

# The Women, Peace and Security Index: a new perspective on forced displacement

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**A new index captures deficits in inclusion, justice and security experienced by displaced women.**

To better understand the experiences of displaced women, a new index was developed to assess their access to inclusion, justice and security in five Sub-Saharan African countries characterised by high levels of displacement: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. It follows the methodology of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index, published by the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo, which scores and ranks 170 countries around the world in terms of women's status and opportunities.

In the forced displacement version of the WPS Index published in 2021,<sup>1</sup> the inclusion dimension considers women's schooling, employment, mobile phone access and financial inclusion (the last by measuring the proportion of women with access to a mobile money account or bank account). The justice dimension captures women's possession of legal identification, legal protection, and ability to move freely. The security dimension takes into account community safety (measured as the proportion of women who do not feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhood at night) and rates of current intimate partner violence (IPV). Most data come from high-frequency surveys carried out by the World Bank that cover internally displaced persons' (IDP) communities, while the data on IPV and legal discrimination were drawn from other published sources.<sup>2</sup>

## Displaced women generally do worse

In all five countries, WPS Index scores for displaced women are worse than for non-displaced, host country women, with an average disadvantage of about 24%. Displaced women's disadvantage was greatest in South Sudan, where their score stood about 42% below that of host country women. In

Ethiopia, the gap was also pronounced, with a 33% disparity. In this country, the rate of financial inclusion among displaced women was minimal, at around 2%, the lowest in our five-country sample and around 25 times less than the rate of host country men and women.

The countries with the greatest disparities between host country and displaced women – Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan – are also the countries with the widest multidimensional poverty gaps between host country and displaced populations.<sup>3</sup> Early marriage, lack of physical safety and lack of legal identification were the largest contributors to poverty in households headed by displaced women.

We found the smallest gap in WPS Index scores in Somalia, where displaced women were about 9% worse off than host country women. Both groups had the same low rates of access to legal identification (14%), for example. Displaced and non-displaced women in Somalia also had similar rates of employment, mobility and community safety.

## Wide disparities on the security dimension

Displacement compounds women's insecurity. In all five countries, levels of current IPV were higher among displaced women than among women in the host population. In Somalia, 36% of displaced women experienced IPV compared with 26% of host country women; in South Sudan, 47% of displaced women had experienced IPV in the previous year – nearly double the national average and quadruple the global average. These results are consistent with accumulating evidence – from Colombia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Mali – documenting how displacement and instability significantly increase the risk of IPV.<sup>4</sup>



UNHCR / Anadine Iyiradi

A Somali refugee client visits the microfinance office in Melkadida refugee camp in Ethiopia to withdraw money from her account.

In Nigeria and Somalia, displaced and host country women had similarly high levels of ‘perceived safety’, with only 5–8% reporting feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood at night. This contrasts with Ethiopia, where about 1 in 4 displaced women felt unsafe in their neighbourhood, more than double the rates for displaced men, host country men and host country women, suggesting that gender inequality and displacement intersect to threaten women’s safety. By contrast, displaced women in South Sudan were less likely to feel unsafe than host country women, though rates were extremely high for both groups at 78% and 86% respectively. The somewhat higher sense of safety among displaced women may be due to residence in camps, which could provide protection and security amid the ongoing conflict.

### Gaps between laws on paper and implementation in practice

Results from the justice dimension reveal that the five countries generally have good laws on

paper protecting IDPs and refugees. Refugees can legally work in the private sector in all five countries and all these countries, except Sudan, have ratified the Kampala Agreement protecting IDP rights. But in Ethiopia, only about 1 in 5 refugee women felt free to move where they chose, compared with 94% of displaced women in Nigeria and 86% of those in Somalia. Ethiopia’s low score on mobility contrasts with a relatively high score on legal protection, suggesting gaps between protection in principle and rights in practice.

### Gender gaps compound disadvantages

Among the displaced, gender gaps were greatest for employment. Across all five countries, employment rates for displaced men were at least 90% higher than for displaced women. Labour markets around the world remain highly segregated by gender, with women more concentrated in unskilled and low-paid sectors. Other obstacles such as language barriers, lower literacy rates, unpaid care responsibilities and gender norms

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that limit women's mobility can compound constraints on the economic opportunities of displaced women. Comparisons between displaced women and host country men exposed even starker gaps, highlighting the cumulative effects of displacement and gender inequality. Even though displaced women are permitted to work in all five countries in our analysis, many faced discriminatory norms and regulatory barriers. These impediments affect the economy at large. Recent estimates suggest that if employment and earnings gender gaps were closed in the top 30 refugee-hosting countries, refugee women could generate \$1.4 trillion a year in global GDP.<sup>5</sup>

### Policy implications

The WPS Index results underline the additional challenges that displaced women face compared with their host country counterparts. Humanitarian and development programmes should seek to understand and address the intersectionality of gender and displacement in order to close gaps in status and opportunities. There are several direct policy implications:

**Need to promote economic opportunities, with attention to earnings:** First, it is essential to expand access to education, and to publicly funded technical and vocational training, which could include occupations not traditionally occupied by women as well as skills that enable displaced women to run their own business. Second, a full range of sexual and reproductive health services is needed to help enable women to determine whether and when to have children. Third, access to affordable childcare services is critical in camps and host community neighbourhoods. Addressing discriminatory norms is also essential; attention needs to be paid to help women to know their ownership rights and to navigate the process of independently owning property.<sup>6</sup>

**Social protection programmes – going beyond the household level:** Given that displaced households often face higher risks of poverty,<sup>7</sup> greater coherence and collaboration between humanitarian

assistance and government social protection programmes, including with direct cash transfers, can strengthen transitions from crisis to greater stability and new opportunities. In practice, however, refugees may lack awareness of social protection programmes or be excluded from eligibility. Cash transfers can be especially beneficial to displaced women by increasing their agency and ability to participate in household decision-making. Social protection programmes with design features that respond to women's care responsibilities, and which address barriers to women's economic opportunities and offset risks of IPV, are especially important. Flexibility in the amounts and duration of cash transfers is important, and different cash delivery mechanisms are needed to give beneficiaries a range of options. More evidence is needed about the combinations of support and services that best complement cash transfers to reduced GBV risks.

### Addressing heightened risk of IPV:

Limited research has been conducted on what works to prevent and address GBV in emergency programming, in part because of issues of safety and privacy. The types of interventions that have been introduced in displacement settings include creating safe spaces, livelihood programming and training, providing psychosocial support and home visits, community mobilisation, and/or provision of cash transfers and vouchers. COVID-19 has led to some innovative approaches; in Jordan, for example, designated phone booths have been transformed into safe spaces where survivors of abuse can discreetly call GBV case-workers.<sup>8</sup> More generally, however, governments have rarely introduced policies and interventions designed to reduce the risk of violence against displaced women and girls. And where policies were in place, resources may be inadequate.

**Importance of data and measurement, and listening to displaced people:** Agencies collecting survey data need to recognise the importance of including displaced

populations in population-wide and household-based data collection, especially in countries where there are significant numbers of displaced people. Large samples with representation of key groups are needed to underpin research on social and economic characteristics, and longitudinal data would enable tracking of trends and better understanding of drivers. Finally, but not least, it is critical that we learn from the qualitative information emerging from displaced groups, including from the voices of displaced women – and especially those facing multiple, intersecting disadvantages.

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