

a series of webinars "Leading Resilience"



New Vulnerabilities New Resilience

June 26, 2020

Welcoming the panellists and participants, the executive director of New Women Connector, Ms. Anila Noor said it was an initiative led by refugee and migrant women who wanted to bring perspective shift, from integration to inclusion and from support to opportunities, for the refugee and migrant individual and communities. She said NWC responded to absence of migrant's voices in policy and decision-making process. We 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.

Structural racism & Negative profiling

2020 is proving to be a year of challenges. Covid-19, police brutality, racism, many reports have already diagnosed the increasing violations of fundamental rights which are affecting migrants & other minorities disproportionately.

Ms. Juliana Wahlgren, senior advocacy officer, (ENAR) gave her presentation from the perspective of racialized minorities (Africans, Romas, Muslims, Jews, Migrants) in Europe. In this intervention, Juliana presented the key findings on the research conducted by ENAR about the impact of the pandemic on migrants and other racialized groups and she also discussed how the new EP Resolution on racism can be a turning point for the combat against anti-migrant racism across the EU. She said EU framed issue of racism primarily in individual perspective, but racism is interlinked and inter-sect dimensions and cannot be disassociated. The structural barriers prevented racialized communities to access opportunities, rights and essential services as well as their basic rights such as employment, health, housing and mobility. She said it was true in Covid 19 situation as well where EU has its own George Floyds and other systemic brutalities. She elaborated her arguments by presenting ENAR map of 250 incidents of racial discrimination including violence against migrants. Key findings included housing problem, precarious living conditions and over-populated areas. The over policed and under protected migrants faced racial profiling and brutality by police, which has been given more power to control and brutalize during Covid-19. Hate speech instigated hate crimes and frame the context of violence against

migrants. Structural racism in employment and healthcare sectors exacerbated inequalities and vulnerabilities, not only as patients but also as care givers during Covid 19. She said only durable solution was to bring structural changes and institutional reforms. She demanded to broaden the EU agenda for racial justice bringing migrants issues into it.

The role of media and opinion makers

Normalize migration and serve as a basis of secure citizenship and a dignified life for women with a refugee background in their new homelands.

Dr. Amanda Paz Alencar shared an overview of the media coverage of the issues regarding refugees and migrants. This presentation critically engaged in reflections about the importance of providing inclusive, sustainable narratives that she said they were primarily seen as terrorists, or illegal and unwanted invaders who abuse beneficial systems and become burden on the economy especially on welfare system. Moreover, the mainstream media tend to show them as threat to the Western cultural and societal values. For example, during the Burkini debates, media argued that Migrants and Refugee had to adapt to Western values.

In this talk, Dr Amanda addressed issues of responsibility related to mainstream narratives that victimize and deprive migrant women of agency to mobilize, transform and create possible futures. The importance of communication practices and networks, as well as media platforms that involve care ethics. Further also discussed the pathways for bridging the gap between normative understandings of migration and the subjectivities and needs of women who become migrants and refugees in different contexts and over time.

She said civil society should prioritize influencing media because media frames perception of individuals and policy makers. She said we need to mainstream alternative views and individual stories to question these negative profiling of refugees and migrants. She stressed upon the need of bringing voices of Refugees and Migrants in the mainstream media to facilitate migrant's integration and host community collaboration. She said refugees' voices should be represented in the media to overcome the negative narratives that reflected fractures in the system that does not recognize diversity and equality. She also called for structural changes as first step to change institutional narratives and individual behavior.

Refugee Women: The stories of Hearts, Minds and Souls

Highlighted the significance of narratives in forming public perception and informing public policy.

Ms. Umbreen Salim (Research scholar, University) presented the findings of her special research method of zooming into the stories of Refugee and Migrant women to understand their perspectives, aspirations, struggles, resilience and strengths. Her research focused on public perceptions, in shaping the lived realities and everyday experiences, and public policies. Her research method questioned hierarchies while co-creating knowledge in a collaborative manner. The host communities just tell what to do without trying to understand migrants' experiences, knowledge, mindsets and socio-cultural conditioning. That partial narratives generates distorted perceptions such as victims or slothful people unwilling to contribute.

While giving many quotes from migrant women regarding their problems of displacements, adjustments, traumas and struggles with mandatory integration, she said migration is a space where identities are either blurred. She said She said that it was important to listen to their stories in their own way so that stories are translated into narratives and perceptions are converted into policies. She said success stories and profiles in resilience should be projected to show that we migrant women are resilient and believe in our passion.

Identity and Agency: Migration Discourse in Politics

Neither footnote nor text? Refugee Women in Migration Discourse and Politics. How we got here and how to move forward?

Dr. Lara Zuzan Golesorkhi (Scholar, USA), started by narrating three flawed common notions regarding refugees that, a) refugees as one fits for all category, b) refugee women having one common experience and c) refugee women as vulnerable. She said these three notions have frame most of the perceptions, behaviors, discourses and policies. The persistent portrayal of refugee women is of victimhood and vulnerability. The state of discourse and politics around refugee women is one of decades of constructing, re-, and de- constructing identity and agency. In this intervention, Lara-Zuzan explored the history of gender-negligence in migration discourse and politics, and outlines ways to move towards anti-discriminatory, rights-based, and gender-

responsive migration discourse and politics. Dr Lara-Zuzan situated these historical, structural, and institutional dynamics within post-colonial and critical race theory approaches on anti-migrant racism and queering migration discourse/politics.

While narrating the evolution of discourse about refugees that lacked gender perspective, she said feminist discourse in 90s, acknowledged right to protection, security and agency for refugee women. Later, Women Refugee Commission (2002-UNHCR) found that states failed to fulfil their obligations under international law, that refugee women's participation in decision making was limited and that specific challenges that they faced were not adequately addressed. She said that not much progress has been made.

In addressing how we got here and where to go next, she shared her views of addressing anti-racist efforts in migration politics and discourse. She said it is intentional institutional and structural design that presents women as victim and vulnerable rather than resilient and that framed perceptions and policies of aid agencies, governments and media. We need to situate these historical and structural designs within post-colonial and critical race theory approaches. We need to interrogate, challenge and dismantle securitization and protection frames in contemporary migration discourse in Europe, which is inherently racist and used to further nationalist, populist trajectories in the name of protecting Western way of life. This unified Western approach has portrayed "violent" Muslim male and veiled Muslim women as classical "other".

Energetic, not depressive; Enterprising, not slothful

The Q&A session further deepened and broadened the discussion. Responding to a question about positive roles of technology, Ms. Amanda stressed upon the need to protect the privacy as well. She said it was crucial because we generate data, which could be weaponized against us. Considering increasing state surveillance, it is important to understand what these technologies really can give us in terms of our rights. She said, first we need to understand how these algorithm work and impacts physical world. Governments, states and big giants who manipulate these infrastructures of oppressions.

Ms. Juliana responded to a question by saying that everything starts with education and we must deconstruct the patriarchy and strengthen the movement for gender equality while challenging the notion that nothing good exist out of white Christian world. She said activism should start at individual self, within family, colleagues and neighborhood by raising questions and starting discussions.

Ms. Salim mentioned many positive stories of charity and self-help by Refugee and Migrant communities especially during Covid 19 such as distributing food boxes and starting online classes for kids. She said media did not project these positive stories. She said language played a big role in discovering deeply motivating stories within Refugee women.

All the panelists agreed that creating more of such initiatives, conducting more of such dialogues, discussions, debates, interactions and research studies would

help creating gender and Refugee responsive policies. We needed to create collaborations in order to help making informed policies. For this, we need to use every space available including advocacy channels, socio-cultural events and social and mainstream media. In order to redesign the narratives or vulnerabilities, decolonize knowledge and practice, influence the racism discourse and empower the Refugee and Migrant women. She spoke about “historical, structural, and institutional designs of vulnerability and resilience” in migration discourse and politics and importance of redesign these persistent conceptions.

Outcomes of the Discussion

- ⇒ Mainstream media should stop portraying Refugees and Migrants in stereotypes such as terrorists, fundamentalists, isolationists, ghettoized, vulnerable, victimized, slothful and abusers. And should bring positive stories of resilience while bringing their representatives while conducting debates and discussions.
- ⇒ Media should actively discourage the distorted perceptions and negative profiling of Refugees and Migrants.
- ⇒ Bring structural and institutional reforms rather surface changes. And develop Awareness programs and trainings for Policy makers and public office holders
- ⇒ Dismantle securitization and protection frames in contemporary migration discourse in EU.
- ⇒ Create more collaborative initiatives at civil society level to create more spaces for dialogue and interaction within migrant communities, and with policy making forums.