



### **Women Refugee Route**

**UNHCR Annual NGO Consultation, Geneva 27-29 June 2018**

**INTERVENTION MINA JAF, 25 JUNE 2018**

*This draft should be considered as the groundwork for my intervention and contribution to the session scheduled on 27 June between 2-4pm.*

I was born a refugee during the chemical gas attacks in Iraqi-Kurdistan. Thanks to my mother, I was also born a feminist. After spending the first 15 years of my life in camps and asylum centers, I now dedicate my life to working with and empowering other refugee women and girls.

At Women Refugee Route we believe in the potential of women as actors of change. We recognise women as individuals with their own identity, in their particular social and cultural context. In order to unlock this potential, we create opportunities and support them in their individual and collective actions, more particularly by organising trainings for them and the people working with them.

In this manner, WRR aims to start a positive cycle in which refugee women are not considered solely as recipients of services and supports, but as actors of change with agency for themselves and their communities.

WRR contributes to policy integration through its work in the field by way of trainings while also having a voice in European and international decision-making processes. By creating a strong nexus between local voices and European and international political frameworks, WRR wants to bring policy frameworks to a more tangible level, where the women concerned have a chance to understand, reflect on and respond to them. In return, WRR is able to bring perspectives of the refugee women to the decision-making processes, while keeping on empowering refugee women to raise their voice.

That is why I would like to share the following ideas which we believe are relevant for the Compact process, global migration and refugee policy in general.

**For a refugee policy that works, we need a ‘whole-of-society’ approach which involves people in a refugee situation themselves, the State, civil society, the private sector, cities/municipalities and the host community;**

- That is why the **UN Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (and on migration (GCM)) and its implementation should reflect more a commitment** to create space for refugee women to claim their seat at the table by not only including them in the process, but giving them ownership of the decisions that concern them.
  - To this end, not only full access to education and the recognition of skills (of all skills levels) are important, but also representation and participation in decision-making. We therefore regret the missed opportunity to include a reference to political participation for refugee women, and all other refugees for that matter in the Compact(s). For a durable, empowering, inclusion and integration of refugee women in host countries, waiting time to take part in the political process (vote/become elected) should be avoided.
  - In addition, we should strive towards a majority composition of women with a refugee background in organisation working with them or making decisions that concern them.
- The GCR reflects very well the sharing of information between States for all kinds of purposes. But **what we want to see** is a recognition of the right to information of refugee women. The Compact and its implementation should reflect efforts to create a bridge between these women, available information, support, services and opportunities offered by the different actors involved.
- The Compact and its implementation **should reflect** the need to support bottom-up approaches to the discussions on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and the ways in which we can accommodate this need. It should ensure that local voices are engaged in the process, recognising the ideas and support that small self-led organisations can bring to the table, by opening more easily accessible funding avenues.

**The second key is ‘putting people first’ – when saying ‘empowerment’; really meaning it, and recognising women as individuals with their own identity.**

- Therefore the starting point should always be one's **self-identification**. This principle should be reflected throughout the Compact and its implementation.
- The focus on **self-reliance, empowerment or resilience cannot be used as a substitute** and does not exclude the importance of a support-based approach, as well as the strong need for legal mobility pathways.
- A strong commitment should be made to **women’s right to sexual and reproductive health**. Which is in line with Goal 3.7 of the 2030 Agenda on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services. This should be reflected throughout the Compact and its implementation.
  - We want to see concrete language on and guarantees for the streamlining of the sexual and reproductive rights of women through all stages of the mobility process, including when in detention.
  - It should specify access to contraception, awareness, access to abortion, etc. In addition, reference to hygiene and sanitation should be made. With a specific reference to safe conditions for making use of these facilities (eg, safe showers), and ensuring access by explicitly mentioning ‘menstrual products such as tampons, sanitary napkins, cups, etc.’.

To conclude, gender mainstreaming should not be included in policy making only, but also in policy implementation and evaluation. This is the only way to effectively reach gender equality for refugee and migrant women.