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Title:

**Exploring Gender-Based Violence in Refugee/Migrant  
Women: Patterns, Challenges and Intersectionality**

by

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## Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) presents a pervasive challenge within patriarchal societies, transcending cultural boundaries and national origins. This study aims to explore the challenges, forms, and patterns of gender-based violence experienced by refugee and migrant women, with a focus on the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and violence originating from state factors. Through a comparative approach, the research examines the conditions faced by refugee women in two deeply patriarchal countries, Turkey and Greece, both significant recipients of refugee flows. The study sheds light on how societal perceptions of GBV are influenced by cultural norms in these contexts. Additionally, it addresses the societal barriers that hinder refugee women from reporting GBV. Utilizing qualitative analysis, the study draws on interviews conducted with experts and professionals specializing in GBV and providing support to refugee women. By capturing the insights and perspectives of these individuals, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding GBV in refugee and migrant populations in host societies and inform policies and interventions aimed at addressing these challenges.

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# Introduction

*A girl, a woman, a mother, a **survivor***

No matter the place in the world, throughout the depths of history up to the present day, the role of women in society remains a subject of ongoing debate and controversy. Across centuries, women have navigated a complex path, celebrated as queens and goddesses in some eras while constrained by established societal norms in others, referred as evil witches sacrificed at the altar of capitalism (Federici, 2004). While progress has undeniably been achieved, the journey towards gender equality remains a dynamic and intricate challenge; In the spectrum of our modern world, the threads of prejudice and tradition persist, forming a complex pattern that sometimes leaves women exposed to vulnerability similar to that experienced by those living under the weight of strict patriarchal structures. Acts such as femicide, sexual harassment, and the enforcement of gender roles remain painful manifestations of gender-based violence, leaving their mark even in regions that are often considered part of the progressive Western world.

From the moment a female is born, she becomes an unwitting recipient of various messages and every-day interactions that promote patriarchy. A young girl learns that the head of the family is the father, a woman is compelled to obey to the patriarchal control of her society, a mother is obliged to listen and be subservient to her spouse, and a survivor<sup>1</sup> is expected to lower her head when subjected to continuous violence from the opposite gender (Soman, 2017). Such messages, acts and practices define and shape women throughout their lives, stripping them from their rights and turning gender equality into an enduring struggle for both subjugation and survival; deeply ingrained in societal norms, patriarchal messages manifest at various stages of life, including educational institutions, workplaces, but also the mass media. In schools, gender stereotypes and biased education may reinforce

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<sup>1</sup> According to UN Women, a survivor, in the context of gender-based violence, refers to a woman who has experienced physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse or harm due to her gender, but has managed to endure, overcome, or escape the violence. Survivors often demonstrate resilience and courage in the face of traumatic experiences and may seek support, healing, and justice.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/fags/types-of-violence>

traditional gender roles (Trautner, Hoffman, & Borland, 2022). Institutions often perpetuate hierarchies and unequal power dynamics, while the labor market may maintain wage gaps and occupational segregation. Furthermore, mass media and social media, through their portrayal of women and men, can perpetuate and normalize patriarchal norms and values. These influential platforms often depict women in highly sexualized and objectified ways, reinforcing the notion that a woman's worth is primarily linked to her physical appearance and sexual appeal. Likewise, men are frequently portrayed as dominant, reinforcing traditional gender roles and hierarchies. These media representations not only shape public perceptions but also impact how individuals perceive themselves and others, contributing to the persistence of harmful stereotypes and gender inequalities in society (Sidani, 2023).

Women are often infantilized by media, which portrays them in ways that undermine their agency and intelligence. These portrayals reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate the idea that women should occupy submissive or childlike roles. Additionally, media's focus on women's appearances rather than their accomplishments contributes to this infantilization, sending the message that a woman's value primarily lies in her looks. On the same way, young girls are hypersexualized by media, which bombards them with images and messages that link their worth to their sexual appeal. From a young age, girls are exposed to unrealistic beauty standards and sexually suggestive content that encourages them to prioritize their appearance over other aspects of their identity. This hypersexualization not only erodes their self-esteem but also normalizes objectification, making it seem like an inherent part of their identity (ibid., 193).

### *An internally displaced/ a refugee **woman***

All the above indicate how societies, either clearly conservative or allegedly progressive manage to often employ subtle forms of communication to convey patriarchal messages that reinforce harmful stereotypes and, at times, encourage men towards violence against women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2008). Undoubtedly, a woman encounters and must overcome numerous challenges as she ages within her community as numerous research has shown. Yet, our knowledge remains limited when it comes to refugee and internally displaced women. This happens because, even though refugee flows have been steadily

increasing in recent years, asylum seekers are still often viewed by the public as mere arrival statistics or unauthorized intruders. Furthermore, the country of origin of these women significantly influences their ability to speak openly about the violence they experience, while European governments do not take adequate measures to ensure their protection. This leads to a substantial knowledge gap regarding the living conditions of refugee women and countless personal stories and experiences that remain untold (Ghorashi, 2008; Crist, 2018).

Refugee women, aside from the gender-related challenges they face, carry bigger burdens than a woman growing up as a member of a society. Forcibly displaced, refugee women have endured traumatic experiences such as conflict, violence, and persecution in their home countries. The trauma of war, the agony of death and separation as well as the lack of legal protection leave them particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence (Chalkia, Tsigkanou, & Lempesi, 2021). Furthermore, language differences and cultural disparities can create significant barriers for refugee women in terms of accessing education, employment, healthcare, and legal support.

These are just a few of the challenges that refugee women confront, and it is profoundly disheartening that, in most instances, these women continue to exist in obscurity, reduced to mere statistics – increased or decreased numbers of flows that fluctuate in news reports.

#### *The purpose of studying Gender Based Violence on refugee women*

*It was not so long ago since 2020 and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and since a boat full of refugees, including children and pregnant women, arrived at the port of Thermi in Lesvos. As the boat approached the port, the already desperate faces of the refugees faced a bunch of incensed residents gathered to block them from disembarking. One of them shouted obscenities at a pregnant refugee, saying he didn't care that she was pregnant, that they (the residents) weren't the ones that got her pregnant, and that she should have thought about it earlier. This incident stands out as one of the most shameful events to have occurred in Greece, serving as a stark reflection of the country's prevailing far-right sentiment (HuffPost Greece, 2020).*



Mistreating pregnant women, or any women for that matter, is not just a violation of their individual rights, but an affront to the fundamental principles of human dignity. Pregnant women fleeing conflict or seeking asylum are among the most vulnerable populations, facing not only the physical challenges of pregnancy but also the additional risks associated with displacement and uncertain futures (Benedetto, 2017).

The aim of the present study is to examine and highlight challenges such the above, as well as forms, and patterns of gender-based violence against refugee and migrant women. Additionally, it seeks to provide evidence of how the vulnerabilities they have experienced during their migration journey have transformed their life. For the purposes of the research aims, a comparative study is used to describe the conditions of refugee women into two countries, namely Turkey and Greece, two countries deeply patriarchal and structured with religious norms. Both countries attract a significant number of refuge flows; Turkey, in the present case study, is the host country and Greece is the direct recipient. Both countries have been accused multiple times regarding their anti-immigration policies. Furthermore, Greece has listed Turkey as a safe third country for returning asylum applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Greek Council for Refugees, 2023). This fact is significant because, despite Turkey's ratification of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, it applies the Refugee Convention with a geographical limitation, restricting its terms to refugees from Europe only (Amnesty International, 1997). Additionally, Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention further complicates the legal framework for addressing gender-based violence and protecting the rights of women, especially when it comes to refugees (Amnesty International, 2021).

The objectives of this study include four main goals. Firstly, it aims to thoroughly examine and point out the multifaceted challenges confronted by refugee women when they encounter gender-based violence (GBV) throughout their migration journeys and in the host societies. Secondly, it seeks to underscore the significance of systemic violence, as an often-underestimated factor that significantly impacts the experiences of refugee women, particularly in the context of GBV. Thirdly, the study intends to highlight the complexities

surrounding reporting GBV among refugee women, by surpassing cultural barriers, to address systemic obstacles and structural inequalities that hinder reporting mechanisms and how all these factors somehow intersect. Lastly, the study aspires to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the intricate dynamics surrounding GBV among refugee women, especially in the context of the two host countries (Greece and Turkey) and demonstrate the deficiencies within the systems of both countries concerning the prevention of gender-based violence.

The case study takes the form of comparative as it scrutinizes the gender discrimination that women refugees experienced during their migration journey in Turkey (host country) and Greece (recipient country). Therefore, the research takes the form of qualitative research since it is based upon interviews with NGO field specialists, lawyers, psychologists and social workers. For the aims of the study, the subsequent research questions were formulated:

*Is Greece different than Turkey in important ways regarding systemic patriarchy?*

*Is gender-based violence that comes from a state instead from an individual experienced differently?*

*Does the cultural background and national origin of female refugees/migrants influence their experience of gender-based violence and stand as a barrier in reporting it?*

To answer these questions, the researcher makes the following hypotheses:

While both Greece and Turkey exhibit systemic patriarchy, the manifestation of patriarchal norms and the degree of gender inequality differ between the two countries. Greece demonstrates relatively higher levels of gender equality compared to Turkey, attributed to historical, cultural, and legal factors (Ilkcaracan, 2001). However, despite Greece's status as a European and modern country and Turkey's cultural, social, and legal influences drawn from the Quran, both nations experience alarmingly high rates of femicides each year (Louloudi et al., 2023: We will Stop Femicides Platform, 2023)

Concerning state-sponsored Gender-Based Violence, it is hypothesized that individuals subjected to gender-based violence originating from the state face distinct psychological, social, and legal challenges compared to those experiencing violence from non-state actors. The severity and impact of such violence vary depending on the level of state repression,

the strength of civil society institutions, and the resilience of affected communities. Refugees subjected to state-sponsored gender-based violence encounter additional psychological, social, and legal hurdles due to their marginalized status and limited access to support networks and legal protections, thereby intensifying the severity of the violence experienced.

The final hypothesis suggests that while cultural background may influence the perception of gender-based violence among female refugees and migrants, the phenomenon is pervasive across patriarchal systems, transcending specific countries of origin. Within patriarchal societies, ingrained socio-cultural norms regarding gender roles contribute to the normalization and perpetuation of violence against women, regardless of their nationality or cultural background. However, factors such as language proficiency, access to support networks, and legal protections intersect with these broader societal dynamics to shape the vulnerability and coping mechanisms of women refugees experiencing gender-based violence.

# Chapter 1: Literature review

## 1.1. Gender-Based Violence Globally

Gender-based violence (GBV), encompasses a wide range of forms and expressions, and its most severe manifestations can have deeply transformative effects on those it targets. This multifaceted and deeply ingrained issue is not confined by geographical or cultural boundaries; rather, it is fundamentally a matter of human rights. Due to persistent inequalities, countless women and girls worldwide face gender-based violence simply because of their gender (UN Women, n.d.).

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been acknowledged as an issue of epic proportion which mirrors the unequal power dynamics which are created within the binary gender system. It is often committed by those who have more power - physical, cultural, or social - and it is imposed upon those who lack the power. Therefore, violence is closely associated with masculinity and has generated both a dangerous and unjust power dynamic which displays all forms of violence in an alarming proportion of the population, the women. In generally, speaking, one in every three women in the world has been subjected to some form of abuse, such as has been beaten or forced to have sex (Tsapalas et al, 2021).

In general speaking violence originates from hegemonic social values, which establish inequalities between the two genders, men, and women, as well as their roles. These values grant the man with greater power in relationships. The asymmetry of power in relationships is one of the determinants of gender violence (Costa et al., 2017).

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been defined as any physical, psychological, sexual, cultural, mental, spiritual, social, or economic ferocity performed by an intimate partner, family member, or any other person as a consequence of gender expression or character. Violence can even be systemic, as part of a patriarchal hierarchical society. The prevalence of GBV exists even in the case of pregnancy. (Baird et al., 2013) Moreover, GBV has been defined as any act which results in physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering. In these actions are also included other methods of violence such as threats and deprivation of liberty among others (De Ferrante et al., 2009).

### 1.1.1 Definition of GBV

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), established as the newest international tribunal under the United Nations, gained recognition as an International Organization. The pivotal moment came on December 18, 1979, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," aimed at eradicating gender inequalities. Serving as the primary body of independent experts, CEDAW monitors the implementation of the Convention, making it a cornerstone in promoting and safeguarding women's rights and gender equality worldwide. Its multifaceted work involves scrutinizing reports from member states, providing guidance, and offering recommendations to enhance compliance with the convention. Recognizing the historical power imbalances between genders, the declaration identified violence against women as a manifestation of deeply ingrained discrimination within societal norms. It encompasses a spectrum of abuses, ranging from domestic violence and sexual assault to human trafficking and harmful traditional practices (Cusack & Pusey, 2013).

In 1992, the convention was updated with General Recommendation No 19, which officially recognized the form of gender-based discrimination as a violation of human rights (CEDAW,1992). CEDAW's definition of gender-based violence remains as one of the most detailed and comprehensive to describe violence against women:

*«... gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. » (ibid., art 6)*

In addition to defining the term, the General Recommendation No. 19 also specifies the main forms of gender-based violence as follows:

1. **Domestic Violence**, referring to physical, sexual, or psychological abuse that occurs within a family or domestic setting.
2. **Sexual Violence**, involving non-consensual sexual actions, harassment, or exploitation (includes acts like rape).
3. **Harmful Traditional Practices**: incorporates customs such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages that are detrimental to individuals.
4. **Human Trafficking**: Involves the illegal trade of individuals, often for sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse.
5. **Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations**, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon during wartime or in the aftermath of conflict.
6. **Economic Violence** refers to situations where individuals are denied access to economic resources, opportunities, or property rights.

To summarize, understanding the concept of gender-based violence (GBV) and its various forms is pivotal while moving further into the broader analysis of violence against women on a global scale. Recognizing its deeply transformative impacts, the multifaceted and pervasive nature of GBV transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, making it a fundamental human rights concern. The definitions and forms of GBV, as outlined by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), serve as the foundational framework for examining this critical issue. This chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the global significance of violence against women, shedding light on the various manifestations of GBV.

### 1.1.2 Global Estimates of GBV

World Health Organization (WHO) conducted population-level surveys on behalf of the UN Interagency working group on violence against women. These surveys extracted data from various reports from survivors, in order to get accurate estimates about the prevalence of GBV. The data spanned over the years 2000 – 2018 across 161 countries and areas.

Consistent with the results, 1 in 3 women – or 30% had been subjected to either to physical or sexual or both types of abuse. In all the cases, the violence was characterized either as an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence or both and it was perpetrated by men. (WHO, 2021)

Furthermore, the same study revealed that more than a quarter of women aged 15-49 years, who had been engaged in a relationship, had been subjected to violence – either physical or sexual or both - by their intimate partner at least once since the age of 15. At regional level, the intimate partner violence was estimated to range from 20% to 33%. Table 1 below presents the estimated prevalence by region. (WHO, 2021)

**Table 1 Regional Estimates of Violence against Women**

Region	Estimation
Western Pacific	20%
Europe and High-Income countries	22%
regions of Americas	25%
African	33%
Eastern Mediterranean	31%
South – East Asia	33%

(Source: WHO, 2021)

Additionally, the same research provided evidence that globally, almost 38% of all murders of women were caused by intimate partners. Besides the intimate partner violence, 6% of the women globally had been assaulted by a non-partner (ibid.).

Moreover, it is estimated that during the lockdown periods imposed from COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women was increased while their access to services was limited. The social and economic impacts of the pandemic as well as the circumstances of humanitarian crises may worsen existing violence, perpetrated by intimate or non - intimate partners and may probably lead to new types of violence against women (WHO, 2021).

### 1.1.3 The Causes of GBV

Based on the guidelines of the Istanbul Convention and according to Concern Worldwide (2023), five primary causes of gender-based violence have been identified. Firstly, entrenched gender stereotypes and patriarchal cultures, often reinforced by religious practices and traditional norms, perpetuate harmful attitudes and behaviors. Secondly, sexual violence is increasingly employed as a tactic of warfare in global armed conflicts, leading to a rise in conflict-related sexual violence. Thirdly, poverty and economic challenges drive forced marriages of girls as young as 15, particularly in non-conflict areas, exacerbating instances of gender violence such as sexual assault and spousal abuse. Fourthly, inadequate legal protection compounds the problem, with approximately 33 out of 195 UN member nations lacking laws against domestic violence and 48 lacking legislation addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Even in countries with existing laws, enforcement often falls short of international standards. Lastly, the insufficient inclusion of women in political representation and policy-making exacerbates the risks and occurrences of gender-based violence, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address systemic inequalities and ensure the protection of women's rights (Concern Worldwide, 2023).

The next section discusses the patriarchal beliefs in relation to GVB along the way there are normalized when addressed to women.

## 1.2. GBV and Patriarchal Beliefs

Patriarchy has been defined in numerous ways within the feminist literature. Hence, this concept has been used to describe the male power over women (Hartmann, 1979) or in the other cases to describe the symbolic power of men (Mitchell, 1974), or to emphasize men's appearance in the economic relations of production (Atakan, 2014). Additionally, patriarchy has been used to define the sexual system of power that depends upon male hierarchical ordering of the society (Eisenstein, 1979).

Furthermore, patriarchy has been identified as a system of social structure and practices in which men govern, oppress and exploit women. The patriarchy system is composed of



fractures and their relationship creates different forms to capture women's subordination: housework, sexuality culture, violence, paid work, state (Walby, 1989).

The following subsection discusses the contribution of the patriarchal belief to GBV.

### 1.2.1 Contribution of Patriarchal Beliefs

According to Hadi (2017), the first belief is associated with the honor of the family. In order to protect their honor, men feel authorized to control and direct women's sexuality and their way of living. Hence, they have to restrict women's freedom of living to protect not only their honor but also the socio-cultural values of society. Women's bodies represent the honor of the family; thus, men have to guard their virginity since the honor of a man lies between the legs of a woman.

Furthermore, when a woman is involved into an illegitimate sexual relationship, she challenges the ownership rights of her husband or father and brothers and by this way she also challenges the traditional social order established on patriarchy. A man can be easily dishonored by rumor, belief, and insinuation. For this reason, a remedial action must be taken; that woman must die- since, only blood can cleanse the honor (Hadi, 2017).

In these societies, honor killing is considered as an appropriate and valid punishment for those women who dared to disrupt and damage the traditional honor code. The man who kills women of his family is perceived as a person who defends his honor and at the same time reveals the power of his masculinity. However, if a man considers honor killing as a barbaric practice and avoids punishing the woman who dishonored him and his family, then he will be regarded as a man without honor as well as socially helpless (ibid.).

Other, equally important issues are domestic violence and rape and both of them fall into the categories of structural and cultural factors. In the patriarchal system, women are considered as a subordinate and suppressed gender. Men believe that their wives should obey them; otherwise, they have the "right" to hit them. Stove – burning is regarded as the most extreme form of domestic violence. Besides their husband, women are also perpetrated by their in-laws for reasons of dissatisfaction with the dowry or for any other unimportant family disputes (ibid.)

### 1.2.2 Normalization of Violence

Namy et al (2017) examined the normalization of violence in order to advance empirical and conceptual understanding of the issue, by collecting qualitative data from Kampala in Uganda. They concluded that the patriarchal family structure creates an environment that normalizes many forms of violence, and at the same time infantilizes women and reinforces their subordination.

Consistent with the study, the violence was normalized in the following three ways: as a means of discipline; as a way to enforce gender norms; and finally, as an expression of masculinity (Namy et al, 2027).

#### *To Discipline*

Beating was considered as an acceptable response when the husband perceived that his wife was deviating from socially prescribed roles and behaviors. The aim of the discipline was to instill proper morals and behaviors. Thus, violence was used to control or correct behavior. This abuse was obviously infantilizing women (Namy et al, 2027).

#### *To Enforce Gender Norms*

The violence was justified as it reflected subordinate femininities. Men were enforced to intervene when women failed to perform expected domestic roles. The woman, who was behaving badly, was 'forcing' her husband's aggression to heat her. The woman in order to avoid violence had to "plead for forgiveness" or "keep quiet". On the other hand, women strategized methods either to reduce or prevent violence by embracing their obedient feminine roles or pacifying their husbands (Namy et al, 2027).

#### *An Expression of Masculinity*

Furthermore, Namy et al's (2017) study provided evidence that when violence was not justified in terms of an act of discipline, it was rationalized and often absolved in light of the pressures connected to fulfilling hegemonic masculine ideals. In some cases, the male aggression was normalized as a display of the anger or shame associated with failed masculinity. Some women perceive this behavior as "natural" or biologically determined.

### *Normalization of sexual violence*

Another recent study by Sinko et al. (2021) regarding the normalization of sexual violence states that societal norms, particularly within wider rape culture and university hookup culture, perpetuate the normalization of male sexual aggression. This study, conducted in the context of university culture in the United States, aimed to understand healing processes after sexual violence (SV) by examining the influence of normalization on internal processing. It found that societal expectations regarding gender roles play a significant role in the normalization of SV, impacting survivors' ability to label, reconcile, and accept their negative emotions. Similar to the findings of Namy et al. (2017), which examined the normalization of violence within the patriarchal family structure in Kampala, Uganda, this study highlights how societal norms contribute to the normalization of violence and its impact on individuals' experiences and perceptions. Both studies touch upon the role of masculinity in the normalization of violence, indicating a consistent pattern across different cultural contexts.

In addition to societal expectations regarding gender roles, the study on sexual violence normalization identified key influences such as university culture and social upbringing. These influencers perpetuated the normalization of male sexual aggression, shaping how survivors processed their experiences and interacted with their environments. The study highlighted how survivors often internalized normalization, leading to feelings of self-blame, shame, fear, and anger after experiencing sexual violence. This internalization of normalization also influenced survivors' abilities to recognize the severity of their experiences and seek help or support. Interestingly, the study revealed alternative processing pathways experienced by survivors, which were often influenced by how normalization was internalized. These pathways included denial, minimization, overwhelm, consumption, disconnection, and reintegration, demonstrating the complexity of survivor experiences and responses to sexual violence (Sinko et al., 2021).

### **1.3. GBV Among Refugee Women**

The impact of disasters varies across different segments of the population, with certain groups, such as refugee women, experiencing more severe consequences compared to

male refugees due to disparities in vulnerability, lived experiences, and societal roles (Kuran et al., 2020). Within this context, vulnerability encompasses various factors, including physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions, or ongoing processes that exacerbate an individual's susceptibility to the effects of threats. Consequently, vulnerable populations are at a higher risk of enduring disproportionate impacts and hardships, including increased mortality, illness, and fatalities, when compared to the general population. (Blaikie et al, 2014).

As regards women, vulnerability is the result of systematic differences in power relations and social hierarchies (Birks et al, 2017) as well as gender roles, which affect their socioeconomic status (Erman et al, 2021). Research has provided evidence of a positive correlation between gender-based violence (GBV) and disasters (Parkinson & Zara, 20213).

In this case, adopting an intersectional approach becomes essential, as it merges the vulnerabilities associated with being a migrant or refugee with those arising from gender. Consequently, it is acknowledged that migrant women bear disproportionately harsh outcomes from disasters compared to the broader population, particularly concerning socioeconomic and labor-related impacts (Trentin et al, 2023).

### 1.3.1 Vulnerabilities of Women Refugees and Migrants

According to UN Women Refugees and Migrants, women face four key vulnerabilities throughout their migration and refugee experiences. Firstly, they encounter marginalization, as their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes is often limited, exacerbating their vulnerability. Secondly, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains pervasive, with countless refugee women enduring rape, sexual abuse, physical violence, harassment, and exploitation during their journey. These traumatic experiences have enduring impacts on their well-being. Thirdly, child marriage emerges as a distressing phenomenon, with many refugee girls under the age of 15 coerced into marriage during their displacement. This practice detrimentally affects their health, education, and personal development. Furthermore, maternal health concerns loom large, with pregnant refugee women facing alarmingly high mortality rates, reaching approximately 60%. Additionally, the hardships of displacement compound over time, adversely affecting the physical and mental health of refugee and migrant women living in protracted displacement situations (UN Women, 2022).

Furthermore, Trentin et al.'s (2023) research has revealed six vulnerability factors:

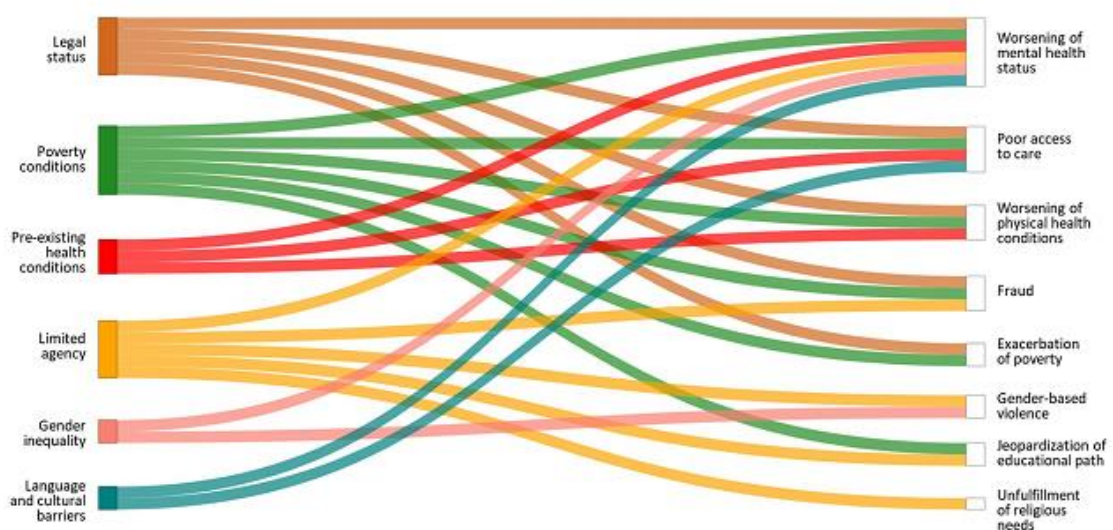
- Legal Status,
- Poverty Conditions,
- Pre-Existing Health Conditions,
- Limited Agency,
- Gender Inequality, and
- Language and Cultural Barriers.

Further investigation revealed that these affected their lives in nine ways (Trentin et al, 2023):

- Poor Access to Care
- Exacerbation Of Poverty,
- Fraud,
- GBV,
- Worsening Of Mental Health Status,
- Worsening Of Physical Health Conditions,
- Jeopardization Of Educational Path, and
- Unfulfillment Of Religious Needs.

Diagram 1 below depicts the pathways in a detailed way.

**Figure 1 Flow diagram outlining the pathways of migrant and refugee women.**



(Source: Trentin et al, 2023, p. 13)

In the following paragraphs each of these factors is explored.

### *Legal Status*

It compromises refugee women's job opportunities as well as access to care and living conditions. As an example in Kenya, the government policies allow pregnant women and infants to access affordable maternity care. However, during COVID-19 this access was restricted. In other countries, discriminatory policies compared with migrant women's poverty conditions restricted their access to health care facilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown measures combined with the shortage of medical staff resulted in an increase to home deliveries and lower employment of health care both to mother and newborn child (Trentin et al, 2023).

Additionally, during the pandemic, the racist and discriminatory attitudes from the police, the healthcare professionals as well as the general population was increased towards refugee women. This affected their mental health status (Golesorkhi et al, 2022).

During the pandemic, they were excluded from the safety net applied for by the general population as a result of their legal status and the informal jobs they usually had. Consequently, they faced extreme marginalization which led them to become more vulnerable when illegal organizations tried to approach them (Mutambara et al, 2022).

### *Poverty Conditions*

Poverty emerges as a significant factor contributing to the vulnerability of migrant women. Due to their legal status, they frequently encounter precarious employment conditions, often relegated to roles such as childminders, cleaners, domestic assistants, car guards, and street vendors. Even skilled migrant women encounter delays in launching their careers. Compounding their challenges, their migrant status often renders them ineligible for labor welfare and emergency government support, setting them apart from the rest of the population. This lack of access to crucial resources and protections underscores the urgent need for policies and interventions aimed at addressing the unique socioeconomic struggles faced by migrant women (Nardon et al, 2022).

### *Pre-Existing Health Conditions*

Their poverty along with the pandemic restrictions prohibited migrant women with chronic health issues from accessing healthcare facilities. This led them to stop receiving necessary treatment as well as to attend their check-ups. Moreover, the social isolation resulted in deteriorating their mental well-being (Trentin et al, 2023).

### *Limited Agency*

Their pre-existing vulnerability factors along with the disruption of social services during the pandemic resulted in hindering them from reporting abuses. Their victimization was stirred by fraudulent initiatives of NGOs, which took advantage from the disruption of social services, and approached migrant women pretending that they are trying to help them (Mutambara et al, 2022). This limited agency and the disruption of social services negatively affected their mental well-being (Acikalin et al 2022).

### *Gender Inequality*

Gender inequality worsens the challenges for migrant and refugee women, especially during the pandemic. There's been a sharp rise in gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV), making their situations even more difficult. Stalking, monitoring, financial control, and coercive behaviors have increased, maintaining cycles of abuse. Sadly, even migrant and refugee children face violence, adding to the struggles these families endure (Trentin et al, 2023).

### *Language and Cultural Barriers*

Other vulnerability factors included language and cultural barriers, which prevented migrant women from accessing agencies – services – as well as to integrate with the host community. For example, in Turkey, the language barrier prevented them from finding a job and accessing health care services. Thus, their physical and mental wellbeing were affected negatively (Acikalin et al, 2022).

### 1.3.2 GBV, Cultural Traditions and the barriers to reporting

There are intricate connections between gender-based violence (GBV), cultural traditions, and the challenges encountered by women in reporting such incidents. It is widely understood that women from diverse cultural backgrounds experience GBV in unique ways, shaped by their societal norms, beliefs, and customs (Ajayi et al, 2022; Heise & Manji, 2016). Consequently, these cultural factors often present significant barriers for women when they attempt to report instances of violence, emphasizing the need to understand and address these obstacles within discussions surrounding GBV.

Drawing upon studies conducted in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority nations, the study of Afrouz et al (2018), states that the prevalence and intricacies surrounding domestic violence among Muslim women are rather high in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan and encompass various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, psychological, and forced marriages. Despite the pervasive nature of the issue, there remains a notable lack of comprehensive exploration into women's experiences and the obstacles they encounter when seeking assistance. Since family values and privacy hold significant importance within Muslim societies the nature of addressing domestic violence is highly delicate. While some advocate for justifications of domestic violence from an Islamic standpoint, others recognize the multitude of factors contributing to violence against women, spanning religious, societal, and legal realms (Afrouz et al, 2018).

The analysis identifies four key themes: social context, family dynamics, individual factors, and service providers' expectations. Religion holds significance in Muslim women's lives, but its role in help-seeking remains unexplored in Islamic nations. In non-Muslim-majority countries, religion often obstructs seeking help due to fear of community backlash and adherence to beliefs endorsing abuse endurance. Religious leaders may hinder attempts to leave abusive relationships. In addition, norms on domestic violence acceptability create barriers, with women in normalized communities less likely to seek help, internalizing submissive roles and feeling powerless. Cultural perceptions affect help-seeking; traditional beliefs may discourage seeking assistance, while opposition to violence encourages it. Family unity and financial dependence on husbands deter seeking help, along with concerns about divorce. Individual factors, like age and education, influence responses; older women prioritize family privacy, while education increases help-seeking likelihood. Immigration



status and language proficiency pose barriers, especially for newly arrived and less educated women (Ammar et al., 2013). Cultural, familial, financial, and individual factors significantly impact help-seeking. Shame, family loyalty, financial dependence, and limited education and language skills are obstacles to seeking assistance and leaving abusive situations (Afrouz et al, 2018).

Similar to the above, Ajayi et al's (2022) study, focusing on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic (BME) populations (including Nigerian women), identified forms of GBV such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and bride-price as prevalent among BME communities. This study also highlights the intricacies of how women perceive gender-based violence in relation to their cultural backgrounds; Factors contributing to violence against BME women, including structural issues like poverty, racism, insecure immigration status, and cultural factors such as gendered norms, religious beliefs, and patriarchal ideologies, emphasize how cultural beliefs and practices, including notions of male superiority and gendered expectations, perpetuate violence against women in Nigeria. Additionally, rape myths, cultural silence, and discriminatory legal frameworks can have a harmful impact on addressing violence against women in Nigerian society, showing that violence against women is a consequence of patriarchal systems that structurally subordinate women to men and underscores the intersection of race, gender, and other structural factors in shaping women's experiences of violence.

Women of BME populations often found themselves in a situation where tolerating abuse became a perceived necessity due to societal pressures, shedding light on the poignant concept of "family and community betrayal" when contemplating leaving abusive relationships. Within the realm of Religious Beliefs, interpretations rooted in notions like wifely submission not only perpetuated gender inequality but also served as justifications for Sexual Abuse and Violence (SAV). These entrenched beliefs contributed to a passive acceptance of abuse among women, constraining their ability to resist and asserting significant control over their autonomy and well-being. Moreover, the intricate realm of Rape Myths, reveals the role in safeguarding patriarchal structures while simultaneously disempowering women. By downplaying the severity of SAV, these myths place the responsibility of prevention squarely on women and girls, further entrenching gendered power imbalances. The intersection of cultural factors and gendered power relations adds

complexity to responses in cases of intrafamilial sexual abuse, creating intricate challenges for those involved (Ajayi et al, 2022).

Finally, examining Bride-Price practices and the associated custom of Libation, the study highlighted how these cultural norms increased male ownership of women's bodies, fostering cycles of abuse. Women experiencing such abuse often felt trapped by societal expectations and the stigma surrounding marriage breakdowns. Libation practices added an extra layer, further disempowering women and underscoring the intricate interplay of gender, culture, and societal norms in shaping the lived experiences of women subjected to abuse (Ajayi et al, 2022; Collins, 1991)

#### 1.3.4 GBV and Political Instability

According to Raftery et al (2023), during challenging contexts and political instability, the GBV prevention and women's empowered efforts were ineffective. Both UN and GBV actors argued that during these hard times long – term progress had been jeopardized. Moreover, they shared the opinion that political instability in combination with other crises, such as COVID-19 and economic crisis, could reverse the progresses made over the past decade. Before political instability, women and young girls used to visit GBV centers and benefit from awareness sessions. These sessions covered issues related to gender roles, women's rights, GBV and the way to build an equal society.

During political instability, both women and girls are more vulnerable and cannot participate in GBV prevention activities, mainly because they don't have enough money to meet their basic needs. In case of Lebanon, the UNFPA piloted a program which integrated cash assistance within GBV case management services. The program impacted positively the GBV risk lessening. It was reported in 2022 that cash assistance led to a 85% reduction of GBV occurrences for service users and simultaneously stimulated access to GBV response services for 85% of the users. However, GBV actors argued that despite the political instability and corruption along with the system's underlying patriarchy, the systematic root causes of GBV should be addressed. (Raftery et al, 2023)

Despite the challenges posed by crises such as political instability, both UN and government actors highlight the importance of upholding government-co-led interagency organization of the humanitarian response in refugee and migrant's settings. This interagency system

eased engagements about GBV and protection. Furthermore, it allowed the humanitarian actors to influence government refugee policies, like in case of refugees in Lebanon. (ibid.)

## 1.4. Challenges Faced by Refugee Women

This section discusses three challenges faced by women refugees: health care, education, and economic opportunities.

### 1.4.1 Healthcare Barriers

Consistent with the research, there are three barriers to gaining access to health services for refugee women in high-income countries. Those are language barrier, stigmatization, and lack of culturally appropriate resources. In the subsequent subsections each of them is presented (DeSa et al, 2022).

#### *Language Barrier*

Language barriers represent the primary obstacle to accessing healthcare services, particularly for refugee women, who heavily rely on interpreters. Despite this reliance, concerns have been raised regarding the insufficient availability of interpreters within healthcare systems. Research indicates that while some refugee women have limited English proficiency, they encounter significant challenges comprehending medical terminology and navigating the host country's healthcare system. Consequently, many miss medical appointments, while others face severe delays in appointment scheduling (DeSa et al., 2022). Additionally, language barriers prevent refugee women from accessing available mental health services and community-based health programs. In instances where official interpreters are unavailable, they resort to using family members as interpreters (Tulli et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

Conversely, instances have been documented where family members acting as translators fail to accurately convey messages. This discrepancy may stem from their own limited English literacy and communication skills. Furthermore, situations arise where sensitive issues need to be disclosed, leading to conflicts of interest and breaches of confidentiality. (DeSa et al, 2022).

### *Stigmatization*

As regards mental health services, stigmatization appeared to be the main obstacle experienced by refugee women by both family and their community. The mental health stigma had been recognized among the various cultural groups. The perceptions of stigma besides their community and family members were also extended to the fear of being stigmatized by their spouses. Qualitative studies revealed that family and community members were discouraging them from visiting a mental health professional by labelling the action of mental health seeker as “shameful” and “she’s losing it”. Stigmatization had a negative impact on the quality life of refugee women (DeSa et al, 2022).

### *Culturally Appropriate Resources*

Another significant barrier pertained to the absence of culturally appropriate resources. Some refugee women seem to mistrust Western medicine and were apprehensive about using medications prescribed by doctors in their host countries. Consequently, they faced challenges in adapting to treatment regimens due to cultural significance concerns.

Furthermore, concerns regarding confidentiality and accuracy stemming from the use of interpreters also posed obstacles. Research highlighted the apprehensions of women refugees regarding the insensitivity of health systems in host countries like Canada to their distinct cultural requirements. They articulated the concept of culturally sensitive care as encompassing practices deeply rooted in religious and cultural contexts. Refraining from Western biomedical treatment, some refugee women found it at odds with spiritual practices that provided them with strength and hope. Consequently, these women encountered difficulties reconciling traditional and religious beliefs with Western biomedical approaches (DeSa et al, 2022).

#### *1.4.2 Education*

The most significant barriers to education for refugee girls and women were patriarchy, cultural tradition, and religious practices. To these barriers the vulnerabilities of lengthy movement were also added (Hattar – Pollara, 2019).

Several factors highlight the intricate dynamics by which patriarchy, cultural traditions, and religious practices hinder girls' educational opportunities. Initially, gender roles within families often confine girls to subordinate positions, thereby restricting their access to

education from an early age. Additionally, cultural norms frequently undervalue girls' schooling, prioritizing domestic duties over academic pursuits and perpetuating educational disparities. Moreover, societal priorities tend to prioritize childbearing over girls' education, reinforcing traditional gender roles and perpetuating inequality. Lastly, early marriages, prompted by environmental threats and the perceived preservation of family honor, limit girls' educational prospects, exacerbating patriarchal norms (Hattar – Pollara, 2019).

Moreover, research findings indicate that across social, familial, and religious spheres, girls were not regarded as equal to their male counterparts. Instead, they were viewed as liabilities and burdens. Consequently, education was not deemed significant for them, as they were considered vulnerable and reliant on a husband to safeguard family honor (ibid.).

### 1.4.3 Economic Opportunities

Research on immigrant integration examined the influence of religiosity and gender roles on immigrant women's labor market outcomes in European countries. The finding revealed that religious immigrant women participate less in the labor market and work fewer hours than non-religious immigrant women. That negative relationship was caused by the women's traditional gender-role attitudes. Further investigation revealed that refugee women have limited economic benefits as well as opportunities for employment in host countries, even though they were ready and self-stimulated to accept gender-equal norms and values (Kanas and Muller, 2021).

## 1.5. GBV during the Migration Journey

### 1.5.1 Challenges during transit

Research conducted by Amnesty International has revealed that women and girls fleeing from Syria and Iraq as refugees encountered violence, exploitation, assault, and harassment during their migration journeys. The organization interviewed 40 refugee women and girls who traveled from Turkey to Greece and then crossed the Balkans. Their journey was fraught with danger, and they faced constant threats along the way. Many endured physical abuse, financial exploitation, and pressure to engage in sexual activity by male refugees.

One interviewee emphasized that women refugees from Syria and Iraq risked everything to seek safety for themselves and their children. However, from the onset of their journey, they were subjected to violence and exploitation (Amnesty International, 2016).

Furthermore, it was revealed that they were forced to sleep alongside refugee men in transit areas and camps in Greece, Croatia, and Hungary. However, some found the option to sleep in designated open areas on the beach, where they felt safer. Nevertheless, many reported having to share common bathroom and shower facilities with refugee men. Some women felt so unsafe that they refrained from eating and drinking water to avoid using the toilets. Others contended that amidst this humanitarian crisis, practical measures should have been implemented to provide shelter for female-headed families and women traveling alone. (ibid.).

At least three women highlighted the heightened vulnerability of solo female travelers, noting instances where smugglers forced them into sexual activity. Moreover, there were reported cases where smugglers offered women discounted trips or expedited crossing of the Aegean Sea in exchange for sexual favors. Furthermore, a substantial number of women recounted experiences of physical (including beatings) and verbal abuse by security officers in Slovenia, Hungary, and Greece (ibid.).

In general, women who travel alone are at a significantly higher risk of ending up in a cycle of sexual violence (by traffickers and human traffickers). According to a study, 90% of women and girls were raped at some point during their migration journey (Women's Refugee Commission, 2019).

### 1.5.2 Lack of Protection on European Soil

#### *1951 Geneva Convention*

In the aftermath of World War I (1914 – 1918) several millions of people escaped from their homelands in Europe in search of refuge. As a response government prepared a set of international agreements in order to provide travel documents for these people, who were the first known refugees in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, refugees number was dramatically raised during and after World War II (1939 -1945) since more millions were effectively relocated. After WWI the international community started to put forward a set of laws, guidelines, and conventions in order to protect the basic human rights and treatment of

refugees. Thus, in 1921 the process started under the League of Nations. After WWII, the same process ended in 1951 Convention in Geneva, under United Nations. The purpose of the Geneva connection was to merge and expand previous the international tools related to refugees as well as to improve the codification of their rights internationally (UNHCR, 2023).

Since refugees are regarded as the most defenseless people in the world, the Convention was supplemented by its 1967 Protocol, in order to increase the degree of their protection. Both serve as the key legal documents, which shape the work of the United Nations' Higher Commissioner (UNHCR). Therefore, the 1951 Convention first recognized the definition of refugees and then formed the legal protection, rights as well as assistance they were entitled to. The UNHCR was established to serve as a 'guardian' of these documents (ibid.)

According to Article 1 (A)(2) a person can be considered as a refugee;

*“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”* (UN General Assembly, 1951, Art. 1, Paragraph A.2).

In this article, it's crucial to highlight the omission regarding the clear address of "gender" as a reason, which could create a gap and foster misconceptions when addressed to female refugees. While some argue that the term "gender" may imply membership of a particular social group, the omission of gender-based well-founded fear leaves a significant void among other recognized reasons. Furthermore, neither Article 3 of the convention nor the definition of non-discrimination includes the category of sex. Despite increasing recognition of refugee women's rights, the Convention provides limited protection for female asylum-seekers, thereby “undermined by deeply gendered practices which fail to offer protection to women” since women’s background of persecution does not often fall within the categories of persecution in the Refugee Convention (Freedman, 2010, p.177).

The Geneva Convention ostensibly offers protection to all refugees on a gender-neutral basis. However, such protection is compromised by deeply entrenched gendered practices

that often fail to address the specific forms of persecution women face. Women frequently experience persecution stemming from domestic violence, rape, feminicides, and traditional patriarchal customs, wherein they are expected to adhere to the rules set by the family's leader and are often unable to act independently.

These concerns have been acknowledged as a special category of refugee protection by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and subsequently in the Istanbul Convention, particularly in Article 60(1) (UNHCR, 2019; Council of Europe, 2011). However, it's important to note that the role of the UNHCR is primarily consultative in most cases, and the applicability of the Istanbul Convention is limited to countries that have ratified it.

### *Istanbul Convention*

Ratified on 28 June 2023, the Istanbul Convention stands as a pivotal document dedicated to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It shows a worldwide commitment to tackling the issues of gender-based violence and ensuring the safety of individuals. The significance of the Istanbul Convention lies in its commitment to providing universal protection to women and girls, irrespective of their identities, and in challenging entrenched prejudices and stereotypes perpetuating violence against women. By advocating for preventive measures and legal reforms, the Convention serves as a vital tool in empowering advocacy groups and allies to combat gender-based violence effectively. Despite facing resistance in some countries, the Convention serves as a lifesaving instrument by empowering women's groups and allies to campaign against violence, ensuring that states implement measures to protect women's rights and save lives (Amnesty International, 2021). Turkey was the first country that ratified it and the first that withdrew from it in March 2021.

The Istanbul Convention notably criminalized a range of offenses aimed at protecting women and combating gender-based violence. These offenses include psychological violence, stalking, non-consensual sexual acts, sexual violence encompassing rape, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, forced sterilization, as well as sexual harassment and crimes labeled as "so-called honor" (Council of Europe, 2011). The Convention also defined violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination. It underscored the imperative for due diligence in preventing such



violence, emphasizing the duty of nations to safeguard victims and pursue justice against perpetrators (Council of Europe, 2011, art. 5)

Furthermore, and when it comes to refugee women, the Istanbul convention serves to address the legal “void” of the Geneva Convention to adequately address gendered practices with its Articles 60 and 61. Article 60(1) notably acknowledges gender-based violence as grounds for asylum under Article 1(A)(2) of the Geneva Convention, recognizing the threat of persecution as a form of significant harm warranting supplementary protection (Council of Europe, 2011, art. 60). Meanwhile, Article 61(1) and (2) emphasize the principle of non-refoulement, echoing the prohibition of expulsion or return outlined in Article 33 of the Geneva Convention. This necessitates legislative action to ensure that women at risk of violence are not forcibly returned to perilous situations, regardless of their legal status or residency (Council of Europe, 2011, art. 61). These provisions underline the critical need for international protection for women seeking refuge in foreign nations, particularly when facing threats to their lives due to gender-based violence, where the risks they face would be different if they were male.

### *1.5.3 Pushbacks as Antimigration Policy and a form of systemic violence*

The application of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 resulted in the rise of refugee flows in Greece especially at the northern borders of Evros region and the Aegean Islands. The Greek government is alleged to exercise illegal refoulement practices (pushbacks) as part of its anti-immigration policies, as reported by testimonies from lawyers, NGOs, and other actors (Global Legal Action Network, 2020; Drakopoulou et al., 2020). The pushbacks operations involve unofficial arrest and arbitrary removal of third-country nationals without having evaluated the validity of their entry or in some cases their presence within the country. Hence, Greece deprives from them the opportunity to request asylum or to defend their removal.

According to published testimonies, the main actors in these illegal refoulement practices are the border guards, the coast guard, the army, the police as well as paramilitary groups or individuals (Greek Council for Refugees, ARSIS & HumanRights360, 2018). Furthermore, Frontex has joined those actors directly or indirectly. The European Parliament, the EU Ombudsman and OLAF (the European Anti-Fraud Office) reported that they were scrutinizing the case (Statewatch, 2021).

However, some reports highlight the fact that sometimes the removals of the immigrants are not upon their arrival or after they have crossed into part of the territory. Instead, they were random removals of individuals who had either applied for asylum or even had international protection status in Greece or in another country member of EU (Greek Council for Refugees, ARSIS & HumanRights360, 2018). This practice has been extended to all refugees including both genders, unaccompanied children, elderly, pregnant women, torture survivors and even seriously ill individuals. Furthermore, pushback practices have been systematically extended in the Aegean Sea, making the situation alarming (Drakopoulou et al, 2020).

Consistent with the Annual Torture Report, 89 incidents of illegal pushbacks were documented in 2019, which affected approximately 4,500 persons. 90% of those cases involved mistreatment and torture and 52% of the victims were children. 10% of the incidents included the use of Electric Discharge Weapons, 44% practices of forced undressing, 15% threats or violence and 19.7% inhuman treatment (Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2020a).

According to Drakopoulou et al (2020), illegal refoulements exhibit several fundamental characteristics. These include standardization, wherein the government utilizes them as a frontline strategy to manage refugee inflows. The practice extends from the Evros region and Aegean Sea to the mainland, demonstrating its widespread application. Violence is frequently employed, accompanied by instances of informal imprisonment, both of which contravene the Greek Penal Code. Despite the evident occurrence of such practices, the government denies their existence, further complicating efforts to address and rectify these violations of human rights.

Equivalent reports concerning the arrival of refugees from Libya to Europe indicate that pushbacks escalated the risk of trauma and denied women the right to seek assistance in cases of violence. Concurrently, rapes were commonly perpetrated by military groups as a means of humiliating women (Kirby, 2020). Furthermore, in Greece, there are many testimonies from refugee women who report forced undressing in front of the group and invasive genital searches by the coastguards during pushbacks operations (Hindrachs et al., 2023).

# Chapter 2: Research Methodology

## 2.1 Research Method

This study seeks to investigate theoretical aspects related to gender-based violence (GBV) and its effects on displaced refugee women, while also comparing and contrasting with established theories. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on how cultural factors influence the interpretation and experiences of GBV by examining how these concepts intersect with GBV experiences among displaced refugee women.

One notable advantage of this study is the acquisition and examination of primary data gathered through interviews conducted with professionals engaged in refugee support services, including lawyers, social workers, NGO representatives, and psychologists. In contrast to many existing studies on GBV among displaced populations that predominantly draw from secondary sources like reports from investigative organizations and media outlets, this research places emphasis on gathering firsthand insights and perspectives from professionals directly involved in assisting displaced refugee women.

By focusing on primary data collection, this study aims to provide a more detailed understanding of the multifaceted nature of GBV experienced by displaced refugee women. It seeks to uncover the underlying factors contributing to GBV within the context of displacement, including socio-cultural norms, structural inequalities, and the dynamics of power and control driven by patriarchal systems.

Through the analysis of primary data and theoretical frameworks, this study aims to shed light on the unique challenges faced by displaced refugee women in accessing support services, seeking justice, and navigating systems of power within host countries. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the development of more effective policies and interventions aimed at addressing GBV and promoting the rights and well-being of displaced refugee women in Europe and in modern societies in general.

For the reasons mentioned above, the present study is based upon qualitative research, which is commonly used in social sciences and humanities to gather in-depth insights about an issue or to produce new ideas for research (Saunders et al, 2009). In researching gender-based violence (GBV) among refugee women, qualitative research methods offer an

insightful approach to understanding the multifaceted dimensions of their experiences. The reason why qualitative research is particularly well-suited for this study is, first of all, the depth of understanding (Merriam, 2002); it allows for in-depth exploration of the lived experiences, perspectives, and narratives of refugee women who have encountered GBV. Through methods such as interviews, participant observation and narrative analysis the researcher can delve into the complexities of their stories and gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to GBV.

Moreover, such kind of research provides a contextual insight (Duda et al, 2020). GBV among refugee women is influenced by many contextual factors including cultural norms, societal structures, and migration experiences. Qualitative research enables the examination of these contextual nuances, providing insights into how socio-cultural backgrounds, displacement trauma, and refugee status intersect to shape women's vulnerability to GBV. Also, GBV survivors often navigate complex trajectories of trauma, survival, and resilience. Qualitative research allows for the exploration of these complexities by capturing the distinctions of survivors' coping mechanisms, support networks, and pathways to healing beyond statistical data points (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008).

Lastly, GBV among refugee women is deeply intertwined with structural inequalities, institutional barriers, and power dynamics. Qualitative research methods enable the identification and analysis of these systemic factors, shedding light on issues such as access to services, legal protections, and social support networks. In general, qualitative research offers a holistic and contextually grounded approach to studying GBV among refugee women as it contributes to a deeper understanding (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008), by prioritizing the stories of survivors, examining socio-cultural contexts, and uncovering systemic inequalities.

## 2.2 Interview structure and table of interviewees

In line with the qualitative research methodology, for the purposes of this study, the researcher employs semi-structured interviews to further investigate the experiences and perspectives of the participants, by using a list of themes and questions that need to be covered during the interview. However, during the process some questions might be

omitted, or some others might be added depending on the flow of the conversation. These additional questions might be needed to explore the research questions and objectives. The data will be recorded by conference call and note taking (Saunders et al, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews are a foundational component of qualitative research methodologies, offering a balanced approach between structure and flexibility and allowing researchers to explore the depth of participants' experiences while providing a loose framework to guide the conversation. One of the key advantages of semi-structured interviews is their adaptability; Unlike fully structured interviews with predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews allow for spontaneity and adjustment. Researchers can tailor the interview flow based on participants' responses, enabling deeper exploration of emerging themes and unexpected insights. This adaptability facilitates the capture of detailed narratives that may not surface through more rigid data collection methods. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow to build trust between researchers and participants. By inviting participants to share their perspectives in their own words, researchers create a supportive environment conducive to open dialogue, leading to richer and more detailed responses (Merriam, 2002).

However, alongside their benefits, semi-structured interviews also present certain challenges. The flexible format can complicate data analysis, as researchers must navigate a wealth of qualitative data to discern meaningful patterns and themes. Additionally, the quality of data obtained may depend on the interviewer's skill in probing and facilitating the conversation. Without proper training and reflexivity, researchers risk introducing bias or inadvertently influencing participants' responses. Another weakness of semi-structured interviews is the inherent tension between interpretations and facts. While these interviews provide rich qualitative data, they are subject to the subjective interpretations of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Unlike quantitative methods that aim for objective measurement, qualitative research relies on interpretations that may not always align with concrete facts or realities (Knott et al, 2022). For this reason, the presentation of research findings derived from interviews will corroborate insights with additional sources such as reports from international organizations and the media, ensuring a more comprehensive and validated analysis.

As for interview sampling, the selection of participants in this study was purposeful. The chosen individuals represent a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives relevant to the research topic. Each participant was selected based on specific criteria designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon under investigation. The sample of the data consists of four distinct categories of interviewees:

- NGO personnel
- Lawyers
- Social Workers
- Psychologists

Personnel from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) dedicated to assisting refugees in Turkey and Greece play a crucial role in supporting women who experience gender-based violence (GBV). These individuals, who directly interact with refugee women, possess invaluable insights into their challenges and cultural differences. A total of two (2) NGO workers, specifically focused on addressing GBV issues among refugee women, were interviewed.

Lawyers were also included in the sample. Totally two (2) lawyers were interviewed who were either working for NGOs to legally support refugee women or generally within the field, with a specific focus on matters concerning gender-based violence.

Furthermore, two (2) social workers were interviewed, closely engaged with NGOs addressing refugee issues, specifically gender-based violence (GBV). They held extensive understanding of refugee challenges, encompassing the difficulties encountered during their journeys to Turkey and Greece, along with insights into their cultural backgrounds. Additionally, one (1) psychologist was consulted, providing valuable perspectives on the psychological aspects of GBV among refugee women.

With the above considerations in mind, the following table presents information on the interviews conducted during the field research, including the specialization of the interviewees.

**Table 2 interviews conducted**

Interview 1	22/02/2024 (Online)	Staff of International organization which focuses on refugees and displaced populations (Female)
Interview 2	22/02/2024 (Online)	Staff of International organization which focuses on refugees and displaced populations (Female)
Interview 3	23/02/2024 (Online)	Lawyer experienced in GBV cases (Female)
Interview 4	25/02/2024 (Online)	Lawyer experienced in GBV cases (Male)
Interview 5	27/02/2024 (Online)	Social worker (Male)
Interview 6	27/02/2024 (Online)	Social worker (Female)
Interview 7	28/02/2024 (Online)	Psychologist (Female)

### 2.3 The use of online interviews in Qualitative research

Online interviews have become a valuable method in qualitative research, particularly during the covid-19 period, and when geographical constraints limit the feasibility of in-person meetings. This approach allows researchers to connect with participants regardless of their location, making it an ideal solution when participants are spread across different cities or countries (Thunberg & Arnell 2022).

In the context of this study, where some participants were either abroad or living in distant cities, online interviews provided an effective means of data collection. The flexibility of

online platforms such as Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams enabled the researcher to schedule interviews at convenient times for both parties, overcoming the barriers of time zones or travel costs. This method ensures that valuable information can be gathered from a diverse group of participants, enriching the research with varied perspectives that might otherwise be inaccessible. Moreover, online interviews can be less intrusive for participants, who can join from the comfort of their own homes, potentially leading to more relaxed conversations. This setting can enhance the depth and quality of the data collected, as participants may feel more at ease and open in their familiar environments (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

The digital nature of online interviews also allows for easy recording and transcription, facilitating accurate data analysis. Researchers can revisit the recorded interviews to ensure they capture all details, which is crucial in qualitative research where context is important. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of online interviews. Issues such as internet connectivity problems and the lack of non-verbal cues can affect communication. Researchers must be prepared to address these challenges by ensuring they have reliable technology and by being attentive to verbal cues that can indicate participant engagement and understanding (de Villiers et al., 2022). In this particular study, both the researcher and the participants were well-prepared, ensuring a smooth and effective communication process. There were no significant barriers, as both parties had stable internet connections and were adept at using the necessary technology. Additionally, the researcher was skilled at interpreting verbal cues, which helped to maintain a high level of engagement and understanding throughout the interviews.

## 2.4 Gender of participants

It is pertinent to acknowledge that the gender of the participants did not play a defining role in this study. While the focus was on understanding and addressing gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by refugee women, the participants encompassed individuals of various genders, including both males and females. This inclusion was crucial as it allowed for a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted issues surrounding GBV within the refugee population.



Throughout the interviews conducted with personnel from NGOs, lawyers, social workers, and a psychologist, gender was not a determining factor in their ability to provide insights and support for refugee women experiencing GBV. Rather, what emerged as significant was their dedication to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by this vulnerable group, regardless of their own gender identity.

## 2.5 Data Quality

As mentioned before, semi-structured interviews pose challenges related to data quality, particularly concerning reliability, bias, validity, and generalizability. The reliability of such interviews is questioned due to the lack of standardization, raising doubts about whether other researchers would uncover similar information. Concerns about reliability often intersect with biases, including interviewer bias, where the verbal and non-verbal cues of the interviewer may influence participants' responses. Additionally, bias can arise from the interviewer's interpretation of the responses provided by the interviewees (Easterby - Smith et al, 2002).

The second type of bias in semi-structured interviews is attributed to the interviewee and is often referred to as response bias. This bias stems from respondents' perceptions of the interviewer or their perceptions of interviewer bias. In semi-structured and in-depth interviews aimed at exploring events and seeking explanations, participants may be cautious about discussing sensitive topics or revealing certain information. Consequently, they may present an incomplete picture of the situation, portraying themselves in a socially desirable role (Saunders et al, 2009).

Bias may result from the time – consuming requirements of the interview process which may negatively affect the willingness of some to take part in the interview.

Other data quality issues are validity and generalizability. Validity refers to the point to which the researcher can acquire access to knowledge and experience of the interviewees. The advantage of the qualitative interviewees is that the flexible and reactive collaboration between interviewer and interviewee results in explored meanings, topics covered thoroughly and clear questions to the interviewees (Knott et al, 2022). As regards

generalizability, the results of both semi-structured and in-depth interviews in qualitative research cannot be used to make generalization about the whole population because the results are based on a small and unrepresentative number of cases (Yin, 1994).

## 2.6 Cultural Differences and Bias

One more important factor that should be recognized is to control bias related to cultural differences. This is usually due to misinterpretation of responses as a result of cultural differences between the interviewee and the interviewer. The issue of cultural differences and bias is related to semi-structured interviews. In opposite, in-depth interviews provide the opportunity to investigate meanings that are culturally explicit. However, the interviewee and the researcher should be aware of both the cultural differences and their implication (Hofstede, 2001; Marshall and Rosssman, 1999).

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research methods offer a higher degree of control, ensuring that the researcher's conduct adheres to appropriate and acceptable standards. During face-to-face interviews, intrusive questioning was carefully avoided, and there was no pressure exerted on participants to respond. This approach aimed to prevent any potential stress for the interviewees. Furthermore, all respondents were explicitly informed of their right to decline to answer any question and to proceed to the next one (Saunders et al, 2009). Finally, all interviews were conducted anonymously, and all participants were provided with consent forms in order to ensure confidentiality and respect for their privacy throughout the research process.

## 2.8 Why choosing Greece and Turkey as case studies for GBV against refugees

The choice of Greece and Turkey as case studies for gender-based violence (GBV) against refugees stems from several critical factors. Firstly, both countries serve as significant entry points for refugees and asylum seekers due to their geographical proximity to conflict

regions and their status as transit countries. Secondly, Greece and Turkey have witnessed a substantial influx of refugees, particularly from war-torn countries like Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, making them pertinent contexts for studying the challenges faced by refugee populations. Moreover, the differing political landscapes, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural contexts between Greece and Turkey offer valuable comparative insights into the responses to GBV against refugees and the effectiveness of support mechanisms in place.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, it's crucial to highlight that both Greece and Turkey struggle with legislative framework implementations concerning the protection of women citizens, exacerbated by high rates of femicide in both countries (Louloudi et al., 2023: We will Stop Femicides Platform, 2023). These gaps not only fail to fully protect women citizens but also indicate that existing laws may not adequately safeguard women refugees. Despite legislative efforts, the persistently high femicide rates in both countries underscore the limitations of current legal frameworks in addressing gender-based violence effectively. Furthermore, both countries have faced substantial criticism for their methods and approaches in managing refugee flows and providing adequate protection and support to vulnerable populations, including women and children (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2023). The combination of legislative shortcomings and criticisms regarding their approaches highlights the urgency and relevance of studying GBV against refugees in these contexts.

## 2.9 Research time frame

The selected time frame for this study spans from the year 2021 to the present day, reflecting recent developments in refugee policies and management in Greece and Turkey heightening scrutiny and criticism on their handling of refugee flows and their adherence to international humanitarian standards.

During this period, Greece designated Turkey as a "safe third country" for returning asylum applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, marking a significant policy shift and adding another stumbling block to the access to a fair European asylum procedure. The designation of Turkey as a "safe third country" raised concerns about the

adequacy of protection for asylum seekers, especially amid reports of human rights violations and inadequate refugee reception conditions (Greek Council for Refugees, 2023).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges in managing refugee populations, including limited access to healthcare, heightened risk of transmission in overcrowded camps, and disruptions to humanitarian aid efforts. Such cases left survivors of GBV imprisoned inside Greek camps with their abusers, unable to access any kind of help (Legal Centre Lesbos & Feminist Autonomous Centre, 2023). Against this backdrop, Greece's implementation of numerous pushback operations against women, children and men further intensified debates surrounding refugee rights and protection mechanisms within the European Union's borders (Greek Council for Refugees, 2023a).

## 2.10 Barriers of the research

Although this thesis is for refugee women, the researcher faced limitations regarding the original plan to conduct direct interviews with them. Despite earnest attempts to engage potential participants, challenges arose due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Moreover, restricted access to refugee camps impeded direct interaction with refugee populations, thereby constraining the depth of firsthand insights into their experiences of gender-based violence and associated challenges.

Another limitation that emerged from the sensitive nature of the subject was that some NGOs specialized in GBV cases were unwilling to provide insights or access to potential participants. This reluctance may have been influenced by concerns about protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved, as well as considerations related to the safety and well-being of the refugee communities. As a result, valuable perspectives and information that could have enriched the study were not fully accessible.

Furthermore, time constraints resulted in a relatively small sample size of participants, which may have limited the depth of the study's findings. Ideally, a more extensive research effort would include a broader spectrum of participants, containing both refugee women and specialists working in the field. This broader approach would offer a more

comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of gender-based violence among refugee populations and facilitate the exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences.

Lastly, in addition to the challenges outlined above, it's important to note that all participants, except one, have worked in Greece rather than Turkey. This aspect further highlights the limitations of the understanding, as insights from individuals working in Turkey were limited. As a result, the perspective on the situation in Turkey remains somewhat distant and reliant on secondary sources of information.

# Chapter 3: Analysis

## 3.1 Discussion of the intensity and forms of GBV experienced by refugees in Greece and Turkey

As mentioned by the literature, Gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by refugee women encompasses a wide range of forms and intensities, reflecting the intersectionality of gender, displacement, and other social determinants. The research provided some insights into the intensity and forms of GBV experienced by refugees in both Greece and Turkey:

Refugees, especially women and girls, are highly susceptible to physical and sexual violence. This includes domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape, which can occur during conflicts, while fleeing their homes, or within host communities. Sexual violence pervades refugee populations across different settings such as camps, transit routes, and host communities. Survivors often endure stigma, shame, and psychological trauma, making it difficult to seek support and justice. Perpetrators may include armed actors, community members, and even humanitarian workers. These forms of violence can result in severe injuries, trauma, and long-term health consequences for survivors (UN Women, 2022).

The first quote comes from a female lawyer underscores the prevalence of domestic and sexual violence among refugee women, indicating the widespread nature of these forms of GBV within displaced communities.

“The most prevalent forms of GBV reported include domestic violence, rapes and sexual exploitation” (Interview 3, lawyer)

The second quote, attributed to an International Organization staff member, expands on the types of GBV witnessed, including survival sex, trafficking, and prostitution. This highlights the complex challenges faced by refugee women, ranging from economic exploitation to trafficking for sexual purposes, underscoring the vulnerabilities they encounter during displacement.

“... we have witnessed quite a lot of incidents, meaning the most common cases include survival sex, trafficking, prostitution...” (Interview 2, International Organization staff member)

The third quote, provided by a psychologist, delves into the origins of violence within refugee families, shedding light on the within-family dynamics contributing to GBV. The examples given highlight the pervasive nature of violence within familial structures.

“Well, another distinction, (...) is that violence often originated from within the family. For example, there were cases where the father was abusive towards an adult daughter. Siblings were abusive towards each other, like a brother towards an adult sister. Another case, okay, but not the usual one, was a woman who experienced violence from both her spouse and her son. Another distinction, quite common, perhaps the most common, I consider, was violence from the partner...” (Interview 7, psychologist)

Another form of GBV revealed from the research and aligns with literature was Socioeconomic Exploitation: Refugees, particularly women and marginalized groups, may face exploitation in labor markets, including unpaid work, low wages, and hazardous working conditions. Economic vulnerability increases the risk of exploitation and exacerbates existing inequalities within refugee communities (Trentin et al, 2023; Nardon et al, 2022).

“I remember a story about an underage girl who remained in Turkey for a period until she managed to gather the money to pay the smuggler... Typically, she had been forced into child labor 10 to 12-hour shifts to be able to gather the money...” (Interview 4, lawyer)

Finally, as highlighted in the literature, the research came across incidents of Harmful Traditional Practices; Some refugee communities uphold harmful traditional practices, such as honor-based violence, reinforcing patriarchal norms and control over women's bodies, leading to physical and emotional harm (Cusack & Pusey, 2013).

“...there was a family coming from Iraq where the wife had been raped and the husband had to kill her... He supported her and they flew together... The wife had

become disgraced, you understand, they had to leave, otherwise they would have been killed.” (Interview 7, psychologist)

This quote from the psychologist's interview highlights a distressing account of the consequences of sexual violence within certain populations. The story of the Iraqi family illustrates the deeply entrenched cultural stigma surrounding rape and the extreme measures taken to preserve honor and avoid further harm. The notion of honor, deeply ingrained in many cultures, often places the burden of shame and disgrace on survivors of sexual assault rather than on the perpetrators, leading to extreme trauma.

Based on the research findings, these aforementioned forms of gender-based violence are evident in refugee populations in both Greece and Turkey. However, it becomes apparent that they are not met with uniform approaches, as each country employs its distinct mechanisms for addressing migration issues. Despite the variations in approach, sexual violence emerges as the most prevalent form of gender-based violence among refugee populations.

### 3.2 Living conditions: Turkey vs Greece

Gender-based violence (GBV) is any prejudice or harmful behavior directed against a person based on their social gender. It involves the use of actual power as a means of exercising social control and punishment, stemming from the inequality in social relations between men and women. GBV encompasses physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, including threats and the removal of freedom (De Ferrante et al., 2009).

During migration journeys, women often become targets of GBV, facing challenges in refugee camps. They endure violence during their journey and stay in camps, with the passage from Turkey to Greece posing particular hazards. Women encounter constant threats, physical abuse, financial exploitation, and coercive pressures for sexual favors from male refugees (Amnesty International, 2016).

In Turkey, various NGOs, including national, international, and Syrian organizations, provide legal and psychological support to women who have experienced GBV. However, accessing help for such issues in Turkey can be challenging for women (AIDA & ECRE, 2023).



Conversely, participants noted that seeking assistance for GBV issues was more accessible in Greece than in Turkey. In Greece, women can report instances of GBV to the police, hospitals, or relevant organizations more easily. While Turkey offers similar reporting channels, women faced greater difficulties in reporting such incidents.

All interviewees discussed the situation within the camps, highlighting a concerning trend of decreasing funding for non-governmental organizations over the years. This decline is attributed to the state receiving grants from the European Union to cover the expenses of immigrants and refugees. However, some noted the emergence of a gap due to the reduction in financial aid to NGOs and international organizations. Despite the state receiving grants to manage the migration crisis and support immigrants and refugees, these funds are not always utilized efficiently.

The following quote highlights the challenges faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing support to survivors from gender-based violence (GBV) among refugee populations due to the decrease of funding. Despite a reduction in arrivals compared to previous years, there are still significant challenges in addressing cases of GBV effectively. Additionally, this gap has resulted in the normalization and prevalence of violence against refugees over time.

“Over time, funding for non-governmental organizations has been decreasing, as the state is supposed to receive funding for all these programs it should cover (...) There are no longer housing facilities for the survivors (...) Therefore, the gap is widening. Even though theoretically, due to reduced arrivals compared to 2016 and 2017, there should be fewer incidents, we still face challenges in how to deal with cases of gender-based violence. And this has a political aspect as well. Violence, in general, has become more open. It's no longer taboo to harm refugees, as it used to be.”  
(Interview 2, International Organization Staff member)

Another illustrative example is the response to incidents of gender-based violence. Samples from the interviews have shown that refugee women in Greece have many times tried to access government agencies to report incidents of GBV and seek assistance. Despite detailed descriptions and evident physical and emotional distress, there was minimal

interest from the authorities. This lack of response can be attributed to government agencies lacking the necessary facilities and resources to address such incidents effectively.

“...It is a significant effort, and it requires the woman or girl to be in a very dangerous situation for someone to intervene immediately... There are no designated places for shelters for abused women, let alone for refugees. So, yes, at such a governmental and institutional level, there is no protection.” (Interview 6, social worker)

In contrast, while NGOs and international organizations previously offered comprehensive services to address gender-based violence, including legal, psychological, and physical assistance, as well as alternative housing options when necessary, the availability of such help has diminished in recent times. This reduction can be attributed to insufficient funding and the increasing scrutiny placed on NGOs, along with the government's adversarial stance towards them. Furthermore, the establishment of closed monitored camps severely restricts the entry of NGOs and the provision of assistance to refugees. Therefore, although there are highly skilled and trained individuals in gender-based violence issues who can aid victims, their role has been significantly reduced, thus amplifying the persistent inequalities experienced by women in refugee contexts.

“To be honest, while I was working in shelters, there was generally staff knowledgeable in various specialties. There was a know-how in how things were done. However, nowadays, in shelters, there is a significant lack of such resources. Without adequate legal or psychosocial services, for instance, one wonders how effective the response can be. Even if there are psychologists available, it's different when they are part of the administration, which often operates in ways contrary to the interests of the state representatives and others. So, I don't know how easy it is for a victim of gender-based violence to disclose such incidents to them. I believe there is a significant deficit in services and integration beyond what happens within the shelters; there's a perennial lack of services. For instance, we used to make referrals and arrange placements in shelters for abused women. But many times, there were no vacancies. For instance, we had a service where, until all this was arranged, we would put the survivors in hotels, which we paid for, which is essential

because a referral and placement cannot always be made immediately". (Interview 4, lawyer)

### Conditions in Camps

As mentioned above, during the past years, the structures had a diverse staff with expertise in GBV and a well-established know-how regarding operational procedures. However, today, there is a significant lack of services. This deficiency makes it challenging for survivors to reveal their experiences. Within these structures, there is also a notable absence of shelters for women who have experienced abuse, leaving refugee women at risk without appropriate support.

According to the interviewees, in Turkey, in informal detention centers, migrants were exploited, with money being extorted from them. It is important to note that the participants also highlighted the dire conditions in Turkish camps, where refugees often reported "they took everything from us." Turkish officials were reported to be robbing migrants upon their entry into the country, a disturbingly common occurrence.

"...most people coming from Turkey mentioned that they were victims of violence... it was extremely violent, and all forms of human rights were trespassed. In informal detention centers, they could fall victim to exploitation by traffickers. They could also fall victim to those who were not in any detention center; they simply found the contact and took their money. They might also engage in acts of rape and so on" (Interview 6, social worker)

"We had reports of extreme violence. They wouldn't distinguish men from women, they would beat them anyway... There were many reports of rapes. There was one woman who got raped by a smuggler. It resulted in her getting pregnant and today she has a child." (Interview 5, social worker)

The above quotes paint a distressing picture of the pervasive violence experienced by refugees, particularly those fleeing from Turkey. Individuals are subjected to various forms of violence, including physical assault, exploitation, and rape, with perpetrators showing no regard for basic human rights. The vulnerability of refugees is exacerbated in informal detention centers, where they become easy targets for traffickers and other criminals.

Apart from the above, sexual violence is again prevalent here, further highlighting the high risk of trauma refugee women face when being in transit.

In Greek camps, refugees live in equally marginalized conditions as those in Turkey. While the conditions may be somewhat better than Turkish detention centers, as mentioned earlier, the camps lack basic necessities for refugees. Additionally, there is no segregation to preserve different nationalities, resulting in tensions, and often, women fear even using the restroom. Furthermore, in Greece, the new camps are located far from cities, causing delays in addressing incidents of gender-based violence and aiding the survivors, as they must travel long distances to access medical care. Many times, the delay is so significant that they have to wait until the next day to receive the necessary help they need. Other times this delay can be extended even more as there is no way for the victim to be transferred.

It is also important to note that Greek authorities systematically delay the legal procedures for granting documents to refugees, leaving them in a constant state of limbo and unable to search for work while staying in the camps for very long periods:

"I have seen people simply mold inside the camps. They go from objection to objection, from asylum attempts to another asylum attempt after the second rejection. Meanwhile, you don't receive money, your allowance is cut, so people are simply stuck in the camps and are forced to resort to illegal ways to leave, because how many years can you sit imprisoned in a camp?" (Interview 7, psychologist)

As stated above, there is a profound impact of prolonged stays in refugee camps, where individuals experience a sense of stagnation and hopelessness. The cycle of failed asylum attempts and decreasing financial support perpetuates a state of limbo, prompting some to resort to desperate and often dangerous measures to escape their circumstances, mitigating the risk of exploitation and further harm within refugee camp settings.

### 3.3 Systemic Patriarchy

Patriarchy exerts a significant influence on the lives of women, beginning from birth. From a young age, girls are exposed to societal messages and everyday interactions that reinforce

patriarchal norms. They are taught that the father, and later the husband, is the head of the family, and that women and girls must adhere to patriarchal control. This obedience is expected throughout their lives, shaping their behavior and interactions within society. Moreover, patriarchal attitudes permeate various stages of women's lives, including educational institutions and workplaces (Trautner, Hoffman, & Borland, 2022). Exploring the systemic patriarchy differences between Greece and Turkey sheds light on important distinctions.

In terms of religion, particularly Islam and Christianity, some of the research participants note significant disparities between the two countries, while others believe that they are very similar. Nevertheless, all agree that Greece has seen a perceptual shift, albeit not always reflected in practice, towards a more progressive view of women's roles. Urban centers have generally embraced this change, while rural areas adhere more closely to traditional customs and norms (Ajayi et al, 2022).

Conversely, Turkey exhibits a more complex landscape. Major urban centers like Istanbul and Ankara strive for Europeanization, with some advocating for women's rights despite prevailing conservatism. However, both countries face challenges with the rise of right-wing and far-right ideologies, which cast doubt on progress towards gender equality (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2022).

By examining these subtle differences, it becomes apparent that patriarchy's influence differs between Greece and Turkey, reflecting broader societal attitudes and political dynamics. The gathered data highlights significant differences in the administrative systems and structures between Greece and Turkey concerning the state's approach to addressing crimes of violence and protecting victims. The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) underscores this contrast, with Turkey previously being found responsible for violations related to cases of gender-based violence (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Notably, Greece recently faced accountability from the ECHR for its failure to protect an applicant who was a survivor from gender-based violence and rape (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2022). In an interview, a lawyer shed light on this matter,

emphasizing the need for improved legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to safeguard survivors from violence effectively.

“If I could compare these two (Greek and Turkish) systems in terms of systemic patriarchy. In general, I can argue that there are problems... (which) have been diagnosed completely from exhibitions of international organizations, in both states...” (Interview 3, lawyer)

Consistent with the research of NGO and international organizations, domestic and gender-based violence are at high levels and have been recorded as recorded crimes, in both countries due to the large number of incidences.

Furthermore, the lawyer specialized in cases of gender-based violence stated that:

“...women, who come to Greece through Turkey report (in vast percentages) that they had been victims of sexual exploitation from smugglers and police figures, that is, that they were obliged to sexual course for a fee and that they were victims of gender-based violence and rape during their journey and through Turkey...” (Interview 3, lawyer)

And she also criticized these incidents through the lens of modern analysis. Hence, when

“...incidents of crimes, such as gender – based violence, occur, they are considered as state’s failure to protect the victims and prevent such crimes...” (Interview 3, lawyer)

The above testimony underscores the pervasive nature of gender-based violence faced by refugee women migrating through Turkey to Greece. The statement reveals that a significant number of women have reported instances of sexual exploitation and violence, including rape, during their journey and within Turkey itself. By highlighting the prevalence of these crimes, the lawyer exposes systemic failures in protecting vulnerable individuals, attributing such incidents to the state's inability to prevent gender-based violence effectively. Her critique implies a need for enhanced governmental intervention and accountability to ensure the safety and rights of refugee women.

## *Perceptions of Turkey Vs Greece*

Perceptions in patriarchal societies often revolve around traditional gender roles and expectations that prioritize men's authority and dominance while relegating women to subordinate positions. These perceptions are deeply ingrained in cultural, religious, and social norms, shaping individuals' behaviors, attitudes, and interactions within these societies. In patriarchal societies, women are often viewed as caregivers, homemakers, and supporters of the family unit, while men are expected to be providers and decision-makers (Dankwa, 2018). These perceptions can limit women's opportunities for education, employment, and leadership roles, reinforcing gender inequalities and power imbalances. Moreover, patriarchal perceptions often dictate rigid standards of femininity and masculinity, enforcing stereotypes that prescribe how individuals should behave based on their gender (ibid., p.8). This can lead to the stigmatization of those who deviate from traditional gender norms and the marginalization of gender non-conforming individuals.

Both Greek and Turkish societies hide a complex and contradictory situation regarding the perception of women's roles and rights. Interview 5 provided a very interesting insight as it emphasizes the discrepancy between advocating for refugee women's rights while simultaneously perpetuating traditional and patriarchal norms that limit women's freedoms.

"I think there is, for me, a paradoxical situation here. I have seen many people who perceive women as reproductive machines and believe they should stay at home and work... These are the same people who will advocate for women's rights when they see them wearing burqas, headscarves, or hijabs. And all this to build a narrative in the extreme right-wing discourse that women are not free, that they cannot express themselves, or have a life like other women in Europe. So, they somewhat condemn the oppressive men of these women. Only they may do worse things. Their pretext is racism or xenophobia and all that. Without, of course, having any desire to help women, to express themselves freely. So, I consider this mindset not helpful... I don't think this mindset helps these women, even though they think they are doing it. But they do it mainly for their own benefit and not so much for the benefit of these women to integrate into society." (Interview 5, social worker)

In the above excerpt the participant addresses a complex societal paradox regarding attitudes towards women's rights within the context of migration and integration, by highlighting the contradiction in certain individuals who, on one hand, advocate for women's rights when it aligns with their political agenda, particularly in opposition to cultural practices such as wearing burqas or hijabs. However, simultaneously, these individuals may hold deeply patriarchal views, viewing women primarily as reproductive tools and advocating for traditional gender roles. This selective advocacy for women's rights is not genuinely motivated by a desire to empower women but rather serves to fuel xenophobic or racist narratives and such individuals exploit women's rights issues to further their own political agendas, without genuinely seeking to support women in expressing themselves freely or integrating into society.

### 3.4 State-Driven vs. Individual-Based GBV

In patriarchal societies, violence becomes a normalized tool within the social structure, serving to reinforce women's subordination. Within this framework, violence is normalized as a means to impose discipline, often through physical punishment aimed at controlling or correcting behavior. Additionally, men enforce rigid gender norms that further subjugate femininities and violence is normalized as an expression of masculinity (Namy et al, 2027).

The subsequent analysis investigates further systemic and individual violence, seeking to ascertain which poses a greater threat to women. This examination considers both the psychological and physiological impacts of violence on women.

#### *Systemic Violence against refugees*

Systemic violence against women refers to the institutionalized norms, practices, and policies within a society that perpetuate gender inequality and allow for the continuation of violence against women. It encompasses various forms of discrimination and oppression embedded in social, cultural, economic, and political structures (Kurtz, 2015).

On the other hand, individual violence against women involves acts of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse perpetrated by individuals within personal relationships or encounters. While individual violence targets women on a personal level, systemic violence operates at a broader societal level, shaping and reinforcing power dynamics that



perpetuate gender-based discrimination and abuse (Fernandez, 2023). Systemic violence often intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as racism, classism, and xenophobia, amplifying the marginalization and vulnerability of certain groups of women.

Based on the testimonies gathered, numerous instances emerged where women were compelled to flee their homeland due to endemic gender-based violence, coupled with the lack of state support and legal recourse. As the research moved further, uncovering a multitude of narratives detailing state-sponsored violence in both Greece and Turkey, it became imperative to discern which of the two forms of violence was worse.

All participants could discern numerous instances of state violence based on their experiences and interactions with refugees. In Turkey, there were numerous incidents involving violence and hindrance to access health, employment, and education facilities, while many reported violence from military forces during transit.

“Women reported experiencing violence from figures, such as unidentified police or military personnel in Turkey, or witnessing the abuse of their male counterparts.... There were people in the Greek camps who had families stuck in Turkey and they were describing the situation rather dangerous...” (Interview 7, psychologist)

Furthermore, many participants reported violent deportations of Syrian refugees from Turkish authorities, including women and children violating series of human rights, which is something that has also been reported many times from international organisations (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In Greece, incidents of state violence do not differ from those reported in Turkey. Many mentioned hospitals' reluctance to serve and examine victims of gender-based violence, racism from police forces during reporting, and reluctance to protect the survivors. A social worker and a staff member of an international organisation, both with years of experience in refugee camps commented:

“I have seen barriers when a young girl would go to school and they wouldn't accept her because she was wearing hijab, .... people unable to receive social insurance number even though they were had all the legal documents because they were

refugees... doctors who wouldn't examine GBV survivors because they were refugees and didn't speak Greek..." (Interview 6, social worker)

The above quote sheds light on the various barriers faced by refugees, particularly women, in accessing essential services. However, apart from the prevalent violence driven by state factors, this testimony further reveals an underlying discrimination based on religious attire, bureaucratic hurdles, and language barriers intersect to exacerbate refugee women's vulnerability. It illustrates how systemic issues intersect with religious and gender-based discrimination, compounding the challenges faced by refugee women. Such barriers not only hinder their integration into society but also perpetuate their marginalization and reinforce power dynamics that disadvantage them.

Similar conditions apply to women living in the camps:

"We have too many complaints from individuals who have experienced violence on multiple levels, not only from authorities but also from organizations. Even from the medical team, from the psychologist who conducts sessions as a government entity. For example, we have complaints that they are often not admitted to hospitals. They speak badly to them (to the refugees). Unfortunately, we now have all forms of violence coming from state factors, including psychological, verbal, physical, and sexual. We see that it increases more and more as time goes by." (Interview 2, International Organization staff member)

As the participant explains, violence experienced by refugees, originates not only from authorities but also from various organizations tasked with providing support. The mention of mistreatment by medical professionals and psychologists underscores the failure of institutional systems to provide adequate care. The specific example of refugees being denied admission to hospitals and subjected to disrespectful treatment further illustrates the systemic challenges faced by refugees. Additionally, the mention of violence escalating over time suggests a concerning trend of worsening conditions for refugees, with various forms of violence becoming increasingly prevalent.

#### *Pushbacks- an underlying state violence*

Another profoundly grave aspect of state violence is the illegal pushbacks against refugees. As previously noted, Greece is reported / said / and in the last instance accused to have

conducted thousands of pushbacks in recent years, with 26,133 incidents documented in 2022 alone. These claims seem to talk about assaults, thefts, and forcible pushbacks using life rafts, even in severe weather conditions (Drakopoulou et al, 2020; Greek Council for Refugees, 2023a). Women have recounted instances where the Greek coast guard, accompanied by paramilitary groups, compelled them to disrobe in front of others and subjected them to sexual harassment (Hindrachs et al, 2023). The next quote comes from a person who lives in a Greek island located very close to Turkey and according to them has witnessed many pushback operations by the Greek coastguard:

"(Regarding pushbacks) I have also heard about rape. Yes, we have quite a few cases, and we've heard about them... they include physical and sexual violence, not only rape but also sexual violence and harassment. And physical violence, not only against women but also against men. And I think every year the incidents are getting worse. When you believe that you have heard everything, the next incident comes and it's even worse." (Interview 2, International Organization staff member)

But pushbacks are not only about physical violence. Pushbacks have devastating consequences for refugees, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and endangering their lives. Forced to return to perilous situations, refugees face trauma, psychological distress, and a loss of trust in authorities. Legal limbo often ensues, leaving them without protection and vulnerable to exploitation (Drakopoulou et al, 2020). Finally, sexual violence is, again, evident here, proving that such operations not only violate basic human rights but also perpetuate gender-based violence and further endanger the dignity of refugees.

### *Systemic Violence Vs Individual Violence*

Regarding the intensity and the prevalence of systemic violence compared to individual violence, the responses from the interviewees were multifaceted and diverse. Some contended that state violence represented the gravest threat, stripping survivors of any fragment of hope for justice and redress. Conversely, others argued that personal and state violence were intricately intertwined, compounding the overall trauma experienced by survivors. In essence, the conversation highlights how personal and systemic violence are

intertwined, revealing the numerous difficulties women encounter when trying to find safety and justice after experiencing gender-based violence.

“When violence occurs, especially when carried out by state authorities, it becomes much more challenging because you lose all hope that you can report it. In practice, although theoretically you can report it, when you see that you're experiencing it from the authorities themselves, who are supposed to protect you, you feel like you have no way out. No hope... I believe it's an indication that experiencing violence from a state entity is worse than from a familiar person, when we see that the state itself, which should protect you, violates these rights” (Interview 2, lawyer)

A very interesting perspective comes from a person very experienced with gender-based violence cases and crimes. She points out how personal and systemic gender-based violence are closely connected, with systemic failures making individual trauma worse and explains how societal structures and interpersonal crimes affect each other, showing how the tolerance for such violence makes it harder for GBV survivors to get help and feel safe:

“Regarding the impact on the victim, I would say that making such a distinction wouldn't be easy, because gender-based violence, which occurs on a personal level, is deeply rooted in systemic gender discrimination, biases, and inequalities. It's all interconnected, especially concerning gender-based violence. Personal is political because it's the thread that ties everything together. There's a dialectical relationship between interpersonal crime and the state's failure to protect a victim, leading to the perpetuation of patriarchal perceptions and gender inequalities. So, these two interact, feeding into each other in a way that you can't clearly distinguish what is systemic violence and what is not. Systemic violence crystallizes or condenses into crime, on a personal level, so to speak. Therefore, I would take it a step further, suggesting that a pervasive environment of tolerance, along with gender-based violence, exacerbates the survivor's trauma. This intensifies emotions further, contributing to the feeling that one cannot be protected, justified, or seek help” (Interview 3, lawyer)

The above statement underscores how individual instances of violence are deeply rooted in broader societal inequalities. By blurring the lines between personal and systemic

violence, the interviewee highlights how broader structural factors shape individual experiences.

The psychologist also explained that state violence and individual violence are connected, as state violence is reflected in the face of each perpetrator. According to her opinion:

“... state violence has an individual face. All these times when you go to a hospital and you will be played like a ping pong ball, let's say it is systemic violence- it is indeed state violence, but it has the face of that doctor who treats you as if you are not 100% human ... Thus, violence is deeply incarnated... When you go to an asylum interview and you have in front of you the person who will decide your fate and gets you through hundreds of questions again and again, this violence is incarnated...”  
(Interview 7, psychologist)

Her statement emphasizes how state violence manifests on an individual level, highlighting instances where individuals encounter discrimination and dehumanization in institutional settings. By portraying state violence as having a personal face, the interviewee underscores the direct impact of systemic issues on individuals' experiences. The resemblance of being treated as a "ping pong ball" in a hospital and facing repetitive questioning during asylum interviews vividly illustrates the dehumanizing nature of such encounters. Such analysis deepens the understanding of how systemic violence is embodied in everyday interactions and institutional processes, shedding light on the complex dynamics between structural inequalities and individual experiences of violence.

### 3.5 Cultural Background and National Origin

The complex interplay between gender-based violence (GBV), cultural traditions, and the challenges faced by women in reporting such incidents is evident. Cultural factors pose significant barriers to recognizing violence, as social context, family dynamics, individual factors, and service providers' expectations intervene. Additionally, structural issues like financial dependence, poverty, racism, insecure immigration status, and cultural factors significantly impact women's ability to seek assistance and leave abusive situations (Afrouz et al, 2018; Ajayi et al, 2022).

Research studies have provided evidence that there is a positive and strong relationship between gender-based violence and vulnerabilities (Parkinson & Zara, 20213). Vulnerability, defined as the result of systematic differences in power relations and social hierarchies, including gender roles, negatively affects the socioeconomic status of women (Birks et al, 2017). All these emphasize the intricate intersection of culture, religion, and societal norms in shaping women's experiences of abuse.

Even though the literature suggests that cultural background significantly influences how women perceive gender-based violence, interviews revealed diverse opinions among respondents regarding the impact of cultural background on these perceptions. While cultural background does shape individuals' views on GBV, it is noteworthy that European countries, often considered more developed, also report high rates of GBV. This indicates that vulnerability to GBV is not limited to countries perceived as less developed, challenging preconceptions about its prevalence based on socio-economic status:

“Qualitatively, there is no difference in the gender-based violence (GBV) being perpetrated or experienced. Rather, the way it is experienced and perceived is determined by the victim, whether it occurs in a third country along the journey or elsewhere. The background of the crime is rooted in gender inequalities and patriarchy, but religious and political backgrounds produce diversity in personalities. When supporting GBV survivors, whether native or immigrant, one faces the same challenges. While an interpreter may be needed for immigrants, the legal process remains consistent. GBV survivors experience similar concerns during the appeal process, and counselling provides psychological and social support to both groups. In practice, native and immigrant women receive similar counselling and support for GBV, with the only notable difference being native women's typically stronger social networks for support due to their longer residency in the country. This difference can be attributed to cultural backgrounds, affecting both the provision and reception of support for GBV, whether interpersonal or domestic. Stereotypes suggesting greater tolerance for GBV based on cultural backgrounds are debunked in the field, especially when working with Greek women, revealing higher levels of tolerance and reluctance to acknowledge GBV than expected. Thus, such myths are dispelled through practical experience”. (Interview 3, lawyer)

This statement aligns with existing literature on gender-based violence (GBV) by highlighting the pervasive nature of GBV and its roots in societal inequalities and patriarchy. Moreover, the statement emphasizes that the normalization of GBV exists on multiple levels, with women enduring violence due to their marginalized societal status, while state actors often fail to intervene effectively. This normalization perpetuates a cycle of abuse and impunity, further entrenching gender inequalities and patriarchal structures within societies (Namy et al, 2017).

“I do think that there is a link between a patriarchal society and gender-based violence. But I do think that this applies to every country. So, I wouldn't say that it happens more in Syria for example than in Greece, because in Syria men are allowed to beat up women... I would tell I'm from (a European country) and I can tell you that I think my country is a patriarchal society and this has an impact on the extreme high rates of gender-based violence”. (Interview 1, International Organization staff member)

Nevertheless, research highlighted subtle differences in how women perceive GBV in different cultural contexts. Subtle variations in societal norms, attitudes towards gender roles, and perceptions of power dynamics contribute to these differences. In some cultural settings, GBV may be normalized or perceived differently, influencing women's willingness to report incidents and seek support (Namy et al, 2017);

"Everyone perceives violence differently, and a woman may consider it normal for her husband to beat her because she has grown up with such standards. She has never learned that this is wrong and should not happen, so she may view being slapped twice or taking responsibility for it as normal. It's how she was raised, and she judges it to be natural and normal... But I can say that this applies in Greece as well, social pressure, whether it comes from the family environment or from society as a whole. For whatever reason. Okay, your husband beats you, you must have done something, be patient and it's okay, he might have been angry, it's reasonable. Nothing happened." (Interview 5, social worker)

The psychologist further explains how these beliefs come from norms deeply rooted in the societies:

“A proverb that women used to tell me is, ‘A woman who doesn't get beaten doesn't learn.’ When you have this proverb, it somewhat expects that you will progress from within yourself. You might have been hurt, but you will move forward, anyway.... These norms play a significant role because they influence the extent of internalized misogyny individuals may harbor, leading them to believe that what happened to them somehow, they deserved it, minimizing their experiences. This phenomenon occurs with other women as well universally. Most women I have encountered are very supportive of each other, however, some coming from strict backgrounds are also very strict towards other women.” (Interview 7, psychologist)

The above quote reflects a disturbing acceptance of violence against women, suggesting that it is somehow necessary for personal growth. This normalization of violence perpetuates internalized misogyny, leading GBV survivors to believe they deserve mistreatment. Additionally, the interviewee highlights the diversity of responses among women, noting that while many offer support, some uphold strict attitudes influenced by their background.

### 3.6 Recognition of Violence & Barriers of Reporting

Numerous significant obstacles impede women from seeking assistance and justice for gender-based violence. Initially, there's substantial uncertainty surrounding their legal status, compounded by lack of information on available support systems (Ajayi et al, 2022).

In both Greece and Turkey, service structures, severely under-resourced, inadequately educate women about their rights, available services, legal frameworks, and procedural options as survivors of GBV. Additionally, the transient isolation within refugee camps exacerbates the situation, preventing a successful integration and the cultivation of relationships with locals or other refugees. As one of the interviewees explains:

"I believe it is also important that there is a kind of ghettoization, even temporary, but in any case, there is a seclusion of all people in reception facilities within the country. There is an issue of lack of contact, let's say, with the host society, so there is no integration, no interaction, and no exposure to stimuli from other things or



even the development of relationships with people who could advise you or help you navigate." (Interview 4, lawyer)

For example, in Greece, project Helios (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection), played a crucial role in integrating refugees and providing them with proper housing. Its closure has had significant repercussions, particularly for refugees in Greece in terms of integration assistance and community support (Raftopoulos, 2023).

Furthermore, the influence of traditional environments from which many women refugees originate cannot be overlooked. Extended family networks wield significant influence, pressuring women to remain within these environments despite experiencing violence. The fear of severing ties with relatives, friends, or vital support networks discourages most female refugees from lodging complaints as also reported in the literature (Afrouz et al, 2018)

Similarly, according to the lawyer who specialises in GBV cases,

"Immigrant and refugee women, hesitate to report violence for two primary reasons. Firstly, they have adapted to survive within their current environment and cannot easily transition to a new, unfamiliar one. Additionally, they face the significant obstacle of being ostracized by their social and community support networks if they do speak out. The lack of legal frameworks to support them compounds these challenges, further discouraging them from seeking help". (Interview 3, lawyer)

Referring to social networks, one social worker adds:

"There is huge social pressure, religion, and generally, even in Greece, there are networks, Afghan communities, Syrian communities, Somali communities, and all these may operate oppressively in all this. Because these people interact with these communities, they talk to them. They go to events, they do things. They are afraid to come forward because communities in Greece may condemn them for this or even expel them even worse". (Interview 6, social worker)

Another obstacle is the fear of retaliation:

“I would say fear of retaliation. So, like what if I report? What is it going to happen to me? Lack of supportive network. So, if my husband is my only network and I report, what is going to happen to me. Issues related to children... if the woman has children, she might be afraid that reporting will mean that her children will be taken away or that she cannot provide for her children anymore”. (Interview 1, International Organization staff member)

However, the psychologist believes it's a combination of the above:

“Refugee women cannot work, especially when they have children. So, you know, they're financially tied to an abusive framework. There is no support. Let's say you're a woman. You take this step and leave from the abuser. There is no legal support from the authorities. There is no kind of support to handle all this. Financial support... There is social pressure... And there is also the fear of the abuser in case he retaliates. I mean, say you leave, and they catch you and send you back; if he catches you, you're done”. (Interview 7, psychologist)

As pointed out from the above quotes, there are multifaceted barriers immigrant and refugee women face in reporting gender-based violence. Adaptation to survival within current environments, fear of ostracization from social networks, and concerns about retaliation are prominent deterrents. Additionally, the lack of legal frameworks and financial dependence on abusive partners exacerbate their vulnerability. These factors create a complex interconnection of challenges, making it difficult for women to seek help and escape abusive situations. The psychologist's insight emphasizes the intersectionality of these obstacles, highlighting the entanglement of social, economic, and legal barriers that constrain women's agency and perpetuate their victimization.

### *Language Barriers*

All participants highlighted language barriers as a significant obstacle for refugees in reporting gender-based violence (GBV). The inability to communicate effectively due to language differences hinders refugees from seeking assistance and support for GBV incidents. Limited access to interpretation services exacerbates the challenges refugees face in navigating the reporting process for GBV (DeSa et al, 2022).

However, beyond language barriers, interviewees highlighted an unexpected obstacle: interpreters. Typically male and from the same countries as the victims, interpreters may share the same perceptions as the abuser, further complicating the situation. Moreover, they are seldom trained to handle cases of gender-based violence, leaving women feeling excluded and unsupported in seeking assistance.

Consistent with the interviewees:

"The interpreters, being predominantly men, often mediate, and many times they may share the same perceptions as the abuser... Also, many times within the structures, interpreters develop relationships with the communities. These dynamics exist and may deter for that reason". (Interview 4, lawyer)

This excerpt highlights how interpreters, often male, may inadvertently reinforce the abuser's perspectives due to shared perceptions or community ties, suggesting a potential for bias or influence in the interpretation process, impacting the victim's ability to express their experiences accurately.

"I feel a bit bad saying this, but patriarchy plays a role even among interpreters because, anyway, all of us internalize such things, and many of our interpreters are members of the women's communities we work with, so they are more entangled in it." (Interview 7, psychologist)

The second excerpt underscores the influence of patriarchy even among interpreters, acknowledging how societal norms can affect their understanding of events. Both quotes indicate that the risk of GBV lurks even within the communication process, where interpreters, influenced by societal norms, may inadvertently reinforce gender-based violence instead of providing help to the survivors.

### *Access to Information*

In addition to the already touch challenges of language barriers, cultural pressure, and fear of retaliation, another critical obstacle hinders refugees and immigrants from reporting gender-based violence: the pervasive lack of information. This barrier, often overlooked yet profoundly impactful, contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV cases among vulnerable populations. As ascertained in Ajayi et al's study (2022) The absence of

accessible and comprehensive information about available resources, legal rights, and support services further compounds the already discouraging task of seeking help and justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

This lack of information is also reflected in the testimonies of the interviewees:

"And of course, there are other various obstacles: ignorance, lack of information about their rights, about the legal framework, lack of trust in state authorities, and lack of access to legal aid. These are all very fundamental." (Interview 3, lawyer)

"...Lack of knowledge on how to report. And lack of knowledge of what is gender-based violence. When is it violence, what does violence mean if my husband is forcing me to have sex when I don't want to. Can I tell if this is violence or not?" (Interview 1, International Organization staff member)

"... it somehow relates to an information deficit or how much they can address. Although there is currently an information shortage, so they are not informed mutually and comprehensively anymore, I mean, with such depleted services in the structures, there is no provision for women to be informed about their rights. Specifically, regarding the services available in Greece, what is the framework? What are the procedures a GBV survivor can follow when something happens? I think it is important." (Interview 4, lawyer)

The above quotes explain the multifaceted barriers that refugee women face in accessing support and justice for GB by highlighting significant gaps in knowledge and information regarding their rights and available resources. This lack of awareness contributes to a sense of vulnerability and hinders women's ability to identify and report instances of GBV. Moreover, the interviews underscore systemic deficiencies in providing comprehensive information and support services within refugee structures. Consequently, refugee women are left uninformed to navigate the legal and procedural complexities concerning GBV issues, further exacerbating their marginalization and blocking their access to justice.

As outlined in the analysis above, there are numerous forms of gender-based violence experienced by refugee women, and they often interconnect to create complex obstacles to their decision to report such incidents. Consequently, the researcher will seek to clarify

these findings and use them to respond to the research questions and hypotheses presented in this thesis.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze and highlight the various challenges, forms, and trends pertaining to gender-based violence (GBV) encountered by refugee and migrant women, alongside the vulnerabilities they face throughout their migration journey through a comparative study between Greece and Turkey. Moreover, the research aimed to explore the important impact of GBV stemming from systemic factors which further extends and increases the victims' trauma, as well as cultural background influences on perceiving and reporting GBV. Employing a qualitative research approach, the research involved interviewing experts in the field.

Chapter 3 presented a comprehensive examination of primary data obtained from field research, complemented by secondary data to ensure the accuracy of the statements made. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, the collection and analysis of primary data were pivotal aspects of the purpose of this research. Over the course of six days, from February 22, 2024, to February 28, 2024, a total of seven interviews were conducted. These interviews involved two staff members of International Organizations, two lawyers specializing in GBV cases, two social workers, and a psychologist who advocates for refugee women experiencing GBV. Together, their insights provided valuable perspectives on the prevalence and severity of violence against women.

### 4.1 Main Conclusions

The research findings have revealed the multifaceted nature of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by refugee women in both Greece and Turkey. The intensity and forms of GBV revealed in the study align with those documented in the literature and highlight the intersectionality of gender, displacement, and social determinants.

Physical and sexual violence emerged as significant concerns, with refugees, especially women and girls, facing risks such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape. These forms of violence are pervasive across various settings, including conflicts, transit routes, camps, and host communities. Socioeconomic exploitation also emerged as a prevalent issue, with women refugees vulnerable to exploitation in labor markets. This includes

unpaid work, low wages, and hazardous working conditions, exacerbating existing inequalities within refugee communities. Survivors often deal with stigma, shame, and psychological trauma, impeding their ability to seek support and justice.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals a stark reality of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by refugee women particularly in the contexts of Greece and Turkey. GBV, rooted in social gender inequality, manifests in various forms including physical, sexual, and psychological harm, as well as socioeconomic exploitation and harmful traditional practices.

In Turkey, the ghettoization of refugees is a troubling reality, with many confined to informal detention centers marked by dire conditions. Reports of exploitation and violence against refugees further underscore the vulnerability of refugee women in such environments. At the same time, in Greece, while women may have relatively easier access to reporting channels for GBV incidents compared to Turkey, the response from authorities is often inadequate due to insufficient resources and facilities. The living conditions in Greek camps, although somewhat better than Turkish detention centers, still lack basic necessities and pose challenges for addressing incidents of GBV promptly. The prolonged legal procedures for granting documents to refugees further exacerbate their vulnerability, trapping them in a state of limbo and dependency on inadequate camp facilities.

As regards to the patriarchal norms, they shape gender roles and expectations from a young age, perpetuating male dominance and restricting women's freedoms. While Greece has seen a perceptual shift towards more progressive views on women's roles, particularly in urban centers, traditional customs and norms still prevail in rural areas. However, both countries face challenges in effectively addressing gender-based violence, with previous findings from international organizations indicating high levels of domestic and gender-based violence. In Turkey, major urban centers advocate for women's rights despite prevailing conservatism, but challenges persist due to the right-wing ideologies.

Perceptions of women's roles and rights in patriarchal societies often perpetuate traditional norms and limit women's freedoms. Despite advocacy efforts for women's rights, conservative beliefs hinder women's ability to express themselves freely and integrate into society. The contradiction between advocating for women's rights and

perpetuating patriarchal norms underscores the complex and contradictory situation within Greek and Turkish societies.

Systemic violence plays its own role to the complexities of gender inequality, as it reflects to institutionalized norms, practices, and policies that perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination, and violence against women. In Greece and Turkey, systemic violence against refugee women includes barriers to healthcare, education, and employment, as well as state-sponsored discrimination. Testimonies highlight instances of violence by unidentified authorities in Turkey and obstacles to accessing essential services in Greek refugee camps.

As regards the comparison of Systemic and Individual Violence responses from interviewees vary regarding which form of violence poses a greater threat to women, with some emphasizing the impact of systemic violence perpetrated by state authorities. Others argue that personal and systemic violence are intricately intertwined, compounding survivors' trauma and making it challenging to seek safety and justice. The interconnected nature of personal and systemic violence reflects the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and gender inequalities within society.

Lastly, the analysis uncovers the intricate dynamics between gender-based violence (GBV), cultural traditions, and the challenges faced by women in reporting such incidents. Cultural factors serve as significant barriers to recognizing violence, with social context, family dynamics, and individual factors intersecting in the decision of women to report it. Structural issues like financial dependence, poverty, racism, insecure immigration status, and cultural factors further impede women's ability to seek assistance and leave abusive situations.

Interviews reveal diverse views on how cultural backgrounds shape perceptions of GBV. While culture plays a role, high GBV rates in European countries challenge assumptions about its prevalence. GBV normalization persists due to societal inequalities and patriarchy regardless of the state or the country. Variations in societal norms and power dynamics influence women's perceptions of GBV, impacting their willingness to report incidents. Normalized beliefs, such as accepting spousal abuse, discourage women from



acknowledging GBV and seeking help. These societal norms foster internalized misogyny and downplay women's experiences of violence.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals several significant obstacles that hinder women from seeking assistance and justice for gender-based violence (GBV). Firstly, uncertainty surrounding their legal status, coupled with a lack of information on available support systems, creates substantial barriers. Transient isolation within refugee camps exacerbates the situation, hindering successful integration and the cultivation of relationships with locals or other refugees, while fear of severing ties with vital support networks and social ostracization discourages most female refugees from lodging complaints, by exerting significant influence.

Language barriers emerge as another major obstacle, hindering refugees from seeking assistance and support for GBV incidents. Limited access to interpretation services further complicates the reporting process, especially when interpreters share the same perceptions as the abuser. Additionally, interpreters, predominantly male and from the same countries as the survivor, may not be adequately trained to handle cases of GBV, leaving women feeling unsupported.

Access to information presents yet another critical obstacle for refugees and immigrants in reporting gender-based violence. In both Greece and Turkey, under-resourced service structures fail to adequately educate women about their rights, available services, legal frameworks, and procedural options as GBV survivors. This pervasive lack of information about available resources contributes significantly to the underreporting of GBV cases among vulnerable populations. Ignorance, coupled with a lack of trust in state authorities, further compounds the challenges faced by survivors.

Ultimately, in response to the research questions and the hypotheses the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Greece and Turkey have differences in terms of systemic patriarchy, influenced by various factors such as cultural norms and legal frameworks. While both countries have patriarchal structures, the manifestations and intensity of patriarchy may differ due to cultural, social, and political differences. For example, Greece's societal norms and legal framework may differ from Turkey's, leading to variations in the expression of systemic

patriarchy. However, both countries implement anti-immigrant policies, despite the fact that the aforementioned research reveals the deficiencies they encounter in safeguarding refugee women from gender-based violence, whether on a personal or systemic level. This is particularly noteworthy for Turkey, which Greece has designated a safe third country. In conclusion, there are indeed differences between the two countries, but they are not significant. Most important is, though, to emphasize that, according to the findings of this study, neither of the two countries can provide a comprehensive approach to combating gender-based violence.

2. Gender-based violence originating from a state, as opposed to an individual, can be experienced differently but only as regards to the fact that it takes away the right of women to report and seek help from their abuser. This unique distinction underscores the severity of state-driven violence, which not only reflects societal norms and normalizes violence, but also amplifies survivors' vulnerability by stripping away their recourse. However, both forms of violence intersect as they stem from the same patriarchal norms, composing an inseparable and intricate connection.
3. Cultural background does influence the experience and perception of gender-based violence (GBV), but it doesn't differentiate between refugees/migrants and European women. In patriarchal societies, ingrained socio-cultural norms regarding gender roles perpetuate violence against women universally. These norms shape how individuals interpret and respond to GBV, regardless of nationality or cultural background. While cultural differences may affect the specifics of GBV experiences, the underlying patriarchal structures remain consistent across diverse contexts. Therefore, women from various cultural backgrounds, including refugees and migrants, face similar patterns of violence rooted in systemic gender inequalities. Additional factors like language proficiency, access to support networks, and legal protections further shape the vulnerability and coping mechanisms of women experiencing GBV, potentially compounding the challenges faced by refugees and migrants in seeking help and resources.

To conclude, women face gender-based violence rooted in patriarchal norms, whether from individuals or the state. State-driven violence uniquely strips women of their right to report abuse, normalizing violence and increasing vulnerability. Cultural backgrounds influence

the experience of GBV, but patriarchal structures perpetuate violence universally and subordinate women. Refugees and migrants encounter additional barriers, such as language and access to support, compounding their challenges. Addressing GBV requires understanding these intersecting factors to support all women effectively.

## 4.2 Future research

As someone further explores the complexities of gender-based violence (GBV), it becomes evident that there is still much to understand. While existing research has provided valuable insights into the prevalence and impact of GBV on refugee and migrant women, there remains a pressing need for further exploration to enhance the level of comprehension of this multifaceted issue.

A critical possible approach for future research lies in the inclusion of more participants from the field of advocacy for GBV. By engaging with professionals who work directly with survivors of GBV, such as social workers, doctors, counselors, and legal experts, researchers can gain broader perspectives on the challenges faced by refugee and migrant women in accessing support services and seeking justice. Their insights can inform the development of more effective interventions and policies aimed at addressing GBV within refugee and migrant communities.

Additionally, future research should prioritize the collection of personal testimonies from refugee women who have experienced GBV. These narratives offer unique insights into the lived experiences of survivors, shedding light on the complex interplay of cultural, social, and structural factors that shape their vulnerability to violence. By centering the voices of refugee women themselves, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse manifestations of GBV and the coping strategies employed by survivors to navigate challenging circumstances. These testimonies can serve as powerful advocacy tools, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and advocating for policy changes that better protect the rights and well-being of all women.

In addition to engaging with professionals and collecting personal testimonies, future research on gender-based violence (GBV) among refugee and migrant women could also benefit from an examination of media representations and narratives. Studies exploring

how GBV is portrayed in mainstream media, both domestically and internationally, can provide insights into the framing and public perception of these issues. Researchers could investigate the impact of media coverage on shaping attitudes, influencing policy responses, and perpetuating harmful stereotypes about refugee and migrant women. The analyzation of media discourse can identify gaps, biases, and opportunities for more responsible and inclusive reporting on GBV. Moreover, exploring the role of social media platforms in amplifying survivor voices, mobilizing advocacy efforts, and challenging dominant narratives can offer new chances for research and intervention. By studying the media landscape, researchers can contribute to a better understanding of GBV and advocate for more ethical representations of refugee and migrant women in the media.

In conclusion, further research on GBV among refugee and migrant women is essential to advance our understanding of this prevalent human rights issue. By engaging with advocates and survivors, researchers can uncover new insights, challenge existing assumptions, and discover more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to addressing GBV. Ultimately, and as these final words are being typed on women's international day, the goal of such research efforts is not only to generate knowledge but also to catalyze positive change and create a world where all women can live free from violence and oppression.

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*Athens, 8.3.2024*

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## Annex (Questionnaire)

1. Introduction: Research aims. Field Experiences and examples of violence
2. How do you perceive the differences between Greece and Turkey concerning the patriarchal system and gender roles?
3. Is Greece distinguished from Turkey significantly in terms of systemic patriarchy?
4. Drawing from your experiences with refugee/migrant communities, how would you describe your perception of state-perpetrated gender-based violence compared to violence perpetrated by individuals?
5. How do you believe the experiences of individuals who endure violence from the state differ from those subjected to personal violence? (Does it affect them differently?)
6. What are some of the psychological, social, and legal hurdles individuals face when encountering state-perpetrated gender-based violence?
7. Do you believe that cultural background affects the experiences of refugee women regarding gender-based violence? What role do you think it plays?
8. What are some of the primary factors contributing to and obstructing the ability of refugee/migrant women to seek assistance and recovery when facing gender-based violence?