed access to resources, right to individual documentation and right to recover/own property".<sup>6</sup>

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6 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), "Sexual and Gender-Based

In other words, women and girls, especially at every stage of the migration process, face different violent acts by the persons in power having the authority, bandits and security forces in the country of destination.

“Soldiers got into the car in Lazkiye, they took me out, they uncovered my face violently and asked me to conduct body-search the other women, I did it while crying. There was a wall on the border; they were firing towards the border. I was pregnant for 4 months. It was very difficult for me to cross that wall. When we did, I could not believe that we are in Turkey (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

“When we first came from Syria, we stayed in the camp in Şanlıurfa. My husband was arrested because he brought illegal cigarettes with him. I was pregnant for 3 months, I wanted to go to the hospital, but they did not let me leave the camp because my husband was not there. I could not go for the medical checks because I was not accompanied by a man. Then, my child was born with a health issue. I could not go for tests or checks. For example, a woman was giving birth there and they did not allow her to leave the camp because there was no man to accompany her” (Amile, 28 years old, having 2 children).

The camps where women stay obligatory after migration have also become environments where they experience different forms of violence. Experiences such as not being able to go out even for seeking healthcare provide an idea of the extent of gender-based violence experienced while residing in the camp.

In the survey data we presented below, it is seen that 42% of women had traumatic experiences during migration. During the relevant parts of the survey, many of the women shared these experiences verbally with the research team. For example, the following note provided by the 23-year-old respondent reveals that every stage of the migration process entails risks for women:

“After the migration, we returned to Syria so my sister could be treated. When my sister and mother went to the doctor there, the bandits stopped the car and made us get out off the car. They

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Violence Against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced People”, Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/3f696bcc4.pdf> on 5.03.2020

confiscated our money and the car, they tried to take my sister, but my mother begged, cried and told them that my sister was sick, and finally they were convinced and did not take my sister ”(37. Survey, the respondent is 23 years old).

In the survey, 21% of the women stated that in the process of crossing the border they were subjected to psychological violence; 18% of them stated that they were threatened and were subjected to physical violence.

“I was threatened at the border by people I do not know, they threatened us with guns and asked for money. When we gave them money, they left us alone” (41. Survey, the respondent is 27 years old).

During the migration, have you experienced one or more of the situations below?	Security forces in Syria	Security forces in Turkey	Bandits/ Gang Members	Members of Family/ Relatives	Someone I do not know	Yes	No	Total
Has anyone ever made you scared or threatened you by intimidating?	9	5	6	1	0	21	29	50
	18.0%	10.0%	12.0%	2.0%	0.0%	42.0%	58.0%	100.0%
Has anyone ever slapped you or threatened you by using knives, guns, etc. or ever used them against you? Has anyone ever had an act that can physically hurt you?	4	2	2	1	0	9	41	50
	8.0%	4.0%	4.0%	2.0%	0.0%	18.0%	82.0%	100.0%
Has anyone ever had unwanted sexual behavior (sexual assault against you)?	0	0	0	1	0	1	49	50
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%

Table- 11 Perpetrators and Forms of the Violence Faced by Women During Their Migration



## Testimonies Presented Regarding Domestic Violence: “I wish I never got married...”

In addition to the insecurity brought about by a long and traumatic journey and by being a refugee, this insecurity transforms into a threat the source of which is the violence at the hands of the partners or the husbands.

“Sometimes he is good, sometimes he is bad, when we fight, he pushes me and hits me a bit, swearings so much, he calls me cow, you are such bad... I got used to it now; I do not feel anything when he does this. I think I am bad. I was strong before, but now I do not feel in that way. We are 7 sisters, my sisters call me Ebu Han, as if I am a man. I was such strong, but now I am not. My husband never supports me, he tells how “unsuccessful and ugly” I am; I cannot talk with my family, I do not have a cellphone, my husband does not let me use his phone. My family is worried about me, he does not let me speak with them or touch his cellphone. My family has not seen my child yet who is nearly 2 years old. We had fight twice because of this cellphone. If his mother (Nisa’s aunt) tells him to buy me a phone, he would buy it, but she never would tell this. Where can I go? I cannot go to my neighbors; he never allows me. I am happy to have my child, but I wish I never got married. I cannot make a complaint against my husband for his violence, it is not worth all the trouble...” (Nisa, 26 years old, having a child).

Nisa’s statement: “Where can I go?” indicates the importance of social service and support mechanisms for women. The inability of women to access their legal rights, the insecurity brought about by temporary protection status poses a serious problem for them as a factor that increases their vulnerability to male violence. When these women would like to rebuild a new life after coming to Turkey, they have to get married as a result of social pressure stating that a woman cannot be alone since they cannot access the necessary support mechanisms. The same insecurity and gender inequality lie behind this discourse they had to deal with.

“After I came to Turkey, due to the social pressure, I married to a Turkish man in his sixties in Şanlıurfa. Everybody was telling that I should not be alone. My neighbors told me that this man is a religious man, a good choice for marriage. The man changed after we got married. When we first got married, he was good actually; he never

beat me or consumed alcohol. But later on, he became violent. He hit me even when I was pregnant. Initially, I could not tell anyone what I experienced, because my parents did not want me to marry a Turkish man, but when the violence increased, I told my mother. I told this my little brother in Jordan and I received their spiritual support. But they also told me that he might change; I should endure this for the sake of my children. Then I told them I wanted to get divorced” (Duha, 40 years old, having 8 children).

“I got married for the second time due to the war, social pressure because a woman cannot be alone. When we first got married, he was working, I was not working, then I started to work, he did not work, he promised me to bring my children from Syria, but he did not. Then my children came with their father. My 13-year-old daughter was forced by my ex-husband to get married to my ex-husband’s new wife’s brother. My ex-husband’s new wife and her brother had treated my daughter badly; my daughter had applied to the social services. They called me and informed me. I brought my daughter to our house. My husband started to create problems; he said that she should work. I told him that I got married to him on the condition that he would take care my children. Even though my daughter was mistreated, he did not want her. We started to earn money by working in a real estate agency with my daughter; we were cleaning the office preparing tea. We were paying the rent of the house and the expenses of his cigarettes by this way. He was creating trouble, he started to beat me. When my daughter was not feeling good to work due to having her period, he said she was pretending. He tried to hit my daughter, I did not allow him, then he hit me, the bruises were visible on my body. When I went to work, my boss told me why you endured this, I was afraid to complain. It was my second marriage, my family would have blamed me, I did not make a complaint in order to avoid having trouble with my family. When my daughter left her job, he kicked her out of the house” (Maysa, 44 years old, having 7 children).

We can observe from the experiences of Maysa and her daughter that the patriarchal values, that consider the women as part of a family, which is seen as an “absolute, blessed and protected” structure, legitimize the domestic violence and make it invisible. At the beginning of her testimony, Maysa explained that how her 13-year-old daughter by her first marriage was not safe at the hands of the father and how she wanted to take her

with her. She explained the reasons behind this further by mentioning on how her older daughter was exposed to sexual violence in Syria. After she learned from her children that their fathers raped her older daughter in Syria, she immediately got divorced from her husband. “When I made a complaint to the police, my older daughter was undergone the medical test, I was relieved when I learned that she was still a virgin. But when she got married, it became clear that she was not a virgin. Her father stayed in prison for 1 month. He bribed the doctor for the medical report. The rape incident was covered up in order to avoid scandal.” Maysa, who was also very worried about her 13-year-old daughter who stayed with the father because there is no “evidence” found about his former sexual assault, stated that all the applications she made were inconclusive. We should highlight that the fact that Turkey’s migration and asylum policies, legislations and legal regulations are not gender-responsive, brought about the structural difficulties that cannot be overcome by Maysa herself with her limited rights.<sup>7</sup> We can observe from Maysa’s following testimonies that how the law also turned into violence. In this respect, Maysa’s struggle against patriarchal order to break the cycle of violence becomes more difficult.

Maysa, who started legal proceedings against her husband on account of the physical and psychological violence she and her children faced by her husband, also stated that she could not get the necessary support because she could not start the divorce proceedings.

“He promised me not to do it again, I accepted it due to community pressure and for my family. But the same problems began again. He hit me, my face was bleeding, he broke the cellphone that my children gave me as a gift, he broke the windows, and I could not stand anymore. I applied to ASAM’s Women Center; I made a complaint against him to the police. The restraining order was issued. There were a lot of people from my family and relatives asking me to return to my husband, they never stood by me. In any case, I do not want to return to my husband. My conditions are not well right now, I asked for help. Since I am seen as a married woman in the system, I cannot use the benefits of Kızılây Card” (Maysa, 44 years old, having 7 children).

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7 See. Kivılcım, Z. (2016). Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu ile Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Perspektifiyle Bir Değerlendirme, Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi, Issue 71, No. 3, 2016, pp. 919- 940.

The violence may not necessarily indicate physical violence, as in the testimonies provided above; the other forms of violence: psychological, sexual, economic violence, just like the physical one, narrow the women's space for living. "At the same time, the threat of violence can constitute as an act of violence in itself" (Bora, 2012: 11).

After migrated to Turkey, have your husband or any of your family members;	Husband	Father/ Brother	Boyfriend	Never
Ever made you upset by insulting or swearing? Ever made you scared or threatened you by intimidating?	12	5	0	33
	24.0%	10.0%	0.0%	66.0%
Ever tried to prevent you from meeting with your friends and neighbors?	3	4	0	41
	6.3%	8.3%	0.0%	85.4%
Ever got angry when you talk to other men?	11	5	0	34
	22.0%	10.0%	0.0%	68.0%
Ever made you to seek their permission in applying to any healthcare facilities in case of a health issue you suffer from?	14	1	0	34
	28.6%	2.0%	0.0%	69.4%
Ever interfered with your clothes and forced you to wear the clothes they chose for you?	7	4	0	38
	14.3%	8.2%	0.0%	77.6%
Ever interfered in your social network accounts like Facebook? (For example, would they like to know your password? etc.)	12	5	0	32
	24.5%	10.2%	0.0%	65.3%
Ever slapped you or ever had an act that can physically hurt you?	4	3	0	43
	8.0%	6.0%	0.0%	86.0%
Ever threatened you by knives, guns, etc. or ever used them against you?	0	0	0	50
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Ever pecked at or pushed you?	4	2	0	44
	8.0%	4.0%	0.0%	88.0%
Ever forced you to have sexual intercourse by using physical force even though you did not want it?	2	0	2	46
	4.0%	0.0%	4.0%	92.0%
Ever engaged in any sexual behavior that bothered you?	0	0	2	48

Table-12 Domestic Violence After Migration

We see that the most frequent form of violence faced by the women who responded to the survey is the psychological violence and the perpetrator of it is the husband. Many of the women who participated in the interview stated that the behavior of their husbands changed with the situation of war and displacement, and that emotional violence occurred or this violence got worse. The answers provided by the respondents under the relevant question of the survey reveals the scope of male violence, which is further aggravated by the war environment.

“After my husband got married for the second time, I returned to Syria. I lived in the same house with his new wife. My husband was beating both of us. I think my husband has psychological problems. Because he was an ordinary person before, he never beat me. But after he lost his brother in the war, he turned into someone who is violent. Two days after his brother died, he got angry with me and he was swearing. But I did not do anything; I said to myself, he was acting like this because he is so upset due to the loss of his brother. But I wish I had not said that. Because after that day, he constantly beat me. Both my husband and his mother and his father use violence against me. After I came to Turkey I have never exposed to violence. I am living with my family” (30. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

### **Sexual Harassment After Migration: “It was not my fault...”**

The fact that the measures to protect women are not working and the efforts to go to third countries through different methods, can lead women to be exposed to violence by other men they do not know. Fairuz, whom we make an interview with, stated on her experiences after meeting with a man she does not know who said that he could send her immediately to Canada that:

“The man met with me and took me somewhere like a hostel in Gaziantep. He took my passport, etc. and he told me that you would be in Canada in 1 day. He entered into the house with us. He told me to put the children to sleep in order we could talk, I got scared. When I went to lay my children down to sleep, he started to send me WhatsApp messages, he threatened me and said that he would beat me in front of the children. I had to approach him, he beat me, he tried to rape me, when I said I was having my period, he left me alone. I went to my room and pulled the bed in front of the door, muted the WhatsApp,

waited until morning. He beat me so much that I fell asleep from exhaustion. He said that he was the agent of Esad and that he would send me back to Syria because I was an opponent and working in FSA hospitals. He took 500\$ by threatening me and he took my cellphone. When I returned to Ankara, I made a complaint against this person, but no action was taken” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

Women find it hard to share their stories because of the vulnerability, insecurity caused by being a survivor and “rape survivors often refrain from reporting sexual assault or receiving medical treatment due to the belief that rape tarnishes the family, and feeling of shame, fear of retaliation, stigmatization and other powerful social norms” (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019: 15). The perpetrators can also maintain the harassments based on patriarchal social norms. With the help of the open ended question and the answers provided to it by the women mentioning on the sexual violence faced, it is indicated that there is a pressure on the women caused by the patriarchal social norms and how the women have resilience in order to break the cycle of silence in the face of this pressure.

“Our society is very strict about adultery or sexual relations, they are against all the sexual relations including the ones had with the consent of the woman, they are violently against this, sometimes they hit, sometimes they oppress. Therefore, they do the same in case of the children. Their families and other families should be trained by the NGOs and other civil society organizations. Because when a girl has a boyfriend and had sexual intercourse with him, she later on can be regretful about that and when she wants to resolve this, she tries to leave her boyfriend. However, she cannot succeed in this, since her boyfriend knows that this is a tender issue in the eyes of the families, therefore he threatens the girl. The girl experiences fear and insecurity, in this case, she is neither able to ask for help nor to leave him, because she is afraid of her family. Therefore, the girl is stuck in her relationship and she is forced to continue to do what her boyfriend wants to do. If the families were trained and had a full understanding, should the girls have not had such problems. And sometimes the girl can suffer from another problem. They can be forced to sexual intercourse due to being threatened by several photos because those photos should not be seen by the families” (21. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

“There was someone trying to open a new charity organization. I would start working with him. We went together with this man and someone else to another city to meet with the other charity organizations and we stayed at the hotel. He came to my room as if he wanted to talk with me, I was exposed to sexual violence and was sexually abused by him” (15. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

As can be seen in the testimonies of women who shared their experiences with us through the survey, another obstacle to women causing the inability to voice the violence and harassment is the impunity. In the testimony of a young Syrian refugee woman, it can be observed that there is the impunity issue caused by the injustice of the system: “...I thought that that person would not receive a just punishment. I did not believe in the effectiveness of the law and organizations”. In this respect, one of the most important obstacles to combat violence against women is the systematic policy of impunity.

“I could not tell anyone when I was subjected to forced sexual harassment, not because I am afraid of society's view or pressure, but because I did not want to upset my parents. And also, I did not tell anyone because they would blame me. We as women are the ones who are constantly accused in Eastern societies. More importantly, I did not believe that I would be able to get a real help if I went to the police to make a complaint or if I applied to an NGO. And I thought that the perpetrator would not receive a fair punishment. I did not believe in the effectiveness of the law and organizations. When I think about it, there is only one thing that I regret that I should have faced this person. I should not have been silent and embarrassed; I should not have tried to keep it silent in order not to be exposed to society, because it was not my fault. Despite all the accusations and rumors that can be mongered about me, I should not have been ashamed. Now, after four years, I understand this” (15. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

Most of the women stated that they were sexually abused by the persons outside the families (16%) that they do not know after migrated to Turkey. At this point, the research team observed that they were afraid to talk about the sexual violence/harassment they faced. This situation was tried to be overcome by giving women the opportunity to express themselves with



open-ended questions. The abovementioned testimonies were reached through open-ended questions that women could express themselves without any restrictions<sup>8</sup>.

After migrating to Turkey, have you ever been exposed to sexual abuse by someone who is not a family member/ husband?	Yes	No	Total
People from the workplace	1	49	50
	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
Neighbor or friend	2	48	50
	4.0%	96.0%	100.0%
People from school	0	50	50
	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Boyfriend	0	50	50
	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Public officers	1	49	50
	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
People I do not know	8	41	49
	16.3%	83.7%	100.0%
Camp officers	1	47	48
	2.1%	97.9%	100.0%
NGO officers	1	48	49
	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
Other	1	14	15
	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%

Table - 13 Sexual Harassment After Migration

We see that the form of violence that women face mostly in public space outside the home is the psychological/emotional violence. It can be said that this is directly related to the sexist and discriminatory policy and discourse on refugee women in Turkey.

8 90% of the women participating in the survey are literate.

After migrating to Turkey, have you ever been exposed to intimidation and degrading behavior such as swearing, shouting, insulting by someone who is not a family member/husband?	Yes	No	Total
People from the workplace	2	47	49
	4.1%	95.9%	100.0%
Neighbor or friend	6	43	49
	12.2%	87.8%	100.0%
People from school	1	48	49
	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
Boyfriend	1	48	49
	2.0%	98.0%	100.0%
Public officers	11	37	48
	22.9%	77.1%	100.0%
People I do not know	18	31	49
	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
Camp officers	0	48	48
	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
NGO officers	8	41	49
	16.3%	83.7%	100.0%
Other	1	15	16
	6.3%	93.8%	100.0%

Table-14 Emotional Violence Faced After Migration

### Discrimination Pervading Daily Life Practices: “All the doors are closed around me...”

It is highlighted by various studies<sup>9</sup> that how the violence led to a situation even the minimum conditions of being human ceased to exist, how the public discourse against the displaced persons coming to Turkey who were forced to leave their homes, their countries and their beloved ones

9 The negative representations took place and circulated in the media by reproducing the hate speech against the refugees, have led to such a perception in the public opinion in Turkey considering the Syrians as “dangerous” persons disrupting the public order and this perception has strengthened the prejudices that exist. The number of studies conducted on the representation of Syrian refugees in the media is quite high. Some of

due to the war, disregard the losses and frame the lives of refugees as if these are not the lives worth living. This public discourse refers to refugees, especially Syrian refugees, as “dangerous others”, and strengthen the distinction between one of us and the ones not one of us by presenting them as mere numerical data. In addition, this discourse hinders the formation of universal and standard “refugee” identity, which bears the meaning of homelessness, statelessness and lack of the sense of belonging and it increases the precariousness<sup>10</sup> starting with the experience of displacement. However, in order to share a common experience with refugees, we should keep in mind that the refugees are the groups with life experiences in the destination country, experiencing the forms of reception/exclusion in the public sphere and experiencing both individual and collective losses (Sancar & Peker, 2001: 6).

The common point of the testimonies presented by the women in the interviews is that they were exposed to discriminatory discourses and practices such as exclusion, underestimation and unequal treatment while accessing public services. As can be seen from these interviews, women face the risk of being exposed to violence because of discriminatory discourses

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these studies are: Medyada Nefret Söylemi ve Ayrımcı Dil Eylül-Aralık 2014 Raporu, Hrant Dink Vakfı, nefretsöylemi.org, pp.61-105, (by) Doğan, Selen (2015). Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Bakış Açısıyla Eleştirel Medya Okuryazarlığı: Haberciler İçin El Kitabı. Kırmızı Kalem, Ankara. Doğanay, Ülkü & Çoban Keneş, Hatice (2016). “Hak Temelli Bakış Açısının Yokluğu ve Ayrımcı Söylemler Açısından Gazete Haberlerinde Mülteci Kadınlar: Haber Okumaları (ed. by) Yasemin İnceoğlu & Savaş Çoban, İletişim, İstanbul Doğanay, Ülkü & Çoban Keneş, Hatice (2016). “Yazılı Basında Suriyeli ‘Mülteciler’: Ayrımcı Söylemlerin Rasyonel ve Duygusal Gereçeklerinin İnşası”, Mülkiye Dergisi, 40 (1) Kavaklı, Nurhan (2017). “Hak Haberciliği Perspektifinden Çevrimiçi Haberlerde Mülteci Seslerinin Değerlendirilmesi”, Erciyes İletişim Dergisi, Issue:5, No:2

- 10 “Precariousness” refers to the state of political awareness of certain communities that benefit from wider social and economic networks of solidarity less than others while they are exposed to many different forms of injury, violence and murder; therefore, precariousness is the differential allocation of precarity. Communities exposed to precariousness/insecurity in different ways are at high risk, such as disease, poverty, hunger, displacement, and injury caused by violence, without an adequate protection. In addition to that precariousness characterizes politically stimulated situation of the vulnerability and exposure that are at their highest level of the communities, that have been subjected to unprovoked violence by the state or that been subjected to the violence, which is not directly perpetrated by the state itself but there is no protection against it provided by the state (Butler, 2010: 21). According to Butler, all organisms that are living exhibit a shared mortality, but some creatures are at higher risk depending on the historical, social and economic contents, since the “lives are by definition precarious” (Butler, 2009: 25).

and practices. In other words, the situations in which women are subjected to violence are not only limited to the migration process and domestic life, but this risk spreads to all areas in daily life. This is clearly stated in the responses provided to the survey and interviews.

Do you think that you are exposed to discrimination in the city where you live?	Number of Persons	Percentage
Yes	34	68.0%
No	16	32.0%
No idea	0	0.0%
Total	50	100.0%

Table-15 Discrimination

As can be seen in the story of Duha, who stayed in the shelter for three times for different periods, xenophobia against refugee women establishes a ground for women to be alone and desperate when they need support and solidarity and to be pushed into violence again.

“I wanted to go to the camp in Adana to join my family. But I was not allowed to reside in the camp because I am married to a Turkish man. Then I stayed in Adana shelter for 18 days. They did not like Syrians in the shelter in Adana; they were always saying bad words. I went there to find a shelter like them, but I was not welcomed by them, a woman was taking a dig at me always and said “may you choke death on it”, she was accusing me for what she experienced, she said that “my child is dying in Syria while you flee”; the officers never warned her in that regard. No one protected me” (Duha, 44 years old, having 8 children).

Violence and exclusion practices that are faced in daily life are the issues seen in social life as well as in public institutions. This situation creates a serious obstacle for women to participate in social life and to establish a new life for themselves.

“Obviously the Turks do not accept Syrians, this is a situation that I am offended with and upset about. They told me that “there is no home for Syrians” while I was looking for a house” (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

“My neighbors do not like Syrians at all, when I salute them, they never answer, I send food, they do not accept it or they send empty plates back. They say you are dirty, my son’s finger stuck in the door, the ambulance arrived, and there were no get-well visits by neighbors. The children talk to the Turks in the parks, but we cannot talk as adults. They do not even say hi” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

“Most of my neighbors are Syrian, we are good with them. But my Turkish neighbors do not speak with us. This makes me upset. They have prejudice, so I cannot say anything. They think all Syrians are the same. I say they are right sometimes; some Syrians make mistakes. They think we all are the same. But we are not” (Safire, 32 years old, having 4 children).

“I was subjected to the violence by someone I did not know in the neighborhood. He invaded my house several times and asked for money, he claimed that he was a relative of my landlord. He threatened me with a gun when I did not give him money” (12. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 28-37).

The women stated in the interviews that they were exposed to discriminatory discourses and practices mostly in healthcare centers and hospitals. In other words, in this study it is revealed that one of the most important problems Syrian women faced is accessing to healthcare services.

“There is a problem in the hospital in Dışkapı, when I go to the hospital, to take a queue number, they told me to bring an interpreter, I face language problems. When I go to take medication, all people are speaking sulkily, especially in the children’s care department” (Şedia, 46 years old, having 6 children).

“There is no difficulty in government institutions, but interpreters are very bad. I go to the doctor, they do not translate, they make fun of us, the interpreters are disrespectful” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

Due to these practices that women face in accessing healthcare services, women cannot reach the necessary treatment. For example, Fairuz stated that she did not go to the hospital because of these practices she faced, and her treatment was incomplete.

“I went to the hospital with my grandfather, I saw the doctor twice because we did not understand the results in the report. When I asked him to explain to me for the second time, the doctor threw us out and said, “You are Syrian, you do not understand anything, get out” (38. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

Another problem becomes prominent during the interviews was the exclusion and peer bullying faced by refugee children in schools because of xenophobia.

“My son wants to leave school. I think his friends are mocking him and he is trying to learn Turkish so that no one can understand that he is Syrian. The school management also behaves badly, trying to throw Syrian children out of school” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

“They say in school things like that you are Syrians you should not come. My daughter had a fight with a child. Her mother had said that “we provided you food and you are doing this in return”. I said you did not” (Safire, 32 years old, having 4 children).

“My sister is having problems at school, there are groups, there are those who become friends with Syrians, there are those who do not. They said, “Why are you getting along well with these Syrians?” (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

“The principal is constantly beating my son and eventually kicked him out of school. When I went to talk with him, he threw me out” (44. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

Exclusion practices encountered in social life play a role in the fact that refugee women and families choose to live in areas where being surrounded by the persons having the same origins. Accordingly, women are less exposed to exclusion practices, and they can develop a solidarity relationship with refugee women. For example, while Şedia, who lives in Önder District, mentioned her life here in a positive way, on the other hand, she also mentions that they live in a closed society as refugees:

“We live in a very nice neighborhood, we are Syrians, we do not live the house so much, we only get out for seeing each other we do not

experience any problem, we do not have any Turkish neighbors” (Şedia, 46 years old, having 6 children).

For this reason, Syrian women have difficulty in finding social environments where they can learn Turkish language and can interact with others. This problem makes the women feel more insecure in everyday life and this brings both cultural and spatial discrimination to a deeper level.

### **Early and Forced Marriages: “I had no idea what marriage would mean...”**

Unlike the prejudice against Syrian refugees, 89% of the Syrian women participating in our survey stated that they are against marrying off the girls when they are under 18.<sup>11</sup>

Also, the women we made an interview with provided the same opinions regarding early and forced marriages in conformity with the results of the survey.

“Traditionally, a girl is married off when she is 14-15 years old, when she is still a child. Since she is a child, she does not know how to deal with the house, they face a lot of problems. When she is married off at an early age, she experiences problems with her husband and her mother-in-law. Her body gets exhausted” (Nur, 30 years old, having 4 children).

“I had hard times in my marriage regarding the children and the domestic works, I got pregnant at the age of 16. I think the best age of marriage for women is the age of 23” (Fatima, 21 years old, having 3 children).

“I was married for 18 years, my husband passed away in the war. I got married for the first time when I was 14. I was married off to our relative. I was happy when I wore the wedding dress. In my first marriage, I had problems with my mother-in-law. I lived with my husband’s family for 7 years, but they were always saying how sassy and childish I am, I have always been persecuted. When I was in Syria, I married off my daughters at an early age, one was 16 years old and one was 14 years old. Actually, I never wanted to marry them off, but

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11 See Table-16 Opinions on Gender Equality

ISIS set the eyes on my daughters, I had to marry off my daughters to their cousins in order not to give them to ISIS. Otherwise, I really did not want to marry off them. Now you are saying that the legal age of marriage in Turkey is 18, but I say that it should be at least 20" (Duha, 44 years old, having 8 children).

"In early marriages, spouses cannot even get along, and they are still fools like children. For example, my son was born in 2000, if I ask him to buy a kilo of tomatoes, he will not understand it, he does not have an understanding regarding the food, the house and the family, I am the house maker maintaining the household" (Şedia, 46 years old, having 6 children).

### **Changing Gender Relations and Masculinity in Crisis: "I am the mother and father of the house, I am dealing with everything"**

While addressing the negativities brought about by the migration process, the gender factor should not be ignored. As Freedman (2017) points out, as the focus of the dominant international discourse shifts from the restrictive measures of Western states to the experiences of refugees, the refugees are often addressed in terms of gender and ethnicity and they are presented as a "threat to Western societies". In this gendered threat pointed by the international discourse, women are often portrayed as harmless and vulnerable "legitimate victims", while men are portrayed as a threat to the modern society; they are portrayed either as the carriers of "non-civilized values" or as "potential terrorist" harmonized by fear of the people regarding terrorist attacks (Coşkun & Eski, 2019:14).

The war and conflict environment also determine the gender regime of the geography where it is located and brings about the transformation of gender roles with it. The impact of violence and masculinity on the social structure, especially in the Middle East geography, is escalating due to the war, but it also brings the necessity to address these experiences while preparing the ground for the emergence of different masculinity experiences. In this study, it can be clearly seen from the statements of women that gender roles started to transform especially with the experience of migration. This situation, which is interpreted by the studies on masculinity with different approaches as masculinity in crisis (MacInnes, 1998) and which is mentioned as crisis tendencies (2005) by Connell, indicates that the



dominant positions of men began to transform with the increase in women's participation in social life and their experiences related to freedom of association, also seems to explain the "crisis" experienced by refugee men. Based on the testimonies provided by respondent women, it can be seen that the fact that the characteristics of the hegemonic masculinity, which is defined by Brannon as "the avoidance of all feminine behaviors and traits, the acquisition of success, status and breadwinning competence, strength, confidence and independence, aggression, violence and daring" have been largely lost by the experiences of war makes the transformation of the domestic relations necessary.

"We were good for a few months after we first got married, then the divergences appeared, we were different from each other. My husband was nervous, restricting me. I like socializing very much, but he does not want it. He wants to be alone, likes smoking very much, plays with his phone. He wants to spend his time alone. He did not let me go anywhere. I had to deal with everything. He does not like taking the children to the hospital" (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

"We are only arguing due to financial difficulties. Children have needs, I want to deal with these needs, and my husband says I do not have money to do this. He takes it as a matter of pride..." (Şedia, 30 years old, having 6 children).

While drawing attention to the relation between masculinity and physical performance, Connell addresses how gender is also endangered when there is a performance loss of male body and states that the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained for instance, as a result of disabling accidents or illness (2005, p. 54). Although the physical losses experienced by men due to the war also necessitate the transformation of domestic relations and gender roles, the state of resisting the loss of the power also manifests itself in the relationship of Ahla with her husband, as stated below in her testimony.

"Since my husband injured during the war, he is suffering from limb length discrepancy, he has pieces of shrapnel in his leg and he cannot work. When school is on holiday, they collect papers with my son. We got 860 TL by Kızılay Card. We spend 300 TL for the rent and bills;

we try to cover the food expenses by the rest. We have just 200 TL to cover food expenses. When I say it is not enough, my husband does not accept it and does not let me work. We are discussing this issue between us, when I want to buy something for the children, he says you will not work, Allah will help us. He does not hinder me for leaving home for other things, he trusts me. Even I did not inform him before I came here. I am the mother and father of the house, I am dealing with everything, and he is not interested in anything. I deal with the rent, bills, shopping, everything” (Ahla, 32 years old, having 6 children).

Various research studies conducted in the field highlight the risk of domestic violence that may be faced by women at the hand of their male family members with whom refugee women have close relationships and these men continue their lives, like women, with the traumatic effects of war and violent conflict. The traumatic effects of war and the experience of remaining standing in a new country cause the deepening of the masculinity crisis and the transformation of domestic gender roles.

“My husband does not work right now, under the pretext that there is no job in Turkey. In fact, he is afraid of something. He knows that if I find a job, I will establish my future by leaving him, so he does not allow me to work” (Amile, 28 years old, having 2 children).

While the loss of status associated with migration becomes an obstacle for men to fulfill their traditional gender roles, women become more active in the family. This compulsory transformation causes women to get stronger and continue their path.

The severe violence experienced and witnessed may cause domestic violence to be invisible and be seen as “normal”. We can see from the experience of Maysa how the emotional development of boys growing up in the war and in domestic violence shaped and how they identified with “masculinity”. According to her testimony:

“Now my children do not know anything about showing compassion and mercy. I tell Ahmet to look at his brother and see how he suffers pain due to his hand. He asks me in return what the pain is. This is because they were exposed to violence...” (Maysa, 44 years old, having 7 children).

## Combatting Violence Against Women: “I decided not to stay silent after the violence”

The women are always resistant and resilient as we observed in research studies on refugee women. This resistance and resilience are the basis of the experience of the women we made an interview with during the research period. Contrary to the narratives based on the weakness and victimization of women, the desire of women to survive and rebuild a new life in a new country should be evaluated with a different perspective.

“I am dealing with the home and I keep all the money” (Şedia, 46 years old, having 6 children).

“My husband never hit me, but he cursed violently. We have been married for 7 years. We got divorced 3 months ago. He came home one day, I said why you are not working, and he said there is no job opportunity on the websites. When I insisted him to seek for a job, he cursed me. I said if you will curse me this, it is better for you to divorce me. And we got divorced. I live alone with my children. I could not stay with my family because their house is crowded. After the divorce, I feel very relaxed psychologically, I was not hearing any bad words, I started learning Turkish language, I take my children and go on trips, and I am very relieved. But I have hard times economically. I want to work but I cannot leave my younger child alone. My husband does not care about my children. My family supported me in this process, they did not have any objections” (Amber, 25 years old, having 2 children).

“My husband has a vision problem, he had a psychological disorder, he had the depression in Syria as well and he has not seen his family for 5 years like me. He has constant pains. The cause of it is unidentified even by x-ray. He did not go to the psychologist, but the situation is obvious, and he is exhausted. He had recovered in Syria. He suffers again here. I cannot say anything about my husband’s condition, I feel sorry for him. Our families are not here, I feel the same. Women are more emotional but are better. He feels good because I feel good...” (Safire, 32 years old, having 4 children).

The most important result of the survey is that the women said that “there is no violence that can be justified”. Being able to realize and understand that the incident faced is violence is one of the most important steps in combating violence. We can see the course of this combat in the answers provided by women to the survey’s open-ended question below.

“I think that the women who are exposed to violence should not be silent, whatever it takes, they have to combat with violence, because if a woman is exposed to violence and be silent, it can also affect her children negatively. If they see that their mother is silent, they will also remain silent when they are subjected to violence. I had a sister in Syria. She is married and has two children, she wants a divorce because she was subjected to violence by her husband, but she is afraid that her husband will take her children. Her husband had got married to another woman without divorcing her. I am calling her and constantly trying to support her. I think violence is not always related to physical or sexual relations. There are other types of violence. I feel like a woman who is exposed to violence because of my current financial situation. My husband is sick and does not work, I want to work but I cannot leave my children. I am in a very bad situation” (2. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 28-37).

“I decided not to stay silent after the violence and I wanted to get a divorce and soon I got divorced” (6. Survey, the respondent is between the ages of 28-37).

82% of the respondent women checked “Strongly agree” box while 12% of them checked “Somewhat agree” while answering to the statement that “no matter what a woman has done, violence cannot be accepted”. Another important result is that 58.7% of the women checked “Strongly agree” while answering to the statement “the woman who is subjected to abuse and violence should make a complaint no matter who the perpetrator is”. Similarly, we see that women support the education of girls. Nevertheless, while answering to the statement that “domestic violence should remain silent as a domestic issue and should not be exposed”, we see that women are undecided and 43.5% of them checked “Somewhat disagree”. We think that it is necessary to interpret this result by considering the vulnerability caused by being a refugee. We should take into account the fact that women may have reservations about applying to official institutions due to the fact that they are not economically independent even though they are informed about how they can apply to legal mechanisms, their belief that nothing will change even if they made a complaint when they faced violence, the feeling of insecurity and the fear of being excluded by the community. These reservations caused by various reasons behind, since they fear that the man, the perpetrator of violence they exposed to, will

be deported when they made a complaint against and most importantly they experience the various violations of rights and they have limited access to rights, constitute the grounds for these reservations. 63.3% of the respondent women checked “Strongly disagree” while 30.6% of them checked “Somewhat disagree” while answering to the statement that “It is ok for men to have multiple wives” (See Table-16).

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Girls should get education like boys.	42	8	0	0	50
	84.0%	16.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
No matter what a woman has done, violence cannot be accepted	41	6	2	1	50
	82.0%	12.0%	4.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Women should endure domestic violence for their children.	3	10	14	22	49
	6.1%	20.4%	28.6%	44.9%	100.0%
A woman should have sexual intercourse with her partner / husband even though she does not want.	3	5	23	18	49
	6.1%	10.2%	46.9%	36.7%	100.0%
It is ok for men to have multiple wives	0	3	15	31	49
	0.0%	6.1%	30.6%	63.3%	100.0%
The woman who is subjected to abuse and violence should make a complaint no matter who the perpetrator is	27	12	7	0	46
	58.7%	26.1%	15.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Domestic violence should remain silent as a domestic issue and should not be exposed	4	12	20	10	46
	8.7%	26.1%	43.5%	21.7%	100.0%
A girl under the age of 18 can be married.	0	5	14	30	49
	0.0%	10.2%	28.6%	61.2%	100.0%

Table-16 Opinions on Gender Equality

In the survey for the question: “Do you know if there is a regulation by laws in Turkey against the acts of violence against women and/or of domestic violence?”, 86% of women answered by checking “yes”. This shows that refugee women have a certain level of awareness on the rights gained by the women in Turkey based on their own experiences or the information they receive from refugee associations. In another question that we provided the details of the information on legal rights, we see that 98% of women have information about the legal age of marriage. Nevertheless, the data provided in table-18 show us that it is necessary that the legal information both on the fact that “Persons who hold a religious marriage ceremony without an official marriage shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment, polygamy is not allowed and shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment, spousal rape, forcing the wife to have sexual intercourse is punishable by law”, as well as the information on legal rights should be disseminated in Arabic in a way that the refugee women can understand. In addition to that, 65.3% of women stated that they never heard about the clause of the relevant law specifying that women do not need to get a permission from their husbands to work outside the home, and 34% of women stated that they never heard about the clause of the relevant law specifying that each spouse has equal rights on each property which is acquired during the marriage in case of a divorce.

Do you know if there is a regulation by laws in Turkey against the acts of violence against women and/or of domestic violence?	Number of Persons	Percentage
Yes	43	86.0%
No	6	12.0%
No idea	1	2.0%
Total	50	100.0%

Table-17 Information on Laws Addressing the Acts of Violence Against Women

Various acts of violence against women and girls in Turkey are punishable by law. Have you ever heard any of the following clauses of the relevant law before?	Yes	No	Total
The legal age of marriage in Turkey is 18 and children can marry at the age of 17 with the consent of their parents or legal guardians	49	1	50
	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Marrying the children off, before the age of 17, by parents and relatives is a crime, punishable with the imprisonment	47	3	50
	94.0%	6.0%	100.0%
Persons who hold a religious marriage ceremony without an official marriage shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment	24	25	49
	49.0%	51.0%	100.0%
Polygamy is not allowed and shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment	44	5	49
	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%
The spousal rape, forcing the wife to have sexual intercourse is punishable by law	26	24	50
	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%
Women do not need to get a permission from their husbands to work outside the home	17	32	49
	34.7%	65.3%	100.0%
Each spouse has equal rights on each property which is acquired during the marriage in case of a divorce	33	17	50
	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%
The offenders of all kinds of sexual attempt against children who are under the age of fifteen is sentenced to an imprisonment	43	7	50
	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%

Table-18 Information on Laws on Combating Violence Against Women

In in-depth interviews, it is observed that women tried to seek the ways for claiming their rights after the violence they experienced by applying to refugee associations, judicial authorities, and shelters. For example, when asked how you would approach this situation if the woman you are in close contact with is exposed to violence, Fairuz provided her testimony in that regard as follows:

“I would like to provide my support if a woman is exposed to violence. I learned how to contact the police, I did not stay silent, I applied to an association because it was reliable. Women should not stay silent anymore and they should claim their rights. I raise up my voice, other women’d better do the same” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

“I have not encountered such a situation, but if I had, I could have made a complaint by definitely learning how to make a complaint. I definitely ask the source of the problem, if the woman herself is guilty, I will not make a complaint. If she pushes her husband’s button, by belaboring the point, by demanding to go out, by insisting on something, then she provokes her husband to beat her. Is there a man perpetrating violence against women in Turkey? Turkish laws are protecting the women, but the laws are protecting men in Syria. Syrian women could not even raise their voices to their husbands, but we became stronger when we see that the laws are protecting women in Turkey and we started to claim our rights. Syrian women were weaker in the past, now they are stronger. After coming to Turkey, the women became stronger when they learned the rights of women” (Ahla, 32 years old, having 6 children).

Ahla’s statement above shows us how the acts of violence can be interpreted by women under the shadow of the cultural and religious traditions leading to the legitimization of violence against women, it also shows us that the more the awareness is raised, the more potential the women have to change their own lives.

In the survey study, women were asked in a multi-coded and open-ended question what they did when they were subjected to violence, and when they checked “other” option as an answer, they were asked to provide a further explanation (See Table-19). From the explanations provided in that regard, it is seen that in such cases they only told their friends what they faced but they did nothing more and they got help from the associations in the neighborhood.

As it can be observed in Table 19, the vast majority of women (50.8%) who have experienced violence stated that they “did nothing”. We observe that women (16.9%) who are trying to combat violence in some way, asked their relatives or friends for help and support. At this point, we should remember the significance of every effort and communication that can turn into women’s solidarity in breaking the cycle of violence and in combating



What or which of the following acts did you do when you were exposed to violence or ill treatment?

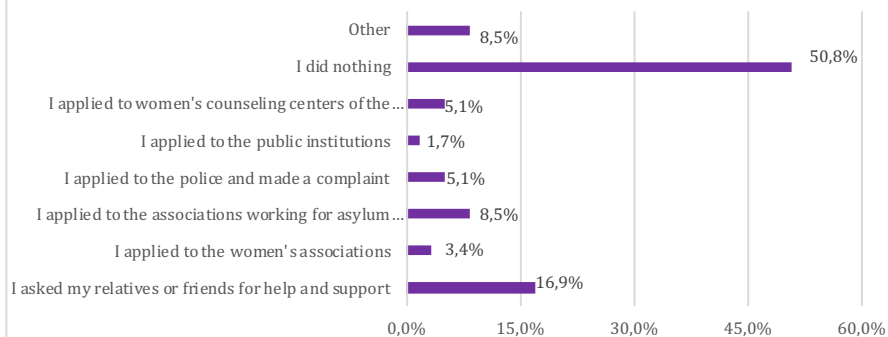


Table-19 on Combating Violence Against Women

violence. However, another limitation of the survey was the inability to reach information on what kind of a course this process followed. In the active combat against violence against women, 8,5% of women stated that they applied to the associations working for asylum-seekers and refugees, 5,1% of them stated that they applied to women's counseling centers of municipalities, 5,1% of them stated that they applied to the police, 3,4% of them stated that they applied to the women's associations and 1,7% of them stated that they applied to the public institutions. In this context, we once again observed that it is necessary to share with refugee women the building environments and communications where information regarding women's counseling centers, which is one of the most important tools of combating violence against women. In order for women to play an active role in combating violence, it is necessary for them to reach solidarity networks, especially legal mechanisms. At this point, the women participating in the survey stated that they mostly needed the psychological support (27,7%) in combating violence and discrimination. Women (22,9%) who thought that it is important to get an education and who want themselves and their children to continue their education effectively, emphasized the support they need in the field of education. Some of the women (19,3%) emphasized their needs in finding a job to participate in the combat against violence, and 10,8% of them emphasized their needs for the childcare support in order to continue their work life. 15,7% of the women who participated in the survey emphasized their needs for legal support.

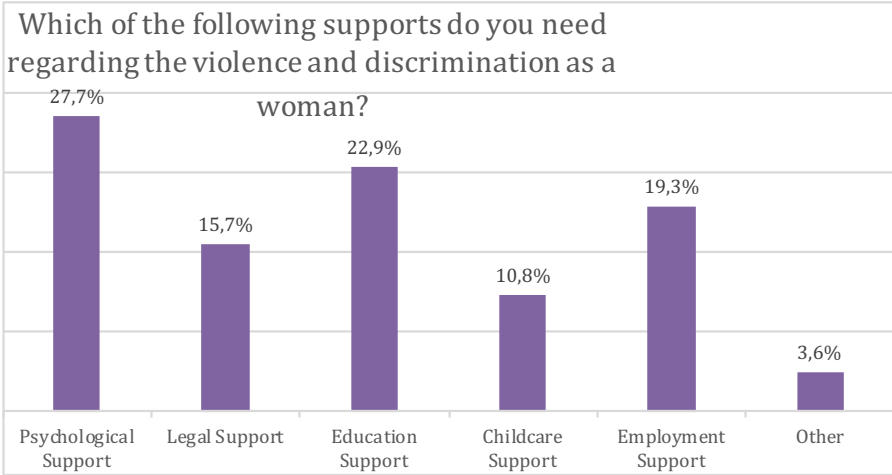


Table- 20 Needs of Women in Combating Violence

The testimonies presented for the relevant question of the survey also reveal the needs of women and the resilience of them in combating violence.

“A woman should always feel safe in the country where she lives, and there should be NGOs to protect women. No matter how strong a woman is, she will always be weak because she is in a foreign country” (8. survey, the respondent is between the ages of 48-59).

“Refugee women need to know that there are laws against violence against women provided by the state (through education programs, posters in Arabic). The rights of women here should be known” (38. survey, the respondent is between the ages of 18-27).

## CONCLUSION:

### “I only live once, there is no other life”

The data and findings we obtained in this study have revealed that Syrian women and girls have become more vulnerable to violence and discrimination due to gender inequality. In this respect, the study once again has revealed that it is necessary that the legal regulations and protection policies should be prepared from a gender perspective in order to prevent any violent acts against refugee women, since the women are one of the most affected ones by the negative consequences of war and migration movements. Amile (28 years old), who stated that she was subjected to severe psychological violence by her husband and that her children were exposed to physical violence, expressed her desire to get rid of this cycle as follows: “I also informed my family, I told them I will leave one day, they did not take me serious. I know that I only live once, there is no other life, I am only concerned about my children. If I had had no children, I would have left earlier.” We also know from the different practices of the combat against violence against women that the feeling of insecurity and unreliability of the protection mechanisms lie behind the desperation and lack of remedy felt by the women. For the refugee women, the fact that “women’s role is taken into consideration in line with their ties with their husbands and families in the regulations on migration and asylum, the legal status of the women is determined through those ties or access to rights is granted to the women through such an administrative practice” (Kivilcim, 2016: 929) also deepen the existing vulnerabilities.

One of the most important findings of the study was that the women face many forms of violence and most of them are against the justification of violence. At the same time, the vast majority of women are against the justification of early and forced marriages.

Refugee women try to cope with a wide range of problems such as violence and discrimination while trying to rebuild a new life. Although the fact of being a refugee woman in Turkey is especially shaped by ambiguity and

discrimination in the cycle of violence, these women, whose daily lives are the field of struggle in itself, are building solidarity networks as not being passive individuals but rather as being political individuals. As Cankurtaran and Albayrak state that “the principle of treating the experiences of women as valuable paves the way for understanding what women have gone through in forced migration due to war and how they have rebuilt life in the country of asylum” (Cankurtaran & Albayrak, 2019: 18), when we observe their different stories.

Endurance/Resilience, which is one of the most frequently used concept in the studies conducted on refugees, has been the reference concepts in terms of understanding the practices of rebuilding a new life following the migration by women, whose testimonies and experiences we listened to during the study. “Resilience refers to the capacity of giving positive responses to the negative, possibly to the traumatic human experiences. Trauma has been conceptualized primarily through the individual psychological responses following a shock...In other words, resilience is not only a personal trait or individual attribute, but it is a social phenomenon...Resilience is not limited to the capacity of individuals struggling with trauma, but also about communities, collectives and even nations” (Karakılıç & Körükmez & Soykan, 2019: 4). The experiences of the women we made an interviewed with, regarding their lives in Syria and the incidents they witnessed during the war, the gender-based violence, their migration process, the economic and social challenges after arriving in Turkey, the discrimination affects their sense of sustaining life negatively. However, the interviews we conducted have enabled us to see that the actions of the women to survive to bring about the practice of resilience and empowerment in dealing with these negative effects and in sustaining life. The social network the women built in their neighborhoods, their livelihood efforts, their efforts to learn Turkish and their participation in the activities of the refugee associations by virtue of the desire and effort to be included in the normal flow of life, contribute to this empowerment and resilience process. The women we made an interview with explained this process of survival and resilience process in terms of the presence of their children, but they also explained that how the solidarity networks established among themselves, their relatives or friends affected this process positively.

Certainly and apparently, it is necessary that this empowerment process should be supported by state and non-governmental organizations at the institutional and structural level. We face the responsibility of taking empowering and supportive measures for refugee women and creating the necessary conditions for the resources and providing opportunities to be used in that regard.

“I wish a good future for my children. I do not want them to be like other Syrian children, there is no future for them anymore. I would love to stay here. The hunger, the war we saw in Syria and the deaths occurred that right in front of my children affected us very much, enough is enough. One of my children is suffering from trauma, is at school right now. Due to a bombing attack in Syria, my cousin and niece died, and my children witnessed this. There were frequent bombing attacks, we were seeing dead bodies around whenever we went outside, and my daughter does not want to go outside now. When my children grow up, when my daughters become mothers, they may forget all of these or perhaps they never can. My children ask when the war will end and when we will return to Syria. I am telling them we cannot return there anymore, there is a war there, we no longer have a home there” (Ahla, 32 years old, having 6 children).

“I absolutely do not want to return to Syria. My three children do not want to return to Syria at all. For them, returning to Syria means death. Whenever someone asks them where are they from, the answer that they are from Turkey. I would like to stay in Turkey. I have to work in order to ensure a comfortable life with my children” (Fairuz, 35 years old, having 3 children).

“I do not have a plan to return to Syria, I stay here for my children. The life there should be normalized in order for me to return there for my children. I want my problems regarding money and healthcare to come to an end” (Nora, 31 years old, having 2 children).

“I would like to go to Europe. Maybe my husband will be treated there and can work. I suffer from depression as well, but I am stronger. However, I cry easily, you all saw that while asking me questions. I do not want to stay away from my family anymore, but living in Syria is very difficult, I do not want to return there” (Safire, 32 years old, having 4 children).

“I have no intention of returning to Syria before the war is over, but when the war ends, I want to return to my country. I want to live with hope; I want to be relaxed psychologically. I want to build a decent life now. I am worried and wondering when Turkey will send us back to Syria. We did not have a decent life in Syria, nor in Turkey. From now on, I want a decent life. We are pleased to live in Turkey, but I actually want to work for example, but all the doors are closed around me, no remedy is available to resort to in that regard. All I want from them is to open centers for children. The situation of us as women is very difficult and the job opportunities are rare for us. I hope I can find a way to live comfortably together with my children” (Safire, 32 years old, having 4 children).

# NEEDS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the fact that women flee to Turkey by also for fleeing from the form of gender-based violence emerged in war environment and in order to apply for asylum in Turkey, it is an obligation that the relevant articles of Istanbul Convention should be implemented. Based on the fact that international protection is needed to survive gender-based violence, it is also the responsibility of non-governmental organizations to build a public pressure for the implementation of the below mentioned articles of the Istanbul Convention listed as follows.

## Article 60 – Asylum claims based on gender

1. Parties shall take all the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that gender-based violence against women may be recognized as a form of persecution in terms of Article 1, A (2), of the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and as a form of serious harm giving rise to complementary/subsidiary protection.
2. Parties shall ensure that a gender-responsive interpretation is given to each of the grounds of 1951 Convention and that where the fear of persecution is well-founded for one or more of these grounds, applicants shall be granted refugee status in line with the applicable relevant instruments.
3. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to build gender-responsive reception procedures and support services for asylum-seekers as well as the guidelines on gender and gender-responsive asylum procedures, including RSD-refugee status determination and application for international protection.

## Article 61 – Non-refoulement

1. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to respect the principle of non-refoulement in accordance with existing obligations under international law.

2. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that survivors of violence against women who are in need of protection, regardless of their status or residence, under any circumstances, shall not be returned to any country where their life would be at risk or where they might be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

“In accordance with Article 61/1, State Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to respect the principle of non-refoulement in accordance with existing obligations under international law. This imposes the obligation on states to apply the principle of non-refoulement to survivors of gender-based violence, who may be subject to prosecution if they return to their country of origin.

In accordance with Article 61/2, State Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that survivors of violence against women who are in need of protection, regardless of their status or residence, shall not be returned under any circumstances to any country where their life would be at risk or where they might be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”<sup>12</sup>.

- Instead of humanitarian strategies, it is important to develop a protection system that will strengthen the groups such as women, children and LGBTI+s and that will ensure social development and liberation of them through policies based on legal, social and economic development strategies.
- Public resources should be used to build the mechanisms for preventing violence and abuse and to providing protection, with a focus on gender equality.
- The capacities of shelters should be increased in order to provide services also for refugee women; the institutions should be administered by the experts, with a gender-responsive, rights-based perspective.
- For the refugee women who are exposed to violence, the Istanbul Convention should be implemented maintaining their right for applying international protection.

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12 Bakırçı, K. “İstanbul Sözleşmesi”. Retrieved from <http://www.turkkadinlarbirligi.org/tr/kurumsal/5/%C4%B0stanbul+S%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmesi> on 5.03.2020



- Racist and discriminatory practices faced in hospitals pose a risk to the health of women and children. As an obligation, the hospital staff and the health system should be structured so that refugees can benefit.
- Non-governmental organizations working in the field of asylum and migration and their staff should work with a manner, which promotes gender-equality and is responsive to gender-based violence.
- Again, institutions working in the field of gender need to implement inclusive studies covering refugee women and need to cooperate with non-governmental organizations working for refugees.
- It should be ensured that the interpretation services to be extended in public institutions and that the interpreters to have a gender responsive perspective.
- There should be studies conducted by the state and NGOs in the fields such as psychological support, educational support, and employment support, which women consider as their basic needs.
- There should be remedied by taking into account the fact that providing free and widespread relevant courses for women who want to learn Turkish in order to ensure women's participation in social and economic life. Childcare support should be provided to women during these courses.
- The staff of all the public institutions should be provided with training in order to eliminate discriminative practices and there should be routine audits conducted by public institutions in order to identify whether the refugees are subjected to discrimination or not.

While developing a policy on refugee women, it is absolutely necessary to ensure that refugee women participate in policy-making processes. We hope that this report will help rights-based organizations that combating violence against women. We also hope that the solidarity practices will be developed and be built together with refugee women while taking into account of the specific conditions of refugee women.

The conclusion of the report was written in the shadow of being witness to violence against refugees in the border areas of Turkey. Following the statements published in the press that "Turkey would no longer stop

refugees at the borders and no longer prevent them from crossing into Europe”, on 28 February 2020, the refugees went to border gates in Edirne in order to access to humanitarian conditions, to start a new life and to cross into Europe. The policies, using Syrian refugees as bargaining chips moved against Europe, encouraged the refugees for attempting a very dangerous journey to Europe through illegal and unsafe ways, and their fundamental human rights, especially their right to life, were transgressed, and the hopes of refugees were ignored. We need more solidarity than ever before in these days, where we recall that we are connected to each other, and that how the borders are meaningless and that how impossible for us to live by ignoring and by turning a blind eye to the “other” lives.

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