

## Dual Discrimination of Syrian Refugee Women in the Labour Markets In Europe and Turkey: Identifying the Challenges

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### Abstract

This paper argues that, refugee women encounter dual discrimination based on both gender and ethnicity, in several aspects of their harmonisation processes, especially in the labour markets in their countries of destination. With this stand point, this paper concentrates on the Syrian refugee crisis which has recently affected both Europe and Turkey; and aims to understand the particular situation of Syrian refugee women, in the corresponding labour markets, in a comparative manner. To do so, this paper first sets to identify the challenges to assessing refugee women's situation, by addressing the gaps in research and policy making; and consequently, attempts to shed light on the gender-specific challenges, stemming from the so-called dual discrimination that Syrian refugee women face in terms of their access to labour market in their respective countries of destination.

### Keywords

Syrian refugee-women • Dual-discrimination • Labour-market access • Gender-specific challenges

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## Türkiye Ve Avrupa İş Piyasalarında Suriyeli Mülteci Kadınlar: Çifte Ayrımcılık Bağlamında Meydan Okumaları Tanımlamak

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### Öz

Bu çalışma, mülteci kadınların, iş piyasaları başta olmak üzere, uyum süreçlerinin çeşitli aşamalarında, cinsiyet ve etnisite temelli çifte ayrımcılıkla karşılaştıkları argümanı ile, yakın zamanda Türkiye ve Avrupa'yı etkileyen Suriye Mülteci krizine odaklanmakta, ve karşılaştırmalı olarak, ilgili iş piyasalarında Suriyeli mülteci kadınının durumunu anlamaya ve incelemeye çalışmaktadır. Bu amaçla, öncelikle, mülteci çalışmalarında ve politika üretiminde, 'kadın' temasına dair meydan okumaları tanım tanımlamakta, daha sonra Suriyeli mülteci kadınların, buldukları ülkelerin iş piyasalarına erişiminde karşılaştıkları, söz konusu çifte ayrımcılıktan kaynaklanan cinsiyet-temelli meydan okumalara ışık tutmayı hedeflemektedir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Suriyeli mülteci-kadın • Çifte-ayrımcılık • İş-piyasalarına erişim • Cinsiyet-temelli meydan okumalar

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## **Dual Discrimination of Syrian Refugee Women in the Labour Markets In Europe and Turkey: Identifying the Challenges**

Refugee women, due multiple identities they embody, encounter challenges that generally intersect, and therefore hinder their successful harmonisation in their countries of destination, particularly in the labour markets. As argued, Syrian refugee women in Turkey and Europe face “dual discrimination” in almost every aspect of their lives in exile, yet, in the labour market context, the disadvantages take a more grifted form, as a result of further attributes embedded to their situation. In this manner, besides that “dual discrimination” may be read as, intersecting challenges stemming from the embodiment of multiple identities associated with the situation of refugee women, it also indicates an even more acute situation caused by systematic challenges, discounting for the reality of refugee women, excluding gender-specific issues of migration and integration from the research and policy-making, and referring to the “invisibility” of refugee women in relevant areas, which in turn reinforce the so-called discrimination, further contributing to such exclusion and marginalisation of refugee women in countries of arrival.

It may be observed that, neither within the literature regarding migration and asylum, nor within the policies developed in response, is the particular situation of refugee women adequately realised, addressed or targeted. With this stand point, to investigate this matter further, this paper takes the Syrian refugee crisis, which has tremendously affected the dynamics in both Europe and Turkey, in its centre, and attempts to understand and assess critical issues regarding Syrian refugee women’s position in the respective labour markets in Europe and Turkey, in a comparative manner. To do so, this paper first sets to identify the challenges to assessing refugee women’s situation, which may be listed as lack of gender-specific perspective in refugee studies, lack of gender-disaggregated data and consequently lack of targeted policies regarding the issues of refugee women. Having reflected these systematic challenges, this paper aims to shed light on the “intersecting” and “overlapping” challenges that Syrian refugee women may encounter, on the basis of their sex/gender and nationality/ethnicity, in terms of their access to labour markets in Europe and Turkey, in a comparative manner, and finally hopes humbly to contribute to the literature regarding women’s empowerment, organising around the of issues gender inequalities in employment, which are further heightened due to immigration status.

While there are many further aspects to labour market integration of immigrants, which are well acknowledged in the founding principles of the United Nations and the European Union, this paper, focuses on the very first step of labour market integration, which is to “participate” in the labour markets of the host countries, by basically taking part in employment, either legally or illegally. In this regard, when investigating the challenges refugee women face in terms of their access to labour market in host societies, the activity rates of refugee women in comparison with their male counterparts as well as with women from the countries of origin are examined, in order to identify additional factors contributing to the low activity rates of refugee women, besides factors of gender and ethnicity. Further issues regarding the conditions of employment such as rights to decent work and principles of non-discrimination, are beyond the scopes of this paper, yet may be a concern for future research.

Given that the legal situation of Syrian women is not the same in Turkey and Europe, not to mention the differences among the EU Member States, the term “refugee” is adapted in this paper due to practical reasons. In order to enlarge my bibliography on the issue, documents regarding different situations of immigration, are benefited from. Therefore, unless particularly identified, or notified otherwise, terms such as “immigrant”, “humanitarian migrant”, “asylum-seeker” are used interchangeably throughout the paper, addressing the same particular situation.

In this respect, after displaying the main concepts vital to understanding and following the argument, this paper initially addresses the challenges for the researchers and policy-makers, regarding the assessment of refugee women’s particular situation that are overarching in literature, and subsequently, tries to shed light on the dual discrimination Syrian refugee women are exposed to, by identifying gender-specific barriers for refugee women in their access to labour markets in countries of destination, and finally after making an overall evaluation, attempts to give an insight into possible solutions, as well as recommendations for future research, with the main objective, which is to understand the particular situation of refugee women, suffering from multiple inequalities regarding work throughout their lives in exile.

## Context and Background

The crisis in Syria, which had led to displacement of millions of Syrians starting from 2011, 4.9 million of whom have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, with an additional 1.2 million who have applied for asylum in Europe (United Nations, 2017, S/PV.7888, p. 2). While, the way the number of refugees in the EU is smaller when compared to neighbouring countries, there is also uneven distribution between Member States (European Commission, 2017, p. 41). Turkey, on the other hand, with an estimated 3 million Syrian refugees, hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees among other neighbouring and European countries under *Temporary Protection* (UNDP, ILO and WFP, 2017, p. 83). Yet, regardless of this distribution, after responding to the emergency and maintaining the initial reception, with the acknowledgement of the permanency of high numbers of Syrian refugees, the attention has been turned to harmonisation of the population in their host-countries, both in Europe and Turkey.

In Turkey, predominantly Erdoğan and Ünver (2015); Hoffman and Samuk (2016); İçduygu and Millet (2016); and Kaya and Kırac (2016), emphasise the permeance of Syrian refugees in Turkey and encourage authorities to acknowledge and respond to this by initiating rather long-term solutions targeting their harmonisation, especially in the labour market. Similarly, in Europe, the concern is expressed by De Geus and Fargues (2016), who, besides reassuring the need to recognise the permanence of Syrian refugees, call for “[turning] what is too often considered a burden into an asset” by facilitating their integration into labour markets (p. 6).

The idea of compensating the challenges of the current crisis with possible opportunities it may bring, is further emphasised by ILO (2018), who argue that if “well-governed”, migration can be beneficial for both migrants and host-communities since it helps “balance labour supply and demand” and “develop and transfer skills” (p. 1), which is particularly important in the European context as the European Commission (2017) notes, “migration brings several opportunities to the hosting societies, notably on the demographic front and in terms of skills” (p. 41). The widely-shared consensus in the literature, which regards labour market integration as a principal step to harmonisation both in Europe and Turkey, is not surprising when considering *the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU*, which clearly

state that “employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants” (Council of the European Union, 20014, n.p). Furthermore, IOM (2002) add that, destination countries may find immigrant women a very valuable addition to their work force and society (p. 5). However, it has been noted by UNFPA (2004) that, although immigrant women take a considerable part in the migrant labour force and contribute to the economy in their host-countries, significant “qualitative differences” exist between the conditions female migration in comparison to male migration, yet they are overlooked from policy making (p. 50).

Another key concept frequently addressed in the literature regarding labour market integration, is the maintenance of “self-reliance” or “self-sufficiency” of refugees, which would ease the financial challenges encountered by host-countries, as well as enabling refugees themselves to sustain and determine their own lives (Desiderio, 2016; Papademetriou and Fratzke, 2016; Schmidt and Liebig, 2016). As UNDP et al. (2017) underline, employment is vital in “building self-reliance” and “fostering dignity” among refugees and host-communities (p. 17). Similarly, in *Turkey 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017-2018*, it is noted that, unless refugees are maintained with formal access to employment, neither can they “contribute to society” nor become “self-reliant” (UNHCR, 2017, p. 81).

On the other side of the coin, when the attention is converted to the refugee women, it is stressed in relevant literature that enhancing “self-reliance” of refugee and/or immigrant women, would contribute to their “autonomy”, “freedom” and “self-esteem” both at domestic and societal levels (Jacobsen, 2002, p. 96; Crépeau, 2014, p. 15). Furthermore, migration itself may be a tool leading to economic “empowerment” of women who migrate into a society where roles are distributed between men and women differently than of their countries-of-origin. Such “empowerment” of immigrant women, both in financial and social terms, may help them organise against gender-based-violence, even if not completely avoid (Omelaniuk, 2005, p. 10; Cengiz et al., 2015, p. 22). Consistently, it is further claimed that maintenance of economic and social rights regarding women’s empowerment, is critical for the enjoyment of other rights and access to other capabilities (Koenig et al., 2009, pp. 14-5; Cengiz et al., 2015, p. 22). However, it is also noted that,

while migration can bring fresh opportunities and contribute to women's empowerment, this may not always be the case since migration also bears exceptional risks for women, both in terms of sex/gender and ethnicity as discussed above (UNFPA, 2004, p. 50; GENDERNET, 2011, p. 27).

To address this particular situation of refugee women, terms such as “multiple” and/or “dual” discrimination is frequently used in the literature in an attempt to explain the “overlapping” and “intersectional” disadvantages refugee women encounter in their host communities, especially in terms of their integration into labour market, due to first their sex/gender and further their nationality/ethnicity (Lerner, Menahem and Hisrich, 2005, p. 194; Mallender Gutheil and Heetman, 2014, p. 43; Easton-Calabria, Tong and Topgul, 2018, p. 9). As a response, IOM (2002) encourages States to “recognise and respond” the “double burden” migrant women encounter, which according to them, stems from factors such as “discrimination, cultural restrictions and heightened exposure to risk” (p. 8). With this stand point, in order to shed light on the “dual discrimination” refugee women face in terms of their integration into labour markets in their respective host-countries, this paper, first sets out to explain the challenges in assessing the situation, then, within the scopes and due to the aforementioned limitations, rely on available data, on sometimes refugee, sometimes immigrant literature, which would be acceptable since disadvantages are said to be “intersecting” and “overlapping”.

Research indicates that even though there are a variety of difficulties for immigrant and/or refugee women, regarding their integration into the labour markets in their host communities, they are not fully acknowledged or targeted by policy making mechanisms. Therefore, before identifying the “overlapping” and/or “intersecting” barriers refugee women face in terms of their labour market integration in Europe and Turkey, it would be beneficial to identify the challenges both in the literature and policy making mechanisms for they initially do not have “gender-specific” point of view, they do not collect gender-disaggregated data and finally and consequently may not be able to develop gender-targeted policies.

## **Challenges in Assessing and Addressing Refugee Women's Particular Situation**

Before embarking on investigating the barriers that lead to “dual discrimination” of refugee women in the labour markets of their host countries, it would be beneficial to identify systematic challenges in assessing and addressing refugee women’s particular situation, which seemingly reinforce and deepen the so-called discrimination, or even more arguably, in certain aspect create it. To elaborate, initially, as Konle-Seidl and Bolits (2016) observe, although there are *Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration*, “specific and practical issues” regarding refugees’ integration, are neither identified nor targeted on the EU policy agenda hitherto (p. 12). Furthermore, Bach (2009) underlines that, many of the Member States fail to integrate a “gender perspective” into their policies on immigration and asylum, which is in contrast with the European ferment which require elimination of “inequalities between women and men in all its activities” (p. 16). Consequently, the “overlapping” disadvantages which stem from “multiple burdens and vulnerabilities” of refugee women, are either ignored or overlooked, in most destination countries (Omelaniuk, 2005, p. 10). Accordingly, when the relevant literature is examined, it can be observed that the overarching challenges in assessing and addressing refugee women’s particular situation can be listed as, lack of gender-specific point of view in handling the refugee situation, lack of gender-disaggregated data and consequently ‘gender-blind’ policy development.

### **Lack of Gender-Specific Point of View in the Asylum Context**

The first challenge to assessing and addressing the refugee women’s situation is the lack of gender-specific perspective in immigration and asylum context, both in research and policy development. To begin with, Callamard (2002), argues that the “ungendered” and/or “desexualised” understanding of the refugee experience, stems from the construction the term “refugee” as a “generic figure”, which in his reflection, rejects certain aspects relating one’s “identity” or “experience of persecution” (p. 138). Likewise, according to Sansonetti (2016), any approach wielded to investigate the situation of refugees in their host communities would be “incomplete”, unless they acknowledge and consider differences among immigrants and refugees, particularly in terms of “race, gender, and class” (p. 12).



However, it can be observed that there is a growing acknowledgement of the necessity to integrate a “gender-perspective” in policy development at international level, which would eventually - and hopefully - reveal itself through regional and national policy-making. For instance, IOM (2015) recognises that “a person’s sex, gender identity and sexual orientation shape every stage of the migration experience” including their needs and vulnerabilities, which underline the cruciality of recognising the interaction between gender and immigration, doing targeted research, and finally developing responses accordingly (p. 30).

One explanation for the lack of gender-specific -or male-dominated- perspective is that, according to existing studies and research, traditionally, women represent a minority in refugee flows, or in other words, refugees are more likely to be men than women (European Commission, 2017, p. 41). When the existing age and gender distribution of Syrian refugees in respective geographies are inspected, it is confirmed that “more men than women were seeking asylum” in Europe, according to Eurostat (2018) figures (n.p.). Yet, OECD (2016) note that, the share of women is increasing because of the recent waves in need of international protection and it is challenging the tendency that associates the refugee situation with men only (p. 5). Nonetheless in Turkey, rather an even distribution of Syrian refugees in terms of gender can be observed. As 3RP report of 2017-2018 regarding Turkey cite, as of September 2016, 46.78 per cent of registered Syrians women and girls according to *the Directorate General for Migration Management* (UNHCR, 2017, p. 4). Moreover, approximately half of Syrian refugee women in Turkey –with 42 per cent camp-based and 44 per cent urban- are between 19-54 years old, which indicates the “working age” group (AFAD, 2014, p. 23). Whereas in Europe, the age distribution disaggregated by gender displays dissimilarity. To elaborate, among the group of 18-34-year-old, almost 75 per cent of asylum-applicants were male in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018, n.p.). However, as Sansonetti (2016) stresses, although women do not compose the majority of the refugee population in their host communities, they may find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation due to their gender, against which tangible measures need to be taken (p. 7).

Alternative explanations concerning the identification of the refugee situation with men rather than women would be regarding is the nature of the immigrant experience, rather than the numbers. To begin with, UNFPA and IOM (2013)

explain the “inadequate” understanding of the gender dimensions of migration, which leads to discriminatory policy impacts, with its being a “recent phenomenon” (p. 195). Likewise, Bach (2009) highlights that, especially at the EU level, gender-responsive understanding of migration has long been missing both in mainstream research and immigration policies which traditionally focus on the “male migrant worker”, reinforcing a model of “inactive migrant women” who only assist their husbands and children (p. 14). As an example, European Communities (2000), identifies “main reasons for leaving” for male migrants as economic and for female migrants as family reasons (p. 74), which is partly attributed to the culture in the countries of origin, where men are comparably active in public spheres (Sansonettil, 2016, p. 12).

However, this paradigm is now being challenged by the recent inflows of humanitarian migrants, instead of migrant-workers in the region, and changing gender-roles and compositions in post-conflict situations contribute to it, as Jacobsen (2002) observes, “crisis situations can lead to the re-making of roles and opportunities for affected communities” (p. 96). UNDP et al. (2017) report that, as a consequence of the crisis, one-fourth of urban Syrian refugee households in Turkey are now headed by women (p. 23). In correspondence, UNPFA (2016) notes that, due to “widespread absence of men” refugee women, burdened new responsibilities and heavier workloads in order to sustain for their families (p. 11). Such “drastic changes” in gender roles and relations as IOM (2015) names it, increases urgency of encouraging women’s integration into the labour markets in countries of destination (p. 32).

### **Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data in the Context of Employment**

One of the difficulties in assessing discrimination against refugee women in the context of employment, is the overall lack of data or research concerning the issue. As mentioned above, due to the perception of migrant women as “inactive” companions, research on female migrants rather concerned “more traditional issues such as family planning” (Mallender et al., 2014, p. 43). Confirming, it is recorded both at national and international levels that, the gaps in sex-disaggregated data and statistics on migration exist largely in “the gender-based socioeconomic profiles; the purpose of migration, [and] the gender-based occupational patterns among migrants” (UNFPA et al., 2013, p. 195). Similarly, 3RP report of 2017-2018 underlines that, since

gender-disaggregated data is limited in Turkey, the implementation “gender-mainstreaming” across the sectors is a challenge (p. 4).

This situation seemingly stems from the absence of gender-specific understanding of the refugee situation explained above. As Sansonetti (2016) notes, once women are granted the refugee status, they tend to be considered as part of the general group composed of immigrant women, which causes the lack of data and consequently deters the opportunity to address the specific needs of refugee women (p. 13). As a response, it is largely addressed that, in order to develop “tailored-action” for the labour market integration of refugee women, first there is a strong need for “gender-disaggregated” data and research to assess the status of refugee women. In this manner, the United Nations (2016), encourage Member States “to invest in data collection, including sex-and-age-disaggregated data, as well as information on the vulnerability of migrants and the economic impact of migration” which should later be analysed in order to make the most of migration and contribute to the active inclusion of migrants (p. 22). Similarly, Martin et al. (2016) highlight that, besides demographic and occupational profiles, the data should reflect on the qualifications and skills of refugees, as well, to be able to assess the data in accordance with labour demand in the host countries (p. 10). Finally, ILO (2018) stresses that, “updated, reliable and comparable labour migration data disaggregated by age and sex” is crucial in developing evidence-based policies at national, regional and global levels (p. 5).

It has been noted that, immigration has historically been interpreted through the framework of male experience, disregarding for immigrant women’s particular situation. However, the thin-line should be realised that, while considering refugee women’s situation, there is the risk of over-representing women as “passive victims without any strategies or resources” (Herwig, 2017, p. 184). As articulated by a refugee themselves; “when we are only perceived as vulnerable beneficiaries of assistance, the opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect us is taken away from us”, which brings forward the importance of refugee women’s representation and participation in decision-making mechanisms, especially regarding employment (UNHCR, 2018, n.p.).

In this manner, Cengiz et al. (2015) stress that, “women’s economic independence is most immediately linked to engagement with the political

and social system” (p. 22). Correspondingly, Diaz and Tordjman (2012), draw attention on the “under-representation of women” and encourage authorities to identify “women’s distinct concerns” by consulting with women and enabling them to “represent their interests” (p. 22). The ILO (2013) suggests that, measures to enhance the situation of women workers need to be taken in consultation with relevant workers and employers’ organisations (p. 7). However, it is reported that in Turkey, women’s organisations “weren’t invited or consulted” in decision-making processes, which according to Easton-Calabria et al. (2018), makes “issues of vital concern to the most marginalised refugees being overlooked” (p. 21). Corresponding to the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” of The United Nations (2015), *Global Compact on Refugees* (2018) encourages States to promote “meaningful participation and leadership of women” and strengthen “the agency of women” both among refugees and host communities (p. 14). Therefore, it can be concluded that gender-disaggregated data should also include the voices of the refugee women themselves, to be able to maintain a more effective and consistent policy-development in the issues of integration.

### **“Gender-blind” Policy Development in the Issues of Immigration and Integration**

The last but not the least, as a consequence of the aforementioned challenges, there is lack of tailored policies, which specifically target the “double-discrimination” of refugee women face in terms of their integration into labour market in their countries of destination. The term “gender-blind”, which I have chosen to employ is initially suggested by Omelaniuk (2005). Following, UNFPA et al. (2013) observes that, still “the current discourse on migration and development is largely gender-blind and lack an inclusive, sustainable, rights-based development orientation” (pp. 195-6). Equally, Cengiz et al. (2015) perceive that, the EU legal framework on asylum and immigration does not consider issues of gender (in)equality, which once again reinforces the “stereotype” of refugee as “young adult male” (pp. 41-2). As a response, ILO (2018) emphasise that, it is crucial to implement policies which are “gender-sensitive” and “evidence-based”, and finally that are constructed in accordance with the international labour standards which encourage ‘decent work’ opportunities where ideally, all sorts of discrimination are eliminated, and hopefully equality is sustained (p. 3).

## **Challenges Refugee Women Face in Terms of Their Access to Labour Market**

The UN (2015) acknowledge that, migrants experience “racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, which is even more acute for migrant women since they further encounter risks of exploitation and abuse both during and after migration (p. 8). Although, as OHCHR (2015) underlines, “under international human rights law, all women, including migrant women, have a right to be free from sex- and gender-based discrimination”, migrant women face many of the same human rights violations as migrant men, but also face additional risks because of their sex, including physical violence, and sexual harassment and abuse (p. 15).

Similarly, OHCHR (2015), who record that, “migration is not a gender-neutral phenomenon”, focus more on the experiences of immigrant women in their host countries and identify the areas women differ from men as “the sectors into which they migrate, the forms of abuse they suffer and the consequences thereof” (p. 15). The idea that, there are considerable differences in the experience and consequences of migration between women and men, has been identified in several studies, in the literature. While Freedman (2009) and Cengiz et al. (2015), attempt to explain these so-called differences with “gendered inequalities” and “gender roles” respectively, Sansonetti (2016), draws attention on the particular situation of refugee and/or asylum-seeking women than of other immigrant women, and emphasise further that their experiences are also dissimilar (p. 51; p. 41; p. 13).

Even before the current crisis, the report by IZA and ESRI (2011) observe that, in the EU, immigrants confront “institutional, social and cultural elements of discrimination” in their attempt to participate in the labour market of host societies, which, in their view, subvert “equal opportunities” for people with an ethnic background (pp. 8-9). Further, having already acknowledged that migration may be more disadvantageous for women especially in the asylum context, to be able to comprehend particular ways which refugee women are affected, OHCHR (2015) suggest that, female migration needs to be investigated within the outlook of “gender inequality” and “traditional female roles”<sup>1</sup> (p. 15).

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 26 (2008) on women migrant workers, para. 5

Evolving from the two standpoints displayed above, which represent the two of the identities refugee women embody, this section aims to investigate the intersecting barriers refugee women face in terms of their participation in the labour market countries of destination. It would be beneficial to note that, the “intersecting” and “overlapping” disadvantages of refugee women, stemming from multiple-identities they embody, get even more precarious, as new roles and attributes are added to the challenges stemming from their gender and ethnicity. To elaborate, more identities the women acquire, such as being a mother, being a single mother, being a wife, having a job, being educated, the more precarious the situation gets. Since equally, the more precarious the situation gets, the more challenging identifying the barriers would be. Keeping these challenges in mind, this section tries to base the argument on the “dual-discrimination” of Syrian Refugee women in the labour markets in countries of destination, on the “intersectionality” of sex/gender and nationality/ethnicity, and plan to identify further attributes, as they come through in the literature.

### **Activity Rates of Refugee Women in the Respective Labour Markets**

It has been noted in Section 2, where challenges regarding the assessment of the particular situation of refugee women are identified, that the data regarding refugees, should include the voices of the subjects themselves. In this manner, it would be beneficial to have a quick look at the findings of a poll conducted in Turkey by Easton-Calabria et al. (2018), which indicate that, refugees’ top priorities were legal employment and economic wellbeing (p. 13). Particularly for refugee women, “gender-based violence” is listed as the top priority, followed by “xenophobia and discrimination” and finally “access to employment” (Ibid., p. 7). This prioritisation by refugees themselves, serves as a key to handling the subject thereof. Correspondingly, it is widely recognised in the current literature that, refugee women tend to participate less in the labour market than of refugee men, due to a variety of reasons which are partially attributed to discrimination by employers on grounds of migrant status or gender, as well as maternal duties or cultural variables (GENDERNET, 2011; Mallender et al, 2014; UNHCR, 2014).

When relevant OECD (2016) indicators are consulted, it can be observed that, even though the employment rate disaggregated by gender may vary

across Member States, the gap between refugee women and their male peers persists. However, it is striking that, the employment rates of refugee women in the host countries is far below than other non-EU born immigrant women (pp. 19-20). To elaborate, “the activity rate” which indicates the level of participation in the labour market, is 57 per cent for refugee women, who rank at the bottom of the equation, when compared to 61 per cent for other non-EU born migrant women; 66 per cent for native born women; and finally, 77 per cent for refugee men in ascending order (Ibid., p. 20).

Comparably in Turkey, the substantial gap between the employment rate of refugee women and men can be observed in AFAD (2014), which notes that 87 per cent of Syrian refugee women were not in employment, whereas the ratio was 18 per cent among Syrian men (p. 30). Confirming, as a more recent study, *3RP 2017-2018* report that, the unemployment rate was 97 per cent for non-camp Syrian refugee women in Turkey, the time the research is conducted (UNHCR 2017, p. 8). When, on the other hand, the employment rates of Syrian refugees are to be compared with the local community, it would be seen that according to the *Household Labour Force Survey* results of Turkstat (2016), the employment rate of men was 65 per cent for men, almost doubling the rate of Turkish women, which was recorded to be 28 per cent in 2016. This rate indicates that, even though the gap between the labour market activity rate of refugee men and women seem more distressing in Turkey, a parallelism between the employment rates of their native-counterparts may be observed. However, the comparison between the employment figures from Europe and Turkey displays that, ‘gender inequality’ in terms of employment is still an issue for women in Turkey, regardless of the immigration status as in the case of Syrian refugee women.

### **Additional Factors Contributing to the Low Activity Rates of Refugee Women**

When identifying the challenges to facilitating refugee women’s integration into employment, it is frequently uttered in the relevant literature that, this challenge primarily stems from relatively low education levels of refugee women in comparison to men (IOM, 2002, p. 4; OECD, 2016, p. 19). As Thyssen (2016) remarks, almost 50 per cent of refugee women in Europe, have a low level of education, compared to 40 per cent of refugee men and 37 per cent of the non-EU born (p. 124). Likewise, in Turkey, the overall educational level

of Syrian refugee women is recorded to be considerably low in comparison to refugee men. To explicate, the total percentage of “illiterate, literate, and primary school graduates” of refugee women correspond to 64 per cent. When higher levels of education such as middle school, high school and university are considered altogether, they constitute the remaining 36 per cent, whereas the rate is 45 percent among refugee men (AFAD, 2014, pp. 27-8).

When on the other hand, the potential value educational attainments would add to labour market participation of refugee women is investigated, it is observed that, in Europe “highly-educated refugee women” have an employment rate of almost 70 per cent, which is even slightly higher than that of both similarly educated refugee men and other non-EU born immigrant women (Thyssen 2016, p. 124). Likewise, in Turkey, it can be discerned that women with higher levels of education, correspondingly have a higher rate of labour market participation when compared to their peers. To elucidate, while the employment rate is 15 per cent for illiterate women, the ratio increases gradually, reaching 71 per cent for females, who have higher education (Turkstat. 2016, n.p.).

However, it should be noted that being employed does not necessarily mean that women are treated equally with men, or immigrants with nationals, in the corresponding labour markets. Gendered and ethnically imbedded inequalities persist, especially in terms of wage and security, contributing to the “double-discrimination” refugee women encounter. Similarly, Erdoğan and Ünver (2015), who assert that the basic supposition that higher levels of education would result in better employment outcomes for refugees, has not been confirmed in the Turkish experience yet, further argue that the level of education would not make any difference in the employment outcomes of Syrian refugees that unless there is regulation on work permits, to which I would add formal recognition of previously acquired education and skills (p. 49).

Having asserted the correlation between educational attainments and labour market outcomes, the idea of “investing in refugees” and advancing their “human capital” in accordance with the needs of the corresponding labour markets requires attention, as one of the issues frequently suggested in relevant literature (Konle-Seidl et al., 2016, p. 11; Schmidt et al., 2016, p. 56; Thyssen, 2016, p. 139). We have discussed in previous sections that



migration may result in women's empowerment. In this manner, trainings aiming to develop linguistic and/or vocational skills of refugee women, who, as Freedman (2009) claim, may have experienced "gendered inequalities" in terms of access to education in their countries of origin, may eventually result in better labour market outcomes (p. 51).

However, still in the countries of destination, due to additional maternal duties they shoulder, refugee women may encounter gender-specific barriers in attending relevant training, which in turn may hinder their chances of improving their position in the labour market (Omelandiuk 2005, p. 10). Similarly, within the Turkish experience, Kaya et al. (2016) observe that, "women tend to feel more exposed to discrimination, [especially] while carrying out household chores and caring for family members" (p. 19). In this respect, Sansonetti (2016) criticises previously mentioned "gender-neutral" labour market policies, for not taking into consideration that refugee women encounter further predicaments than their male counterparts, as a result of their responsibilities for the family care (p. 48). Finally, Mallender et al. (2014), view the absence of work-life balance arrangements provided to women, as a "structural" and "indirect barrier to the hiring process" which again takes us to the systematic challenges discussed in Section 3 of this paper (p. 45).

Another factor addressed in the literature explaining the lower labour activity rates of refugee women compared to their male counterparts, as well as other women groups in the host communities, appears to be concentrated around cultural issues especially in the European context. For instance, Konle-Seidl et al. (2016), presume that low labour market activity of refugee women in countries of destination, might be partially attributable to "cultural patterns" given that, the labour market participation rates of women are also considerably lower than of men, in their countries of origin (p. 24). The employment figures of Syrian men and women in 2010, right before the crisis, which indicates that the activity rate of Syrian men was 72 per cent, whereas the rate was 13 per cent for women, ostensibly confirm the aforementioned argument (Thyssen, 2016, p. 124).

Even though, contributing to the literature which brings the cultural issues of migration forth while explaining lower rates of labour market participation of refugee women, as Sansonetti (2016), who claims that, "in some cultures

women are not allowed to work”, according to Freedman (2009), the low-activity rate may basically be related with the purposes of migration, that women who migrated for family reunification may not necessarily be looking for employment (p. 35; p. 51). However, this assumption does not seem to apply to the situation of humanitarian migrant women in Turkey. As noted by AFAD (2014), 77 per cent of camp-based 64 per cent of non-camp Syrian refugee women “have looked for work in Turkey” (p. 65), which, while does not refute the possible cultural aspects of the situation, may shed light on the changing gender roles and distribution, as a result of the migration experience, which has been explained earlier in the paper.

Nevertheless, whatever the case might be, Freedman (2009) perceives that, there are emerging criticisms regarding “the use of ‘cultural norms’ or ‘cultural differences’ to explain women’s low labour market integration”, which encourage considering “structural inequalities”, that reinforce and re-create, the so-called disadvantages of refugee women in accessing the labour market, instead (p. 51).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research**

To conclude, it has been argued throughout the paper that, there are several challenges to addressing and assessing the particular situation of refugee women in the immigration and asylum context, which are pivotal to consider prior to identifying the “intersecting” and “overlapping” disadvantages refugee women encounter in countries of destination, since in a way, these contribute so called “double-discrimination” particularly in terms of labour market integration. It has been noted that, the overarching challenges stem from lack of gender-specific understanding in the issues of migration and asylum that lead to deficiency of gender-disaggregated data, which all together result in failure to develop targeted and well-organised policies regarding women’s integration in labour markets. As *Global Compact on Refugees* (2018), emphasises once more, women and girls may experience particular “gender-related barriers” in their host communities, and therefore policies targeting refugees and immigrants’ well-being cannot be “gender-neutral” (p. 10).

Considering the fact that, such systematic challenges, would in turn contribute to the existing challenges the refugee women face, they need to be

eliminated first, with active inclusion policies. To enhance and sustain gender-equality in both European and Turkish labour markets, the reality of Syrian refugee women should not be dismissed from the research, policy-making, and measures taken thereof. In this manner, it is essential to adapt a gender-specific point of view and acknowledge the particular situation of Syrian refugee women, where now, the number is considerably larger to ignore, unlike the traditional trends; and finally collect gender-disaggregated data which would be used in policy development. The integration plans targeting labour market participation of refugee women, should take the “self-reliance” debate into account, which, as well as empowering women, would eventually ease the pressure of the cost of hosting immigrants, for host-countries.

When the activity rates of refugee women in the respective labour markets are investigated, it could be seen that, the unemployment rates are higher for women than for men, in both groups of citizens, third-country nationals, including refugees, which indicates that, cumulative factors adding to gender inequalities, leave refugee women in a more disadvantageous position, in comparison to their male counterparts, as well as to women, who are citizens of countries of destination in question. Thus, it can be concluded that, gender counts as a relevant factor for labour market inclusion, revisiting that, patterns of discrimination against women in the labour market persist (Platonova and Urso, 2012, p. 18; Urso and Schuster, 2013, p. 26).

As discussed throughout this paper, refugee women encounter further disadvantages while entering the labour market and display lower labour market outcomes, initially because of lower levels of educational attainment acquired in their countries of origin, which arguably attributed to culturally embedded gender inequalities, which may continue to their disadvantage in the countries of destination. Furthermore, due to additional roles attained such as child-care, refugee women may not always attend relevant trainings, which would contribute to their labour market participation. As observed in previous section, there seems to be a greater chance of escaping unemployment for refugee women if educated, therefore further effort may be placed in investing in refugees and advancing their human capitals, in accordance with the needs of the respective labour markets in the host countries, as well as considering measures to ease refugee women’s additional responsibilities such as child-

care among other household duties (OECD, 2017, p. 59). Finally, measures targeting gender-specific barriers refugee women face in terms of their integration in the labour markets, need to be expressed by the host-countries, in their respective budget plans (Crépeau, 2014, p. 16; Cengiz, et al., 2015, p. 8; Easton-Calabria, et al., 2018, p. 14).

The last but not the least, before concluding, it would be useful to note that further qualitative research might be conducted with the refugee women resident in Turkey and/or Europe, who are either legally or illegally employed in their countries of destination, initially to see if their current occupations is in line with their attainments, talents, and most importantly with their expectations and aspirations; and identify further, what additional challenges refugee women face, when are employed in the labour markets of their host-societies. Similarly, as another alternative, measures already taken or being discussed as a response to the aforementioned challenges refugee women encounter in terms of integration into labour markets in their respective countries of destination, can be compared and contrasted at either national, international, supra-national or European levels.

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