



Prioritising protection and inclusion of conflict-affected displaced women and girls in Muslim-majority contexts

Executive Summary

- The number of conflict- and climate-induced displaced people has reached unprecedented levels, with the majority generated by and hosted in Muslim-majority countries.
- The scale of feminised displacement emergencies (where the majority of those displaced are women and children) and the continuum of violence have not been matched by appropriate resources and political will to protect displaced women's rights.
- To manage the escalating forced migration flows, it is necessary to shift from the Eurocentric refugee management model to understanding and further involving Global South actors – such as the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation \(OIC\)](#) – in the global refugee governance system.
- The OIC is the world's second-largest intergovernmental body but despite its multiple policy commitments to and organisational initiatives for displaced populations lacks a refugee support mechanism and integrated framework of response to displacement.
- Cross-cultural and faith-sensitive models of cooperation in the international system and humanitarian policy are needed in order to advance innovative solutions for women in displacement, thereby contributing to SDG 5 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' and SDG 16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'.

Policy Recommendations

Call for concerted efforts and innovative solutions

Responding to the scale of harms that displaced women and their families experience requires continued advocacy and diplomatic efforts to mobilise resources and political will to protect their dignity.

Key recommendations include the need for the following actors to:

International community

- Strengthen cross-cultural dialogue and understanding between Global North and Global South actors to develop innovative solutions to global displacement emergencies and to advance contributions to SDG 5 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' and SDG 16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'.

OIC General Secretariat

- Develop an integrated framework to complement existing refugee support mechanisms and mainstream responsibility for displaced populations

through continued advocacy, policy dialogue, capacity building, and advancement of Islamic social finance and Islamic law.

- Form the steering committee to prepare and submit reports on the implementation of the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) to safeguard and advance the rights of displaced women.
- Mobilise collaborations to advance implementation of the OIC Resolutions No. 4/7-W and No. 11/8-W on 'Joint Action to Support and Empower Refugee and Displaced Women'.

OIC Member States

- Consider strengthening policy frameworks to extend solidarity with conflict-affected women and girls and offer them support cross-sectors regardless of their legal status, drawing on moral and practical imperatives.

UNHCR and OIC

- Revisit the OIC–UNHCR Ashgabat Declaration to recognise and address the disproportionate vulnerability and increased risks among displaced women and girls.
- Develop a robust inter-agency implementation strategy of the Ashgabat Declaration to strengthen the inclusion and protection of displaced women.

Islamic Development Bank

- Integrate sensitivity to the diverse displaced women's needs into the Fragility Financing Facility and Global Islamic Fund for Refugees (GIFR, in collaboration with UNHCR) addressing their specific needs and concerns.
- Mobilise resources at the 'Tadamon platform' to support refugees by sensitising donor community and developing capacity of funded NGOs to support refugee women.
- Establish new initiatives and funding mechanisms tailored to provide specialized support for displaced women and girls survivors of violence. Support referrals to specialised agencies.

Other governments

- Advance international cooperation to protect women's rights in Muslim-majority displacement settings. Foster diplomatic efforts to prioritise inclusion of displaced women in foreign policy.

INGOs

- Develop advocacy strategies targeting Global South actors to strengthen inclusive responses to women in displacement.
- Develop faith literacy and cross-cultural dialogues on forced displacement to strengthen value-based refugee protection and contribute to inclusive humanitarian policy-making.

About the Research

Research project on '*Protection of forcibly displaced women in the Muslim world*' aimed to develop an evidence base, conceptual resources, and recommendations to put the inclusion and protection of forcibly displaced women high on the humanitarian agenda.

Methods

Methods included interdisciplinary literature reviews on gender, religion, forced displacement, and the OIC, alongside discourse analysis of the OIC humanitarian resolutions and cultural and social resolutions (1979–2022) from the Council of Foreign Ministers annual sessions and OIC Ministerial Conferences on Women (2006–2021). Key terms included: women in humanitarian emergencies and displacement; protection; and violence against women.

Background

- **Forced displacement is a key challenge affecting the Muslim world** characterised by fragility, armed conflict, and the long-term impacts of colonialism and subsequent unstable socio-economic conditions. Muslim-majority countries host the highest numbers of refugees worldwide in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, but many lack migration laws. Only 36 of 57 OIC Member States are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- **Humanitarian responses are constantly underfunded and challenged by geopolitical dynamics.** Top donors to refugee emergencies are predominantly Western countries. South-South aid for displacement is not accounted for systematically.
- **In global forced displacement emergencies, women and girls often bear a disproportionate burden of violence and discrimination.**
- **Empowering women and girls impacted by crisis and ending violence against women in conflict and forced displacement, are a priority for a few countries' foreign policies.**
- Recent conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine, and the international response to these, have highlighted yet again **differential support measures, with some displaced populations seemingly perceived as more deserving of support than others.**
- **Perceptions of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Global North negatively influence asylum policies,** affecting implementation of international humanitarian law, funding, aid and refugee support allocation.
- In the Global South there are **long-term concerns about equitable sharing of responsibility for supporting people affected by armed conflict and disasters.**
- **Issues related to displaced women are often deprioritised,** with stability and regional security taking precedence. Diverse state identities and values and competing needs and interests pose barriers to responding to displacement crises, threatening global peace and security.

“A Duty, Not an Option”

- Muslim faith traditions of refugee and women's protection offer important values and resources for mobilising material support for displaced women but are rarely leveraged to uphold their rights to protection from violence and exclusion.
- There is a compelling pragmatic and value-based case for the OIC to draw on faith traditions and prioritise the inclusion and protection of displaced women and girls on the humanitarian agenda.
- The OIC has historically referred to safeguarding women's rights across its Charter, Resolutions and Action Plans based on normative faith values. However, there's a noticeable absence of systematic and coherent focus on the most vulnerable women, particularly those in conflict and displacement situations. Little is known about the implementation of the OIC's commitments to displaced women. Its response remains inconsistent and reliant on the UN.
- Specifically two resolutions (4/7-W and 11/8-W) adopted by the OIC Ministerial Conferences on Women (2018 and 2021) and the OIC Plan of Action for Advancement of Women (OPAAW) require mobilisation of resources, collaborations and accountability to deliver life-saving assistance.
- Islamic social finance and Islamic law remain under-utilised and require further development to respond to specific needs of different groups of displaced people across different sectors.
- Islamic Development Bank and UNHCR implement a new Global Islamic Fund for Refugees which requires adequate protection and inclusion standards for implementation.
- Better coordination between and within Muslim and mainstream international humanitarian agencies is needed to maximise impact and meet the growing humanitarian needs of women and girls in global displacement.

About the Author

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