

Women in Refugee Law (WiRL)

A network to centre refugee women in international law, policy and practice

1st Anniversary Members' Event

16:30-18:00 (BST), Tuesday 12 July 2022

Note of event

1. Update on developments and introduction of WiRL Steering Group members (Moirá Dustin and Christel Querón, WiRL Convenors)

The Convenors introduced themselves and welcomed all WiRL members. They provided an update on WiRL's developments to date and introduced WiRL's Steering Group members.

Timeline of WiRL's developments and activities:

- WiRL held its first event – a [roundtable](#) – in May 2021
- WiRL held its first Conference in November 2021 (summary and recordings available on the [WiRL webpage](#)).
- A Special Issue on Refugee Women in International Law, Policy and Practice to be published in Refugee Survey Quarterly in September 2022
- We secured a small ESRC impact grant which enabled us to employ Elizabeth Mavropoulou as Research Assistant for a short period to help us develop the network
- Membership increased to 110 globally
- Twitter Account: @WiRL_Network (please do follow us!). Developed also a Twitter media strategy
- Steering Group Members held their first meeting today and discussed Terms of Reference and plans for the network going forward
- We have set up a shared platform on Teams which members will be able to use to collaborate on. We will send details and invitation to all members in due course
- We are updating the [WiRL webpage](#) which the University of the West of England kindly hosts for us
- We are working on a larger funding application for the network to ensure WiRL's sustainability going forward

The Convenors introduced the WiRL Steering Group as of July 2022

- Prof Deborah Anker - Harvard Law School Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program
- Prof Heaven Crawley - Coventry University / United Nations University
- Dr Moira Dustin (Co-convenor), University of Sussex
- Prof Liliana Jubilut - Universidade UniSantos
- Dr Sara L McKinnon - University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Maggy Moyo - Right to Remain
- Loraine Masiya Mponela - Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG)
- Prof Karen Musalo - Centre for Gender and Refugee Studies, UC Hastings College of the Law
- Dr Christel Querton (Co-convenor) - University of the West of England
- Lore Roels – Ghent University
- Prof Sibel Safi - Dokuz Eylul University
- Dr Kalyango Ronald Sebba - Makerere University
- Prof Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso - Babcock University
- Natasha Yacoub - University of New South Wales
- Samarie Wijekoon Lofvendahl - UNHCR

SG Members who attended the Members' event introduced themselves briefly to plenary.

2. Contributions by Steering Group and Members

Selected members reflected on the following questions in plenary.

Questions

- What are the priorities for refugee women from your sector, discipline, region and/or perspective?
- How might WiRL contribute to addressing these priorities in our second year?

The contributors' reflections on priorities from the perspective of their sector, discipline and/or region were the following:

- Lack of access to education for refugee children
- Many women who want to tell their stories don't get the support to access a platform, or have opportunities to share lived experiences
- Refugee women's non-participation in knowledge production and exchange
- Refugee women suffering from labelling and victimisation
- Challenges from post-resettlement or post safe third country transfers (STC) e.g. housing without consideration of individual circumstances, such as placing a queer person with homophobic roommate

- Global North shifting responsibility for refugees to Global South through development aid agreements (containment policies)
- The dichotomy between refugee v migrant (the one does not exclude the other)
- Ignoring experiences of refugee women in the interpretation of the law
- Humanitarian agencies responsibilities for protecting refugee women
- Systemic oppression of women, perpetuated by gender discrimination and gender stereotypes, follows them into transit countries and through the asylum procedures contributing to an ongoing cycle of violence

Contributors' suggestions to overcome some of the identified challenges

- Advocate for access to education for refugee children
- Campaign for undocumented migrants to get status
- Involve people with lived experience in research and data collection directly
- Initiatives for research should come from the communities themselves
- WiRL should reach out to NGOs supporting refugee women to support them in providing resources so that women can make a safe and fair claim
- Information sharing with refugee and asylum-seeking women on the asylum process, and their rights in different formats (eg infographic, or brief)
- Information sharing about barriers as well as opportunities
- Solidarity with refugee students and student communities at university level
- Targeted lobbying and action within universities/institutions eg sponsoring a refugee student, mentoring a refugee student/colleague, asking for a position in the institution to be filled by a refugee woman

3. Break out groups and feedback

The plenary broke into groups to brainstorm and reflect further on the two questions (above). Each group provided its reflections, comments, suggestions through a facilitator who reported during the plenary and final session.

Members' suggestions and comments included:

- Create a shared database on how the Particular Social Group element of the refugee definition is interpreted across various jurisdictions
- Research and support on mental wellbeing of refugee women
- Advocate for sanctuary for refugee and asylum seeking women at local level, (e.g. cities, municipalities, boroughs and councils)
- A symposium in the form of a series of blog posts to raise awareness on the needs of refugee women in law, policy and practice and raise WiRL's profile as a global network

- Reach out to NGOs that work with refugee women to support the training of refugee women to develop their entrepreneurial skills
- Provide safe spaces for refugee women, supported by NGOs for example, ensuring e.g. trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive, interviewing techniques.
- Analyse and assess the impact externalisation deals between states have on refugee women (eg the UK-Rwanda Deal)
- Organise book launches authored by refugee women or book launches written about refugee women
- Monitor the UK's new Nationality and Borders Act, s. 32 and 33 as women may no longer be recognised as refugees due to interpretations of Particular Social Group in the Act
- Advocate for countries to respect their international obligations and defend the currency of the global refugee regime
- Collaborative research projects between different institutions and stakeholders and members of WiRL
- Targeted use of CEDAW in protecting refugee women, particularly for non-signatory states to the Refugee Convention
- Targeted litigation and joint third-party interventions (amicus curiae before the ECHR)
- Bring forward and highlight good practices of States under the global refugee regime. It is as important as showcasing bad practice
- Reach the general public through conversations, seek to change the anti-refugee, anti-migrant narrative
- Ensure WiRL members can reach each other, share members' work, research, any questions they have, and use WiRL as a forum to exchange information.

The Convenors thanked the members for this fruitful discussion and for generating ideas. All suggestions were noted for future reference and planning.

4. Closing remarks and next steps

The Convenors provided closing remarks. They particularly thanked Elizabeth Mavopoulou for her excellent work and support for the network. They thanked all participants for attending and contributing to the event, and also thanked the Universities of Sussex and the West of England for their support. A note of the event will be published on the [WiRL webpage](#) in due course.