



Speak out against xenophobia, racism and violence against women!

The Women and Global Migration Working Group denounces violence against women in all its forms. However, we also strongly condemn the 'othering' of perpetrators of gender-based violence, such as happened in the reporting of widespread sexual attacks and harassment of women in central Cologne, Germany, on New Year's Eve 2015. In the immediate aftermath we witnessed a frighteningly xenophobic and racist reaction in the media and political commentary that led to physical attacks on migrant and refugee men in the name of 'protecting women'.

We loudly reject racist tropes about black and Muslim men. Stereotyping, racial and religious profiling of their sexual behaviour and/or misogyny, with absolutely no evidence to suggest that migrant men are more likely than other men to commit sexually aggressive acts, is both racist and xenophobic. In Europe, the rush to protect women is being used to feed anti-immigrant and refugee sentiment and a backlash against newcomers desperately seeking refuge from war and oppression. This has disturbing historical echoes in the use of violence against Black slaves in the US, or colonised peoples in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East in the name of "protecting our women".

All women should be safe from sexual and gender based violence, regardless of the migratory status of the women or the perpetrators of such acts. Women are assaulted by people who have access to them, whatever the race, religion, nationality or country of birth of victims or aggressors. This is borne out by the experiences of migrant women in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Migrant and refugee women face particular risks – including as women, as migrants, as precarious workers, due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, religion, dependent migratory status and in many instances as black women, women of colour, and women from the global South. Profiling, prejudice and discrimination restricts their access to social, medical, psychological and legal assistance, compounding the risks they face at every stage of their journeys.

Apart from sexual violence that takes place in countries of origin (frequently one of the reasons for women migrating), this also manifests on the journeys they undertake. Examples from different continents include the constant reports of rape and sexual predation of women travelling through the Meso-American migration corridor in Central America - 80% of women in transit through Mexico suffer some kind of sexual abuse - and the routine sexual violence committed by the Magumaguma smuggler gangs on the Zimbabwe-South Africa border.

In destination countries, migrant women are at high risk of sexual and gender based violence and abuse through the precariousness of their migratory status and of the employment and economic restrictions imposed on them. Domestic workers in the Gulf States and in Europe, sex workers in European and African countries, textile and garment workers in some Mashreq and Asian countries and agriculture workers in Asia-Pacific and North America; women from sub-Saharan countries and Asia exploited as au-pairs in Europe; women in USA detention abused by wards; and Maquila workers on the US-Mexico border are among the myriad examples. According to the ILO, women make up 98% of workers trafficked for sexual exploitation in the private economy and 40% of workers trafficked for labour exploitation.

Migrant women are not only at risk outside their own communities but also within, as they often lack the information, resources and networks in host countries to challenge or change the domestic situation they find themselves in. Undocumented migrant women fear reporting domestic violence as they might face detention and deportation. All migrant women face numerous barriers to accessing preventative, remedial and support services, **particularly public services such as health, childcare, legal and social services due to culturally and linguistically insensitive policies that discriminate against women.**

The Working Group therefore asserts that the rise of violence against women cannot be 'blamed' on migration but rather on the rise in patriarchal and nationalistic expressions of culture and identity, stemming from economic and social systems and conditions, in nearly every country and society around the world.

In addition, a complex intersection between racism, gender based violence and xenophobia is becoming a global patriarchal phenomenon and is playing out in both contemporary homogenous and pluralist societies where different cultures, customs and codes coexist and interact.

The Working Group believes that 'outsourcing' violence against women as a problem of others, outsiders from and within the global South, and setting one marginalised group against another is a disingenuous, anti-feminist, anti-migrant/refugee, and dangerous response. Conversely, building solidarity between oppressed groups points to the answers, as this demands that we all challenge our own prejudices, the inequalities and discrimination in our own contexts, and the global systems of post-colonial power and privilege that create and foster racism, xenophobia and violence against women.

The Women and Global Migration Working Group brings a gender, race and class perspective to the realities of women in migration and advocates for human rights-based development and migration policy at national, regional and global levels. The Working Group includes migrant rights, trade union, feminist, human rights and faith-based organizations from all regions of the world.

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