

## **INTERVIEWER**

So, looking at your research on Syrian women and (free?) refugees in Turkey, can you explain how Syrian women's experience of being refugees is different from men?

### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Well, we live in patriarchal societies where the structure is male dominated and men are given much more power than women, so it's very hard to generalise and say well all women have the same experiences, because there are intersecting aspects. So we have other identities which interfere with gender, like class, ethnicity, age, marital status. So really we cannot really have a general idea of women having a set of experiences and women having other sets of experiences.

### **DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

To add to what Nof said, it's basically our approach to it is an intersectional approach that takes into account all of these different variables and factors. And how when we ask how they're different, we say they are different, but it's hard to say that women's experiences are worse than men's experiences, they're just different. And this is an important thing to highlight. Of course, the experiences of women are influenced by their gender and gender plays a major role, but I would like to emphasise that it doesn't mean that they are worse off than men.

### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

So there isn't a clear cut; there are different complexities and contexts.

## **INTERVIEWER**

OK that's great. So what do you think are the key challenges they are facing as refugees in Turkey?

### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Well, I would say that the language issue, because in Turkey they, well, there's the Turkish language, it's completely Arabic than from Arabic. So the language is a huge, huge barrier to them. And actually some say in our research that they get bullied and they don't accept it, because they can't speak the language. On other aspects, in terms of women experiences, women feel a lot of isolation, so they do have, they feel isolated because there's the stigma and stereotype about Syrian women as being cheap

guests. They're not welcome; they're easy targets. So women do not prefer to leave the houses, so instead they stay in the house, and also if they're exposed which happens, like they get exposed to sexual exploitation and assault and harassment from people, they don't report it to the police, because also the police may take advantage of their position as Syrian refugees.

### **DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

So there are experiences specific to women and to challenges that are specific to women, and some of these are to do with access to economic activity. For example, access to employment, their legal status is usually dependent on a man, who is the main provider. And one of the challenges that specifically Syrian refugee women in Turkey face are to do with being female heads of households. So, for instance, many of them head their household. They have to provide for their children. They face multiple burdens because of the loss of the main breadwinner in the family. And this is how, these are their main key challenges facing refugee women in Turkey, Syrian refugee women.

### **INTERVIEWER**

Yes, thank you. So your work has a more complex understanding of gender than simply saying these are men's experiences, these are women's experiences; how does sexuality transcend intersects affect the people's refugee experiences?

### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Well our approach to gender is very broad, so we don't look at only men's experience and women's experiences and their roles; we look at the whole spectrum which has different identities. You have like lesbians, gays, intersex, so we look at gender in terms of different identities and different performances. So, for example, you have the performances of masculinities and femininities, which in typical like conventional societies the men does the, it's expected for a man to do the masculine roles and the women to do an emasculate role, but however we cannot also generalise because it's different. These performances are completely different, depending on culture, depending on where they are from and the context as well. So yeah we look at it as a broader spectrum.

### **DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

And it is a spectrum that needs to be, I mean the way we conceptualise it is to do with it gender being on a spectrum that is also influenced by culture and it is contextualised. For instance what might be perceived in a country as a feminine trait might be perceived in another country as a masculine trait. So we try to conceptualise gender in more complex ways than simply men and women. And we also focus on the experiences of LGBTQ people and refugees, because they do go through different processes, refugee processes. For instance, they have to register with, in Turkey they have to register with the UNHCR. After they register with the UNHCR they have to, they're sent to satellite cities which are often times placed in conservative areas within Turkey, and they feel isolated.

The sense of isolation is huge. There also because of their legal status they cannot, they don't have access to regular employment so they end up doing sex work for survival, especially gay men. And this is for gay men. For lesbians it's a different story because they face different types of oppression: the oppression of their family being a woman who has to stay with her family and not become independent. Gay men mostly move to Istanbul to work while the women stay in the south of Turkey, yeah.

#### **INTERVIEWER**

So how does the legal situation in Turkey affect women refugees?

#### **DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

Yes. The legal situation affects women refugees, in particular when it comes to marriage, because we have, in Turkey polygamy is not allowed. Men are only allowed to get married to one wife. And what's happening is so many Turkish men are taking on Syrian wives as second wives. Those women do not have any legal rights. Because their marriages are registered unofficially – they're not officially registered with any governmental body – and because of that they don't have basically the rights any woman can get under, by the law and they don't have custody rights.

#### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Also, there's an issue which we came up through our research is the gender-based violence. A lot of women, because of what happened to refugees, so of course the dynamics of gender has changed dramatically. So the men have lost their jobs, they stay at home all the time. The women go seek jobs sometimes outside because they're less of a threat. And these gender dynamics have changed, putting women in fear positions in terms of like they were much more exposed to gender-based violence, and of course because they're not protected by the state of Turkey, they cannot report these cases.

#### **INTERVIEWER**

So, for example, is that in the workplace that you're talking about or?

#### **DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Yes, for example, a lot of women were exploited. So, for example, a lot of women were, if they want to, like let's say if they're working in an office. So they will be exploited by the employer saying if you don't have like, if she refuses to have sex with him, he will or she will, they will like fire them, and then she cannot report this harassment because of the legality in the country. But also she cannot, they cannot report cases of domestic violence which is done by their husbands, brothers, etc.

#### **INTERVIEWER**

Thank you. So what do you think are the differences between the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and in Europe, especially with regard to gender?

**DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

Well it's important to know that there are challenges in Europe and also challenges in Turkey. They are different in nature, but they exist everywhere for refugees. And perhaps women might have for instance more access to justice or the rule of law or be able to report their sexual harassment in the UK; they don't have that per se in Turkey. On the other hand here there is the legal protection for women, but this doesn't necessarily apply in reality because you find that refugee women even in the UK still feel isolated. Despite having that access, they have language challenges and they have challenges of the Islamophobia and harassment on the streets these days, especially to women who are wearing the hijab in Europe.

**DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

And also I would like to add one last point is like maybe I would see the differences in like neighbouring countries when they fled Syria and they went to Jordan, Lebanon, these are transit countries, so they know that they're temporary there. Europe or these settlements in the third country is like, for them it's like, it gives them some sort of protection because they know that they will be resettled. So maybe that's the difference between being in these transit countries and in settlement countries.

**INTERVIEWER**

Thank you very much.

**DR NOF NASSER EDDIN, CTDC**

Thank you.

**DR NOUR ABU ASSAB, CTDC**

Thank you.

**[End of interview]**