

Women in Refugee Law (WiRL) – the first conference

Tuesday 30 November 2021

Summary

The first Women in Refugee Law (WiRL) network conference took place on 30 November 2021 on Zoom. The conference brought together around 70 academics, refugees, activists and practitioners from different countries to ask the following questions:

- To what extent are women seeking international protection adequately protected by existing legal frameworks of international and domestic refugee law and international human rights law?
- To what extent have the insights of feminist theory and praxis been reflected in improvements in the understanding of the needs and experiences of women claiming asylum?
- What are the new theoretical, legal and practical challenges faced by women seeking international protection?
- How are advocates and activists addressing some of the new or ongoing entrenched obstacles faced by women claiming asylum?

After introductory comments by WiRL conveners Christel Querton and Moira Dustin, the conference included two panels.

The first on ‘Protection and Credibility’ was chaired by Gabriella Bettiga and included presentations on:

- ‘Disproving adverse credibility before tribunals in a culture of disbelief: how women experience the asylum tribunal process’ by Helen O’Nions;
- ‘Non-State Actors of Protection in Refugee Law and the Sliding Scale of Protection for Refugee Women’ by Christel Querton; and
- ‘The notion of ‘protection’ in gender-related asylum claims: game-changing developments at the European Courts?’ by Janna Wessels and Younous Arbaoui

The second panel on ‘Politicising Women’s Claims’ was chaired by Kalyango Ronald Sebba and included presentations on:

- ‘Interpreting the notion of persecution in the asylum claims of refugee women’ by Mathilde Crépin;
- ‘Engendering Decolonisation of the Study of African Refugee Women’ by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso; and
- ‘The personal is political: lesbian and bisexual women’s asylum claims in the UK’ by Moira Dustin

The final session of the conference was a discussion on ‘Building Bridges: North/South and Academia/Practice’ chaired by Sara McKinnon and with contributions from Heaven Crawley, Maggy Moyo, Deborah Anker and Catriona Jarvis preceding open discussion with conference participants.

In their closing remarks, Moira and Christel highlighted next steps for the WiRL Network including working on a special issue including some of the conference papers and expanding the network’s membership, before giving a big thank you to all panellists, participants and UWE colleagues Jyoti Shaw and Lynn Goh.