

## Introduction

During 2016 KETHI, with the aim to better understand the Gender-Based Violence phenomenon in the refugee population, undertook the initiative to assign to CRWI Diotima the implementation of a 3-month study. More specifically, the aim of this study was to capture and map out existing gaps and related needs in infrastructure, services, human resources and know-how, in the areas of protection and safety, prevention and assistance of vulnerable groups (i.g. female single parent households, pregnant women, single women, survivors of gender-based violence). The study aspired to produce results and insights which could contribute to the design of targeted policy interventions and to the achievement of economies of scale. In that way, synergies to avoid duplication and to ensure that real, existing and foreseeable needs are met, could be established. The ultimate goal of such a targeted resource direction (financial and human) is their maximum positive impact on the target population itself. On a more qualitative layer of analysis, this research aimed at identifying all forms of gender-based violence, which may include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic violence, and harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation, forced marriage). Enriching our knowledge and our understanding of those forms of gender-based violence that are endemic in situations of humanitarian crisis (like the refugee one which we experience since 2015) and which, undoubtedly, pose new challenges in the field of prevention of gender-based violence and the effective support of survivors was among the main objectives of this research.

## “Contextualizing” the field

In order to contextualize the field of research it is important to discuss some key elements of its specific socio-spatial context in order to be able to better situate the broader phenomenon of Gender-based violence in the Greek reality. We need to highlight it as firmly as possible. Gender-based violence occurs in all its forms and is a life threatening and protection issue regardless of the existence of specific and valid evidence. Despite the globally accepted objective difficulty of systematic data collection, it is estimated that 45 incidents of gender-based violence were “managed” per month on average at national level. It is, thus, vital to recognize the crucial role of empowering women and to ensure a natural, social and political space where services are provided and survivors are informed about their rights. As far as the refugee population is concerned, it is estimated that 40,242 people resided in Open Accommodation Facilities (hereinafter camps), while 21,717 people resided predominantly in urban fabric structures (as of December 2016). It is important to underline that the refugee population is part of a society in motion and is therefore distinguished by various social and cultural characteristics and specific living conditions (often characterized by informality, mobility, diverse coping mechanisms and survival strategies). The fear of stigmatization and/ or rejection of the referral by the community, women’s multiple dependencies (living conditions in the camps, pending asylum claims for international protection) as well as lack of knowledge about their rights to assistance and protection, are some of the key prohibitive factors for women to access psycho-social support services provided within camps.

## Methodological Tools

The methodology of the data collection and analysis included a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. More specifically, 10 individual interviews with key informants/stakeholders and 3 focus group discussions in Athens, Thessaloniki and Lesvos (with a total of 42 front line professionals in GBV) have been conducted. Moreover, 57 questionnaires from the 61 Public (State/Municipal) structures on gender-based violence have been completed. The data collection was also enriched by secondary research (e.g. UNHCR database and other important documents – publications), the research team’s participation in working

groups, roundtables and taskforces and finally by knowledge and information from the presence of the research team in the field through implementation of programs of the research organization.

### Highlights/Key issues from the data analysis

The research identified key issues which are presented below.

- Low number of gender-based violence cases' identification (disclosure), mainly due to the transition and difficult living conditions, fear of social stigma and social marginalization, shortcomings and gaps in the scope of programs, lack of trust of women in the protection system in general.
- The stakeholders responsible for identification of GBV cases were Asylum Service, Reception and Identification Service, NGOs as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The need for horizontal compatibility of vulnerability identification tools was also pinpointed.
- As far as the GBV case management is concerned, the following interesting points need to be highlighted: unequal distribution of NGOs to camps across Greece (great lack of GBV case management actors in Northern and Central Greece and lack of legal aid services in general), uncertainty about the role of each organization, lack of specialized and experienced professionals, lack of interpretation/ cultural mediation in camps but also in Public Shelters (in particular female interpreters), lack of legal assistance services (in particular legal aid and court representation), inadequate referral pathways or delays in referrals and incidents of breach of confidentiality.
- Significant shortage and limited attention is being paid in preventing gender-based violence through the implementation of interventions to empower women themselves, to create Women's Friendly Spaces and to provide them with information on sexual and reproductive health. In a similar vein, programs and interventions aiming at activating and involving the community (refugee and local) around the issue of GBV through informing and raising awareness were rather limited and without long-term sustainability.
- With regards to further gaps, the research team has identified the insufficient policing of camps, the lack of gender mainstreaming in the administrative Bodies of camps, the incompatibility with international standards of camps' design and construction (e.g. lack of adequate and appropriate lighting, proximity of the tents/containers where residents live and the number of residents - overpopulation in some camps), the institutional failure to transfer female refugees from camps to various public services (when needed) and cases where the Asylum Service does not consider gender-based violence as a variable in the women's claims.

As for the Public System, some interesting figures are underlined below:

- Including their children, 134 women survivors have been hosted by the Public Shelters from April to October 2016. 10 Shelters have hosted or are currently hosting from 1-10 women refugees, with the largest number of survivors being concentrated mostly in the urban areas of Athens, Thessaloniki and Ioannina.
- 37 referrals were registered in the Counseling Centers of the country, with the largest number being concentrated again in the urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki. Referrals to Shelters are mainly done by the Counseling Centers, but also by UNHCR, as well as by local and international NGOs.
- The main request of the refugee women is hospitality in a Shelter (an urgent need especially in cases of active domestic violence where their removal from the perpetrator is vital). The majority

of the beneficiaries is 20-45 years of age, married and with an average of 3 children, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan.

- On average, refugee women reside in the Shelters from 2.5 to 6 months whereas the total number of rooms available for incidents is three hundred twenty (320). Lack of adequate Shelters in Athens combined with the size of the refugee families (often with many children) resulted in the non-coverage of hospitality requests.
- Lack of interpretation/ cultural mediation, lack of psychological and social support services in Shelters, lack of psychological services and recreational activities for their children, difficulty in accessing and moving in urban areas, and the prolonged residence time of the refugee women are some of the key challenges of the public response to gender-based violence. Moreover, the time-consuming process of coordination and interconnection of services and agencies involved in the case management, lack of escorting services in the Shelters, the limitation of accommodating male minors over 12, lack of information received from NGOs on the regulations of Shelters as well as the completion of medical examinations were also identified as structural constraints of the Public Response System to Gender-Based Violence.
- On the other hand, the main factors for women to deny hospitality in the Shelters were moving away from their network (relatives, community), the fear of losing their place in the camps and the services they are provided (e.g. cash assistance), the distance from the Asylum Service as well as their fear of retaliation by the spouse.

### Policy Recommendations

The key interventions proposed are stressed below, codified in 3 different axes.

#### Proposals for the improvement of the coordination between all relevant Stakeholders and the interventions' funding

- Completion, dissemination to all stakeholders and compliance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
- Better interconnection between the Public Protection System and the services provided by NGOs (international and local). Continuous update of referral pathways for all camps and urban areas in Greece.
- Better centralized planning of the programs implemented and gender mainstreaming in all interventions.
- More funding for GBV case management services in camps and urban areas (including legal aid and representation at court, adequate shelters, PSS, health care and recreational activities for children), and funding for the transfer of vulnerable persons from camps to proper accommodation facilities in the urban.

#### Proposals for the camps and the involvement of the community

- Creation of emergency shelters for short-term hospitality of the urgent cases as well as more Shelters in urban centres to accommodate all the requests. Ensure interpretation services in the new but also in the existing Public Shelters.
- Create more Women Friendly Spaces in all camps and strengthen the system of transferring vulnerable cases from camps to urban accommodation.
- Enhance a more systematic involvement of the refugee community in the protection and prevention mechanisms of GBV through establishment of empowerment teams for men and women as well as feedback mechanisms between the refugee community and the service providers.

- Promote female participation in decision-making in refugee communities, women's leadership as well as women's visibility/presence in the public spaces of the camps.

#### Proposals for capacity building and specialized staff

- Provision of interpretation and cultural mediation (in particular, with female interpreters) in all public services (including SOS line 15900)
- Ensuring female representation in public services (female doctors, female police officers, etc.) and specifying GBV focal points in selected police departments.
- Implementation of various targeted trainings for both public servants and (I)NGO staff in issues of identification and management of GBV cases as well as in intercultural and asylum issues.
- Raising awareness and training of all staff involved in camps (army, police, municipality staff, and any other administrative staff). Sensitization and training of volunteers, as well as of interpreters/cultural mediators on gender-based violence.

For an extended version of the research document (in Greek only) please visit KETHI'S website

<https://kethi.gr/meleti-anichnefsis-anagkon-gynekon-prosfygon-pou-diamenoun-se-domes-prosorinis-filoxenias/> and Diotima's website: <https://goo.gl/8prrtC>.