

A Focus on Refugee Women and Girls

(The following is an excerpt from a paper written for the World Refugee Council by Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei)



The question is often asked: “Why such a focus on women and girls — surely men and boys are just as important?” The needs of both groups are equally important, and without effective policy frameworks and tools, these differences are not recognized. There is a male bias in refugee policy, an assumption that women’s needs will be automatically covered by addressing needs articulated for and by men. However, if these differing needs are not articulated, they are often not addressed (Oosterveld 2017; Callamard 2002).

and the different barriers they face are left unacknowledged. Many girls do not have access to sanitary materials and thus miss school one week per month; some are forced to have sex with teachers in exchange for grades and school books (DeJong et al. 2017; UNHCR 2017a; Hassel and Krause 2017). “Survival sex” is seen as the only option for single women living alone on a single person’s rations in a camp, or paying rent in an urban area (Anani 2013; Pittaway 2003). Many single young men take dangerous journeys to seek asylum, as a result of forced recruitment into terrorist groups; they face human rights abuses, including rape (Freccero et al. 2017; UNHCR 2017b). Gender affects every stage of the refugee journey, from reception to durable solution. A failure to develop effective responses to meet the different needs of refugee women and girls, men and boys.

However, without diminishing the lack of rights and suffering of many women in the Global South, for many refugee women, the impact of this inequality is more damaging than for women residing in their own countries. They endure rape and sexual abuse at every stage of the refugee journey. Refugee women and girls have little access to protection or justice systems, and perpetrators operate with impunity. In many places there are no reproductive health services. They have even less access to education and employment than most women in host communities, and, most

