

# **Provision of appropriate welfare and safe spaces for women and children in refugee camps**

Resolution Shortlist Briefing Notes

**theWI**  
**INSPIRING WOMEN**



*Migrants waiting at the border in Idomeni, Greece, September 2015 - Ververidis Vasilis / Shutterstock.com*

## Provision of appropriate welfare and safe spaces for women and children in refugee camps

*Millions of women and children are fleeing conflict and disaster around the world, finding themselves at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation in refugee camps. This meeting calls on all WI members and the NFWI to raise awareness of the risks facing women and children refugees and push for action to ensure they have access to safe places to eat and sleep, to get the care they need and space to learn and play.*

### Proposer's position

The proposer is concerned by the growing numbers of women and children refugees around the world. These groups are particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation. Children in particular are at risk when exposed to the harsh elements.

The proposer would like to see WI members raise awareness of these affected groups to shine a light on the conditions and risks they face. In addition, the proposer would like the WI and WI members across the country to push for action to support their access to safe spaces in refugee camps in order to get the care and support they need.



Syrian refugees families in Turkey , Sanliurfa, October 2015 - Orlok / Shutterstock.com

### The scale of the problem

In 2015 there were 65.3 million forcibly displaced people around the world. Of these, 21.3 million are refugees who have been forced to flee their country,

40.8 million are internally displaced persons who are forced to flee their homes but remain within the borders of their own country and 3.2 million people are asylum seekers who have applied for asylum in another country.

Between 2013 and 2014 there was an increase of 8.3 million people who were forcibly displaced, the largest single year increase. Between 2014 and 2015 the number increased by 5.8 million.

Children under the age of 18 make up 51% of all refugees, and women (including girls under 18) make up 49% of all refugees.

### Women and children refugees

Women refugees face particular difficulties when they leave their home, their community and their support network. They often become more isolated and their mobility is curbed significantly. Women and girls report having limited movement outside the home due to fear of sexual violence, harassment, and indiscriminate attacks.

Women will often become the head of the household when in refugee camps. As a result they can be forced to start working when they are displaced and are at risk of exploitation.

Many refugee children are travelling alone, risking their lives in search of safety. Many have lost their parents and loved ones, their homes, their schools. The journey is treacherous and children are exposed to the harsh elements as well as to violence, abuse and exploitation.



## Safe spaces

A safe space is a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term 'safe,' in the present context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. For children, a safe space will respond to children's immediate rights to protection, psychosocial well-being, and non-formal education.

Evidence suggests that the establishment of women only spaces helps to reduce risks and prevent further harm. These spaces provide women with a safe entry point for services, a place to access information, an opportunity to engage with each other, exchange information, and rebuild community networks and support.



*Syrian refugees families in Turkey, Sanliurfa, October 2015 - Orlok / Shutterstock.com*

Children in refugee camps find it difficult to develop a sense of normality, and are vulnerable to psychological trauma. Only a fraction of school aged children in camps attend schools, and where camps have schools they are often overcrowded. A safe space for children will offer classes to continue developing their skills and interests, psychosocial support services and recreational activities in a friendly environment. They offer a space where a child's needs will be prioritised and looked after, and where the child can develop a sense of normality within their lives.

## The current situation

The UK Government have given £1.1bn in humanitarian aid to refugee camps since 2012, and in 2015 committed a further £10m to support vulnerable refugees. The government have also committed to taking 20,000 refugees into the UK, although progress on this is currently very slow and its not clear when this commitment will be fulfilled.

Across the world, refugee camps are receiving some support from the UN, Unicef and other charities for women and children only safe spaces. Unicef claim to have reached 81,000 children in Europe through their supported child-friendly safe spaces, although this falls short of reaching the millions of refugee children that need support.

## How could the WI work on this resolution if it was passed?

A full campaign plan would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account latest developments. In the mean time, to help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on this issue if it was passed.

### ***At a national level the WI could...***

The NFWI could partner with expert organisations in this field. Together we could highlight to the government the strength of opinion of WI members and lobby for resources to be directed to safe spaces for women and children. We could also develop a high profile awareness raising campaign for all members to engage with.

### ***Federations could...***

At the federation level, members could host regional events, workshops, talks or exhibitions. This would bring together WI members and the public to learn more about this issue and raise awareness of it. Politicians can be invited to be directly lobbied, or the event could be aimed at raising awareness amongst the wider public.

### ***At a local level WIs could...***

WIs could invite speakers on the issue to learn more about the conditions for women and children in refugee camps. Members could go into their community to raise awareness through innovative local campaigns, including stalls, petitions, exhibitions or stunts. Politicians could be invited to meetings to hear members views.

## Arguments for the resolution

- WI members are uniquely placed to talk about safe spaces for women to come together and build community networks. After all, this was one of the main aims of the WI when it was founded.
- Many WIs have been concerned about the refugee crisis in recent years, yet the NFWI do not have a mandate on supporting refugees and are unable to campaign on the issue. This resolution would give us the mandate to work on tackling the refugee crisis.
- Currently, political discussion around refugees is focussed on programmes to bring them to the UK. This resolution would allow the WI to shine a light on the millions of refugees suffering in camps around the world.



*Refugee camp on the outskirts of Hargeisa in Somaliland, January 2010  
Free Wind 2014 / Shutterstock.com*

## Arguments against the resolution



*A Syrian woman in Belgrade, Serbia, September 2015  
Photoman29 / Shutterstock.com*

- The UK government has agreed to bring some vulnerable refugees, including some unaccompanied children, to the UK from refugee camps. Is this a better solution for women and children than safe spaces in camps, even though the numbers supported this way are minimal compared to the scale of the refugee crisis?
- The refugee crisis is affecting over 60 million people around the world, in countries, cities and refugee camps across continents. Given the scale of the issue, would the WI be able to make a meaningful difference to the lives of women and children affected, or would it be better to focus efforts on a more achievable issue?

## Further information

Amnesty UK: Amnesty International is a non-governmental organisation focused on human rights. They work extensively to support and protect vulnerable refugees around the world. [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)

Save the Children: Works for a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>

For a video looking at the issues in this briefing please contact the NFWI Public Affairs department

## Public Affairs Department contacts

If you have any questions about the resolutions or the resolutions process then please get in touch with the NFWI public affairs department:

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