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SPECIAL ISSUE/EDITORIAL

Mapping the Intersection of Migration and Gender-Based Violence

Alicia Castillo Villanueva
Dublin City University

Arpita Chakraborty
Dublin City University

As of mid-2024, the total number of international migrants worldwide is estimated to be 304 million, representing 3.9% of the global population. Of this, women comprise nearly half, accounting for 48% of all international migrants, or approximately 146 million (Migration Data Portal 2024). More than 60 million women and girls who are forcibly displaced or stateless face high risks of gender-based violence[1] (GBV) (UNHCR 2024). The dangers become even more severe for women and girls living in conflict situations or those who have been forced to flee their homes, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR 2024). These figures highlight not only the scale of female migration, but also the heightened risks of violence that accompany many of these journeys.

Migration is a defining feature of the contemporary world, driven by conflict, economic instability, environmental changes, and political persecution. While migration can offer opportunities for safety and improved living conditions, it also exposes individuals—particularly women, girls, and marginalised groups—to heightened risks of GBV. Migrant populations often face exploitation, sexual violence, human trafficking, and institutional discrimination both in transit and at their destinations. Structural inequalities, restrictive immigration policies, and systemic failures in legal protections further exacerbate their vulnerability, making GBV an urgent issue within migration studies and human rights advocacy.

Migration and GBV are deeply interconnected. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) emphasises that gender is not merely a "variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organise migration patterns" (3). This

[1] For the concept of GBV we follow the definition of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention, 2014, art.3) considers gender based violence "as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination" and considering as violence "all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life", see https://rm.coe.int/168008482e.

perspective highlights how gender shapes migration experiences, influencing who migrates, how they migrate, and the risks they face. Tastsoglou and Nourpanah (2019) further argue that migration is both a consequence of GBV and a factor that exacerbates it, as migrants—particularly women and LGBTQI+ individuals—often experience heightened vulnerability during transit and in host countries. Additionally, research indicates that most GBV is rooted in power inequality dynamics (Tan and Kuschminder 2022), reinforcing the structural vulnerabilities that many migrants face. All these issues are explored in depth by the contributors to this special issue.

Women may migrate voluntarily, but they can also be forced to flee due to armed conflicts (Jolof, Rocca, Mazaheri, and Carlsson 2022). Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has contributed to internal and cross-border displacement across the world, including in Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and Palestine, significantly increasing the risk of GBV against women and girls. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that in 2022, over 600 million women and girls were affected by war, with CRSV violence rising sharply (UNHCR 2023). This form of violence remains a largely overlooked issue in many crises.

These global patterns are further illustrated by specific cases documented in recent years, which shed light on the widespread and multifaceted nature of CRSV. A press release by the United Nations Ukraine in November 2024 reports that during the period 24 February 2022 to 31 August 2024, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission documented 376 cases of CRSV against 262 men, 102 women, 10 girls, and 2 boys (United Nations Ukraine 2024). This type of violence affected all genders, and cases involving men were subjected to torture in places of detention in occupied territories or the Russian Federation. In Syria, years of protracted conflict have resulted in the widespread use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, with women and girls facing systematic abuse in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon. Different studies show increased rates of child marriage driven by financial hardships, lack of educational opportunities, and safety concerns (Bartels, Garcia, and Mokdad 2018; Mourtada, Schlecht, and Dejong 2017). Sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, and 'survival sex' have also been documented as coping mechanisms for economic hardship which, in turn, increases the vulnerability of many women and girls to sex trafficking (Human Rights Watch 2016). Similarly, in Sudan, an estimated 6.7 million people are at risk of GBV, with displaced women and girls being particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, leading United Nations officials to call for urgent intervention (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA] 2023). There is a danger that, as crises proliferate and conflicts persist, violence against women and girls is becoming normalised, leading to the collective acceptance of the crime, which demonstrates the failure of both protection mechanisms and legal accountability (UNFPA 2023). In Palestine, the ongoing conflict has exacerbated vulnerabilities, as women and girls bear the brunt of war and face increased exposure to GBV due to forced displacement and restricted access to humanitarian aid (Pratt et. al 2025). As explored in *Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender among Palestinians in Israel* (Kanaaneh and Nusair 2010), gendered experiences of structural violence and displacement persist even within the borders of the state, where Palestinian women continue to navigate marginalisation and precarity.

Given the widespread risks discussed previously, displaced women and those living in post-conflict environments are at an increased risk of experiencing various forms of violence, including emotional (Al-Shdayfat 2017), physical, mental, and also sexual violence (Leaning, Bartels, and Mowafi 2009, Lopez in this issue).

Migration does not necessarily bring an end to their exposure to violence. On their journey, migrant women face increased risks of abuse, often targeted by human traffickers and other forms of exploitation. Rather than experiencing isolated traumatic events, they are subjected to what is known as a continuum of violence that persists upon arrival in host countries (Castaneda 2014, Aytacoglu and Pica this issue). This ongoing violence is not confined to a single moment but continues throughout the migration process, with women often enduring physical, sexual, and emotional abuse both in transit and within refugee camps or host societies (Leaning *et al* 2009; Fedele and Garafalo this issue). Moreover, the breakdown of legal protections and inadequate support systems in many countries exacerbate these risks, creating a cycle of vulnerability that many women and girls are unable to escape (Gatti and Vittoria this issue). This continuum of violence is not limited to women alone,

but extends to other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQI+ individuals and people with diverse SOGIESC, all of whom face various forms of violence.

Migrant women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and people with SOGIESC are all affected by various forms of violence—both visible and hidden—such as political, structural, symbolic, interpersonal, physical, and sexual violence. These forms of violence are interrelated, with one often enabling the other. As this violence becomes intertwined and normalised in the everyday lives of migrants, it often goes unnoticed, further entrenching the cycle of abuse. Multiple forms of violence merge in their everyday lives and become normalised to the point of becoming invisible and 'natural' (Menjívar 2008). Research has highlighted the physical risks of border crossing for women, and the higher rate of mortality at the borders for women than for men (Pickering and Cochrane 2012; Pickering and Powell 2017). Despite these risks, women continue to try and cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe and other borders to find a safer home for themselves and their children. A source of violence against women and girls comes from smugglers, who are paid to transport migrants through illegal routes, and traffickers, whose ultimate goal is labour and sexual exploitation (Freedman 2016b, 20).

Trafficking and forced prostitution of women and girls are also exacerbated during and after conflicts, with these forms of abuse becoming more widespread and systematic (Martin and Callaway 2009; Decker, Oram, Gupta, and Silverman 2009). Forced displacement, particularly driven by narco-violence in Mexico, along with unprecedented levels of violence, homicides, extrajudicial killings, and forced gang recruitment in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), has led to exponential increases in both internal and external displacement. This complex situation has significantly contributed to the rise in human trafficking networks operating across borders and within conflict zones, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of migrant women (Acharya and Clark 2021). In addition to the direct physical risks that migrant women face during their displacement, many of these women, who are victims of trafficking, refrain from reporting their exploitation due to overwhelming fears for their personal safety and the potential reprisals from traffickers. Many also fear being treated as criminals or offenders by state authorities, which leads to their reluctance in seeking help (UNDOC 2020; UN WOMEN 2021). These concerns are compounded by the lack of comprehensive data on human trafficking, which leaves the crime underreported and hidden from public view. In many cases, victims face additional challenges, such as language barriers, a lack of awareness of their rights, and a general distrust of law enforcement, all of which prevent them from reporting their experiences (Ibrahim 2018). As outlined in the 2020 ICAT report, rather than prioritising the safety and rights of trafficking victims, authorities often resort to coercive measures, such as threats of criminal charges and deportation, in an attempt to pressure victims into cooperating with investigations. This systemic failure further endangers the lives of the most vulnerable.

LGBTQI+ Migrants and SOGIESC-Based Persecution: Risks, Rights, and Resilience in the Context of Forced Migration

Forced migration due to sexual orientation and gender identity is a pressing issue that requires distinct consideration. While previous sections have addressed the general vulnerabilities of migrant populations, LGBTQI+ individuals and those with SOGIESC face specific and compounded risks during migration. These individuals are often persecuted in countries where same-sex relationships are criminalised or where violence is perpetrated by state and non-state actors. According to UN WOMEN (2023), LGBTQI+ people experience unique and specific risks at all stages of migration. Their experiences differ markedly from those of other migrants due to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they encounter based on their SOGIESC. As of July 2023, 62 UN member states criminalise consensual same-sex acts, with some imposing severe penalties, including death or life imprisonment. Most of these countries are located in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Furthermore, 40 jurisdictions enforce laws specifically targeting 'lesbianism,' and in 12 countries—including Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan,

Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Uganda—the death penalty is applied for same-sex sexual activity. Additionally, 10 jurisdictions criminalise the gender identity and/or expression of transgender people through so-called 'cross-dressing,' 'impersonation', and 'disguise' laws (Statista 2025). Such hostile legal environments, coupled with societal stigmatisation, can lead to profound trauma, imprisonment, or even death at the hands of state or non-state actors.

In these hostile environments, LGBTQI+ individuals—particularly transgender and trans women—experience higher levels of violence and discrimination. Direct violence from family members, schools, workplaces, and other societal environments often leads to isolation, discrimination, and limited access to vital resources such as employment, education, healthcare, and housing (Canal Laiton 2024; UN WOMEN 2023). Transgender women, in particular, face frequent attacks that can culminate in transfemicides or attempted transfemicides (Canal Laiton 2024). In the Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala), LGBTQI+ individuals—especially transgender women—are often targeted by gang members who view them as especially vulnerable and easy to exploit (Human Rights Watch 2020).

The Yogyakarta Principles, adopted in 2006, are a set of international human rights standards that apply to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. These principles affirm the non-discrimination, freedom from violence, and legal recognition of gender identity (International Commission of Jurists 2007). Notably, Principle 9 guarantees humane treatment in detention, protecting LGBTQI+ individuals from abuse and ensuring access to appropriate healthcare, while Principle 23 upholds the right to seek asylum for those fleeing persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. While not legally binding, the Yogyakarta Principles have influenced national and international policies, including efforts to decriminalise same-sex relationships, improve detention conditions, and recognise LGBTQI+-based asylum claims.

LGBTQI+ migrants, including individuals with diverse SOGIESC, face heightened risks of violence, discrimination, and exploitation during transit. Many are forced to travel through dangerous routes, where they are vulnerable to physical and sexual violence from smugglers, traffickers, and criminal organisations. In some cases, they may also face kidnapping and torture (Campana 2018). LGBTQI+ individuals are at greater risk of encountering discrimination and abuse, not only from local communities and authorities but also from fellow migrants who may hold cisnormative and heteronormative attitudes—particularly when their SOGIESC status is disclosed (Kahn, Alessi, Kim, Woolner, and Olivieri 2018). Studies have found that LGBTQI+ and SOGIESC migrants, including minors, are more likely to experience higher levels of vulnerability and trauma. They require specialised services in reproductive health, mental health, and HIV care. Furthermore, these migrants experience higher rates of PTSD and mental health issues compared to other migrant groups (Shidlo and Ahola 2013; Yarwood, Checchi, Lau, and Zimmerman 2022). As Toprak, a queer activist engaged in feminist and migrant rights struggles interviewed by Aytacoglu and Pica for this issue describes, migrants often live in a state of "temporariness within temporariness" where unpredictability itself functions as a mode of governance and pushes them into a state of perpetual precarity.

According to the Global Report 'Mapping and Research to Strengthen Protection and Assistance Measures for Migrants with Diverse SOGIESC' (IOM 2023), transgender migrants, especially trans women, experience disproportionately high violations of their human rights across various country contexts. When detained, trans women are often assigned to men's prisons based on the sex they were assigned at birth, resulting in a severe lack of protection (21). The report highlights the marginalisation of trans women in South America, where they are often linked to sex work, exposing them to additional risks, including extortion by criminal organisations and, in extreme cases, murder. The report also underscores the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms to hold border officials accountable for their actions (24). Trans women who travel between cities in South American countries are frequently suspected of being irregular workers, which forces them to bribe police officers and border officials to avoid arrest and detention. This systematic marginalisation, compounded by the lack of legal and institutional protection, exacerbates the risks faced by transgender women during transit and detention, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive protection measures for LGBTQI+ migrants, particularly those with diverse gender identities.

Border Closures and Violence: Far-Right Policies

As a result of various conflicts and gender-based reasons for migration—such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), or domestic violence—many refugees find themselves trapped in what can be described as 'liminal spaces' within transit countries or at their resettlement destinations. These spaces, including refugee camps, detention centres, informal settlements, and border zones, expose women and other vulnerable migrants to extreme insecurity, sexual violence, and exploitation (Freedman 2016a). Without adequate protection mechanisms, refugee women in these liminal spaces face various forms of violence, which can be exacerbated by border closures, as was the case when Macedonia and Bulgaria closed their borders in 2016 (Freedman 2016b). In countries like Greece (Kos), Serbia (Belgrade), and France (Paris and Calais area), women in refugee camps reported widespread sexual violence, harassment, and lack of access to safe housing (Freedman 2016a, b). Many of these women reported engaging in transactional sex with male guards in exchange for faster processing of their cases (Freedman 2016b, 20). Similarly, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya women and girls stranded in Bangladesh face significant risks of gender-based violence, including harassment, rape, exploitation, physical violence, and enslavement. Rohingya refugee women and girls are especially vulnerable to kidnapping, forced marriages, and sexual and domestic servitude (UNHCR 2025).

The global rise of far-right movements has become a defining feature of contemporary politics, characterised by nationalism, anti-immigration sentiments, and the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies. These movements have gained traction by capitalising on societal fears and discontent, embedding racist and exclusionary narratives within democratic systems. As explored by Mondon and Winter in *Reactionary Democracy* (2020), far-right ideologies have been normalised not just by fringe actors, but by established political figures and media platforms, leading to the mainstreaming of exclusionary rhetoric. In Europe, parties such as France's National Rally and Italy's Brothers of Italy have advocated for stricter immigration laws (Golder 2016). Similarly, figures like Trump, the Brexit vote, the Lega in Italy, and the rise of parties like Vox in Spain have promoted nationalist and exclusionary rhetoric, framing immigration as a threat to national identity, security, and economic stability. This securitisation of migration has led to increased detention, deportation, and the externalisation of borders, forcing migrants into dangerous and irregular migration pathways (Wodak 2017). The recent deportations of Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador by the United States on March 15, 2025, under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, further exemplify this trend. Under these policies, migrants are seen as a threat, justifying their expulsion even under questionable legal grounds. The Trump administration implemented some of the most restrictive immigration policies in recent U.S. history, reinforcing a nationalist and anti-immigrant agenda. The zero-tolerance policy led to the separation of thousands of migrant children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border as part of a broader effort to criminalise illegal crossings. The Muslim travel ban, introduced in 2017, restricted entry from several predominantly Muslim countries and faced multiple legal challenges. Additionally, the administration sought to dismantle DACA, a programme protecting undocumented migrants who arrived as children, leading to prolonged legal battles and uncertainty for thousands of recipients (Pierce and Selee 2017).

Xenophobic deterrence policies undermine the internationally recognised right to seek asylum safely, contribute to the increasing criminalisation of migration, and have been strongly criticised by legal and public health experts (Stirling-Cameron, Ramos, and Goldenberg 2023). The continued implementation of such immigration measures will further exacerbate human suffering, disproportionately affecting women of reproductive age and their children. Many asylum seekers are forced to wait in Mexican border cities, where living conditions are precarious, and security risks are high. Women and children often reside in overcrowded shelters or makeshift camps, exposing them to additional hardships. Women face particularly alarming security threats, including high rates of sexual and physical violence, harassment, torture, extortion, and even femicide perpetrated by organised crime groups, officials, and, in some cases, intimate partners (Physicians for Human Rights 2021). This prolonged exposure to violence exacerbates pre-existing trauma, resulting in higher

incidences of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, particularly among women (Women's Refugee Commission 2022). Furthermore, the intersection of racism, xenophobia, transphobia, and misogyny exacerbates the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, as well as Afro-descendant and Indigenous individuals, making them more susceptible to violence and exploitation. The global rise of far-right movements and the increasing securitization of borders are creating a dangerous context for migrants, particularly women and gender minorities, who are exposed to unprecedented levels of violence and exploitation. It is crucial for the international community to act urgently to ensure the protection of human rights and provide safe and legal migration pathways before exclusionary and criminalizing policies further deepen the humanitarian crisis at the borders.

Identifying Perpetrators of Violence and Barriers to Reporting

GBV occurs at all stages of migration—during departure, transit, and in receiving countries. In fact, migrant women and LGBTQI+ individuals face a unique set of challenges because of the intersection of their gender identity, migration status, and social positioning in the host society. Studies indicate that perpetrators of GBV against migrants are often individuals who hold some form of authority over the victims, reflecting unequal power dynamics. These include smugglers facilitating travel, border guards, local police, and, in some cases, soldiers of armed groups or employers (Castagna, Ricciardelli, Piazza, Mattutino, Pattarino, Canavese, and Gino 2018; Ghaddar, Khandaqji, and Ghattas 2020; Alessi, Kahn, and Van Der Horn 2016).

As previously discussed in earlier sections, we focus on GBV as a problem rooted not only in individual acts of violence but also in broader structural issues such as policy and gendered social norms. These norms, deeply embedded in societal institutions, continue to perpetuate unequal power relations, which in turn enable and normalise violence. These power dynamics are not only physical but also psychological, where perpetrators manipulate victims by exploiting their dependency on the smugglers or authorities for basic survival needs, such as food, shelter, or transportation. Furthermore, the issue of accountability is compounded by the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms, especially in informal migration pathways, where official oversight is minimal or non-existent.

Women and LGBTQI+ migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are the most prevalent groups exposed to GBV victimisation. However, several studies indicate that in certain migratory contexts—such as Lebanon and Jordan—GBV against males and boys can occur at comparable rates to that of females and girls (Tan and Kuschminder 2022). Conflict-related sexual violence, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation against boys and men in asylum countries is increasingly recognised (Chynoweth, Buscher, Martin, and Zwi 2022). This challenges the common perception that sexual violence is primarily a female issue, highlighting that GBV is not gender-exclusive and that men and boys, especially those in conflict zones, are also highly vulnerable to gender-based harm, though the numbers remain lower compared to those of women and other minority groups.

The reality is that many women who have experienced violence, particularly sexual violence, do not report it for various reasons. Cultural stigma and fear of retribution from perpetrators are major deterrents, especially in transit centres or within migrant communities where solidarity may conflict with reporting violence. Due to the nature of transit centres and migration routes, it is extremely difficult to identify and prosecute perpetrators of violence. GBV survivors are often reluctant to report or speak about their experiences because of stigma, shame, and fear that it might happen again as an act of revenge (Freedman 2016b). Another barrier that prevents them from reporting violence is the lack of knowledge about the language, as well as the existing mechanisms and protocols. Additionally, irregular or undocumented status can deter migrant women from reporting GBV due to fear of deportation or legal repercussions. This precarious situation often forces them to remain silent about their experiences (Tan and Kuschminder 2022).

Compounding these barriers is the lack of trust in formal authorities, particularly among migrant populations who may have had negative experiences with law enforcement or government officials in their

home countries. This mistrust is often exacerbated when migrants fear that reporting violence could lead to their detention or deportation. Once settled, they often encounter intersectional discrimination, as gender, race, ethnicity, and legal status intersect to reinforce their marginalisation. This intersectionality means that migrant women and LGBTQI+ individuals are not only discriminated against because of their migration status but also due to multiple axes of oppression, such as their race or gender identity. When these intersect with GBV, the effects of discrimination and vulnerability become even more pronounced.

Within the context of asylum-seeker arrivals at EU reception centers, research has identified (ex-)partners and asylum professionals as the most common perpetrators of GBV **(**Keygnaert, Vettenburg, and Temmerman 2012**).** Several studies indicate that family, conjugal, and intimate partner violence (IPV) is prevalent among female irregular migrants, asylum-seekers, and those migrating from rural to urban areas (Freedman, 2016b; Tan and Kuschminder, 2022; Roupetz, Garbern, Michael 2020). In these cases, women do not report their husbands, and support from the police, social services, or refugee support programs is scarce (Freedman, 2016b). Various studies show that husbands control access to essential resources, making women more vulnerable to victimization and allowing violence to remain hidden in host societies. Alongside physical and sexual violence, other forms of violence are normalised and rendered invisible in host societies under cultural pretexts (Sisic, Tastsoglou, Dawson, Holtmann, Wilkinson, and Falconer 2024). Emotional and financial violence, social isolation, threats of child apprehension, and the involvement of extended family are all forms of violence that are exacerbated in the case of migrant and refugee women, as the authors illustrate in their study within the Canadian context. In particular, husbands often use threats against family members remaining in the country of origin as a form of coercion and control, increasing the women's fear of reporting the violence. Additionally, the control over language acquisition prevents women from achieving economic independence and acts as a barrier to accessing services such as women's shelters or legal assistance (Sisic et al. 2024). These realities underscore the necessity of policy responses that consider the full spectrum of violence experienced by migrant women and gender minorities.

Finally, it is crucial to integrate a trauma-informed approach when addressing GBV within migrant populations. Survivors of gender-based violence may not always present their experiences in linear or conventional ways, and a lack of understanding from service providers can further hinder their ability to access justice and support. Therefore, improving training for social workers, police, and refugee support personnel in recognising and responding to the unique needs of migrant survivors is vital to breaking the cycle of violence and providing adequate protection. As Tan and Kuschminder (2022) highlight in their review, intervention strategies must consider the complexities of gender-based violence in migrant settings, which often require tailored responses due to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of survivors. Similarly, the critical role of culturally sensitive and trauma-informed care approaches in supporting the resilience of African migrant women is emphasised, highlighting that these approaches are essential for addressing their unique mental health needs and ensuring that care is both effective and respectful of their cultural backgrounds (Babatunde-Sowole, DiGiacomo, Power, Davidson, and Jackson 2019). One of the key factors in improving support services is the integration of trauma-informed care, which recognises the lasting effects of trauma on individuals and tailors interventions accordingly. Jolof, Rocca and Carlsson (2024) highlight that for forced migrant women, trauma-informed care approaches are essential in ensuring their specific needs are met. Their study underscores the importance of providing services that not only address the immediate physical and psychological impacts of violence but also create a safe and supportive environment for survivors to rebuild their lives. Cultural sensitivity plays a critical role in this process, as it allows service providers to engage with women from diverse backgrounds in a way that respects their experiences and helps overcome the reluctance to seek help.

Contributions of this Special Issue

Keeping the above discussion in mind, we seek to focus on the experiences of migrant survivors of violence and their experiences of GBV, accessing support services, as well building resistance against the structural barriers to their access to these services. The contributors of this special issue come from various disciplines and study various geographical regions of the world. Through their intersectional understanding of the interconnections between neocoloniality, migration and GBV, they have enriched and deepened our understanding of the experiences of one of the biggest yet most marginalized groups in this world: migrant women survivors. Our aim as guest editors of this special issue was to focus on three aspects: one, to look at migration related policies at national levels and how they impact migrant women's experiences of GBV. The first three articles of this special issue does this by looking at the gaps between GBV protection policies and migration policies of countries like Italy that fail to address the needs of migrant women.

We start this issue with the experience of the journey undertaken during migration. Maria Lopez (2025, this issue) uses data collected in a migrant shelter in Iztapalapa Mexico City in 2023, to expose institutional machismo (Pita 2017) as a set of violent norms by state officials, migration agents and shelter workers that ironically exacerbate the dangers of undocumented women's journeys. With migration officials and guards empowered to intercept and detain suspicious people based on their behaviour, skin colour or clothing (INM 2021), migrants attempting to reach the US often face arbitrary extortion, discrimination and assault by the authorities (Human Rights Watch 2021; Sánchez 2024). Through 15 in-depth interviews with migrant women, two focus groups (one with 12 women and one with 14 women), and interviews with a volunteer, the shelter's psychologist (three times) and the director (twice), Lopez highlights four types of exclusionary and corrupt practices by state actors: a complex and ever-changing legal system for seeking asylum in both Mexico and the US leave women at risk of being intercepted and attacked with impunity by criminals and traffickers[2]. Neglect and abuse at the hands of migration guards (*migra*) and INM and COMAR officials in accessing information and assistance in seeking asylum and shelter make them further vulnerable. Lastly, shelters run as penal institutions with a military regime often violate basic humanitarian rights and make migrant women subject to further risk of GBV.

One of the primary motivations of survivors of violence to migrate is to reach safe places with better support services and infrastructures for a better quality of life. Unfortunately, the situation rarely improves even when they have managed to conclude the arduous journey and reach the host countries. Aytaglou and Pica (2025, this issue) have shown how the Turkish state discourse of religious and cultural solidarity, for example, has shifted to one of migration containment and repatriation since the 2016 European Union (EU)-Türkiye migration agreement. French's article in this issue shows the intersection of racism and GBV in the United States, where feminicide is used as a weapon to demonise Latin American migrants seeking asylum. She highlights the color-blind structural inequality that privileges whiteness as the norm in the United States, leading to invisibilisation of the deaths of migrant women and hyper visibilisation of the death of white women in the hands of migrant Latin American assailants. The anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration uses these cases to further their agenda and in the process, leads to further exclusion of migration survivors of violence who, as the earlier articles showed, has been fleeing situations of violence in their home country as well on the way.

Rosa Gatti and Armando Vittoria's article in this issue show us how the two key factors influencing the governance of GBV: the legal framework—which determines a woman's ability to report violence and seek

[2] Tschalaer (2022) has earlier demonstrated that waiting is not merely a bureaucratic process but a racialized and sexualized form of state violence, disproportionately affecting queer asylum seekers. While migrants in the Global North are often caught in accelerated bureaucratic hurdles, those in Türkiye and other peripheral states face deliberate delays through prolonged administrative processes (İkizoğlu Erensü 2019, 163).

protection—and social protection schemes for IPV victims are starkly different in six countries across the EU. This table (Gatti and Vittoria in this issue) give us a very concise picture:

GBV's Legal frameworks and Welfare regimes (social protection schemes by areas of social policy) in six EU's countries

	IPVs 2020	*Legal framework*		*Welfare regimes*			
		IPV as criminal offense by itself	*Special law on IPV/GBV*	*Social assistance*	*Social insurance*	*Housing*	*Labour Market*
Hungary	6 %	Not	None	None	None	None	None
Italy	6 %	Yes	None	None	Domestic violence and Parental leave	Yes	Yes
France	5 %	Yes	Yes	None	Job insurance	Yes	None
Sweden	5 %	Yes	Yes	Cash transfers, Subsides	None	Yes	None
Germany	3 %	Not	None	None	None	None	None
Spain	2 %	Yes	Yes	Cash transfers, Subsides, Public work programs	Job insurance, Widowers' pension	Yes	Yes

Source: Data on IPV are from FRA 2014, WHO 2020, and UNW 2022. Legal frameworks' data are from EIGE 2024. Data about welfare regimes are retrieved from IMPR 2024. The social protection scheme quotes Cookson, Fuentes, and Bitterly 2024.

Gatti and Vittoria inspected the Reddito di Libertà (RDL) policy in Italy designed to address gender based violence and the limitations of this policy in considering the needs of migrant women. Designed as a housing cash benefit policy to help women move out of domestic situations of violence, it was largely perceived as a response to the rise of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their article shows how the RDL fails to support immigration survivors of IPV and GBV. Data from RDL applications between 2021 and 2023 confirm that it excludes victims on a masculinist and racist basis, particularly because the bureaucratic challenges faced by immigrant victims were not considered in the design of the implementation. The lack of legal residency remains a significant barrier, leaving irregularly residing women outside the scope.

The second aspect we wanted to focus on was the various feminist responses to these oppressive policies. This issue looks at the role of organisations across the globe such as Collectiva Madrecitas, the Kurdish Women's movement, the Congress of Free Women (KJA) and Arci-gay among other meso and grassroot organisations. Magdalena Muzel (2025, this issue) focuses on experiences of Polish activists who have migrated to the United Kingdom. Faced with oppressive policies targeted towards limiting reproductive rights, Polish activists' decision-making process to migrate is explored in this article. Through 21 in-depth interviews, the study uncovers complex migration motivations that blend economic necessity, personal safety, and political defiance. Muzel thus reframes migration not only as an escape but a deliberate political decision, an act of resistance that contributes towards building transnational solidarity.

Gaudioso's article continues in the same arc of documenting resistance to oppressive state regimes by meso and microlevel migrant women's organisations in Spain through an intersectional lens. Their article shows the emergence of solidarity among Latin American migrant women living in Spain within the context of violence and labour rights through the discourse analysis of various movements' texts. The article shows how migrant groups spearheaded a coordinated campaign to expose the vulnerable situation of migrant households in the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. This movement culminated in the formation of the *#RegularizacionYa* (#RegularizationNow) initiative, in which migrant and racialized people took the lead in

promoting activities, often working independently from Spanish pro-migrant NGOs (Martín-Díaz & Castellani, 2022).

Apart from state policies, broader socio-political context also pose significant hindrance for survivors with a migrant background. Prevalent bias against particular migrant groups, compounded with masculinist and gendered biases within their own community prevents survivors from leaving conditions of violence. If we view Vulnerability not as a weakness to overcome, but rather as an ontological condition intrinsic to the human experience, reflecting our social, economic, and political interdependence (Butler 2006), the resistance of migrant survivors of GBV become a source of inspiration for all. The third and final aspect, a consistent presence that we have come across in our own work as researchers of GBV among migrant women, is the resistance to the suffering they experience and the solidarity among various migrant groups to create a life that focuses on political and personal aspirations of owning their identities. As an experience, migration does 'strengthen their agency and articulate a more egalitarian understanding of gender roles' (Lopez, 2025 this issue).

Echoing some of the concerns raised by Gatti and Vittoria (2025, this issue), Fedele and Garafalo (2025, this issue) focus on the Italian reception system and the hindrances it creates for LGBTQI+ migrants. Based on the project "MigrAzioni" organised by an Italian Association for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in the South of Italy, Arci-gay, they used a mixed-method approach and mapped anti-discrimination centers in Calabria and their users - and subjective data, as the perceptions and representations of both migrants and associations' operators. They show us two distinct strategies by which SOGI asylum seekers protect themselves - covering and reverse covering. Forms of tactical denial of one's own gender identity - covering - often emerged as a way to prevent further violence and isolation from within their own communities.

Türkiye, positioned at the crossroads of transit, immigration, and emigration, provides a crucial lens for analyzing diverse migration trajectories beyond dominant South-to-North narratives. The study by Aytaçoğlu and Pica (2025, this issue) focuses on the past decade, marked by the rise of an authoritarian national-Islamist, patriarchal, and heteronormative regime, which has reshaped migration policies, media representations, and legal frameworks. In this context, they highlight the resistance to victimhood among queer migrants, and how they navigate state and social violence, as well as the realities of mobility that do not always fit into conventional migration models.

Gabriele Leone also highlights another aspect of resistance and solidarity from Turkiye in this issue. They share the concept of *Jineolojî* in their article on the Kurdish women's movement in Turkey in response to oppressive policies of the Turkish state as well as the Kurdish communities. *Jineolojî* aims to counter this oppression by revitalizing 'perwerde', a Kurdish concept of education embodying freedom and love, thus shielding future generations from the oppressive educational systems of capitalist modernity (Diyar, 2021).

One of the most marginalized groups at the complex intersections of GBV continuums, survival migration, and (dis)empowering agency transformations are transwomen. Using participatory arts-based methods within a mixed-methods framework, Rios-Rivera produces an analysis focused on how GBV is experienced, challenged and transformed by women and transwomen migrants crossing and settling in Mexico. In showing a continuum that intersects with criminal violence, structural oppression, transmisogynistic and homomisic values, her work takes the analysis of this issue beyond the confines of heteronormative gender politics and visibilises the issues faced by transwomen while in migration. They also show the positive psychological change migration can induce through inclusion in participatory processes and expansion of life choices, thus inculcating a sense of empowerment.

Conclusion

This introduction is being written at a time when the impact of Trump's second term is being felt across the world in the form of trade tariffs, withdrawal of developmental funds, attacks on the promotion of equality, and direct questioning of many of the basic rights of migrants not only within the US but across the world. The homophobic and xenophobic policies of Trump have empowered many across the world. Netherlands declared a major cut in its funding of research on gender, companies such as Meta have dropped their EDI initiatives, and we are seeing a backsliding of many of the hard earned racial and gender equality rights since the world wars. What does it mean to bring together scholarship on migration and gender based violence in such times?

Beyond standing our ground on the necessity of works which are part of this special issue, this reiterates the vision of an equal world at a time when it seems to be getting farther away. We recognise our own vulnerability (Butler 2006) in a world which is increasingly understanding migration as a form of movement that needs to be regulated, where providing asylum is a contested concept, and were necropolitics about bodies of migrants in treacherous conditions across the developed world are increasingly normalised. José Esteban Muñoz's "methodology of hope", used in this issue, links queerness with rejecting present reality and emphasises the potential for another world, and defines potentiality as "*a certain mode of non-being that is imminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense*" (Esteban Muñoz 2019, 9). We as guest editors aspire that this special issue will contribute to imagining the possibility of creating a world without GBV where migration is an accepted reality.

As Babâk, one of the respondents of Aytacoglu and Pica (this issue) says:

> I've been running for the last 11 years. […] I've been persecuted for being who I am for the last 11 years and […] I am not ashamed of […] what I've been through, it made me who I am […] I think it [his journey] made me quite strong. I took my time to cry but then I got up and I did something […]. Before I left Iran, I was thinking about suicide. […] I wanted to be who I wanted to be, but I couldn't, and I was arrested, abused—sexually and physically—by the police in Iran. In the end, I decided either I die or I leave. Because there was no other way for me to survive (Babâk, October 2021, İstanbul).

This resilience to persistence experiences of oppression is our central lesson from migrants and their lives. This special issue showed that while limits in policies and their implementation can create significant barriers for migrant women, migrant women's organisations continue to create and expand spaces, opportunities, and hopes for those who have fallen through the cracks of developmental practices.

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AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Alicia Castillo Villanueva is an Associate Professor in Hispanic, Gender and Sexuality at Dublin City University. Her research explores the social and cultural representations of gender-based violence and feminicides, as well as the roles of women, conflict, forced migration, and memory in histories shaped by dictatorships, military regimes, and post-conflict settings. Her recent publications include the co-edited volumes *New Approaches to Translation, Conflict and Memory* (2019) and *HIV/AIDS in Memory, Culture and Society* (2024).

Arpita Chakraborty is a post-colonial feminist researcher whose work lies at the cross section of gender and migration studies from a postcolonial feminist perspective. She is the Vice Director of the Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities at Dublin City University and Principle Investigator of a four year Irish Research Council project on migrant South Asian women's experience of accessing support services in Ireland. She is specifically interested in looking at how ideas around gender, masculinities, and caste migrate transnationally and how it effects migrant women of colour in Europe. Her work has been published in various academic journals like the International Feminist Journal of Politics, Societies, and Critical Studies on Security.