

PROJECT PROFILE

Gender and Forced Displacement

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About the Project

While the number of forcibly displaced people continues to rise worldwide, there remains very little discussion around the impact of gender and the need for policies directed specifically at women. All too often, women are treated as objects of development, not as informed participants and leaders. In this context, this research explores the nature of migration and displacement (internal and international) for adults, adolescents and children through a gender lens in order to better understand the many ways gender informs experiences of displacement and access to resources and opportunities in displaced households.

Specifically, the project seeks to understand and measure how gender inequalities are affected by forced displacement in Afghanistan, Kurdistan-Iraq, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey, and to examine how these inequalities might be addressed in policies of international protection and assistance so as to facilitate the empowerment and acquisition of skills of displaced girls and women.

To examine these questions, this project first conducted a semi systematic literature review of how gender is described in humanitarian discourses, including by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), other UN agency reports,

national government reports and NGO reports over a twenty-year period. Next, the project team conducted a survey of displaced populations in all focus countries. The survey aims to better understand how gender features in respondents' lives and how it structures their experiences as well as their current living conditions, finances, asset ownership, safety and security concerns, access to services, social networks and relationship with other displaced people and the host community, and water, sanitation and hygiene issues they face.

Key Findings

- **Global discourse on displacement is not embedded in the realities on the ground.** It is difficult to translate global discourse on displacement from key actors, such as the UN, into national and subnational contexts, and then marry this up with developments on the ground. For example, at the international level Sri Lanka appears to be putting proactive policies in place that are aware of gender realities, but how local laws and policies reflect these priorities is unclear. This damaging gap between rhetoric and action is built upon the assumptions that high level discourse is both indicative of forthcoming policy and that it drives decisions – but this is not the case on the ground.
- **Across all contexts, there are profound differences in terms of health and education by gender amongst displaced groups.** People of all genders lose human and social capital as a result of displacement. However, these effects are further magnified for women on the basis of gender, particularly when it comes to education, as is the case with Sri Lanka.
- **Displacement accelerates existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities and, in some contexts, precipitates early marriage.** There are vast differences between male and female participants at the time of their marriage. This was particularly evident in survey responses from Afghanistan. Among girls in Afghanistan, early marriage remains a significant reason for dropping out of school.
- **Displacement compromises health and sanitation, access to clean water and reproductive health across all contexts.** There are clear and consistent challenges in accessing sufficient healthcare, food and water, although certain populations struggled more than others, such as those living in rural areas vs more urbanised areas. In Afghanistan, participants record that most income is spent on food and that they often needed loans. Further, only 22%



You have this double feature whereby, people may lose human and social capital as a result of displacement, but those effects are further magnified on the basis of gender categories as well. ”

PROFESSOR BRAD K. BLITZ

of female respondents have access to sanitary towels, with most using cloth. This is especially problematic given the lack of access to clean water.

- **The granular details of displacement camp living conditions are overlooked in place of broader messages on displacement management.** In many contexts the discourse implies that displaced persons living in camps have access to clean water and bathroom facilities. However, often there are no questions asked about how much clean water is available and how often people can access it. This level of detail is overlooked.

Recommendations

International Organisations

- **Gender inclusive policies and trainings on forced displacement need to be better implemented at the national level.** There is a need for both better training and communication of gender inclusive policies at the international level to the national and local governments. Doing so could improve both awareness and understanding of why gender analysis in forced displacement policies is so important.
- **Effective humanitarian training must be made available.** In order to make good on promises and ambitions, as recorded in humanitarian discourse, it is essential to reaffirm these messages with effective training and consistent communication to humanitarian and development partners.

CASE STUDY

Sri Lanka



The Gender and Forced Displacement project conducted a survey of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Jaffna District in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, one of the areas that still has a large IDP population. The main focus of the survey was to examine the gendered experiences arising from protracted conflict and displacements spanning over three decades. 220 households (182 male-headed and 38 female-headed) were surveyed, which accounts for 54.3% of the total IDP households in the Jaffna District.

The survey gathered data on the respondents' current living conditions, finances, asset ownership, safety and security concerns, access to services, social networks and relationships with other IDPs and the host community, and water, sanitation and hygiene issues they face. The survey also gathered data on the respondents' pre-displacement experiences to compare with their current lives and to examine the role of displacement in the gendered issues they face.



The vast majority of survey participants currently live in camps, and most of them arrived in these camps in the 1990s. The tragedy is that a large proportion of them arrived in these camps expecting this to be a temporary living arrangement yet are still there after more than 30 years. "

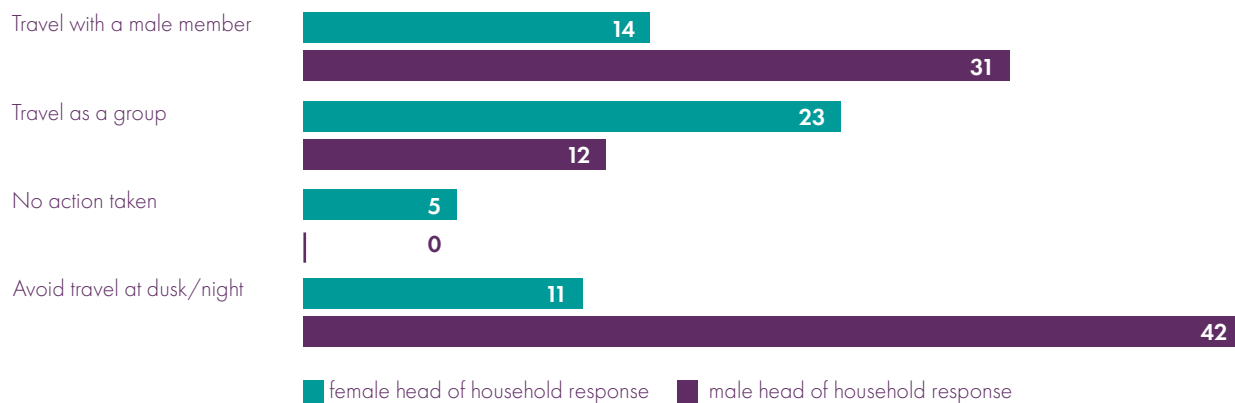
LAKSHMAN ET AL. (2020)

Gender and Displacement in Jaffna, Sri Lanka: Survey of Internally Displaced Persons, 2020.

Key Findings

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are still waiting to be resettled or relocated.** During the war more than a million Sri Lankans belonging to the country's Northern and Eastern provinces were displaced from their homes. While the majority of those affected by the conflict have received aid to return, have been relocated, or have assimilated with their new communities, some IDPs are still waiting to be resettled or relocated many years after the end of the war.
- **There are inadequate living conditions and opportunities for IDPs.** The root causes for the protracted displacement and the resultant economic and social issues faced by the IDPs are the result of limited economic and livelihood opportunities. In the context of Sri Lanka, this is coupled with the reluctance of IDPs to accept alternative land proposed by the **government** due to economic reasons linked to the quality/fertility of alternative land offered; the insufficiency of land and housing grants by the government; and a lack of livelihood opportunities in areas where alternative land is offered.
- **There are significant disparities in the ways men and women have experienced protracted displacement over the years.** One of the key differences between male and female respondents' experiences is connected to household finances. The average income of female-headed households (FHHs) is half of that of the male-headed households (MHHs). This has aggravated the poverty levels among FHHs, as indicated by the much larger proportion of FHHs than MHHs reporting that their income is not sufficient to cover household food expenses.

Measures Taken to Protect from Sexual Harassment



- **There are multiple factors preventing IDPs from returning home, principally access to the land they own.** A key reason why many IDPs are unable to return to their hometowns/villages is that land in those towns and villages is located in high-security zones, which are out of bounds for them. Other reasons include lack of livelihood opportunities, their home is no longer liveable, delays in assistance and poor access to services to enable them to return home.
- **Out of the 220 total respondents, 42.5% of the women and 39% of the men surveyed (90 people in total) stated that they had witnessed sexual harassment in their neighbourhood.** The above data illustrates the measures taken by these 90 respondents to protect themselves and their families from sexual harassment in the area they reside in. Female respondents' most common measure taken or recommendation given to their family to avoid being sexually harassed is to travel as a group. The most common measure taken or recommendation suggested by males is to avoid travelling after dusk. While five females said that they take no action to counter sexual harassment, no males reported that they do not take any action.

Recommendations

Sri Lankan Government and Ministries Working on Forced Displacement

- **Increase the current land and housing grants to internally displaced persons in line with inflation in Sri Lanka.** Continue and expand work on thematic and local level documentation of difficulties experienced by the IDPs so that this information informs policies of protection and assistance in resettlement and relocation. Consider the livelihood sources of internally displaced persons when proposing alternative lands.
- **Use data such as these survey results to create policies grounded in evidence and the lived realities of IDPs in Sri Lanka.** Thematic and local level documentation of difficulties experienced by the IDPs can reliably inform policies of protection and assistance in resettlement and relocation in Sri Lanka. Community enumerations at settlement or neighbourhood scale are known to offer a practical and reliable policy engagement, especially in urban settings, such as in Jaffna. Similarly, the issues regarding the host-IDP relations that were captured in this survey are critical for developing sustainable policy and practice interventions.



To learn more about this research project and read its publications visit:
<https://thegenderhub.com/stories/gender-and-forced-displacement/>

This Project Profile was first published in the Hub's final report, *Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures*. Go to www.TheGenderHub.com to read the full report and to learn more about all 38 research projects in the Hub.



This research is part of the UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub. The Hub is an interdisciplinary, transnational research network working with local and global civil society, practitioners, governments and international organisations to advance the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality; SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; and the implementation of the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

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