Climate Change and Forced Migration: Assessing the Gender Impacts in the U.S. and Italy

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Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude to my parents and to my grandparents for their unwavering support in all of my life's endeavors. You always taught me to believe in myself and pushed me to follow my own path with kindness and strength — for this, I am lucky. I love you so much!

A special thanks to my fantastic supervisor, Nicole de Paula: I couldn't have done this dissertation without your brilliant direction.

My strongest solidarity with women and girl refugees in all corners of the world. May we empower them with resources and decision-making roles, and protect them from violations of their human rights.

Thank you to my classmates and to my friends in Rome who made this journey one of bliss, enlightenment, and adventure - amidst a pandemic, nonetheless. To my friends back in the U.S. who have supported me from afar during this time, you mean the world to me. The passion for change and the warmth emanated by my peers instills hope within me for a better world. A more equal, sustainable world that we will create together.

Abstract

The goal of this work is to identify and explore the burdens female refugees endure in the circumstances of forced migration, climate change and COVID-19. It uses contexts in the United States and Italy to analyze the topic from a practical standpoint.

Previous research has not addressed the interlinkages between these subjects in detail. The question motivating this research asks *how* are female refugees particularly affected by simultaneously occurring issues of climate change and COVID-19, and *what* are the unmet needs of this population? Building on these findings from this research, this work then intends to advise on potential policy reform and data developments to enhance the lives of this subgroup.

Data for this master's thesis was collected through qualitative interviews and supported by a robust literature review. A lack of gender-disaggregated data available may be considered as a limitation to this thesis. A scarcity of studies related to the experience of refugees who identify outside the gender binary is of additional significance to note. Lastly, an additional constraint to this research is the absence of first-hand accounts from female and non-binary refugees in this research due to COVID-19 precautions.

In its final assessment, this study concludes that there are different adverse outcomes faced by female and non-binary refugees in the circumstances of forced migration, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis concluded that future policymaking must address the specific needs and concerns of this population to alleviate inequalities and to support their livelihoods. Collection of data disaggregated by gender, by refugee status, and by climate change is recommended to be collected to make these policy responses possible. Additionally, amplified research on the specific adverse effects female refugees experience from COVID-19, climate change and the economy of care is recommended to advise policies.

Introduction

As forced migration rates and climate change impacts are simultaneously increasing, vulnerable populations face substantial risks of suffering from consequential inequalities. Myriad studies have demonstrated that girls, women and non-binary individuals are disproportionately impacted by climate change (Lama et al., 2020; McInerney-Lankford et. al, 2011; Onwutuebe, 2019; Sen Roy, 2018).

Female refugees are an integral component in the topic of surrounding climate change and forced migration, as they comprise roughly 50 percent of refugees in the world, according to the UNHCR. The United Nations (2017) reported that gender and age play instrumental roles in shaping the susceptibility to adverse climate change impacts. Women and non-binary individuals have significantly less economic, political and social agency on a global scale, which is a detriment to their ability to rise above climate change impacts. Adding to the disadvantages, they are the most reliant on the natural resources that climate change strips away, as the most common earners of less than $1 a day are disproportionately women across the world (Sen Roy, 2018). In 2020, over 98 percent of roughly 31 million displacements were caused by weather-based hazards (IDMC, 2021). As climate change continues to unleash detrimental harm on the planet, large masses of people are predicted to be forced to migrate — which will undoubtedly impact the lives of women throughout the globe.

In this thesis, I analyze the intersectional experience of female and non-binary refugees within the context of forced migration and climate change to highlight the unique disadvantages faced by this population. There is a void in knowledge of the specific extent this group is impacted by climate change and forced migration — particularly within the backdrop of COVID-19. This research asks: *What* are the specific adverse effects refugee women and girls face while under the conditions of climate change, forced migration and a pandemic? *What* are the gaps in policy support for female refugees' livelihood? Ultimately, my work seeks to shed light on understanding the unique burdens of female and non-binary refugees after policy solutions are created from conclusions made in interviews conducted and data gathered.

A case study comparison of the U.S. and a European country, specifically Italy, offers a promising field to analyze the differing experiences of female refugees as climate change continues to

worsen. In recent years, the volume of refugees accepted by each country has fluctuated and migration has evolved into a contentious debate for each country due to differing factors.

Prior to 2018, the United States accepted more refugees than any country in the world since the adoption of the Refugee Act in 1980 (Radford & Connor, 2019). In the U.S. political arena, migration evolved into a controversial and bipartisan topic prior to the 2016 presidential election. The number of refugees resettled into the U.S. then plummeted due to a change in refugee admissions policy from former President Donald Trump.

Italy offers a compelling comparison to the U.S., as they both are countries where migration has grown into a controversial subject in recent years (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020). Specifically, the number of refugees in Italy grew from 93,700 to 207,600 in 2019 (Varrella, 2021).

Regarding the methodology of this paper, one primary component is based on interviews conducted from ten sources, which vary from refugee practitioners, academic experts, and other sources from relevant disciplines or experiences. The other component of my research derives from a comprehensive academic literature review.

The first chapter of this work, "Academic Background and Literature Review," lays the framework for the research by providing a literature review of relevant subject matter. To begin, an assessment is given of the differing ways climate change can disadvantage women and girl refugees. It explores the difference in behavioral responses to climate change between females and men, and as well as future climate-induced threats to women's livelihood. This chapter aims to lay the groundwork for areas of opportunity in data gaps and policies related to female and non-binary refugees. This connects to the ultimate mission of this work, which is to recommend more comprehensive policy solutions to support this population. Then, a legal lens is applied to frame an understanding of the rationale behind the absence of an international legal definition for climate refugees. Following this, a review of the public attitudes of refugees in both the U.S. and Italy are examined, in addition to media narratives perpetuated about migration in the countries. This is intended to help inform the varying environments and integration challenges refugees may face from residents in these countries.

Chapter Two, "Climate Change and Displacement" seeks to set the stage in addressing the current ways climate change is impacting the planet before investigating how it connects to forced

migration. We then inspect how environmentally motivated migration is defined and measured. This lays the groundwork for the final component of this chapter, which looks at future climate change trends and their implications to society. This shines a light on the threats globally that future climate migration trends can bring to the world and why the topics discussed in this dissertation can negatively change the lives of individuals globally. This chapter ends with a conceptual overview of how responsibility for climate change solutions is argued to be best divided. This intends to inform readers on the potential leadership approaches for policy solutions for the intersectional issues of climate change, forced migration and gender.

Chapter Three, "The Disturbing Realities for Refugees," strategizes to compare the different experiences of refugees living in the U.S. to Italy to analyze the varying support and resources given. One component of the chapter examines with a gendered lens to these realities. The other parts of this chapter first explore the realities faced by refugees outside of climate issues in their home country, and contrastingly, it then explores refugees' realities related to climate change. Through interviews with refugee practitioners in both countries, an Italian geography professor, and an asylum seeker, sources paint a picture of the realities that refugees face in Italy and the U.S. We then examine with a gender and environmentalism expert, a refugee camp practitioner, and a migration-focused art studio owner about the ways female refugees' experiences are categorically different. Ultimately, this chapter serves to inform the reader of the layered, intersectional experiences of the refugee experience by a case study comparison of the U.S. and Italy.

In Chapter Four, "COVID-19's Impacts," we pull our perspective back to the current date through evaluating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees. This strives to provide a full picture understanding of ways the already difficult life of a refugee has been challenged by the pandemic since 2020. This chapter aims to expose the lack of support female refugees are faced with regarding education, health, violence, and social support during the pandemic. Through interviews conducted and data accumulated, this chapter informs the reader of the troubling trends of intimate-partner violence against women increasing on a global scale, and in some more specific reports, for female refugees during the pandemic. It additionally examines the crisis of sexual violence against female refugees. In its assessment, it highlights the gaps in healthcare quality and access for refugees during the pandemic.

Chapter One: An Overview of Gender, Climate and Refugees

1.1: Gender, Climate Change, and Refugees

The impacts of climate change are not gender neutral, and many studies indicate that women tend to be more severely impacted. A discussion of the gaps in resources and tools for supporting women affected by climate change help inform potential solutions decision makers can act on to support this group. In Shouraseni Sen Roy's 2018 book, titled, "Linking gender to climate change impacts in the global south," she demonstrated that due to cultural norms, lower levels of security, less legal rights, and higher exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, female refugees are left significantly more vulnerable and less able to cope with climate change's impacts. In a study by mobility risk experts Lama et al. (2020), it was concluded that social structures will likely prevail during disasters, which contributes to the reason why climate change will not be experienced the saw way across genders. This typically is less favorable for women, and certainly to non-binary individuals, too (Lama et al., 2020).

In other words, climate change serves as a "threat multiplier" to preexisting injustices stemming from gender inequality (Onwutuebe, 2019). In a report from The World Bank, it was highlighted that due to the reality that women are the disproportionate majority in poor communities reliant on surrounding natural resources, they will suffer more from climate change effects. This finding is due to the way climate change exacerbates preexisting gender inequalities, such as in political participation, economic opportunities and social leadership roles (McInerney-Lankford et al., 2011).

A study from The World Bank highlighted that because women are the disproportionate majority in poor communities reliant on surrounding natural resources, climate change effects will be experienced more acutely (McInerney-Lankford et. al, 2011). The study additionally emphasized that this circumstance is further worsened for women due to gender inequalities in political, economic, social, and cultural roles, information access and property rights (McInerney-Lankford et. al, 2011).

Climate change impacts — such as already-limited access to natural resources, extreme weather events, rising temperatures and rising sea levels — can worsen previously existing conflicts and stressors for refugees, and subsequently, it can increase abuse against women (Sen Roy, 2018).

Although Sen Roy's research is focused on the context of the Global South, it can provide crucial connections to the possibility of climate change impacts on refugees who are not males.

In the circumstance of cyclones in South Asia, social norms — such as an expectation to stay in the house with family, in addition to limited education and restrictive clothes — may make women less mobile from this disaster and increase their chances of death (Lu et. al, 2016). During a slow on-set event such as an extreme temperature shift, men are more likely to migrate while at the same time, women are less expected to migrate (Lu et al., 2016). In the study by Lama et al. (2020), it was concluded that most often, mobility patterns vary by gender, with men more likely to migrate to adapt to climate impacts due to societal structures. Within the same topic, in a study by Kayly Ober (2019), a senior advocate and researcher at Refugees International, it was concluded that previous migration can generally predict future trends. More specifically, human movement catalyzed by climate change is probable to take place within an established channel of movement, or to be contingent on networks or relationships. With all the above considered, adopting proactive measures are crucial to adapt to the future expectations of climate change, particularly for female and non-binary refugees.

Based on Sen Roy's research, it is evident that increased education and access to financial resources are key tools to empowering women in the context of climate change. Furthered education for women will generally lead to an increase of financial capital that will boost their preparedness for climate change after-effects, in addition to the increased education of young girls being a catalyst for their future participation in decision making related to the climate (Sen Roy, 2018). Furthermore, it is apparent from Sen Roy's studies that recognition of women's roles as unpaid caregivers and their unique abilities to formulate social capital must be recognized and translated into formal decision-making roles.

In her research, Sen Roy (2018) found that a lack of gender-disaggregated data contributes to an absence of gender-specific policies related to women. Additionally, when this data is collected, it is often done irregularly, for short periods of time, and it does not frequently span across regions. Sen Roy (2018) concluded that this fact makes it difficult to assign casualties on gender's relationship with climate change on a global scale. Sen Roy (2018) found that future policy should be designed through the lens of gender and an understanding of already-occurring climate change impacts. In summary, it can be concluded that to execute more successful initiatives at the local

and government level for climate change, multiple steps are necessary. A more time-sensitive and longitudinal approach to collecting data, in addition to the combination of qualitative and quantitative data inclusive of age and gender each are steps that could boost climate initiatives (Sen Roy, 2018). Not to be undermined in significance, framing climate change as a "risk modifier" to existing gender inequalities can ensure risk reductions strategies tackle the root of gender-related problems, rather than symptoms (Luma et al., 2019).

1.2 International Legal Dimensions of Climate Refugees

Climate change is real. Displacement caused by climate change is argued by many researchers to be a growing crisis, too. In research done in 2015 by Lauren Nishimura, an Oxford Law expert on human and environmental rights, it was projected that the number of future climate migrants will rise between ten to hundreds of millions. Yet, at present date, there is no international legal recognition of climate change refugees, nor an academic consensus on how to characterize this population, and nor are there any specific protections delegated to them (Nishimura, 2015). The lack of a legal definition for climate refugees in international, environmental, and human rights law hinders the ability for decision-makers to prepare for inevitable increases of climate-induced refugee migration in the future.

Nishimura (2015) emphasized that a continued debate on whether climate change migration is only disaster-motivated, or instead, motivated by economic and social factors, creates a challenge in conceptually defining this group, too. Additionally, the differences between rapid effects of climate change (floods, hurricanes, earthquakes) and slow on-set effects of climate change (diminished natural resources or food) make it harder to define climate change migrants into a clear category (Nishimura, 2015). The lack of consensus on whether crossing borders is a necessary element of the criteria in defining climate migrants builds onto this difficulty. The aforementioned factors all contribute to difficulties in creating a conceptual and legal definition for climate migrants on the international scale, thus hindering the ability for specific funds to be distributed to this population (Nishimura, 2015).

An expert in the law and policy of climate change, Maxine Burkett, has stressed that an individual's capacity to adapt to environmental changes could be a greater factor in climate-motivated migration, rather than a climate disaster or slow or on-set environmental changes (Burkett, 2012).

Burkett (2012), in other terms, stressed that a changing climate may act as the first nudge to migrate, yet, social, political and economic needs weigh more significance in an individuals' decision to move.

Exploring the reasons behind the absence of a legal framework for this group is an additional important component of this discussion. The complexity around directly connecting climate change efforts to migration complicates the ability to create a protection framework. This makes it challenging for transnational advocacy networks to rally around this issue, because they are generally most impactful when there is a clear causal link and when there is one responsible actor (Nishimura, 2015). Of a similar nature, civil society organizations have been less effective in addressing this issue because of the multifaceted nature of climate change (Nishimura, 2015).

Empirical studies show a "statistical correlation between climate change, environmental phenomena and (mostly internal) migration," but they also show that the causal link between forced migration is complex (Mayer, 2013, p. 31). Regarding law studies, there are multiple explanations and critiques for the lacking areas in the legal framework for defining climate refugees.

There is a current gap between the observation of the existence of climate migrants, and the claim that action must be taken to modify international law to fix it (Mayer, 2013). Upon examining the different rhetorical gaps in the reasoning behind a lack of international protection for climate refugees, multiple relevant factors can be revealed.

To begin, there is a "humanitarian" or "poverty alleviation" narrative that centers climate migration in a distributive justice framework analysis, which frames governing climate refugees as a technique to establish global solidarity with minority groups (Mayer, 2013).

A vital question in the discourse of international legal protections in the text by Mayer (2013, p. 110) asks: "should displacement be defined in terms of what drives it, or rather in the terms of the needs of those who move?"

Alexander Betts, migration expert at Oxford University, calls for a new protection framework addressing "survival migration" (Mayer, 2013). Betts argued that normally, flight that is triggered by slow-onset environmental change is triggered by a variety of factors, which makes the

thresholds for distinguishing solely environmentally motivated migrations quite slim. Applying this knowledge, Betts pushed for a new framework that recognizes the rare possibility of distinguishing environmental migrants (Mayer, 2013). Betts additionally added emphasis on the ethical concern of separately identifying climate migrants in legislation (Mayer, 2013). The negative moral implications behind this are simple: if you distinguish one group of migrants in a different legal framework than the others, this could arguably elevate one migrant group's struggle to appear to be more important or worthy of protection. Similarly, Betts acknowledged the argument that the creation of a "new regime" as a sensible next move to address this phenomenon, due to the multi-causal nature of the issue and the reluctance of existing policy systems to assume leadership (Burketts, 2012).

Weaving these rationales together, it can be concluded that there are various factors to consider when analyzing the absence of legal protection for climate migrants. The current absence of this legal definition is dangerous. Without the legal definition of refugees, the realization of appropriate political national and international responses to this community is tremendously hindered (Burketts, 2012). In other words, Burketts (2012) stressed that the absence of a legal definition of climate-induced migrants is dangerous for individuals in this group.

Looking forward, migration must be included in the nucleus of climate change strategies by decision-makers, particularly through focusing on societal benefits brought by adaptation to climate migration, rather than framing with national security risks (Nishimura, 2015). Of course, it is vital for human rights protections and the consent of local populations to be incorporated into any managed migration scheme (Nishimura, 2015).

1.3 Context of Refugees in the U.S. and Italy

Public attitudes and political climates surrounding refugees are complex in every region. During Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S. resettled the lowest number of refugees in a single year in the country since 1980 (Cooke & White, 2015).

In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in May 2018, 51 percent of Americans reported believing that the U.S. has a responsibility to allow refugees into the country, while 43 percent disagreed (Manuel Krogstad, 2019). However, a political division amongst Americans on the acceptance of refugees has been consistent in the country's history, usually erring on the side of

being unwelcoming to refugees. For much of the 1900s, public opinion surveys demonstrated Americans were frequently not in favor of allowing large numbers of individuals seeking asylum from war or oppression: 62 percent of Americans disapproved of this in 1979, and 71 percent disapproved in 1980 (Manuel Krogstad, 2019).

In Italy, most public opinions towards refugees are generally more accepting. In a sample survey of 2,000 participants, it was found that 72 percent of Italians support the principle of asylum and only nine percent of Italians opposed refugees coming to their country (Dixon et al., 2018). Of additional significance, the same study also found that a majority of Italians, or 81 percent, believe the European Union should offer stronger support to Italy amidst the migration crisis.

However, this study also demonstrated that only 18 percent of Italians viewed immigration in a positive manner, largely due to concerns around threats to the economy and job competition (Dixon et al., 2018). A 2019 Pew Research Center study found similar results: 79 percent of Italians reported viewing immigrants as a burden to the country (Gonzalez-Barrera & Phillip Connor, 2019). Additionally, the majority of respondents, around 66 percent, listed unemployment as the primary issue in Italy. This suggests that the economic vulnerability of Italy may play a role in shaping the way Italians view resettled refugees and immigrants living in their country.

Another factor to be considered in the rationale behind Italian's view of refugees is the following statement, which half of Italians agreed to: foreigners who want to come to Italy are not really refugees, rather people with motivations related to welfare and the economy (Dixon et al., 2018). The distrust in the status of refugees in Italy may make some of the population wearier towards accepting refugees.

1.4 Media Coverage of Refugees

An understanding of general media coverage of refugees by Italian and American media, in addition to their overall trust of the media, can help paint a picture of the factors shaping the views these groups have towards refugees.

In the research by Dixon et al. (2018), it was found that less than half of Italians (45 percent) trust the media. In regards to coverage around refugees, a meager 16 percent of Italians agreed that the media reports about immigration and refugees in a truthful and fair manner. Among regions of Italy, the media's reporting on this issue is most trusted in southern Italy and Italy's islands (27

percent), which are geographically closest to the issue (Dixon et al., 2018). Disagreement that the media's reporting is fair and accurate is at its highest in the northwest and northeast of Italy.

In the northwest and northeast regions, a greater number of Italians disagree that the media's reporting is truthful or fair — 72 percent in the northwest, and 68 percent in the northeast. To summarize, this research could indicate that Italian's trust in the media varies by region and proximity to refugee camps.

Looking at the U.S., Americans' distrust of the media is considerably high. In a 2020 Gallup poll, only nine percent in the U.S. trust mass media "a great deal" and 31 percent trust the media "a fair amount" (Brenan, 2020). In the same poll, 27 percent of Americans reported "not very much" trust and 33 percent "none at all" in regards to the media (Brenan, 2020). Undoubtedly, political affiliation shapes the trust Americans have on news reporting, and reporting related to refugees.

Of additional significance, U.S. media narratives surrounding migration have largely been centered on the debate of legal status for migrants. Prior the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the national conversation surrounding migration was primarily catalyzed in the televised campaign debates, where the issue formulated as a contested topic (Cooke & White, 2015). Then-candidate Donald Trump consistently perpetuated xenophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric, which metamorphized into the normalization of racist media debates about the topic (Cooke & White, 2015). This conversation was not triggered by an actual spike in migration trends. Nonetheless, survey results months after Donald Trump displayed this issue showed most Republican viewers mirrored his hardline opinion on the topic. This was a notable change from the previous 56 percent of Republicans who believed immigrants should be allowed to stay in the U.S. regardless of legal status (Cooke & White, 2015).

It also must be stressed that for Americans, trust of news content varies significantly by the news source itself. Increasing polarization in the U.S. mainstream media, particularly in broadcast, has represented this division. Republican voters, specifically older, white-male Republicans primarily watch Fox News and listen to conservative talk shows for their media consumption (Cooke & White, 2015). Democratic voters, on the other hand, sway towards MSNBC and "The Daily Show," each of which are liberal-leaning programs (Cooke & White, 2015). The starkly different patterns

of news consumption by political affiliation highlights one potential factor in the division of American's acceptance of refugees.

In this chapter, we concluded that in Italy, news reporting of refugees is generally more trusted in southern Italy and Italy's islands. In the northeast and northwest, less of the population trusts the media's reporting. Given that Italy's refugee camps are in the south of the country, it could be considered that proximity to refugee camps has a positive relationship with trust of media reporting.

Looking at the U.S., trust of the media is quite low nationally: only nine percent report trusting the media. The 2016 U.S. presidential election and former U.S. President Donald Trump were two primary catalysts of the political polarization of immigration and migration. American's differing media consumption patterns, usually varying by political preferences, can also shape differing attitudes.

Chapter Two: Climate Change and Displacement

Climate change has altered the lives of many living beings on the planet. Below, we will examine how current climate change impacts are reorienting the lives of refugees in particular, as well as future threats. Then, we will explore the intersection of gender to the experience of being a refugee in modern times.

2.1 Climate Change and Migration

Evaluating the status of climate change impacts on the planet is a crucial component of research's framework. The United Nations' State of the Global Climate 2020 report found that last year was one of the three hottest years ever recorded, as the global mean temperature stood to be 1.2 degrees Celsius. The top greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide) continued to incline last year, despite the temporary emission reductions prompted by the pandemic.

Sea level rises are accelerating at a higher rate, which is partially due to melting ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland ("State of the Global," 2020). Of additional significance, heat storage in the ocean and acidification are rising, which disrupts the ocean's ability to moderate climate impacts ("State of the Global," 2020).

Extreme weather events — such as heat waves, droughts, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes — were more common in 2020. Floods took many lives, with extensive flooding occurring in various regions of Africa ("State of the Global," 2020). 2020 saw the largest fires ever record and exceptionally large wildfires increased in number, one of which was the largest area burned in the U.S. in 20 years ("State of the Global," 2020).

There is a division among scientists on the measurement of climate change impacts, said Simone Lucatello, an expert in sustainable development analysis and governance (S. Lucatello, personal interview, February 5, 2021).

"There is a debate in the scientific community about climate change, we call it detection and attribution," Lucatello said. "It means what climate change is really doing and about how climate change is downscaling these effects into the communities, especially related to migrants and refugees. This is a big question."

In the case of the U.S., Lucatello describes circumstances where climate change impacts are less ambiguous.

“We have wildfires in California and the southwest,” he said. “There are a lot of places where climate change is certainly having a strong impact on populations and communities.”

Lucatello is confident that enhancement of current monitoring programs in the EU and beyond related to refugees will improve the livelihood of this population.

“We need to build data sets — and this would be for a recommendation policy — that are specific and disaggregated for refugees and climate change, because it is a growing issue.”

In an additional critique, Lucatello noted that it's a challenge for host countries to acquire funds aid for refugees, and in the case of funds available, some countries “are still depending on resources that are not very clear” or not directed yet to the issues of refugees, such as the Green Climate Fund.

“We need to make more awareness about the ways money can be used and directed to causes like the support of refugees,” Lucatello said. “We need national budgets, but we also need international cooperation budgets.”

Looking at the relationship between climate change and forced migration, direct causal links can be complex to distinguish. Giovanni D’Ambrosio, an employee who works with refugees at Mediterranean Hope, described circumstances in which he’s worked with refugees who fled from Bangladesh due to perceived climate-related-motivations. Mediterranean Hope is a migration project of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, or FCEI (FCEI).

“We can see that many people coming from Bangladesh have immigrated because of climate change or climate disaster,” D'Ambrosio said (D’Ambrosio, personal interview, May 4, 2021,). “The problem now is that before coronavirus we had the opportunity to speak with them, now that is not possible.”

Due to the complications brought by COVID-19, the hindered communication line between refugees and staff further complicates determining the exact leaving motivation for refugees. D’Ambrosio noted that since those migrating from Bangladesh don’t often speak English, it's difficult to determine if their motivation was solely triggered by climate change.

This instance highlights how the already challenging procedure of distinguishing environmental motivations of migrants can be even more difficult amidst the backdrop of a pandemic.

Beyond evaluating past and present relevant factors in the mix of forced migration due to climate change, looking at future environmental threats is a vital element of this research. Examining future projections for the United States, Lucatello noted "millions of people are at risk for sea-level rise and moving towards other parts of the country." This can suggest a future potential threat for refugees living in areas with a proximity to bodies of water in the U.S.

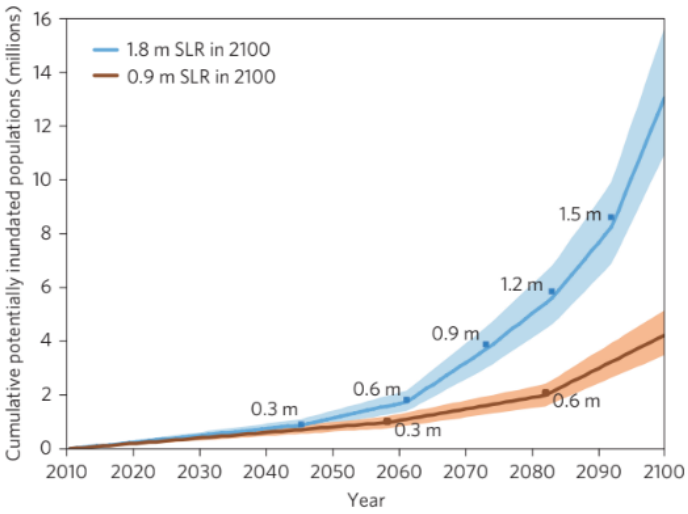

Figure 1 | Cumulative projected at-risk populations for the continental United States, 2010–2100. Projections reflect assumed growth/decline rates for 72,664 census block groups in 319 coastal counties. The shading indicates the 90% confidence interval of the projection models.

Source: Hauer et al., 2016.

The threat of sea-level rise in the U.S. is foreseen to be one of the most socially disruptive and likely climate change threats. Through a study spatially and temporarily aligning projections from coastal U.S. states, one projection model predicts that roughly 13 million Americans are at risk for sea-level rise impacts (Hauer et. al, 2016). The southeastern U.S. comprises 70 percent of the at-risk population, with 50 percent of this area being the state of Florida.

With this finding considered, it can be inferred that along with the rest of the population of the U.S., refugees living in the U.S. will potentially face additional hardships caused by damages from future predicted sea-level rise. Like the other greatest crises faced by the world, refugees and

other vulnerable populations will likely face the most severe consequences of future climate change symptoms like the rising of sea-levels.

2.2 Measurement of Environmental Displacement

An environmentally displaced person is defined by the International Organization for Migration (p. 13, 2021) as a person who is "displaced within their country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction is a major cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the sole one."

Around seven million people in 104 countries and territories were living in displacement as the consequence of disasters from 2020 ("Environmental Migration," 2021). Data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2021) reported that disasters remained the top cause for internal displacements globally in 2020, triggering 30.7 million internal displacements. Over 98 percent of those displacements were motivated by weather-caused disasters, like floods and storms, in East Asia, Pacific Asia, and South Asia ("Internal Displacement," 2021).

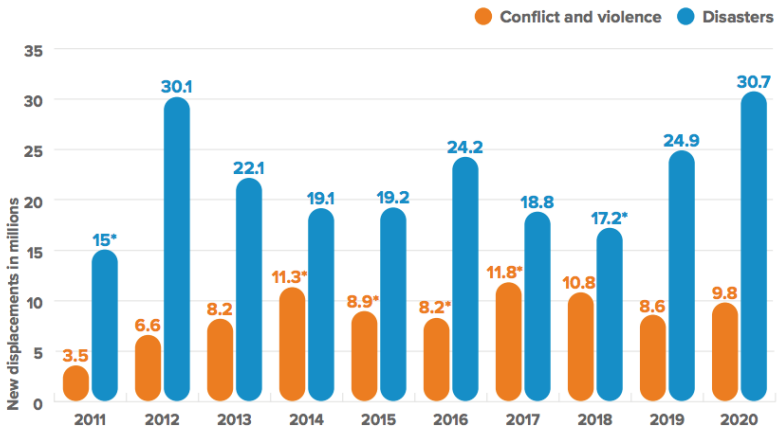

Figure 2: New displacements by conflict, violence and disasters worldwide (2011-2020)

**Updated figures. For further details see monitoring methodology, available online.*

Source: "Internal Displacement," 2021.

During the pandemic, people remained in exposed homes even during disasters due to fear of COVID-19 infection. Despite this, the aforementioned disaster displacement statistics are at a decade-high. The countries accounting for these figures, in descending order, are: China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India and the U.S ("Internal Displacement," 2021).

One limitation among the discourse of environmentally-caused migration is the absence of a global data set on the topic, according to Migration Data Portal (2021). As previously discussed, quantifying the drivers of climate-related migration is a complex process, as migrants are commonly driven by a multitude of reasons. One particularly wide data gap is in regards to migration prompted by slow-onset environmental changes, like sea-level rises or droughts, as there are few comparative studies on the matter ("Environmental Migration," 2021).

2.2 Implications of Future Climate Migration Trends

Climate change will continue to complicate and present new hazards to global security. The connection of forced migration and climate proceeds like the following: global warming impacts sea-level rises, which depletes agriculture, and subsequently, results in a spike of migration flows and hazards (Uexkull & Buhaug, 2021). Research by Nina von Uexkull and Halvard Buhaug (2021) concluded that there is a dire need for research focusing on climate caused conflict to shift its focus on long-haul security effects from climate change, rather than empirical reviews of climate variability. Furthermore, future research designs must accommodate the connection of climate and conflict, which play out in specific scopes (Uexkull &Buhaug, 2021).

Applying a holistic perspective, it's imperative that there is interdisciplinary integration, scenario work and approaches rooted in prediction to help assess "compound and cascading effects" (Uexkull & Buhaug, 2021, p. 5). This is the basis for properly outlining future security threats prompted by climate change. In regards to other obstacles for future research in relation to migration trends and climate change, it is without doubt that the longer greenhouse gas emissions are grossly exerted into the atmosphere, the more dire mitigation measures will have to be. Thus, this will necessitate massive transformation in society, exploit resources, and will likely trigger migration (Uexkull & Buhaug, 2021). Certainly, this is a reality known among most in the scientific community and beyond. However, its relevance can't be underlined enough in the conversation around future security threats and migration trends.

Results found by the U.S. National Security, Military and Intelligence Professionals in 2020 grimly reflected that even if the lowest estimated levels of global warming occur, massive consequences will follow. The results showed that in this circumstance, destabilization of security environments, infrastructure and major institutions will occur in each region of the world (Guy et al., 2020).

Specifically, it noted that higher levels of global warming pose catastrophic and potentially irreversible security risks around the world.

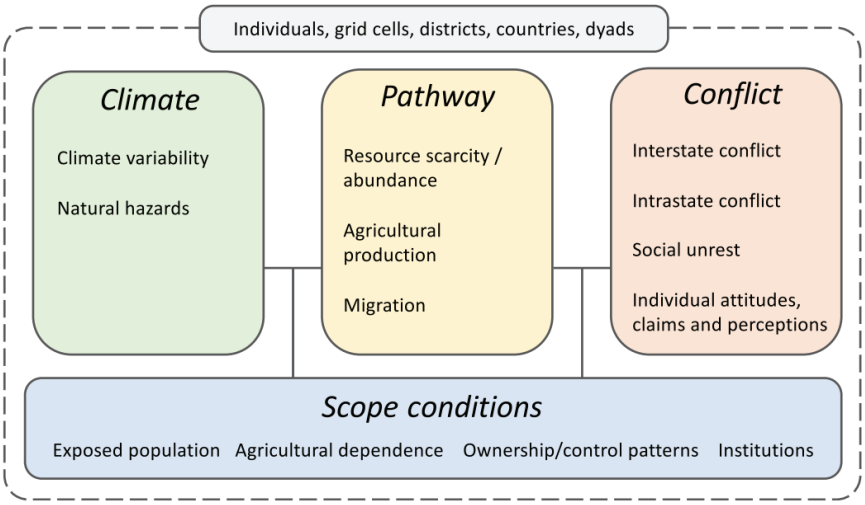

Figure 2. Collective thematic scope of special issue contributions

Graphic above: Uexkull and Buhaug, 2021.

In high-end scenarios conducted by this research in 2020, entire sections of the planet will be left inhabitable due to climate-related disasters, temperature changes, straining of crops and resources all of which led to food scarcity, and major detriments to livelihood (Guy et al., 2020).

As climate change continues to wreak havoc on biodiversity, almost one million species are facing extinction, the U.S. National Security, Military and Intelligence Professionals (2020) reported. Earth's freshwater sources and crop yields will continue to see great reductions at a time where our population keepings growing, the report said. Agricultural stressors will contribute to local social insecurity and to a rise in political tension in communities with low development (Guy et al., 2020).

These factors will alter our ecosystems as we know it and will contribute to a massive reduction in the availability of natural resources. Competition over natural resources can incite disagreement or violence at the community level. The availability of natural resources is a crucial element to a secure society, and as it decreases, the threat to security on a global level encroaches (Guy et al., 2020).

The aforementioned conditions could destabilize entire societies and produce major waves of migration. Research has shown that individuals displaced by environmental causes can lead to internal state migration, which can sometimes destabilize host communities (Guy et al., 2020). This destabilization can be related to the fact that host communities have their own resource constraints, which can cause tensions between host citizens and migrants. The social impact of this can be harmful, as it causes great difficulties for migrants to integrate in society and to avoid additional conflict in their new home. In summary, when evaluating through the lens of security, climate change impacts will mostly alter environmental and social systems, which directly relate to global security and safety (Guy et al., 2020).

Looking into the future, GirlForward's director of programs, Samera Hadi, shared that the organization believes "there is going to be a high rise of refugees coming from certain parts of East Africa based off of the Lake Victoria Basin for water." GirlForward is a nonprofit organization in the U.S. that works to empower refugee girls from ages 12-21.

"Namely, many of our participants are from East Africa and rely heavily on the Lake Victoria Basin for water and electricity, but it is drying up at a rapid rate," Hadi said (S. Hadi, personal interview, July 6, 2021). "So, we are likely to find an increase in poverty and food insecurity in that region, which will only increase the need for sound refugee resettlement programs in the U.S."

Lake Victoria is the second biggest freshwater source on the planet, supporting over 42 million individuals within its basin (Khaki & Awange, 2021). From 2019-2020, water levels of Lake Victoria inclined at an alarming rate, resulting in floods, tainting of drinking water, increased diseases from the water, and more consequences (Khaki & Awange, 2021). The dramatic changes in this lake are derived from human activity, heavy rain, urbanization, and the degradation of the environment (Khaki & Awange, 2021). Taking a closer look, the lake's sedimentation and influx streamflow has increased due to deforestation and poor agriculture methods (Khaki & Awange, 2021). Lake Victoria, which is sensitive to rainfall and evaporation, has jumped 0.5 degrees Celsius in temperature since 1960 (Khaki & Awange, 2021). The long-term effects of the lake's changes could significantly impact the livelihood of surrounding residents due to the integral role that Lake Victoria plays in Africa, according to Khaki & Awange (2021). This serves as a potential example of a climate-induced threat to forced migration that could unfold in the future.

GirlForward doesn't ask female participants their motivation for fleeing their home country. Due to this reason, Hadi shared that in her time at GirlForward she has not "heard as much about why girls became refugees or what pushed them out." Hadi shared that she does believe climate-inducing factors are "why a lot of girls come, like Haitians with the earthquake."

Of course, landing on one sole reason as a motivation for a refugee's reason to flee is not easy. Hadi emphasized that big part of why it is difficult to define those who are motivated by climate conditions is because "a lot of times the environmental component is not in the definition of refugees."

2.3 Global Responsibility for Climate Change

How should climate change mitigation be distributed among nations or relevant actors? In acknowledgment that climate change impacts will intensify social vulnerability (Burketts, 2012), applying a moral perspective to the division of responsibility for climate change responses is vital. Richard Beardsworth, Leeds professor of international politics, suggested that responses to climate change should be combatted with global solidarity and responsibility.

Further, political action is central to mitigating climate impacts and preventing further environmental damage. Climate science has proven the grave importance of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and minimizing carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 to avoid catastrophic damages (Beardsworth, 2021). This immense challenge will require robust and coordinated political efforts by nations. Beardsworth (2021) stressed the critical role of the state leadership in this coordination.

Social justice must be accounted for in the conversation of global action towards climate change. Developing countries and the world's poorest people will continue to suffer the biggest consequences of climate change impacts, which certainly includes forced migration (Torres & Casey, 2017). Furthermore, the integration of strategies which elevate migrants who have been forcibly displaced due to the climate is an additional recommendation from experts. Torres and Casey (2017) argued that climate strategies must be designed with the intent to forge social connections between migrants in their new countries, as well as preserving their preexisting familial connections.

As forced migration continues to rise due to environmental factors, the most vulnerable populations will transcend deeper into vulnerable circumstances without help (Beardsworth, 2021). Collaboration between advanced and developing countries is vital in the formula for combatting this.

National responsibility for climate change contributions varies significantly when evaluating carbon dioxide emissions. The U.S. holds the greatest national responsibility for carbon dioxide emissions, as it is responsible for 40 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions (Beardsworth, 2021). This is followed by the European Union, which is responsible for 29 percent (Beardsworth, 2021). During the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC), the UN established the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities among nations" (Frumhoff et al., 2015). This concept promotes the following: nations that have contributed the largest number of emissions should exert a proportionate responsibility for preventing future climate disruptions (Frumhoff et al., 2015). Subsequently, it could be argued that the U.S. and the EU are responsible for spearheading the most of the world's climate response efforts.

Major fossil-fuel corporations are the top contributors to the ravaging effects of climate change and the injustice it perpetuates. Research by Frumhoff et al. (2015) suggests the following as the first method to actively contributing to climate change solutions: to blatantly communicate to consumers, politicians, and shareholders about climate risks associated with their products. Another proposed recommendation for corporations is to publicly dispute falsehoods perpetuated by lobbyists and industry trade associations (Frumhoff et al., 2015). With certainty, transitioning to low-carbon energy is a paramount measure corporations can take to assume climate-action responsibility (Frumhoff et al., 2015).

Climate change is an enormous threat. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, extreme weather events have become more commonplace. 2020 also stood to be one of the three hottest years ever documented.

We found in this chapter that environmental consequences from climate change hold the power to destabilize entire societies and incite new flows of migration. Research has shown that climate change impacts leads can lead to internal state migration, which can lead to destabilization of host communities.

We also examined different approaches to dividing responsibility for climate change. One scholar argued that responsibility for climate change should be shared globally between nations in a collaborative approach. More advanced countries must offer tangible support to developing countries, as they suffer the greatest burdens from climate change. State leadership can additionally be a strong mechanism in mitigating climate change impacts.

Chapter Three: The Disturbing Realities for Refugees

Outside of potential climate issues in their homeland, refugees face many new experiences and challenges in their new homes. A comparison of the livelihoods for refugees in Italy and the U.S. will be analyzed to illuminate these realities. Additionally, to further contextualize this point, a comparison of the gendered experience for women in these nations, the differing resources given, and the public attitudes in each country will be examined.

3.1 Realities for Refugees in Italy

Italy accepted 4,924 refugees in 2020, according to a 2020 report from Association for Legal Studies on Immigration (ASGI). Alfonso Giordano, professor of political geography at LUISS in Rome, shared his expertise on public reception to refugees in Italy (A. Giordano, personal interview, April 15, 2021). Giordano asserted that refugees in Italy have a unique opportunity to integrate into the culture, as it is common for Italians to have a welcoming attitude towards immigrants, and they view refugees in the same manner.

Giordano stated that Italy doesn't "have a problem with integration" when it comes to immigrants as they have a "good civic reaction," and he believes this applies to refugees as well. He credited this to Italians associating immigrants and refugees in a similar category, in addition to excellent work done for refugees by intermediate associations, Catholic associations and NGOs.

It can't be forgotten that various politicians in Italy currently push anti-refugee narratives — Giordano noted that the responses to refugees vary greatly by one's political affiliations. In regards to refugees, he said, "if you just look at the populist answer, it's very bad."

Shifting towards a climate-focused examination, Giordano commented on current and present risks related to climate change, and he emphasized that future risks are increasing: "We are a long country with different climates," he said. "So, there is part of Italy that is beginning to have desertification. If you go to Sicily, there are some parts of land that are disappearing due to desertification."

Looking into the future, he asserted that more proactive "structural support" for future climate change impacts would be beneficial, as current responses are usually just reactive.

“The main problem is that we don’t have a good management of the land. We just act after the problem, not preventing it,” Giordano said. “It's the problem throughout Italy: we’re not investing much in this.”

Beyond a lack of investment in climate action in Italy, the migrant experience alters based on gender. In the EU, the differing gender experiences in political and civic integration, in formal and active citizenship, in addition to representation, has not garnered a great amount of focus (Chiappelli, 2016). Assessing the limitations for female immigrants in Italy is an essential component in comprehending the experience for female refugees in the country once immigrant status is reached.

Research by sciences of education and psychology expert, Tiziana Chiappelli (2016), outlined female migrant participation in the following sectors: politics, education and trade union representation. The results found were unfavorable. Comparing from a legal, national and local level: migrant participation in Italy is considerably limited (Chiappelli, 2016). Factoring this in, it is not jarring that those qualitative interviews found that migrant experiences in Italy are generally described unsatisfactorily.

Looking through a lens of gender in the Italian migrant experience, Chiappelli (2016) found that immigrant women often promote active participation in Italian society and are frequent founders of gender-focused associations. In fact, in the 1970s’, the first migrant women organizations were created right after migrant women first arrived in Italy for domestic work (Chiappell, 2016). This can be argued to demonstrate a notable contribution that migrant women have made on Italian culture.

For refugees in Italy, experiencing homelessness is another common reality. At the JNRC in Rome, Giulia Bonoldi explained that 70 percent of their refugee clientele are homeless (G. Bonoldi, personal interview, April 27, 2021). In considering what is causing homelessness for refugees, there are myriad potential factors. Few housing owners are willing to sign contracts with them, Bonoldi said: “According to what [refugees here] say, there’s a lot of non-inclusive attitudes."

Bonoldi explained that in late 2018 and during 2019, Italy’s “Security Decree” caused “many asylum seekers to lose their opportunity to be supported by the public system, especially the second level of the reception systems.”

In Italy, there is a regulation requiring the first country where refugees enter as the country responsible for the renewal and permit process. Bonoldi shared that this creates logistical problems for refugees, and sometimes, homelessness.

“For those who managed to reach other countries in Europe, they have to come back for this renewal and bureaucratic issues,” Bonoldi said. “We know from speaking with refugees, that the time they have to spend here, we’re talking about months: they are homeless. They don’t find a proper location to stay.”

Adding to the challenges accompanied by Italy being a “very bureaucratic country,” Bonoldi described a fear of diversity felt by some Italians, catalyzed by a large amount of misinformation: “There’s a fear that migrants can take jobs away from Italians.”

It is integral to examine these accounts with the historical context around refugees in Italy. In previous years, migration has existed as a front and center concern in Italian politics. The country has faced enormous challenges in recent times, which has prompted this focus on migration. Some of the catalyst events were a lingering economic crisis, the 2013 collapse of the bipolar party system, government budget cuts driven by centrist coalitions, and more (Pietro Castelli, 2017).

The issue of Italy’s ongoing economic crisis is intertwined with its perceived migrant crisis. As the public controversy on the influx of migrants of Italy began, it prompted a national discourse of the social, economic and safety threats from immigration (Pietro Castelli, 2017).

Bonoldi said “socioeconomic integration” is the ultimate goal of the refugees she works with. Yet there are unique challenges in finding work in Italy as a refugee. This could be said to demonstrate the complex relationship between Italy’s economic crisis and its refugee crisis. She highlighted the importance of helping refugees become acquainted with “what the mindset of Italian people are,” and to “train them on everyday life in Italy.” Another example of this is training refugees on CV, or curriculum vitae, etiquette preferred by Italian employers.

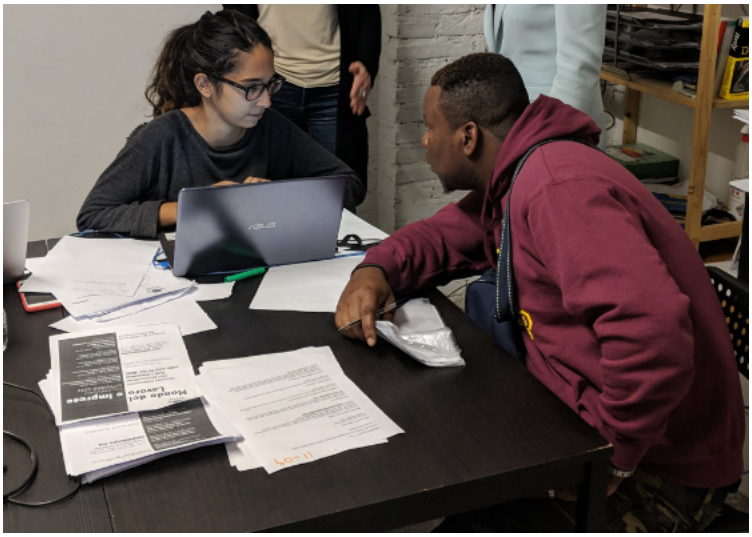

Photo above: Job assistance is given to a client at JNRC. Photo credit given to Giulia Bonoldi.

Bonoldi described a scenario where a refugee received training to become a hairdresser, but once she arrived on the scene of the job, it appeared she did not have a full understanding of what the position would entail in the Italian market. This exemplified the challenges refugees can encounter culturally when trying to enter the job market.

“Sometimes it is not important to train them with technical skills, but on how people think, and what people would expect from them when carrying out a job,” she said.

“Work is the number one thing refugees need help with. This isn’t just a problem for refugees or migrants, Italians have the same problem,” Bonoldi said. “Our job market is not a flexible job market for young graduate Italians.”

In summary, the perceived migrant crisis has produced societal panic in Italy. The origins of this panic can be traced back to the country’s preliminary economic crisis and its political legitimacy crisis (Pietro Castelli, 2017). Public anxiety triggered by these preexisting challenges bleeds into other issues, such as the availability of economic opportunities and social integration for refugees.

3.2 Realities for Refugees in the U.S.

In the U.S., resettlement is made possible by the coordination of refugee assistance organizations, who work with refugees to integrate them into American culture after refugee status is attained.

According to the U.S. Department of State (2021), all refugees are met by someone once they arrive (either a family member or friend) before they are taken to their initial housing. Then, U.S. resettlement agencies, like RefugeeOne, assist with matters such as enrollment in employment services, schooling, social or language programs, and additionally, assistance with Social Security registration. RefugeeOne is the largest resettlement agency in the state of Illinois and is recognized by the U.S. government.

In the U.S., "there's one of the largest refugee programs in the world," Shubi Bocko, a volunteer coordinator at RefugeeOne in Chicago, emphasized (S. Bocko, personal interview, June 22, 2021). She explained that "the U.S. has 9 resettlement agencies that welcome refugees into the U.S.," which are connected to UNHCR and the government.

"The way that refugee systems are set up in the U.S., is that once people get here, they need to find jobs quickly," Bocko said. "Within three months, they have to find employment."

The focus of resettlement agencies is to economically empower refugees, according to the U.S. Department of State (2021). Bocko echoed this focus. She explained that all the refugee services at the organization are geared towards promoting self-reliance, due to the quick turn-around time required for finding employment before government assistance ends. For instance, at RefugeeOne, there is an employment coordinator who works with the refugees to find interests and subsequent job opportunities.

Bocko shared that reversal in roles for refugees upon arrival to the U.S. can cause "friction within the household: "When it comes to women and girls, one thing I definitely notice about women is that their roles switch once they get to the United States," she said. "Women may have an opportunity to work and make money, which might not have been the case in their home country. Now they have a little more power, they can make more money, they're more independent... and sometimes, the husbands are not okay with that because they're used to being the dominant one in the household."

Frequently, resettled refugee girls learn skills such as "speaking up for themselves, being confident" upon their arrival in the U.S, Bocko said. These skills are not often championed in the home countries of some refugees.

Facing racism is an additional layer on the multifaceted experience of female refugees of color in the U.S. The Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020 was triggered by the killing of George Floyd and centuries of systemic racism against Black Americans. This forced many refugee to girls face the intersectionality of their identities in America.

“There were a lot of conversations about race, racism, oppression, and police brutality within that year,” Hadi said of the girl refugees at GirlForward. “They have a moment where they’re realizing — especially with African participants — that, ‘I am included in this discrimination. I am also Black to a lot of people.’”

“It takes a longer time for them to understand the racial and socio-economic prejudice that they might be facing, or people who are Black and Brown might be facing,” she added.

Heightened xenophobia from political polarization in the U.S. also trickled down to adversely affect some refugees in the United States. After former President Donald Trump came into office, the refugee girl participants of GirlForward reported facing racist behaviors, including “a lot of stares, a lot of pushback.”

When there was a surge of Syrian refugees resettling in Chicago, girl and women refugees shared being prejudiced due to their Islam faith, according to Hadi: “A lot of times they would talk about being discriminated against because they wore a hijab.”

“The intersectionality of these girls' identities starts to play out as they progress in their education and their lived experiences, as they get jobs and go to college,” she said. “Identities and coming of age are completely different from what their parents were used to.”

Age can play a defining factor in the experience of female refugees in the U.S., unsurprisingly.

“With the older women, they’re more to themselves, not always as open. Part of that is also because of language: most of our older adults don’t speak English that much,” Bocko said.

Within the same vein, Bocko shared that refugee women often mention the challenge of raising children without “a sense of community” and “not knowing their neighbors” as a primary difficulty, given that most refugee women come from cultures where large communities help raise children together.

“Most refugee women do have children so if they’re working, finding a babysitter and finding a daycare or someone to watch their children has been one of the biggest challenges,” Bocko said.

The United States does not provide free childcare for its citizens, and it often is unaffordable to many populations — refugees included.

Before refugees resettle in the U.S.; logistical difficulties can ensue. The challenges in the process of acquiring refugee status in the U.S. are closely mirrored in the process of applying for asylum. Nadeesh Mohotty, a Los Angeles County resident and asylum seeker, detailed his family’s challenges applying for asylum in the U.S (N. Mohotty, personal interview, June 30, 2021).

“I’m originally from Sri Lanka. I immigrated to the U.S. with my family back in 2010. The reason why I came here is because of my father. Because of his job there was a lot of political pressure on him, because he worked as a military officer,” Mohotty said. “Due to political pressures from opponents basically, it was not safe for us to live in our own country anymore. That’s why we left to the U.S. to seek asylum.”

Although Mohotty’s family did not migrate to the U.S. under climate-induced circumstances, his story paints a picture of what the reality can look like for a family seeking asylum in the U.S. In terms of assistance given once his family arrived in the U.S., Mohotty recalled that his family “did not receive any resources at all.”

“We did not get any job training, any financial training, any legal assistance at all,” Mohotty said. His family did not receive help from any development organizations, because his family was “not aware that there was any help for them.”

No one told us that there were such things to look for such things. We had no idea and thought we were just on our own,” he said. Despite the lack of communication provided from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services about available resources, Mohotty describes his arrival in the U.S. positively. He described that in his experience in the community and the school system, “everyone was welcoming and accommodating.”

Mohotty shared that even in his youth, he recalls the process of applying for asylum in the U.S. being extremely complicated for his family.

“One thing I can definitely attest to is that it is extremely time-consuming, complicated and financially exhausting,” Mohotty said. “They make it so complicated that filling out any application or any formal paperwork makes you have to hire an attorney for the process.”

Mohotty shared the following as a recommendation to improve the asylum process: “They could step up to have extra language resources. If you were assigned legal counsel as an asylum seeker, that would be a really big help for us. If you had some kind of legal help when filing your case.”

“The whole system is set up to be non-accommodating from the get-go,” Mohotty said of the asylum application process. “I believe there has to be a complete overhaul of the system.”

Asylum seekers and refugee status seekers each work with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services department in their processes. Asylum seekers must complete a form “I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal” in order to officially apply for asylum. The application holds a whopping 12 pages of questions and 14 pages of instructions.

Contrastingly, refugees must receive a referral to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to be considered for refugee status, according to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services webpage (2021). Upon being referred, potential refugees are offered help to complete the application before being interviewed by a USCIS officer, who ultimately determines if the individual qualifies for refugee resettlement (“Refugees,” 2021).

The National Immigration Forum (2021) reported that after the individuals are referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it then takes an average of 18-24 months for refugees to be screened and vetted. In 2020, around 11,814 refugees were resettled in the United States.

3.3 The Intersecting Experience of Being a Female and a Refugee

Following the previous chapter, which focused on the realities of refugees outside of the context of climate change, we will now look at the intersection of gender, climate change and migration.

Climate change impacts are not gender neutral. A professor with expertise on gender and environment, Manuela Picq, elaborated on the disproportionate impacts that climate change has on women (M. Picq, personal interview April 30, 2021).

“Women lose the common spaces where they feed their family. They lose where they work. They oversee the economy of care, and they’re the ones who end up commodified as nature and used as a slave towards those generating capital,” Picq said.

Recognition of the unpaid economic value that women bring to the economy is an essential component in the discourse around gender, climate change and migration. Social scientist and lawyer, Riane Eisler, asserted that the lack of recognition for the work of caregiving is a major hindrance to sustainable development in society. Eisler urged for the integration of policies and practices in economics that support caregiving for humans and the environment (Eisler, 2012).

“We need data that is accurate. We have fake data that doesn’t take into consideration the loss generated, the free labor and the value that women are producing every day,” Picq asserted. “So, we need to have labor integrated into through data. We need to have data that takes into account all of the developments.”

The origins of economics we know today did not factor in the environment, nor did it factor in the free labor of care. Adam Smith and Karl Marx identified care for people in childhood as “reproductive labor” done as “women’s work,” which created the foundation for modern capitalist and socialist thinking (Eisler, 2012, p. 60). The degradation of caring work into the term “reproduction” is criticized by some, as it can further a gendered economy that disadvantages women.

“Parents subsidize the state by raising children. We are not taken into account when we discuss developments, or the labor of women that is constantly compensating for the losses produced by the state,” Picq said.

In old economic maps, three life-sustaining models were not included: “the household economy, the natural economy, and the volunteer economy,” which shows that “productive” work is only defined in terms of work that is paid (Eisler, 2012). Based on this, Eisler (2012) promoted the idea of redesigning an economic system to holistically address the complex, social, environmental and economic challenges we face in modern times. This redesign would put human caretaking at the core of its framework.

The crises battled in our modern world all make one thing clear: previous economic models are not fit to support our current circumstances. Eisler's theory reinforces the thought that measurement of growth, like GDP, bears zero to no significance on individuals' daily lives (Eisler, 2012). Current definitions of growth do not reconcile the fact that relentless growth is unsustainable. Further, new definitions of productivity must use economic indicators that recognize the tremendous societal and financial benefits brought by the economy of care.

From one perspective, it could be argued that "reproductive work" is the most worthwhile of all when "high-quality human capital" is prioritized in economic pursuits (Eisler, 2012). Of course, like with many proposals for major change, this must be prompted by reframing of policymaking discourse.

The theory provided by Riane Eisler is echoed by Manuela Picq, and it is particularly relevant in the discussion of supporting female and non-binary refugees in the context of climate change.

Women are "excluded from decision-making" and then they are expected to take care of the impacts of climate change, explained Picq: "When the water is no longer clean, who has to walk another five hours to pick up water from another river? It's going to be girls and women doing that labor too."

"With all of these issues combined, there's of course the issue of self-determination. We cannot see self-determination as gender neutral, because it's not," Picq said. "Men lose their territory, but women lose their territory and their political agency, so they lose twice." Picq described why violence can increase against refugee women in camps, as she stated that in camps, "when there are no resources, the bodies become resources."

"Camps are like jails: they are spaces of violence and confinement. Whenever there is violence, the weakest bodies, the sexualized and racialized bodies are the first ones to suffer," Picq said. "We understand gender is a social class, and we understand that being a woman is being a second-class citizen."

The subjection of sexual violence against refugee women is a grave, widespread reality. Picq described that in the context of refugee camps, "one of the jobs that can be practiced in this environment is sex, whether it is the body for labor or exploitation."

“For instance, in Haiti, there was an earthquake or hurricane, a lot of blue helmets who went there to ‘help’ supposedly, were getting sex from little girls in exchange for bananas in the refugee camps,” Picq said. “They were climate refugees basically on their own island. The only way to get food was through sex, with the soldiers who were there to ‘protect them.’”

Adding on to the severity of this issue, the camps “don't have healthcare, so it’s not like they have condoms or the morning after pill.”

Pepi Papadimitriou, the refugee education coordinator in central Greece’s Ritsona Camp, described a similar disturbing reality of sexual exploitation of refugee women (P. Padadimitriou, personal interview, March 21, 2021).

“I know African women [refugees] are having sex for five euros in Athens. Because they’re in a tragic situation, they’re obliged to become prostitutes, just for five euros. This I know for sure,” Papadimitriou said.

“When they go to find a job, it’s easier for an employer to think that they should get exploited because they’re a refugee and need a job,” she said about refugees.

Photo above: The Ritsona Camp in Greece, taken by Pepi Papadimitriou in 2021.

In a systematic review of sexual violence experienced by female refugees in the world, results found that sexual violence consistently happens to female refugees throughout the migratory

process, mostly from intimate partners but even from supposed “protection authorities” (Araujo et al., 2019). The review, which was conducted from 60 articles throughout all continents, showed that rape was the most reported kind of sexual abuse at 65 percent. In the 2019 studies review by Araujo et al. (2019), 89 percent of the reported victims of sexual violence were women, and 42 percent of whom were from Africa. Despite the severe mental and social consequences of sexual violence, it is worth noting that rape severely increases the chances of victims receiving HIV, or human immunodeficiency virus. Of importance, it is noted that this study did not provide data specific to the non-binary refugee experience related to sexual violence.

Measures of protection are direly needed by the refugee community, in addition to further studies with appropriate tools to measure the size of the issue are vital elements in combating this sexual violence crisis (Araujo et al., 2019). The vulnerability of refugee women knows few bounds. Looking at another barrier to female refugees’ integration of society, a lack of childcare is an obstacle.

“When they are looking for a job, they have no one to take care of the children,” Papadimitriou said. “If a refugee woman wants to find a job, sometimes it is impossible because if she doesn’t have anybody to take care of the children, how can she work?”

In regards to a gendered difference in experience for refugees in Italy, different protections are given to refugee women than men through Italian law. “If a woman claims she doesn't have a place to sleep, we call the emergency number and they immediately provide a place for her to stay,” Bonoldi said. “This doesn't happen with men.” Looking at the U.S. perspective, Bocko could not identify any different legal protections for female refugees in the country. Further research on this also failed to find any gender-specific laws for female refugees in the U.S.

3.4 Other Impacts on the Female Refugee Experiences

From a cultural adaption perspective, community organizations can step in as a non-transactional space for refugees to express themselves and connect with those living in the community. Particularly for women or non-binary individuals, it can be where they discover their agency in the Western context. Sushmita Mazumdar, the owner of Studio Pause — an art studio in Virginia which focuses on sharing stories of migration and home — weighed in on this experience in an interview (S. Mazumdar, personal interview, July 7, 2021).

“When we talked about social justice issues, she said we don’t have these words in my language: ‘women’s agency’,” Mazumdar explained about Rana. “She left an abusive marriage. But she said, ‘No one in my family or culture will help me, because they don’t understand that I can leave.’”

Refugee supporting organizations that aren’t affiliated with the government or churches can bring a safe space for refugees to find a new home in their society without a “transactional” aspect.

“Organizations look at people as a statistic: ‘this is one more person, this is the region they’re from, this is what they speak, this is what they need,’” Mazumdar said. “They don’t look at them as individual people.”

“What I’ve found is that there are organizations, and there is a feeling that ‘they can help me.’” So, what happens is, the interaction is totally different,” she said. “It is of, ‘I have some needs, and you can help me, and I am beholden to you.”

Mazumdar shared stories about a female poet, Rana, who fled Iraq as a refugee and found a haven in Studio Pause. “There is no other place where I can go and just be me, as a person who doesn’t have any means, but as the poet I used to be in my country in the language I used to speak,’” Rana said to Mazumdar.

“My refugee friend told me how she healed herself through her art after three wars in Iraq,” Mazumdar said. “She couldn’t understand my English at first, but she told me: ‘It didn’t matter, If I could sit there and just do poetry, I would go.’”

A study based on qualitative interviews from ten refugee women resettled in Sweden found that organizations, like multicultural groups, can be powerful tools in improving literacy of the host-country language for resettled refugees (Mangrio et al., 2019).

Building strong social connections in destination countries can decrease mental health consequences from climate events and forced migration. Research has shown that strong social ties between migrants and those living in their host countries can even benefit the population health as a whole (Torres & Casey, 2017). Shared emotional support and subsequent stress relief is one way of how this benefit can evolve. To illustrate, social isolation is a top risk-contributor for heat-related health issues. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends formal check-ins and social partnerships for preventing heat-related illness (Torres & Casey, 2017).

As heat-related illnesses can come from climate-related disasters, the importance of social cohesion to prevent heat-related illness is particularly relevant to those forcibly displaced by climate change.

Religious, cultural, and gender norms in the home countries of refugee women are additional dominant factors on their experience in their new country. Bonoldi of the JNRC recalled the JNRC center producing a female-refugee-only event, yet "there was a barrier" between women of different cultures intermixing at the event.

"We had to dedicate a time only for women because they didn't like to ask for their needs in front of men. So, I think it is a religion and cultural aspect," Bonoldi said. "Most of our clients are Muslims, so if there are many men, then maybe women may not be willing to go to our center."

Papadimitriou reported a similar reality at the Ritsona refugee camp. She shared that differences in ethnicity and religion of those in the camps, such as Arabic, Kurdish and Afghan backgrounds, can separate the girls' participation in education.

She then shared that some families of Arabic descent in the camps don't let the girls go to school: "Not all the time, but most of the time, they don't think women should get educated," she said.

Furthermore, mental trauma and mental health is an enormous component of the experience of a refugee woman, as they've often battled war, violence or persecution. In the study by Jacqueline M. Torres and Joan A. Casey (2017), health and environmental experts based in California, it was found that adverse mental health impacts from climate-related displacement are particularly prominent among female refugees. A main driver of this is the greater social burden women possess, including the expectation to manage family networks, and to provide emotional support to families in their home countries (Torres & Casey, 2017).

Asking refugees to share their origin story about why they fled their home country can activate traumatic memories and can inflict mental distress.

"Organizations say, 'Come to this event and speak.' They can never say no, because the organization has helped them so much," Mazumdar recalled from stories of her refugee friends. "They speak, then they come home and they are a puddle."

Mazumdar described a story where her refugee friend went to speak at a church in the U.S. and was told she would receive donated clothes and food. One of the donated clothing items had a large hole in the sleeve and the food was rotten. She shared that her refugee friend had a full breakdown after speaking about her trauma at the event. Mazumdar recalled her friend's words: "'All of these memories came back because we were talking about my hometown. He's yet another white man who wants my story, he will publish and he will become great, famous. And I'm still here and I have nothing.'"

Mazumdar said "well-meaning white people" often push boundaries simply because it isn't commonly understood that the origin story of refugee women shouldn't be asked. "If they want to tell you, that should be up to them," Mazumdar said.

Although the aforementioned example is one anecdote, this could open the door for future research on the traumatic responses brought upon refugees who are asked to share their origin stories. It also shines a light on the role that multicultural organizations can play in helping female or non-binary refugees integrate into their new home.

In this chapter, we compared the realities of refugees living in the United States to Italy. In Italy, key takeaways of the refugee experience include: inefficient bureaucratic processes often leave refugees homeless. Attitudes towards refugees in Italy can differ greatly based on region and political affiliation. We found that the multilayered rationale behind perception of refugees is infused by economic insecurities, negative political narratives of refugees, and sometimes, underlying racism. It was also shown the female refugee and migrant experience in Italy is different than that of males' experiences. This can be distinguished from a reportedly poor social integration of female refugees and migrants, and a different legal protection for female refugees in Italian law.

Upon examining the experience of refugees in the U.S., it was found that a three-month limit on resources for refugees can make finding employment quickly a top priority. The U.S., which holds one of the largest refugee programs in the world, works in tandem with resettlement agencies to help provide social services and employment support.

We reviewed the unique hardships that female refugees suffer from, such as alarmingly high rates of sexual abuse (89 percent of reported refugee victims of sexual violence are women) and

increased domestic violence, too. In a positive respect, we found that strong social bonds between migrants and neighbors in their new countries can benefit the population of the community.

Chapter Four: COVID-19's Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed devastation on the lives of people around the world – and especially in vulnerable populations. Refugee populations are certainly included in this reality. In this chapter, we will explore how the already difficult life of refugees have been made even more challenging in the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1 How COVID-19 is Changing an Already Difficult Life for Refugees

In the context of COVID-19, women who are increasingly "stuck in the home with their perpetrators" are at a much higher risk for violence, Picq said.

"Generally speaking, women are more impacted by the pandemic because 80 percent of violence against women happens in the domestic sphere," she said.

Picq stressed the additional issue female refugees have amidst the pandemic as "integrating into society, having a job, learning the language, having neighbors... which gets stifled too." A stripped sense of masculinity by refugee men in the camps can be another trigger for increased violence against women in refugee camps, Picq noted.

"Men who come from anywhere in the world are supposed to be the providers. Their masculinity goes down when they are feminized because they are racialized, they are feminized because they cannot provide, feminized by police forces who treat them as black/brown 'others,'" Picq said. "So, that violence is reproduced onto women's bodies in their own communities."

At RefugeeOne in Chicago, this reality rings true. Domestic violence reports for the center have spiked during COVID.

"We do have clients who report domestic violence especially in situations where the husband is not working," Bocko said. "When we have cases where most husbands were laid off, and some of the women were still working and the men weren't comfortable with that."

Bocko reported refugee husbands being "uncomfortable not being in control once their wives become the working spouse, as they want to know where their wives are going and how much money they're making."

During the pandemic, Hadi said reports of domestic violence in the family of GirlForward participants “didn’t increase, but were heightened.” She also noted that “it was hard to stay consistent on figuring out what was happening with each individual” once they didn’t see participants in person due to the pandemic.

“When we see each other every day, we have a pulse on what’s happening,” she said. “Once we went virtual, we tried our best to reach out to certain participants who we knew had prior domestic violence situations.”

Hadi shared that during the pandemic, Girl Forward mentors partnered girls who needed a mental health professional with one: “We tried to keep an eye out for participants who we knew had issues in their home life and making sure that we understood what was happening with their case managers and mentors,” she added.

A 2021 review by the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice reflected that during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence reports in the U.S. jumped 8.1 percent. The review analyzed 18 U.S. and international studies, which each compared domestic violence incidents before and after stay-at-home restrictions were put in place last spring (Piquero et al., 2021).

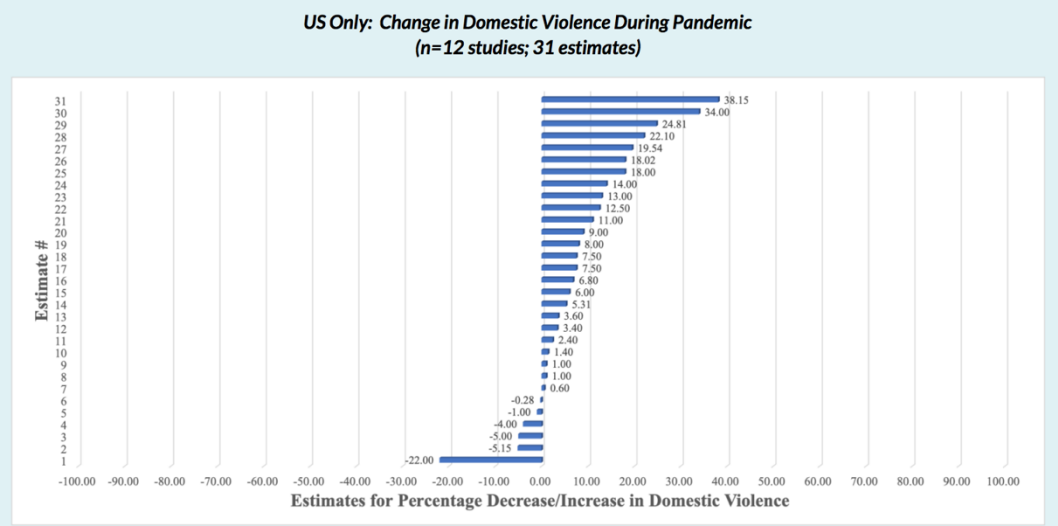

Photo above: (Piquero, et al., 2021).

The studies acquired data from an array of sources: police call logs, crime reports specific to domestic violence, health records, and emergency hotline records (Piquero et al., 2021). This is a

trend seen globally, not just in the U.S, according to the study. On an international level, domestic violence reports have skyrocketed 7.9 percent (Piquero et al., 2021). This finding solidified the following concern from the health, social science and education community: domestic violence has risen worldwide amidst the pandemic.

The economic hardships brought by COVID-19 cannot be underscored in the context of the refugee experience in the pandemic. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, reported that refugee and displaced women are more likely to hold informal jobs and thus are at a higher risk for income loss during the pandemic ("Protecting Forcibly Displaced," 2021). In Italy, Giulia Bonoldi highlighted how COVID-19 took away the limited opportunities refugees have in the job market the country: "Most refugees work in restaurants, tourism, domestic work, assistance to old people, agriculture — and these are all sectors that were really impacted," Bonoldi said.

Looking at a comparison in Italy: the number of refugees received in Lampedusa, Italy is great in size, however, the resources available to assist them with are limited. During COVID-19, access to resources has become even more complex in Lampedusa. Giovanni D'Ambrosio of Mediterranean Hope in Lampedusa described circumstances in which the southern border is currently overwhelmed with the number of incoming refugees. A hotspot is hosted in Lampedusa, which is a camp that serves as the first reception point for refugees arriving in the European Union.

"COVID completely changed how people stay in Lampedusa. As this is a hotspot, here, people stay for two days — one week if they are not transferred. Then, they must make 14 days of quarantine, and then they start the whole process," D'Ambrosio said. "The mayor of Lampedusa decided to make a local requirement that puts people in quarantine inside of the hotspot, 40 people. The day after, another 70 people would come. This is a problem: you're putting people in quarantine in a hotspot."

D'Ambrosio highlighted another COVID-prompted-change for migrants who arrive after fleeing from their home country: an ability to contact their loved ones about their safe arrival.

"When they arrive, they cannot speak to [their families] anymore. That is one thing that changed with COVID, because they cannot go inside," he said.

4.2 COVID-19's Impacts on Female Refugees

In the context of COVID-19, the lives of refugees have become significantly more challenging. To begin, an evaluation of the decline in education opportunities for some refugees in the pandemic is useful. It must be noted that even prior to the pandemic, female and nonbinary refugees already faced a multitude of obstacles when seeking an education. These obstacles, stated in a report by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) include sexist cultural norms, systematic discrimination, minimized economic and healthcare resources and increased violence (Canetti, 2020).

Due to massive shifts from in-person learning to online learning as responses to the pandemic, tremendous inequalities have been illuminated. In some refugee camps in Greece, this reality is clear. Pepi Papadimitriou of central Greece's Ritsona Camp, described a current crisis where refugee students in various Greek camps have not been to school in over one year.

"In the refugee camp I'm working in Ritsona, children haven't been to school for one year now. First, it started with the coronavirus situation, because all schools stopped their education last March," said Papadimitriou. "Then, finding corona and positive cases in the camp — which weren't a large number of positive cases — they didn't allow the children to go to school."

The stripping of the needed bus transportation for refugee students began this September when the local region had taken up a transportation project and never finished it, she said. With the location of the school being 20 kilometers away from the camp and with an absence of money for other transportation options, buses are a necessary element for the children to go to school.

Photo above: Children playing in the Ritsona Camp in Greece. Papadimitriou, 2021

Papadimitriou described that the local region told Ritsona Camp employees that “because of coronavirus, the [refugee] children should not come to schools when they operate,” despite any legislation validating this claim. A lack of resources for distance learning also negated this as an option for refugee children to learn online amidst the pandemic.

“The problem with our children is that they don’t have distant learning, their internet is very weak, and they don’t have the necessary equipment in order to have distance learning,” said Papadimitriou. “So, they’ve been out of every kind of education for a year now.”

It can be connected that this unfortunate reality of refugee children in Greek camps not having access to education during the pandemic isn’t occurring in a vacuum. It is possible that refugee children in other camps in the world are facing this same complete education disruption. For these reasons, future research needs to be conducted on the educational disparities faced by women in refugee camps during the COVID-19 crisis on a global scale.

This example in Greece serves as a case study for the unique obstacles COVID-19 can create for refugee women. Bocko shared that for RefugeeOne clients in the U.S., enormous challenges in communication and digital access for refugee students occurred. Some refugee parents were

under the impression that school was no longer in session, rather than it moving to online learning, which caused some students to miss school, she said. Upon learning this, youth staff from the center went knocking on doors of refugee families to inform them that school was still in session.

“We had to reach out to families because there was a disconnect. They thought there was no school until 2023,” Bocko said. Chicago students were issued laptops if needed, yet, a lack of training on how to use the devices left some students behind.

“Once the kids were issued a Chromebook or a Wi-Fi hotspot, they still didn’t know how to navigate it,” Bocko recalled. “So, we’d have to take it to the next step of telling them: this is a computer, this is how you turn it on.”

Bocko noticed that most children caught on quickly in learning how to use a computer, yet older resettled refugees faced more difficulties in adapting to the technology.

“Lost jobs and a rise in domestic violence made it so education was not a top priority,” Bocko said of adult refugee adults.

The temporary disruptions to education brought by COVID-19 risk evolving into permanent disruptions to the education of refugee girls. If those who left their school during the pandemic do not return, potentially 20 million refugee girls could be without education (Canetti, 2020). This would destroy decades of progress towards elevating women's education globally (Canetti, 2020).

Furthermore, in the circumstance of a physically crowded hotspot with refugees, women can be more emotionally impacted, D'Ambrosio suggested. This is particularly due to the pre-existing trauma many female refugees already bear.

“Women are more vulnerable to the situation in the hotspot. There are separate places for men and women inside,” he said. “But at the same time, it’s a place that contains 250 people, and sometimes there are 1,000 people inside. When there are many people like that, people sleep outside, they have no privacy of course, no separate spaces.”

“We are talking about women who suffered from violence and all of these things in Libya. Not all of course, but many are traumatized,” D’Ambrosio said.

4.3 COVID-19: Decision Making and Health Impacts for Female Refugees

Amidst two simultaneously occurring crises, a global pandemic and climate change, acquisition of proper funding for vulnerable populations and healthcare access are additional challenges.

“It’s men who are decision makers and it’s mostly men who decide where to allocate the money,” Picq said. “The whole allocation of funds for emergencies. Women’s security is never taken into account.”

“A lot of resources are spent on climate issues, they’re spent for institutions, stuck in the capitalist mode of production. All of the economy of care is never taken into account and it doesn’t get more funds,” Picq said. “They’re the ones who have to take care of the kids who don’t have school.”

Furthermore, the health of female refugees has been compromised by the impacts of COVID-19. Refugees face additional roadblocks and difficulties in receiving proper healthcare compared to other citizens. During the pandemic, research by University of Cambridge researcher Sigrid Lupieri (2021) found four significant gaps in care for refugees. The areas in need of improvement are: a lack of attention to the specific needs of refugees in camps and detentions; the absence of public health information; and exclusivity from physical and mental health services (Lupieri, 2020). Lastly, the absence of refugees in decision-making forums was another critical finding in the study of health barriers for refugees (Lupieri, 2020). Most studies incorporated into this report looked especially at high-income nations like the U.S. and Canada.

The report found that in both high and low incoming settings, governments generally failed to overcome these four health gaps experienced by displaced peoples (Lupieri, 2020). When looking at the cases of refugees in detention centers, the healthcare circumstances are even more dire. It is suggested by some data that at the time of the study in 2020, there were 1200 cases of COVID-19 prevalent throughout 52 detention centers (Lupieri, 2020). This highlights the grave need for special attention to be placed on the healthcare needs of refugees and migrants confined in close quarters.

Once the pandemic hit, a lot of refugees in Hadi worked with in the U.S. were “struggling to figure out where to go if they had symptoms” of COVID-19, she said. “One participant was afraid that she

had it, and didn't know where to go or who to call. It was hard to get access to a doctor, there was a lot of fear."

Challenges around gaining the trust ofrefugees concerning the safety of vaccines was an additional road bump. Many refugees "weren't comfortable in getting" the vaccine, Hadi reported. "There was a lot of fear, maybe some misinformation: 'Don't get it, I hear it's haram,'" Haram is an Arabic term that means "forbidden."

"There were a lot of elders in the community pushing back on the vaccine, maybe because of misinformation," Hadi said. She also highlighted the presence of a "historical mistrust in the medical field" for some refugees, and an attitude of "We've been through worse, so we can make it out of this."

Female refugees are at a significantly higher risk of facing mental and physical health difficulties (Mangrio et. al). After recognition of the unique healthcare obstacles female refugees face on a normal basis, and the worsening of such obstacles during the pandemic, solutions can be examined. To tackle accessibility gaps, a more widespread use of online medical programs and telehealth is needed (Lupieri, 2020). Given that digital literacy is an obstacle for some older refugees, technology education would be a necessary element to pair with expanded telehealth. In the lens of policy changes, public health communications must be further developed and widespread for marginalized populations (Lupieri, 2020). Additionally, including refugee camps in national health plans will be of paramount importance in future health crises or pandemics (Lupieri, 2020). The need of extending healthcare access to non-citizens is also a necessary step in eliminating the healthcare access gaps for refugees.

In Chapter Four, we examined how domestic violence reports have skyrocketed during the pandemic by 7.9 percent internationally. Additionally, we reviewed how COVID continues to complicate the reception of refugees in Lampedusa, as required quarantines and an inability to call loved ones upon arrival both are new COVID-related causes. The economic hardships of refugees were highlighted by Giulia Bonoldi from the JRNC of Rome, as she stressed that the industries suffering the most from COVID are the jobs that refugees primarily work in. In regards to education impacts, shifts to distance learning has been particularly difficult for refugees due to communication gaps between schools and parents, Wi-Fi connectivity and general "Zoom fatigue."

Some education impacts from COVID are more severe; at the Ritsona Camp in Greece, students have not had any schooling for over an entire year.

We reviewed the lacking experiences refugees have, specifically related to COVID-19. The gaps in service are in public health information, a lack of inclusion in physical and mental health service. Additional ways refugees were found to be underserved in healthcare are by the absence of refugees in decision making roles and a lack of attention given to the specific needs of refugees in camps.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Female refugees face particularly difficult conditions amidst the circumstances of forced migration, climate-induced impacts, and COVID-19. In the inception of this research, I was motivated by the question of: *How* are these global challenges influencing the lives of female refugees? *What* are the unmet needs of these individuals? Climate change amplifies social vulnerability, and climate-induced migration is only expected to increase. An additional reality is that women compose over half of the population of refugees worldwide. Examining the missing policy solutions for these issues through the lens of gender is an imperative for social justice.

Careful exploration of this research questions allows me to highlight the following main findings.

Female refugees face *different* hardships in modern times, bearing burdens from forced migration, climate change impacts, and the pandemic. The different difficulties this population faces in this context takes form as the following: increased domestic and sexual violence, increased unpaid emotional and economic labor, and additional social adaptability barriers. The intersection of gender and displacement impose particular educational obstacles for refugee girls and women, due to sexist norms, risks of violence, and a lack of healthcare and economic resources. During the pandemic, the education disparities for female refugees has grown even greater. Furthermore, healthcare accessibility between refugees and host-country citizens has continued to decline even further amidst the pandemic, too.

Climate-related policies must integrate the specific needs of female refugees, as women are impacted differently by climate change and respond differently to it. My research highlights that future policies in this dimension should focus on elevating educational roles and economic empowerment for female refugees, and on allocating support for proactive and reactive responses to climate change.

There is a need for an expansion of data disaggregated by gender and by refugee status to inform such policies. The void in data disaggregated by each of these topics weakens the ability to provide more specific intel in policy designs. The research and interviews that were conducted found that

disaggregated data is an essential component to spearheading policies that are specific to gender, to climate change and to refugees.

Applying the main findings from the comparison approach between the U.S. and Italy inform the overarching conclusions for this research. Key findings reflected that female refugees in each country endure particular difficulties with social integration, educational challenges, and language comprehension. In the backdrop of COVID-19, female refugees from both Italy and the U.S. experienced major disruptions to education, health, job security, social support, and in some cases, increased violence. Bureaucratic inefficiencies in policies related to refugees in Italy can cause distress and hardship. The economic crisis and a political legitimacy crisis in the country have compounded to cause increased societal anxiety surrounding migration in Italy. In the U.S. context, where the 2016 presidential election framed migration as a controversial issue, some refugees of color report to face increased racist attitudes during this period.

One of the greatest struggles experienced by refugees in each country is finding employment upon arrival, another main result this research found. In the U.S., refugees are given a three-month limit on government resources they are expected to find employment. Research found their needs are often adequately supported by resettlement or community organizations in the U.S., despite challenges. In both countries, refugees who are not males face particular obstacles and have unique needs that require support, especially amidst the pandemic.

An absence of a legal framework and protections for climate refugees leaves this population significantly more vulnerable to adverse experiences. A different approach to legally defining those who are forcibly displaced by climate-caused factors could potentially act as a solution to this problem. A new protection framework addressing “survival migration” should be prioritized, some argue. Furthermore, migration must be included in the creation of climate change strategies by decision-makers. These strategies should specifically frame the societal gains brought by adaptation to climate migration. These changes could work in tandem to address the current gaps in the legal protection realm for climate refugees.

A grim reality reflects that refugee women are particularly vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence. This rings particularly true in the circumstances of mandated lockdowns during the pandemic and distress induced from job losses. Experts at the UNHCR reported that each three

months of lockdown mandates in the world, 15 million additional girls and women would face gendered violence ("Women", n.d.). Gendered policies must be designed to protect this population.

Upon addressing these conclusions, limitations to this research should be noted. As previously stressed, a lack of gender-disaggregated data and studies specific to non-binary refugees is a hindrance to this research. Under the circumstances of COVID-19, it was not feasible to conduct interviews with refugees to inform this work. Moreover, there were ten interviews conducted, so it is acknowledged that the sample size of qualitative could be larger in future research. Lastly, there is a gap on COVID-19 related research as it is a recent phenomenon, which is a potential limitation on this thesis.

5.2 Recommendations

Incorporating realities illuminated through this thesis, multiple recommendations have been formulated for future work on this topic.

Government policies need to factor in the unique concerns and needs of female refugees in climate-solution policies and beyond. Climate change does not affect women and non-binary individuals in the same way as it impacts men. The reality that women have less economic agency, political agency, and less education, paired with a lessened ownership of resources or property makes them especially vulnerable. Furthermore, female refugees respond differently to climate change adversity, and these behavioral differences must be addressed in policy solutions. There is a scarcity of data and literature on the gender non-conforming refugee experience, but given their societal disadvantages, it can be safely estimated that this group endures different obstacles. Given this void in information, researchers should focus on the challenges experienced by gender nonconforming refugees to aid in efficient policy design for this population.

Future research must focus on the educational disparities faced by refugee women during the pandemic. Several sources interviewed reported a stark decline in educational quality, and one source reported a complete disruption to all studying of refugee students in a camp. Researchers with additional time and resources could delve deeper into the ways education was either completely disconnected or declined in quality for this population due to COVID-19's interference with in-person learning.

Data on the free-labor women produce must be collected and analyzed. Currently, there is a lack of data that calculates the economic input women bring to our society, particularly within the context of climate change adaptation and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical to quantify the economic value that women create in the economy of care. In this case, smarter, far-reaching policies can be designed and supplementary funding can be allocated as a result. This would lift up women, girls and non-binary individuals who are refugees worldwide.

Policies designed to foster social connections between refugees, their family members, and members of their host-country community should be bolstered by policymakers. Research has exhibited that these social connections are vital to boosting mental health and improving population adaptation to climate change outcomes. Qualitative interviews conducted mirrored this reality, reflecting that support by host-community residents can be a strong tool in improving the livelihood of female refugees.

Female refugees are more susceptible to mental and physical health challenges even outside of the conditions of a pandemic or climate change. To empower this population and to potentially advise better healthcare practices, more decision-making positions in healthcare must be offered to refugees when possible. Bolstered public health communications and telehealth are additional crucial steps to elevate the health inclusivity with refugees, in addition to expansion of mental and physical health services to refugees. It has been demonstrated that there is a dire need for close attention to be placed on the healthcare needs of refugees and migrants confined in close quarters. This is particularly true in the backdrop of COVID-19, where risk of infection is significantly heightened for individuals in camps or hotspots who are unable to social distance.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that there is a complex nature of these topics and a scarcity of data related to the intersection of these topics, each of which reinforces the necessity for future research to be driven on the nexus of gender, forced migration and climate change.

How and *when* will current power regimes face the extraordinarily urgent matter of empowering female and gender nonconforming refugees amidst climate change and a pandemic?

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