

## “Leading Resilience” Webinar Series



### “Leading Resilience” Arabic Speaking Webinar

**22 July 2020**

Welcoming the panelists and participants, the executive director of New Women Connector, Ms. Anila Noor is attending as an observer.

Razan Ismail, the session moderator, presented New Women Connectors as an initiative lead by refugee and migrant women who wanted to bring a perspective shift, from integration to inclusion and from support to opportunities, for the refugee and migrant individuals and communities.

She said NWC responded to the absence of migrant's voices in policy and decision-making process. They highlight perceptual mistakes and understanding gaps due to not taking in account-specific socio-cultural backgrounds, skills, needs, desires and priorities of refugees and migrants especially women.

The NWC gives an open platform to such people and their success stories and tries to connect them with relevant forums at national and international levels.

### Gender Based Violence in the Time of the Pandemic

Raghida Ghamloush

**Key Point: Working with government is most important because they facilitate access to communities that need the help.**

Raghida Ghamloush, Senior Program Manager in ABAAD organization.

She is a Medical-Social Worker acting as a GBV Senior Program manager responsible for designing, planning and implementing all activities and ensuring proper implementation throughout the life time of a project, mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment into projects.

She talked about the following points:

- Forms of abuse
- Increase in numbers of GBV survivors
- ABAAD response to GBV during the Covid-19 pandemic

ABAAD organization has pioneer services in raising awareness for women and men and has infrastructures in place to help women and girls in situations that include violence.

Forms of violence reported during Covid 19:

- Marital Rape
- Threatening
- Verbal abuse
- Kicking out of the house in times of confinement

ABAAD has a secure hotline to receive complaints and reports of domestic abuse for all women in Lebanese soil without discrimination.

Covid-19 crisis came along with many other crises Lebanon is suffering from:

Increased numbers of refugees, unemployment, cashflow problems, and many more humanitarian and economical issues. There has been an increase in the number of domestic violence incidents. To a point where security forces could not but announce the problem, and cooperate with organizations such as ABAAD to face the increasing numbers.

In 1 month more than 1100 calls on the hotline.

**They reported an increase in domestic violence reported 40% for women and 10% for men during the pandemic.**

They had to work remotely while keeping the privacy and access as not all women have their own space, especially Syrian refugees in refugee camps. They faced the challenge, and they created tools for their social workers to practice moral and psychological response communicating with refugee women under domestic violence.

They were able to create temporary safe centers, renting apartments as a quarantine measure before moving the victims to the centers. They were able to accommodate the COVID but they realized that working with government is key to providing the service to communities much in need.

They reevaluated their course and processes while able to respond to large numbers of women.

They provided Whatsapp groups and phone support. They also had to provide free food and hygiene kits for women and children as per UN standards.

## **Mental and Psychological Health in the time of Pandemic**

**Dr. Aseel Masoud**

**Key Point: Anxiety and stress affect our immune system directly and we need to care for our mental health just as well as our physical health in a time of crisis such as covid-19**

Dr. Aseel Masoud is a Medical doctor, and a graduate of the Conservatori Superior de Música del Liceu, with a degree of honors on her Master in Musictherapy.

Dr. Aseel presented how anxiety can affect the immune system.

During Covid-19, we need to be responsible for our health and that of others, which makes the crisis even more complicated and more stress-inducing.

Stress increases the levels of Cortisol which decreases the levels of prostaglandins, which in turn, are directly related to the immune system. This means Stress adversely affects the immune system

Musictherapy: is a young science, aims to improve the quality of life, increase emotional adjustment and simply improve the mood. However, Dr. Aseel used her background and her newfound knowledge to use Musictherapy to create Social bonds against social distancing.

Aseel is a part of a musical band called Athrodeel, which in ancient Assyrian means: MY HOME. They had to cancel plenty of their activities due to the virus. They also live in a touristic neighbourhood in Barcelona, which had turned into a ghost-town.

She and her band members created an initiative called: #our\_home\_theatre, whereby she goes to the window and sings a compilation of songs for 10 minutes. She made sure to include the neighbours in song selection and to make them feel like a part of the initiative, a part of the community. The effects of this initiative were incredibly visible and evident upon further research. She was able to give us examples of improved cases of depression and elevated moods which affected people's immune systems directly.

Aseel said: "Music was a trigger to connect with people and counteract the effects of social distancing"

She advised that we need to care for our mental health during difficult times such as Covid-19 times just as well as our physical health

## **Increasing Importance of Technology During and Post Pandemic**

**Dima Mahjoub**

**Key Point: Access to internet in the time of Covid-19 has proved to be a basic human right and needs to be treated as such.**

Dima is a human rights activist dealing with refugees and migrants. Dima is also active in several NGOs concerned with human rights for refugees and migrant women.

Dima shared with us the difficulties refugee and migrant women face in the new reality. Homeschooling was the most difficult side effect of Covid-19 crisis.

Women had to take on the load of teaching their children at home while doing other chores and not being familiar with technologies and methodologies used in schools.

A second side effect was remote working using internet tools that they had no previous experience with. Many migrant and refugee women have little to no access to the internet and certain technologies. This puts them at a disadvantage during and post Covid-19 era.

In addition to having to deal with a completely new language and a new system. This created great barriers to women to be productive and be able to handle all the pressures caused by the pandemic.

Dima's recommendations included advocating for internet and technology access to be a basic human right and for training in such tools would be included in the integration training that refugees and migrants receive upon arrival to countries such as Germany and Sweden.

## **Social, Financial and Domestic Stress during the Pandemic**

**Lubna Muhammad**

**Key Point: This crisis has affected the sense of belonging and integration for migrant and refugee women.**

Lubna is a psychologist displaced persons and refugees. She worked in several local, national and international organizations projects - in Syria, Lebanon and now in Sweden.

Lubna stressed on the stigma surrounding psychological and mental health issues in the refugee and migrant communities, especially for women.

Covid-19 crisis caused the elimination of the physical connection, and several activities that had a massive impact on integration abilities for refugee and migrant women.

It had different levels of impact based on gender, age group, demographic and integration level.

So, Covid 19 is a problem stacking up on top of other problems involving integration, adaptation and psychological stability.

Belonging and looking for identity: customs, culture, community, family, etc When someone is disconnected from the community, it means they have lost a massive part of their identity. This is the normal state of migrant and refugee population.

The social disconnect impacted people who are looking for their identity, and it makes migrants and refugees more vulnerable to the adverse effects of such crisis, such as mental and psychological stress.

Another side effect of such crisis is lack of information. This is especially difficult for people who are not fully familiar with the native language and have no access to information in their own language.

Misinformation makes us stressed and feel a lack of belonging to the community in which we live. This also harms our mental health and stability.

We need to reinvent ourselves in the new countries and in the new social and economical paradigm.

Suggested Solutions:

- Language learning
- New hobbies and skills
- Meditation and mindfulness
- Communication
- Informing ourselves with procedures
- Taking initiatives

## Closing Remarks and Commentary

Shaza Al Rihawi

**Key Point: There is a massive under representation of refugee and migrant women in the decision-making process.**

On a human level, the pandemic has hit refugee and migrant women very hard and with the stigma related to mental health, it has been extremely hard for them to ask for help.

Shaza insists that asking for help is essential to maintaining our mental and psychological health during the tough times of quarantine.

As migrant and refugee women, we need to be able to ask for support and help from our friends, families, friends and even doctors.

On an organizational level, feminist organizations and local organizations have proved to be the ones taking actions to help their local communities.

Nevertheless, women and their issues are still absent in general in policy making and in particular in facing Covid-19.

There is no real participation in decision making process especially in funding when action is needed.

So far, they have been working on a volunteer only capacity but volunteer work cannot be longterm.

## Outcomes of the Discussion and Recommendations

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Mental health was a big topic that women significantly related to in the session.

A massive gap in awareness and support for migrant and refugee women mental and psychological health has been highlighted.

Especially in this crisis, mental health and stress are directly related to our immune system, a fully accessible and easy-to-navigate support system is needed to help women cope with their many struggles during quarantine time.

Knowledge and access to technology and the internet was another gap that had been identified, especially, with the prevalence of remote work, social distancing and homeschooling era of Covid-19.

Refugee and Migrant women suffered to bridge that gap for various reasons, some of which are lack of equipment and lack of training.

We identified that the right to access internet and training to use it, is a fundamental human right that women need in order to integrate successfully and be able to be functioning citizens in their new societies. Training to use the internet and basic technology tools should be included in the integration stage of receiving the newcomers.

Third problem that we were able to identify is misinformation or lack of information. Being uninformed in stressful and impactful situations such as Covid-19 makes us stressed and feel a lack of belonging to the community in which we live.

There is a scarcity of channels that provide reliable public health information, that are only available in a limited number of languages and channels.

We identified the need to have an accessible, multilingual, well-marketed, user-friendly resource guide to include all reliable information on healthcare systems and specific instructions related to this or future situations.

In terms of civil action, migrant and refugee women lead initiatives have responded quickly and efficiently to the crisis. More support, especially in terms of funding is needed. Cooperation between small local initiatives and bigger organizations should be considered to overcome bureaucratic barriers such as legal entity registration.

Networking with UN organizations and Oxfam and Care is essential. These organizations can have a massive impact, only with the help and cooperation of local initiatives.

Migrant and Refugee women need to have access to the following training opportunities:

- Capacity building, with funding
- Involvement in decision making and program-making.
- Navigating the health and public systems.
- Leadership and initiative-taking training.
- Technological literacy especially in job finding tools.
- Access to the digital economy and all digital public resources.
- Social and professional Networking

Such training would guarantee that women understand their rights and seek to be represented and participate in the decision making process, and have a part in shaping their lives in their new societies.

## ***Special Thanks to our supporters:***

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The logo for New Women Connectors consists of a stylized fan-like shape made of several curved, overlapping lines in shades of blue, green, and orange. To the right of this graphic, the text "NEW WOMEN CONNECTORS" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with "for inclusion & social justice" in a smaller font below it.

**#Coping2Gather  
#Growing2Gather**

**A Virtual Gathering of  
Refugee & Migrant Women**

**Leading Resilience**  
We invite you to join us and share your stories of resilience

**Solidarity and collaboration form the core essence of  
New Women Connectors, a step further and share  
the space to imagine and build together 'The New  
Normal' during and post COVID-19**

**TO JOIN CONTACT:**  
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Support by: Epim  
European Programme  
for Integration  
and Migration

The publication is supported by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), a collaborative initiative of the Network of European Foundations

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