



2021 - 2024 Progress Report

WiRL
Women in Refugee Law

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Who we are

Women in Refugee Law (WiRL)

A network to centre refugee women in international law, policy and practice

Women in Refugee Law (WiRL) was set up in 2021 to bring together asylum claiming and refugee women, senior and early career scholars, practitioners, judges, policymakers and activists from all states and jurisdictions to re-centre the study of refugee women within refugee law, policy and practice. In particular, the initiative challenges the assumption that legal and policy changes in the last 30 years have displaced the need for continued research and advocacy efforts. The network aims to safeguard advances and, identify and redress contemporary obstacles to the protection of women in refugee law, policy and practice.

*In this report we include all asylum claiming and displaced women and girls in the category of 'refugee women'

Our values and objectives

Diversity – we are a diverse membership in respect to gender, sector, discipline and region

Collaboration – we work collaboratively to advance the network’s objectives

Knowledge – at the centre of the network is knowledge production and sharing

The broad objectives of the network are:

- Refocusing attention on the needs and experiences of refugee women in all their diversity.
- Providing a platform for refugee and asylum-claiming women to contribute to refugee policy and law.
- Ensuring that women’s voices and interests are included in academic and policy discourse relating to refugee protection.
- Reviewing the state of protection in domestic jurisdictions, regionally and internationally.
- Identifying unrecognised setbacks to adequate protection.
- Creating new knowledge to improve the quality of protection for refugee women.
- Highlighting gender diversity in refugee protection and incorporating the views of women and men.
- Creating opportunities for collaborative work to address new and persistent challenges.
- Supporting the development of young and early career scholars and practitioners, especially women.
- Building an open and inclusive global network to take forward all of the above objectives.

What we do

WiRL is a knowledge-exchange forum for sharing good practice and identifying gaps in refugee women’s protection, and for using that knowledge to develop research agendas and collaborations, and inform law, policy and practice. We support refugee women and their advocates by creating new research agendas that contribute to the diversification and decolonisation of refugee scholarship and strengthening the capacity and expertise of advocates for refugee women.

“WiRL is a vital meeting place for refugees, humanitarian-minded academics, policy-makers and field workers passionate about nourishing and facilitating cutting edge ideas and practices which literally save refugee women's lives and enlarge their rights, freedoms, and positive futures.”

Dr Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, WiRL Steering Group Member



Our team



Dr Christel Querton

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Dr Moira Dustin

Convenor
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Dr Elizabeth Mavropoulou

Research Assistant
Apr '22 - Aug '22



Ms Nicola Robbins

Research Assistant
Feb '23 - Present

Steering group

WiRL's activities are guided by an expert and diverse Steering Group made up of scholars, lawyers, activists and experts by experience from around the world. The Steering Group meets bi-annually to discuss WiRL's strategy and vision, whilst individual members support WiRL throughout the year in light of their particular area of expertise and interests.

Professor Deborah Anker (2022 - Present)

Harvard Law School

Laura De Somer (2023 - Present)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Gabriella Bettiga (2023 - Present)

MGBE Legal

Professor Heaven Crawley (2022 - Present)

Migration for Development and Equality Hub (MIDEQ)

Ana Carolina Pinto Dantas (2023)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Dr Moira Dustin (2022 - Present)

University of Sussex

Professor Kate Jastram (2024 - Present)

Center for Gender and Refugee Studies

Professor Liliana Jubilit (2022 - Present)

Catholic University of Santos

Samarie Wijekoon Lofvendahl (2022 - 2023)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Dr Sara L McKinnon (2022 - Present)

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Maggy Moyo (2022 - Present)

Right to Remain

Lorraine Masiya Mponela (2022 - Present)

Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG)

Professor Karen Musalo (2022 - Present)

Center for Gender and Refugee Studies

Dr Christel Querton (2022 - Present)

University of the West of England

Lore Roels (2022 - Present)

University of Ghent

Professor Sibel Safi (2022 - Present)

Dokuz Eylul University

Dr Kalyango Ronald Sebba (2022 - Present)

Makere University

Professor Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso (2022 - Present)

Brandeis University

Natasha Yacoub (2022 - Present)

University of New South Wales

Our activities and achievements

This report covers the period between May 2021 and the end of August 2024. Below are just some of the network's activities, please [contact us](#) if you would like further information on a specific project or a broader view of the network's outputs.

Creating and supporting an inclusive global network

- What started as a brainstorming session between 20 people has evolved into a global membership of about 230 members (at the time of drafting) that includes academics, community groups and NGO representatives, legal practitioners, judges, policy-makers and – most importantly – women with lived experience of asylum systems. WiRL's membership spans 22 countries and 90 academic institutions.
- WiRL's Kitchen Tables - our quarterly members' meetings – are central to the network's identity. They provide a supportive space for discussion and knowledge-sharing, the development of new working relationships, and a platform for people and organisations with a commitment to refugee women's rights to share knowledge and experience. Kitchen Tables have featured presentations from the British Red Cross' VOICES Network of refugees, the UK's Women and Equalities Committee, UNHCR's Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse team, the International Organisation for Migration's Gender and Migration Research Policy Action Lab and UNHCR's Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network. Regular members' updates are a space for talking about new developments, whether by early career researchers or small NGOs.
- WiRL's first conference in November 2021 was attended by 70 members – academics, refugees, activists and practitioners from different countries – to debate 'Protection and Credibility', 'Politicising Women's Claims' and 'Building Bridges between North and South and between Academia and Practice'.
- In July 2022, WiRL's one-year anniversary event discussed members' priorities for women's international protection and WiRL's strategy for helping to address them.
- 'Safe Spaces', WiRL's first workshop for members was in April 2024 to promote understanding of and practical tools for gender-sensitive asylum interviewing.
- WiRL frequently holds events in partnership with our members, most recently a seminar addressing the gendered invisibility of refugee women outside their specific African cultural and political contexts with Brandeis University's Department of African and African American Studies.

“What a great event with a fabulous spread of very knowledgeable people involved, and very well organised!”

A member's feedback from WiRL's Conference, 2022

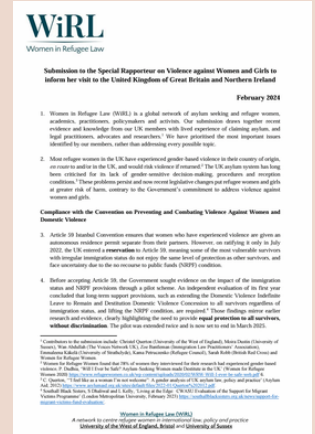


Above: Some WiRL Members at Refugee Law Initiative's Annual Conference, 2024

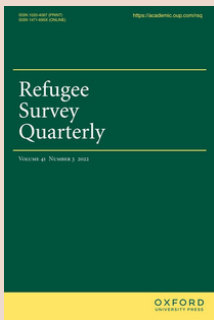
Influencing law, policy and practice

WiRL ensures that refugee women's needs and experiences are included in international, regional and national initiatives. We:

- Informed the 2023 keynote speech of Dr Alice Edwards, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, at the Refugee Law Initiative annual conference.
- Provided expert guidance for the 2024 UK visit of Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls to ensure that refugee women's experiences and needs were addressed in her report to the UK government.
- Contributed to the 2024 Chile Declaration and Action Plan in the context of the Cartagena +40 multi-stakeholder pledge, where we suggested States consider gender-sensitivity in the asylum application process and recognise refugee women's wider support needs in their discussions.



Setting research agendas and generating knowledge and debate



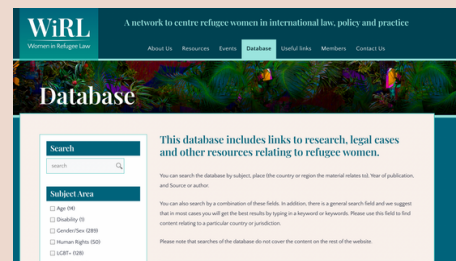
In 2022 we produced a special issue of Refugee Survey Quarterly including academic articles alongside 'field reflections' by practitioners and NGO stakeholders. The introduction and several articles are open access.

In 2023 we collaborated on a Women in International Law symposium on the academic blog Völkerrechtsblog through a series of blogposts, authored by WiRL members.

Raising public awareness and knowledge exchange

In 2023 we created a standalone website that features a growing database - currently more than 350 research items and wider resources relating to refugee women.

In 2023, we also launched a series of public events on the theme of "Refugee in a Cold Climate: The Impact on Women". These events are for anyone whose work relates to refugee or asylum-claiming women or with an interest in their needs and experiences. The series draws on WiRL's global membership to apply a gendered lens in analysing the impact of increasing hostility to refugees in different states and contexts. Videos of these seminars are also available on the WiRL website.



Our financials

Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAA) at the University of Sussex. Also supported by the University of the West of England (UWE) Bristol, and The Society of Legal Scholars. We would like to thank our funders for their financial support and support in kind that have helped the development of the WiRL network.



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

Economic
and Social
Research Council



How we have used our funding

82% of our funding has paid core costs (staff) and 18% has gone towards our website project.

Going forward

WiRL has an exciting agenda of Kitchen Tables, seminars in partnership and public events planned for 2024-2025. We have plans to further expand and diversify WiRL's membership, and we also have projects and funding applications in the pipeline to develop legal and other resources.

We welcome new members, suggestions for the network and contributions to our database of resources so please [get in touch](#). Information about how to join is available on our website, as is information about our public events – past and future, and the resources described in this report. If you would like to support WiRL's activities please contact us to discuss.

Find out more

wirl.org.uk

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