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A migrants woman's story

Extract from her book" The Journey of Patience"

S.A¹, a 26-year-old woman, started to use the services of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) on November 6, 2019, when she initially reported her story.

She was born in 1993, and left her country of origin fearing for her life, following public attention her pursuit for justice raised. She was raped by a high-ranking official and reported it. She fled the country leaving behind her (now ex) husband and (at the time) 6 year-old child.

S.A. managed to reach Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Here she received accommodation and security support, as well as psychosocial support. She is currently undergoing the asylum procedure in BiH. Since recently, she is eligible to work in BiH, however, due to scarce employment opportunities, she spends her time working on her book - "The Journey of Patience" - where she describes in great detail all the challenges that she faced in her life and on her path to BiH.

The following is an extract shared by the author:

"This is not a story of a single woman; I think this is a story of thousand women who survived in their life. And their life is connected with one spectacular peaceful word: Patience. This word is somehow connected with every human life, but her whole life depended on this word. She survived only with the help of this one word.

She was born in Made-up-land, where she first learned of patience from her name. Whenever she tried to give up her name, she was reminded to be patient. In her childhood, she was patient for her father's love, after marriage she was patient for the love and respect of her husband's and in-laws, and one day someone raped her and left her to die, but she chose to fight for justice patiently. I do not know how many times society killed her with their words, but she was patient that one day everything will be ok with her life. Society and customs have taken away her rights from her, but she was patient to start a new life and she left her country in hope of achieving that.

In Bosnia, the time has come to pick up the results of her patience. She met the team of the DRC; it protected her and helped her to start a new life. Now there was nobody to disrespect her and take away her rights. She started her new life with them and now she is only in patience to see her child. She gave her life to this one magical word. And this word gave her a totally new life."

Thinking Gender in Mixed migration Context

Mixed Migration Context in BiH Since mid-2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) remains one of the most travelled mixed migration routes in the Western Balkans. With the "Protection and Health" program, also supported by the SDC, the DRC strives to address vulnerabilities of migrants and to minimize protection risks.

¹ Note that the initials have been invented to protect the identity of the survivor.

The Drivers of Migration, Vulnerabilities and Risks

The term “mixed migration” incorporates variety of causes or circumstances that drive people to leave their countries. It includes people fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Different factors that influence people’s movement are reflected in their legal status as well as in the veracity of their vulnerability. Less visible, however underlining the vulnerability of people on the move, there are also different gender norms and gender roles that shape the lives of people on the move. For instance, adult men travelling alone are more likely to be opting for onward movement in peruse of better life or employment opportunities. On the other hand, women and unaccompanied minors travelling alone are more often survivors of trafficking. However, survivors of trafficking have been identified among adult men, as much as there have been single women traveling in pursuit of better life opportunities. This is to point out that, while general patterns or trend might be identified when analysing gender aspects of mixed migration flows, every person has a different story to tell and most vulnerable ones, might not be obvious.

The interviews and focus group discussions with asylum seekers and migrants of different nationalities, age, gender and specific characteristics, are looking specifically at drivers of migration and risks they are facing along their journey. The interviews conducted in June 2020 and involving 242 men, 7 women, 15 male unaccompanied and separated children and LGBTQI persons, shows that the majority of migrants left their country of origin because they were unable to achieve basic standards of living and due to the general insecurity in the country. Women reported different reasons to leave their country of origin, including personal or family matters (mixed marriage), political pressure (experienced by spouse), and economic reasons. The LGBT persons reported leaving the country of origin due to fear of being prosecuted and fear for their safety as a direct consequence of the gender identity.

When it comes to gender-based violence (GBV), it is essential to understand that it could be both the driver and consequence of migration. Different forms of violence occurring in the country of origin, such as forced marriages or domestic violence are common reasons for persons to flee fearing for their lives or safety. The majority of migrants reported experiencing GBV also during their travel.

Support, engage and empower

Addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants and asylum seekers and minimizing their exposure to protection risks is a primary task of duty bearers and humanitarian workers on the ground. Access to essential services, such as dignified reception conditions and basic services (food, water and sanitation, non-food items), as well as health care, has a direct impact on the position of communities concerned. Lack of access to these only increases vulnerabilities and exacerbates the risks. DRC has been facilitating the creation and operations of Community Councils in migrant’s reception centres, gathering representatives of different nationalities and gender. Wherever possible, male and female representatives were elected to communicate with their respective communities, engage on their behalf with the service providers and report back to their communities. These initiatives lead to more dialogue between services providers and affected communities in addressing everyday needs, adjusting activities and service delivery to communities’ needs and mitigating health and safety risks. Community representatives provide essential support during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring peer support and sharing information to affected communities. In addition, there is an initiative to form women's councils that would tackle issues of concern for women situated in migrant’s centres. Women are also actively engaged in organizing different awareness raising events and activities such as 16 days of activism, 8th March celebration and others, mostly in order to teach communities on the move about history and implementation of rights of women.

In BiH, DRC has been ensuring support to GBV survivors through case management activities, as well as needs assessments and referrals to specialized services such as psychosocial, medical support and legal support. Safe House provides essential and life-saving protection. In addition, DRC is supporting asylum-seeking individuals with integration into the BiH society through capacity development and employment opportunities, informal and formal education, job search etc).