

# **Navigating Displaced Women's Protection in the Muslim world: Analysis of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This article critically analyses the role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in assisting women in conflict and displacement, focusing on its political commitments and institutional capacities. Moving away from Eurocentric models of refugee governance, it centres on a Global South actor—the OIC, a cross-regional institution bringing together 57 countries. The study uses multi-methods, including interdisciplinary semi-structured literature reviews on gender, displacement, and the OIC, alongside policy analysis of OIC humanitarian, cultural, and social resolutions from the Council of Foreign Ministers' annual sessions (1979–2022) and the OIC Ministerial Conferences on Women (2006–2021). Findings indicate that although the OIC has articulated political commitments and introduced institutional measures in collaboration with international organizations such as the UN, its contribution remains largely symbolic due to the absence of a coordinated refugee support mechanism within its ecosystem. Nonetheless, the OIC's soft, non-binding commitments offer ethical and moral value, rooted in Islamic principles, to enhance support for displaced women. These values may influence member states' responses to displacement. To strengthen regional protection systems, the OIC might consider developing a complementary framework and an entity responsible for refugee support. International actors, in turn, could engage more substantively with the OIC around its faith-informed principles to advance humanitarian diplomacy and protection.

**Keywords:** women, protection, Muslim world, OIC, violence against women, forced migration governance, world's politics

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## Introduction

Forced migration has doubled in the past decade to 114 million people (UNHCR 2023), and has taken on an increasingly feminised character with women and girls disproportionately affected by the complex socio-economic and political drivers of displacement. Experiences of forced migration are complex and gendered; women and men experience displacement differently in terms of risks of abuse and access to resources and opportunities. With increased numbers of displaced people, the global refugee governance system is falling short in its capacity to manage increasing forced migration flows of people fleeing their countries due to factors beyond political persecution (recognised as refugee grounds in the 1951 Refugee Convention), such as political economy, climate change and organised crime (Estévez 2022, 409-424).

This paper recognises outcomes of the recent Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees focusing on the role of non-state actors and keeping refugees in the Global South. As such, it aims to contribute to debates moving from Eurocentric/Western models of refugee management based in Global North to Global South actors, focusing on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC, formerly known as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, identifies itself as the world's second-largest intergovernmental body after the United Nations (UN), stretching beyond any geographic or thematic boundaries, including humanitarian affairs such as conflict-induced displacement. However, no research to date examined the OIC's motivations, ideas and behaviours around refugees and displaced women. Thus, at the intersection of gender and forced migration studies, this article critically analyses the role of the OIC in seeking to assist forcibly displaced women and girls, focusing on their political commitments. It responds to the research question, *what are the opportunities and challenges for the OIC in supporting displaced women and girls?* through a thorough policy analysis. Understanding the OIC's role in refugee response matters in promoting multi-stakeholder engagement and accelerating international cooperation.

## Background: Forced migration in Muslim-majority countries

Forced displacement is a key challenge affecting the Muslim world and follows an upward trajectory. Muslim-majority countries (MMCs) are estimated to host around half of the world's refugee population (Islamic Relief 2014, 5). Many are characterised by fragility, armed conflict, the long-term impacts of colonialism and subsequent unstable socio-economic conditions in which the situations of displaced people are protracted and dire. Indeed, IOM data shows that countries with the highest numbers of displaced people are often among the most fragile states worldwide (IOM 2022, 179-180). Three MMCs are among the top five refugee-hosting countries, namely

Turkey, Iran and Pakistan (UNHCR 2022). Muslim countries are also among major countries of origin of refugees, including Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen, and those that have some of the highest refugee densities globally; for example, in Lebanon 1 in 7 persons (Ibidemem). Also, the upheavals during the 'Arab Spring' led to increased numbers of internally displaced persons in the Middle East and North Africa (Hanafi 2014).

However, the scale of feminised displacement emergencies and the continuum of violence have not been matched by appropriate global governance to protect displaced people's dignity (Pertek and Phillimore 2022). This paper examines alternatives for displaced women's protection by focusing on the overlooked role of the OIC in the international system. Findings are structured by using an adapted 'web of institutionalisation' model (Levy 1996), as a diagnostic tool, to assess the extent to which protection of displaced women is institutionalised in the OIC. Focusing on two spheres of power: the policy sphere and organizational sphere enables to conduct a thorough analysis of mainstreaming assistance to displaced women by looking within policy at the resources, political commitment and policy planning, while in institutional sphere at procedures and mainstream responsibility for displaced women.

### *Gender, Islam and forced migration*

There is a wide body of knowledge on Islam and displacement. The general value-based Islamic framework for the protection of forced migrants is an important resource (Kidwai 2017), including the Islamic tradition of welcoming people seeking refuge and a range of anti-poverty mechanisms. Muslim scholars often refer to the principles of justice, equality and distributing alms to marginalised communities such as refugees to protect their dignity (Islamic Relief 2014). Numerous studies and reports outline an Islamic approach to refugees and other displaced people but they are not gender-sensitive nor do they consider the issue of violence against women (Islamic Relief 2014; Hollenbach 2014, 1-14; Kirmani and Khan 2008, 41-50; UNHCR 2006; Zaat 2007; Hossamaldeen and Jureidini 2022). Little is known about the specific mechanisms of displaced women's and children's protection in the Muslim world. While gender, religion and forced migration studies often explore the role of religious beliefs and religious organizations (Pertek et al. 2023), they do not account for the role of international intergovernmental bodies—such as the OIC—that explicitly refer to religious values. Similarly, feminist approaches have yet to discuss the OIC's role in the advancement of women. Petersen and Kayaoglu (2019) in their edited book discuss the role of the OIC in the human rights system with a focus on specific issues such as humanitarian aid and refugees (Mencütek, 2019). However, there is a general lack of scholarly considerations of women analysing the OIC and refugees, and it is this gap that this paper aims to fill.

## *The Muslim world: Heterogeneity and contestations*

By referring broadly to the Muslim world, the focus is on Muslim-majority countries, under the umbrella of the intergovernmental organization, the OIC. While the Muslim world is certainly heterogeneous and cannot be generalised, addressing Muslim-majority settings collectively highlights their shared membership in the OIC and the shared religious values which they reflect in their instruments, such as justice and family. This article draws upon the relational ontological convergences, while recognising the epistemological and political tensions between and within Muslim countries and within global Islam. Fiddian-Qasmiyah (2022) encourages us to move away from a fixed conceptualisation of regions through providing a critical approach which avoids conceptualising these as homogenous blocs of countries, territorially defined and demarcated by borders. While this paper fits in with Fiddian-Qasmiyah's call for further research on diverse modalities, directionalities and conceptualisations of Southern-led responses and on exploring the connections between different geographical areas (Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2022, 68), it points out the need to cultivate a new research agenda on forced displacement in the Muslim world in response to its diverse religious identity.

The paper begins with a background on displacement in the Muslim world and introducing the OIC, followed by our methodology and a critical analysis of the OIC's role in the context of global feminised displacement and politics of migration.

### **Forced migration governance challenges in Muslim-majority contexts**

36 of the 57 OIC member states are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and many countries have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR which entitles UNHCR to manage refugee flows in their territories. The OIC countries have also signed regional legal instruments, for example the 1994 "Arab Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries" and the 2009 "African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)."

This paper explores what role the OIC play in filling the gaps in the existing refugee regime complex (Betts 2014, 349). Forced migration literature deprioritises non-European host states (beyond those in neighbouring Syria), focusing rather on Northern states – and with even less focus on IDPs (Rohwerder 2016; DeJong et al. 2017, 25-34). Existing research reports an absence of specific legislations in most Arab and Islamic countries concerning asylum. Individuals are advised to seek the assistance of UNHCR representatives, and the provision of social benefits to refugees often based on provisions stipulated in a Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR. Some countries undertook amendments to its asylum system, for instance

Turkey through the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, focusing on temporary protection for asylum seekers while awaiting resettlement in another country, rather than offering them full refugee status (Özçürümez and Akyüz 2020). Increasingly studies point to the international refugee regime being characterised by institutionalised racism (e.g. Almasri 2023, 29). For instance, aid which is often distributed based on nationality favours Syrians under temporary protection and excludes Afghans under international protection (Almasri 2023, 54).

Focusing on the OIC in the context of women and forced migration is relevant because the organization presents itself as a force bringing all Muslim majority countries together, including (but not limited to) 18 African countries and 22 Arab countries. Clearly, promoting peace, solidarity and conflict resolution has been a key item on the OIC's agenda since its establishment in 1969 in response to the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (Ghani 2021). The organization also offers a platform for political and economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance, cultural and educational exchange, global advocacy for Muslim causes (such as discrimination against Muslim women) and contributing to global debates on various issues. In terms of forced migration, the OIC has issued an "Ashgabat Declaration" (2012) highlighting the plight of displaced people in the Muslim world and setting out some political commitments. However, it does not have any specific instrument to help guide refugee management in the OIC member states; it rather endorses and promotes the Global Migration Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration – the first inter-governmental agreement on tackling international migration, and facilitates partnerships with international organizations, such as UNHCR and IOM.

## Methodology

A four-step integrated discursive and policy analysis methodology was used which was developed for the purpose of this study. First, an interdisciplinary preliminary review of academic sources on gender, religion and forced displacement and the OIC was conducted, in order to collect background and contextual data to inform the analysis and identify key policy instruments. Literature review of the OIC included academic articles retrieved from databases such as Scopus, World of Science and Google Scholar. Key search words of external literature included: OIC, women, refugees, displacement and humanitarian.

Second, original discourse analysis of the OIC policy on displaced women was conducted by critically reviewing 22 OIC Resolutions on Humanitarian Affairs (between 2006 and 2022) and 44 Resolutions on Cultural and Social Affairs (between 1979 and 2022) from the annual sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM). In overview, cultural resolutions referred frequently to women's empowerment, promoting Islamic values, protecting the institution of family and

addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Humanitarian resolutions, in turn, made references to humanitarian aid provision, recognising women and children as the most vulnerable groups in armed conflicts and calling for refugee protection, drawing on faith values and Islamic social finance mechanisms.

Third, drawing on initial themes, the analysis was expanded to include resolutions from the seven sessions of the OIC Special Sessions of Ministerial Conferences on Women (between 2006 and 2021), frequently referred to in the CFM resolutions. These resolutions were focused on the advancement of women's status and a joint action plan to support and empower refugee and displaced women. Also, outcome documents from the Islamic Summits were consulted.

Using a discursive approach to policy, in reviewing the resolutions the central analytical focus was language, argumentation and discourse drawing on social constructivist perspectives (Parsons 2010, 80-98), and focusing on references to women in humanitarian emergencies, displacement and fragile settings. The examination of the language used helps understand how the OIC's communication constructs meaning.

The discourse analysis included a double coding procedure for quality assurance. The first round of coding was initiated in the summer of 2023. All resolutions and outcome documents were uploaded to NVivo 12 for manual inductive thematic analysis, where keywords such as 'refugee', 'displaced', 'forced migrant', 'women' and 'girls', 'protection', and 'violence' were used. In winter 2023, a data scraping exercise followed to filter relevant data with keywords for the second round of coding to triangulate coding practice. In practice, this meant extracting all relevant paragraphs (containing keywords) from all resolutions into Excel, reaching over 900 entries. To reduce coding bias, a second round of coding was carried out after a time-lapse. All filtered data was coded independently in summer 2024 until saturation of codes was reached. Then, both coding books (from round one and two) were compared and compiled into an integrated coding framework (Annex 1). Mother nodes were re-grouped under the following emergent themes: portrayal of displaced women, institutional mainstreaming of women's empowerment, protection from violence, Islamic values, enhancing humanitarian protection and empowerment of women. Each of these included sub-themes as outlined in Annex 1. Finally, inductive thematic data analysis of codes was used to identify and connect key themes and subthemes, as presented in Table 1. This process identified recurring themes, narratives and rhetorical strategies. It was promptly identified that the OIC resolutions tend to repeat similar commitments from year to year.

Fourth, the integration of themes proved to be a reiterative process which was supported by a final step – an additional review of OIC reports, documents and press releases available online, and some relevant academic literature. In result piecemeal evidence was collected – 'a complex landscape of overlapping realms of action' (Parsons 2010, 96). Examining further literature supported corroborating the

evidence, complementing and discussing the analysis of key themes, accounting for any recent policy developments.

**Table 1: Themes**

Policy sphere: Political commitments to support displaced women	Organizational sphere: Under-utilised and limited resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calling for advancing women's status and empowerment across different high-level meetings and conferences through family and Islamic values, addressing VAWG</li><li>• Recognising women and children as most vulnerable groups in armed conflicts</li><li>• Calling to support displaced women across inter-governmental platforms and over time<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ The OIC's Program of Action aims to support refugees</li><li>◦ Breakthroughs in Ministerial Conferences on Women</li><li>◦ Unified plans to support displaced women (OPAAW)</li><li>◦ Limelight on displaced women at the 'Women in Islam' Conference 2023</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• OIC Charter: 'safeguard and promote women's rights'</li><li>• Establishing the OIC Women's Development Organization</li><li>• Role of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Call for actions to delink Islam from VAWG and address misconceptions</li></ul></li><li>• Recognising efforts to enhance humanitarian assistance and collaboration with the humanitarian community</li><li>• Limitations: relegating responsibility for displaced women to UN<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Joint the OIC-UNHCR Ashgabat Declaration</li></ul></li><li>• Collaboration with Islamic institutions</li><li>• A cross-cutting issue: Islamic values mediate OIC's approach to women</li></ul>

In terms of limitations, the thematic data analysis of codes was focused on the content and development of the OIC political commitments. Thus this paper does not examine the implementation, outcomes and impact given no access/lack of availability to internal OIC evaluations. Further empirical research would help to understand the internal monitoring, evaluation mechanisms and outcomes. Nonetheless, on balance, it is fair to conclude that the discourse and policy analysis complemented each other leading to theorising how the language used by the OIC shapes its political commitments, discussed next.

### **Analysis of protection and inclusion of displaced women in the OIC system**

In this section, a slowly developing OIC discourse on displaced women is reviewed. Findings are structured following key themes identified based on the policy and organizational spheres of Levy's framework. The analysis focuses on the opportunities and challenges in the policy and organizational spheres of the OIC (Table 2) to theorise its position in assisting forcibly displaced women. The themes are presented around specific policy instruments, high-level meetings, and specific events that shape the OIC's narratives and priorities.

**Table 2: Opportunities and challenges in the OIC to support displaced women**

	Policy sphere	Organizational sphere
<b>Opportunities</b>	<p>Legal basis for refugee protection - the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol.</p> <p>Collaboration with UNHCR in global refugee governance.</p> <p>Endorsement of the Global Migration Compact and International Humanitarian Law to protect women in armed conflicts.</p> <p>Revisiting the Ashgabat Declaration could strengthen focus on assisting displaced women.</p> <p>Updating the OIC Declaration of Human Rights provides protection to female and male asylum seekers.</p>	<p>OIC's multilateral outlook and willingness to cooperate with the international community.</p> <p>The OIC's legitimacy to address forced migration and influence the behaviour of states and other transnational actors by drawing on Islamic values and social finance.</p> <p>Develop an integrated OIC framework for refugee protection and complementary mechanisms.</p> <p>Further operationalise and implement the OIC's Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) commitments.</p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<p>Diverse interests and disagreements about unequal responsibility sharing for refugees between member states.</p> <p>Risk of instrumentalising the OIC for funding purposes and overlooking Islamic ethics for displaced women's protection.</p> <p>The Ashgabat Declaration, as a foundational document for the OIC to address displacement, overlooks the disproportionate vulnerability of women.</p>	<p>Lack of central body responsible for OPAAW implementation.</p> <p>Reliance on the refugee regime and UNHCR, lack of capacity to develop OIC's institutional responsibility for refugees.</p> <p>Security concerns overshadow moral responsibility.</p> <p>Insufficient integrated efforts to develop Islamic law for assisting refugees based on Islamic values of <i>aman</i> (sanctuary) and <i>bijra</i> (migration) into policy.</p>

### **Policy sphere: Calling to support displaced women across inter-governmental platforms**

The OIC policy on displaced women is located within its wider approach to advancing women's status and empowerment, which aspires to advance women's rights, pronounced as a priority by the OIC on numerous occasions. References to Islamic values such as solidarity, dignity, and justice frequently accompany such aspirations. Rich commitments to supporting displaced women are situated across a range of soft instruments (non-binding but morally obliging), discussed herein.

The key source of the OIC's framework on women is embedded in the outcome documents of the OIC Summits – the highest decision-making body of the organization – with frequent references to general Islamic values such as justice. Over the last two decades, the OIC Summit Declarations have called for solidarity

with women and consolidation of women's rights (2003) and active participation of women in war and peace times. For example, the commitments to support women's rights are illustrated in the ten-year program of action from the 10<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit held in Makkah-Al-Mukarramah in 2005 which initiated an OIC reform to enhance Islamic solidarity (OIC 1969). It suggests that protecting women against violence requires enabling them to take an active role in developing Muslim society with access to education in accordance with Islamic values (OIC, Resolution No. 3/33-C, 2006: 13). Similarly, the 11<sup>th</sup> OIC Summit in Dakar in 2008 emphasised that women need 'special attention' in formulating policies, legislation and decision-making processes and encouraged civil societies to implement dedicated programs for women's protection (OIC SUMMIT 11/F.C/DRAFT, 2008). Alike, the OIC Summit in 2013 in Cairo emphasised the importance of promoting gender equality with respect to the principles of Islamic law:

"We encourage all related stakeholders...to promote gender equality, gender justice and the advancement of women in their work and activities in a manner that would not contradict the Islamic Sharia." (OIC 1969, 23)

Empowerment of women was also prioritised at the 13<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit Conference in Istanbul in April 2016 which concluded with the OIC's Program of Action (POA) 2016-2025 including a joint Islamic humanitarian action led by the OIC's Department of Humanitarian Affairs (ICHAD), established in 2008. According to point 14 of POA 2025, Islamic humanitarian action means: health and water projects, building refugee camps, organising study visits (e.g., identifying solutions for repatriating refugees), and coordination with UN agencies and member states. While the Plan includes numerous references to supporting refugees, for example in Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Niger, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it refers to women affected by conflict only once (Point 2.13.6/1 – 'Improving policy framework to address needs of the women adversely affected by conflicts'). In terms of wider women's advancement plan, POA 2025 aims to address harmful traditions and cultural practices and to advance legal and policy measures on violence against women and girls (VAWG). The organization has also committed to dismantling Islamic misconceptions in member states and through OIC Missions in Geneva and New York.

#### *Calls for advancing women's status and empowerment*

Similarly, the resolutions from the OIC Council of Foreign Ministries (CFM) refer to (displaced) women on multiple occasions. From CFM 2002 in Khartoum to CFM

2023 in Nouakchott, resolutions affirm the importance of empowering women and developing relevant programs and strategies, often in line with the international commitments. These often refer to promoting women's advancement and socio-economic integration by ratifying laws and agreements to support women's economic empowerment, protecting family and women from violence, through Islamic values. For instance, the OIC member states are called to '*adopt appropriate measures to promote Islamic principles for reinforcing and consolidating the foundations of the family unit and empowerment of women*' (OIC, Resolution No 4/49-C, 2023: 36). The organization also called for reducing poverty among women "*to promote their status in the Muslim world, and for the formulation of a roadmap to rectify misperceptions concerning women*" (OIC, Resolution No 4/44-C, 2017: 20).

Across CFM resolutions, women, children and older people are mentioned as most vulnerable groups in armed conflict, and victims in need of care and protection. But women and youth are also referred to as agents of change whose engagement is needed for social development. The organization also acknowledges the rights of women in 'building family and society' and their role in developing 'the Islamic community' (OIC, Resolution No. 16/21-C, 1993: 16). In terms of refugees, despite recognising various national groups of displaced populations (e.g. with frequent references to Afghan, Palestinian, Rohingya, Syrian, Malian and Somali refugees), in general references to refugee women take them as a homogenous group, overlooking the specific vulnerabilities and capacities across humanitarian contexts.

The OIC urges support for refugee host countries through 'equitable burden-sharing' to address refugees' needs, as most of these countries are low-income societies (OIC, Resolution No. 6/49 -E, 2023, p.42.). This burden-sharing could involve increased resettlement places for refugees, without discrimination, respecting their dignity and accounting for their vulnerabilities (OIC, Resolution 3/44 ICHAD 2017, 14). For instance, the OIC commended the humanitarian efforts of Pakistan and Iran for hosting a large number of Afghan refugees (OIC/CFM-44 2017).

### *Addressing violence against women and girls*

The OIC presents itself as having always taken a clear position on the elimination of all forms of violence against women (VAW), consistent with the principles of Islam and international covenants (such as UN conventions e.g. CEDAW and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), that are in line with the OIC's objectives and principles. The OIC's discourse on addressing VAW includes terms which specifically describe the need to stop violence completely such as 'eliminate', 'eradicate', 'combat' and 'condemn', which requires an integrated approach at familial and societal levels. The OIC, on numerous occasions and in multiple resolutions, has emphasised the importance of protecting women against all forms of violence, including domestic

violence, structural violence, such as in employment, housing and access to other services, and violence caused by military attacks.

As for refugee women, CFM Resolutions recall the 'universal human rights' of refugees and migrants and the protection guaranteed in international refugee law (OIC, Resolution, No 8/46-ICHAD, 2019: 18). Emphasis is put on the importance of providing humanitarian assistance (shelter, health, finance, education, service assistance), addressing poverty and ensuring 'decent living' standards for women in refugee camps and conflict zones (*Ibidem*).

The OIC's consideration of VAWG extends to structural and war violence as the worst forms of VAW. For example, the second Ministerial Conference on Women refers to the situation of Palestinian women:

"On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the conference stressed that the blockade of Gaza, constituting a flagrant violation of International Humanitarian Law, is the worst form of violence against women and humanity in general." (OIC Second Ministerial Conference on Women 2008, 5)

On a similar occasion, the International Day for the Elimination of VAW in 2023, the OIC issued a press release titled 'A Unified Stand Against Violence: Commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women' where Secretary General H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha called on all OIC member states to foster collaboration and implement joint measures to safeguard women and girls, particularly during crisis, war and environmental disasters (OIC 2023).

The OIC has also issued a range of papers on human trafficking, including by its Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), and has outlined progress towards ending VAW through a submission to the UN SG's 2019 Reports. Among others, the OIC frequently has called on all its member states' parliaments to 'pass necessary laws' to combat all forms of VAW and particularly trafficking, smuggling and abuse and protect women victims' 'high moral and spiritual status and dignity and their right to decent life' (OIC, Resolution, No 3/33-C 2006, 14). Similarly, violence against the Muslim community in Muslim-minority countries has also been a concern for the OIC, in particular in terms of 'civil and religious rights' and 'religious freedom' (OIC, Resolution, No 3/45-C 2018, 18).

In fight against VAW, the OIC has suggested measures to combat violence, including engaging civil society, media and religious institutions through awareness-raising activities, such as campaigning against the smuggling of women. More recent measures have suggested closely monitoring discrimination against women across sectors and enabling victims to report abuse. On female genital mutilation, the OIC

has specifically called on its member states to take preventive measures to criminalise it. It has also encouraged research centres such as the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) to conduct research studies to ‘highlight the OIC’s position on such practices and help workers, organs and institutions in the field in OIC member states to exonerate Islam from them’ (OIC, Resolution, No 4/43-C 2016, 24). To promote girls’ protection, the OIC, Resolution, No 4/46-C also points to protecting children from early marriage and exploitation, underscoring children’s rights to ‘protection from trafficking, sexual abuse and use in scientific research and experiments’ (2019, 32). This is recommended to be done, again, by ‘disseminat[ing] the Islamic values relevant to women, children and the family in general to convey the right image of Islam...’ (Ibidem), stressing the importance of clarifying misconceptions based on values. A significant progress in promoting action for women in crises is seen in the Ministerial Conferences on Women, discussed next.

### **Joint Action to Support and Empower Refugee and Displaced Women**

Strong commitments to support decent living conditions for refugee women have been embedded in the OIC Ministerial Conferences on Women since 2018. However, clear assignment of responsibilities and capacity building for relevant implementation are lacking. As of 2024, there had been eight sessions of the OIC Ministerial Meetings on Women (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2021) dedicated to preserving gender equality and women’s empowerment. The first five conferences on women discussed general progress, challenges and plans for empowerment of women, often in the context of family. It is only in the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States, that the OIC asserts every humanitarian response to support displaced women, women refugees and women migrants needs to facilitate access to humanitarian safe zones, food, shelter, education and health care. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Ministerial Conference on Women presented key breakthroughs in considerations of displaced women. The Resolution 4/7-W from the 7<sup>th</sup> Session in 2018, for example, recognises that women are ‘disproportionately affected’ by conflict and that they face ‘serious risks including gender-based violence and sexual abuse’ (p. 9) and acknowledges various human rights violations and abuses including rape and torture of Rohingya refugee women. In response, the session proposed a Joint Action to Support and Empower Refugee and Displaced Women which was revisited in the 8<sup>th</sup> Session in Resolution 11/8-W. Both resolutions (No 4/7-W and 11/8-W) recommend supporting refugee and displaced women by aiding member states and agencies in developing tailored projects for refugee women and recognising the rights of Palestinian refugees, particularly women, to return to their homes. These resolutions also call for supporting UN agencies providing services to refugees and for adopting the Covenant on the Rights of Women in Islam.

### *OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW)*

Over the years, the OIC has developed commitments to support displaced women, particularly through its flagship Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) adopted in 2008, as a significant milestone following the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Conference on Women in 2006. Amendments in 2016 introduced a ten-year roadmap to OPAAW, emphasising its alignment with international human rights instruments and again acknowledging Islamic faith values.

OPAAW acknowledges that women's challenges often arise from non-Islamic traditions and religious misinterpretations. In line with earlier OIC calls, it emphasizes enhancing women's social status according to Islamic teachings, viewing the protection of displaced women as integral to Islamic values. For example, OPAAW refers to 'the values of the Islamic World', recognising that "...[women's] difficulties emanate from non-Islamic traditions and practices as well as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion" (OPPAW 2016, 4). This instrument clearly frames the need to promote women's social status in adherence to Islamic faith teachings.

However, despite OPAAW's specific objectives for protection in different contexts, challenges persist in the enforcement of its commitments at various levels and monitoring of the implementation. OPAAW lacks dedicated resources for monitoring and relies on voluntary contributions and reporting from member states. Noteworthy commitments include combating GBV, human trafficking and harmful practices against women (Objective 6), ensuring women's protection in crisis situations (Objective 7), gender-sensitive responses to refugees and displaced women (Objective 8.c), and preventive measures in armed conflicts (Objective 9).

OPAAW's approach to GBV is comprehensive targeting all forms of violence, including domestic abuse, human trafficking and violence against migrant women, through research, awareness, education and media (OPPAW, 2016: 6-7). Its objectives encompass multiple steps, such as adopting national measures against family violence, early marriage and female genital mutilation, data collection and ratifying relevant laws and international conventions (Cairo Action Plan for Women 2008). In forming multi-stakeholder collaborations, it urges to engaging religious leaders in preventing VAWG, particularly FGM (2016:9), highlighting the importance of working with religious actors at different levels to effect lasting change in social norms. It also emphasises improving services for victims, provision of reproductive, sexual and mental health services, women's empowerment policies, and participation in peace-building.

## Shifting focus on women in conflict and displacement: ‘Women in Islam’ Conference

Notably, shifts in promoting action for displaced women affected by armed conflict are recorded in the outcomes of the international conference on ‘Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment’ (6-8 November 2023 in Jeddah). Organised by the OIC and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the conference aimed to examine the status of women in the Muslim world. It focused on Islam’s role in promoting women’s rights—their roots and application—to dismantle misconceptions, debunk myths about Islam, and raise awareness of women’s position in Islamic society and their rights in Islamic law. The conference concluded with the Jeddah Document and Final Communiqué which recall and co-opt international instruments such as UDHR but appropriate these to Islamic values of social justice and gender equality (OIC 2023b, 1).

These outcome documents emphasise that all women’s rights come from Islamic sources – the *Quran* and *Sunna* – as ‘*the fundamental reference for women’s status, rights, duties and all women’s issues in Islam...*’, but go on to state that ‘*women were not spared from men’s absolute power under some wrong traditions and malpractices that dehumanise women and strip them of their basic rights...*’ (OIC 2023a, 4). Such a defensive tone actively disassociates women’s maltreatment from Islam, while acknowledging a range of commitments and actions taken by various OIC member states to advance women’s status.

The Jeddah Document taking on a protective stance specifically outlines some Islamic principles and women’s rights to argue that malpractices against women stem not from Islam. In doing so, that Document reiterates the statement of the Makkah Al-Mukkaramah Document, was signed by 1200 muftis (religious leaders/judges) and scholars, in affirming that women have the right not to be marginalised, humiliated or belittled in religion, knowledge, political and social affairs (OIC 2023a, 3).

In terms of displacement, the Jeddah Document draws on humanitarian and moral obligations to highlight the rights of women in war and crisis, stating:

“Islam also made sure women have the priority in the provision of services during crises and wars. It prohibited any attack, harm or abuse of their suffering in any form whatsoever.” (OIC 2023a, 7).

In addition, the Document calls for increased efforts at all levels to alleviate the suffering of ‘female vulnerable groups’ (p. 11) – victims of armed conflicts and poverty among refugees and displaced populations, especially widows and divorced women. Psychosocial and legal support alongside basic needs – such as housing and finance solutions for livelihoods – are recommended. This output also seeks comprehensive protection from violence for women as per Islamic rights and ‘*the international*

*principles of human rights' (OIC 2023a: 9). In particular, it calls for the implementation of different 'measures, procedures and protective mechanisms to protect women under armed conflicts, cases of post-conflict, displacement or forced migration; ensure women receive humanitarian aid; have access to safe areas; streamline their access to shelter, food, education, healthcare and other essential needs.' (OIC 2023a, 11).*

Given the geopolitical circumstances, the Conference put special emphasis on supporting Palestinian women to help strengthen their resilience and capabilities within the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and in refugee camps in host Arab countries. The participants recognised the significance of adapting legislation and policies to protect their rights and called on OIC member states to extend any means of assistance to Palestinian women.

The Jeddah Document calls for the implementation of OPAAW across socio-economic, cultural and political domains and for peace and security, emphasising the importance of 'presenting a true image of women in the Muslim world' (OIC 2023a, 12,) and of accelerating the launch of the Covenant on Women's Rights in Islam. Having explored political commitments in depth, the analysis now move to the organizational arrangements.

### **Organizational sphere: Under-utilised and limited resources**

In the institutional sphere, we account for procedures, resources, mainstream responsibility and collaborations. The first broad commitments to women's rights are laid out in the OIC Charter with its calls to 'safeguard and promote the rights of women and their participation in all spheres of life' (OIC 1969, 2). In particular, Article 1(14) states that the objectives of the OIC are:

"to promote and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including the rights of women, children, youth, elderly and people with special needs as well as the preservation of Islamic family values".

A newly formed specialised Organization for Women Development (WDO) in the OIC member states (based on OIC's Resolution No. 2/37) raises expectations of addressing the plight of displaced women. However, WDO's statute, which was adopted at the 37<sup>th</sup> OIC CFM Conference in 2010 (noting that the organization was only eventually launched a decade later in 2021), makes no mention of refugee, displaced or migrant women nor women in conflict. Interestingly, the WDO's first listed objective (Article 5.1) is to 'highlight the role of Islam in preserving the rights of the Muslim woman, especially at the international fora...', which again indicates the importance of Islamic identity and values in the OIC's political and social activities.

WDO's multiple objectives are to strengthen policy, advocacy, capacity-building, research and networking activities to support women's development in member states. But, WDO's approach seems to overlook the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Thus far, as of 2024, only 19 OIC member states have ratified the WDO statute. The WDO neither takes responsibility for OPAAW but rather works within its framework<sup>3</sup>, while SESRIC is solely responsible for collecting data and technical reporting of progress. The latest resolution on OPAAW, called to form a steering committee to oversee its progress and implementation (OIC, Resolution No 4/49-C 2023).

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) is another potential resource, playing a pivotal role in consolidating scholarly perspectives on women in Islam through regular general assembly meetings attended by prominent Islamic legal scholars. In 2015, IIFA was tasked with establishing a specialised family division, engaging experts on women to address religious, juristic and cultural issues concerning Muslim women in public spaces and offering solutions for marriage, divorce and family matters (OIC Resolution No 4/42C 2015, 18).

Furthermore, the OIC has instituted committees like the Joint Advisory Committee for Family Affairs, Women, and Children to develop legal and institutional frameworks for monitoring trends related to women and children in member states (OIC, Resolution, No 4/43-C, 2016, p.25). Also, the OIC Strategy for the Empowerment of the Marriage and Family Institution recognises the strain of migration on family dynamics, often resulting in forced separation. More efforts are needed to support displaced families in policy and practice. In 2017, the OIC issued Resolution No. 4/6-W on the Establishment of the Women Advisory Council (WAC), which contributes insights to Ministerial Conferences on Women. However, the linkage between WAC's contributions and support for displaced women remains unclear. Finally, the OIC has been conducting various workshops on women's issues, including refugees, such as the international workshop on the Empowerment of Young Women and Girls in Conflict Zones, organised by the OIC Women's Advisory Council (WAC) and the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC) in 2018. Such initiatives that require upscaling and continuation.

### **Limitations: Relegating responsibility for displaced women to the UN**

The OIC has frequently called on multiple Islamic institutions to support women's advancement and empowerment and to protect refugees. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) has been the institution most often called on to support women and girls in conflict and refugee camps through economic empowerment, fighting poverty,

3 Informal conversation with WDO Executive Director, 8 November 2023, Jeddah.

ensuring a decent living, and facilitating integration services in '*health, education and childcare, entrepreneurship, vocational training and employment opportunities*' (OIC, Resolution No 11/8-W 2021, 44-45). Other organizations that OIC calls for increased response to displacement include the Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ISESCO, SESRIC and IIFA. In 2016, the OIC also encouraged its specialized organization 'the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent' (ICIC), to support the protection and care of displaced people through humanitarian assistance international collaboration.

While urging the IsDB, ISF and several institutional Gulf donors to support refugees, the OIC prioritises collaboration with and funding the UN system to respond to the plight of displaced women in the Muslim world. The call to work with the UN is recurrent in the OIC instruments, perhaps externalising its duty of offering complementary refugee support mechanisms to the UN. While the OIC perceives UNHCR as an organization mandated to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees globally, UNHCR may perceive OIC as an entity prioritising mobilising resources and supporting the political will of MMCs to manage forced migration. Yet the OIC lacks its own integrated framework or specialised entity to address displacement. The OIC 2025 vision calls for enhanced cooperation and coordination with partners (particularly UN agencies) at the regional and international level on refugees and IDPs. Similarly, the Ministerial Conferences on Women urge international organizations, including UNHCR, to provide protection to refugees and those affected by wars and natural disasters (OIC, Resolution No 11/8-W 2021, 43).

UNHCR collaborates closely with the OIC, based on its partnership agreement (first signed in 1981) and subsequent action plans. The first action plan was developed by the OIC Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which aimed to improve education in refugee camps in selected states (UNHCR 2006). The latest action plan between the OIC and UNHCR was signed in 2022 (for years 2022–2025). The organizations are committed to mutual consultations, strategic dialogue and enhanced coordination based on common grounds of providing protection. They have undertaken a range of engagement activities from field visits to joint workshops such as the UNHCR Workshop on Harnessing Islamic Finance Mechanisms to Support Displaced Populations and Host Communities in OIC Member States in 2021. The UN seems to tap into the OIC as experts in their contexts and resource mobilisers. Since 2006, UNHCR has invested some efforts into developing a narrative of refugee support in Islam via working papers and studies to highlight the tradition of asylum in Islam.

A key joint initiative from the last decade was the OIC's and UNHCR's landmark Ministerial Conference on Refugees in the Muslim World which led to the Ashgabat Declaration (2012). This is the only OIC-based soft (non-binding) instrument which promotes the protection of displaced people. The Declaration provides important

commitments to safeguard the dignity of displaced people and advance responses to displacement challenges with durable solutions, encouraging OIC member states to collaborate with UNHCR to address displacement. However, it does not differentiate between women and men refugees—their specific needs and capacities, gender-specific vulnerabilities and challenges in displacement, and the need for women-specific solutions. CFM 2023 called for the OIC General Secretariat to organise a workshop to follow-up the Ashgabat Declaration.

Similarly, wider arrangements between the OIC and UNHCR rarely refer to specific protection needs of women. The organizations promote multilateral cooperation including burden- and responsibility-sharing to protect and assist refugees, and voluntary repatriation as a potent durable solution. Sensitivity to women's rights has not yet been prioritised on the cooperation agenda of these organizations, which seems to signal possible sensitivity around these issues.

There also appears to be a disparity of power at play between the two organizations. While OIC documentation demonstrates frequent references to UN documents, indicating some bridging and synergy, the UN rarely refers to the OIC sources publicly and creates its own narrative of refugee protection in Islam to fill in gaps. In the 2012 UNHCR-OIC Conference, António Guterres, previous High Commissioner for Refugees, presented the Islamic case in the context of international humanitarian law to galvanise support from Muslim states for refugees:

“Islamic law and tradition embrace the same values enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. As the norms subsequently codified in international refugee law are found in Islamic law, so are they present in the work of the OIC.”

### **A cross-cutting factor: normative Islamic values to promote action for refugees**

The analysis above demonstrates that, although a non-religious organization, the OIC has consistently included references to Islamic faith values, law and traditions across its instruments as a potential bridge-builder for its membership. Islamic values have been mentioned 199 times across all OIC resolutions included in the dataset. Such language indicates the importance of faith values as a factor shaping the OIC's ideas and identity, and the intertwine of religion in women's rights debates and humanitarian affairs. Key faith values, such as solidarity, dignity and compassion, inform the meanings some OIC stakeholders give to their actions and mobilise support. For instance, Islamic solidarity is used by the OIC to promote support for displaced women and children (OIC, Cultural Resolution No. 3/33-C):

“Emphasizing the need for the expression of Islamic solidarity with the women and children victims of wars and occupation...” (2006, 16)

Islamic solidarity has been recalled in multiple other instances, such as providing assistance to displaced people in specific regions, e.g., the Sahelian people and Rohingya, and widely in neighbouring countries to promote responsibility and burden sharing (OIC, Resolution, No 8/48-LO 2022, 22). In a similar spirit, in the same year, the CFM announced the 1<sup>st</sup> of October to be a day of Islamic solidarity with “women and children victims of wars and occupation in the Islamic World” (OIC, Cultural Resolution No. 1/33-C 2006, 15). The OIC also recalls other Islamic values in refugee support, such as hospitality and generosity, e.g. of Pakistan hosting millions of Afghan refugees (OIC, Resolution, No 1/49-ICHAD 2023, 3).

However, faith values are subject to diverse interpretations of what a meaningful response to displacement entails. Faith values, thus, may engender legitimacy for action and inaction in the OIC. And although the organization draws on international instruments (e.g. CEDAW), it appropriates them to ensure accordance with Islamic principles (Mencutek 2019). Appropriation of international instruments can be a mechanism to further integrate MMCs into an international system and promote the compatibility of international human rights with core Islamic values. In doing so, one may argue that OIC may bridge the different worldviews and promote international cooperation for a more coordinated and effective response to refugees. Nonetheless, OIC's human rights positions attract criticism among human rights campaigners for its alleged conflict with UDHR (Kayaoglu 2020; Mencutek 2019). This particularly refers to the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), widely adopted by its member states in 1990, which revisits the concept of UDHR and proposes a set of rights informed by *Shariah* (Kayaoglu 2020). It also entails the rights of asylum seekers, but Article 12 at that time reiterated such rights only for men:

“Every man shall have the right, within the framework of the Shari’ah, to free movement and to select his place of residence whether within or outside his country and if persecuted, is entitled to seek asylum in another country. The country of refuge shall be obliged to provide protection to the asylum-seeker until his safety has been attained ...” (Cairo Declaration 1990)

Almost three decades later the OIC revisited the Cairo Declaration and adopted the OIC Declaration on Human Rights (ODHR) in November 2020. The review aimed to refine the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam and ensure its compatibility with universal human rights, while recognising ‘the socio cultural and religious particularities and aspirations of the member states’ (POA 2016, 47). ODHR is now considered a better reflection of UDHR, offering an opportunity for cooperation in supporting human rights in the Muslim world (Kayaoglu 2020). For example, an amended Article 12 spells out that displaced women have rights not only as humans and women but also as asylum seekers.

However, the OIC's value-based reliance does show some contradiction through its more frequent referencing of Islamic values in relation to some issues, e.g. women's rights, and not to others, such as refugees. Leveraging the rich Islamic heritage of refugee protection is not at the forefront of the OIC's agenda, although it could play an important role in assisting host countries in dealing with issues relating to forced migrants, and in supporting displaced populations to be aware of their rights and duties. Given that faith values matter to OIC member states, it is an important entry point for mainstream organizations to develop their capacity and willingness to cultivate a theological dialogue to improve practical assistance for displaced women. In particular, the Islamic social finance mechanisms such as *zakat*, *sadaqa* (voluntary charity) and *waqf* (endowment), very well known to the OIC, can help to upscale support to women in displacement, facilitating support for displaced populations. The 2023 CFM praised 'the efforts made by the General Secretariat, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, and the UNHCR...by encouraging the use of Islamic Social Financing mechanisms for refugee relief' (OIC, Resolution, No 1/49-ICHAD 2023, 11). Further research in this field is needed.

## Discussion and conclusions

This paper expands and adapts gender and forced displacement discourse in academic and policy to Muslim-majority contexts. It sought to examine the role of the OIC in assisting displaced women, by critically analysing the opportunities and challenges. The analysis indicates the OIC plays an intermediary role in mobilising wider policy commitments to displaced women across its membership with a non-binding but rather moral and symbolic value. As a global actor bringing together Muslim-majority states, the OIC's authority is located across its member states and various processes and levels of governance, involving various institutions. This paper helps to understand the OIC's potential to influence the behaviour of its member states and other transnational actors. While the OIC has been concerned about women's welfare since its inception, there is less coherent focus on the most marginalised and vulnerable women in situations of conflict and displacement. The OIC's efforts are often inspired by faith values and secular international instruments, indicating sacred versus secular boundaries are narrow and porous (Paras and Gross Stein 2012). Indeed, the OIC navigates and integrates the use of both secular and sacred language. Its multiple commitments form some legitimacy for the OIC to take a more proactive and coordinating role in urging its members to address displacement challenges.

Clearly, the OIC considers protection of displaced women as part of Islamic faith values and tradition, similarly as it broadly affirms international human rights instruments. Albeit human rights groups have severe reservations about the OIC's commitment to international human rights instruments. For example, the OIC has

developed a reputation for being anti-gender diversity due to its strong position against sexual diversity and minority groups (Petersen and Kayaoglu 2019). Such a reputation makes it difficult for some international stakeholders, such as humanitarian INGOs, to engage with the OIC on women's issues, overlooking some opportunities to enhance women's protection. Instead of demonising the OIC, to support refugee response, international actors wishing to work with the OIC would benefit from forming multilateral partnerships that are faith sensitive.

Prioritising women's advancement often goes concurrently with the OIC announcing efforts to combat the portrayal of Islam as oppressive to women. Islamophobia is fuelled by extensive Western discourse projecting Muslim women as victims of their religion, as discussed extensively in literature (e.g. Mirza 2013, 5-15). Thus, the OIC seems to take often a defensive stance to address misconceptions about Muslim women and to counter intersectional discrimination against them by disseminating information about women's rights in Islam and developing new initiatives to raise the status of women.

It remains unknown whether and to what extent the OIC's religious foundation influences its member states' commitments to and actions to support displaced women. Similarly, it is unclear to what extent Islamic values are used by the OIC to forge solidarity between members, although the organization is not religious in nature. Nonetheless, religious values remain central in OIC narratives and serve as a potential unifying factor for its 57 member countries. The OIC's limited supranational authority is a key limitation in enhancing displaced women's protection, as it depends on the cooperation of member states that prioritise their sovereignty and competing interests. Nonetheless, the organization offers a platform for information exchange and promoting cooperation, which could be leveraged to advance international refugee protection based on moral obligations often deprioritised in favour of national security concerns. The OIC's aim to develop joint Islamic Humanitarian Action, a priority in its Program of Action 2025, seeks to legitimize a framework aligned with Islamic values. Establishing this framework would likely be highly contentious, given the polarized interests of member states and the influence of colonial forces in global aid politics.

The 2023 Jeddah Document from the Women in Islam conference demonstrates strong links between Islamic principles and international instruments, indicating a confluence of global Islam, the international community and world politics. Frequent references to Islam make the OIC appear as embodying political global Islam in its attempts to clarify and defend religious positions on women. However, given the geographical, social, economic, political and cultural diversity of the OIC membership, the OIC's representation of Islam is flexible, with a light touch and universal enough to accommodate the diverse positions of its membership (Petersen and Kayaoglu 2019).

Islam's global contemporary diversity and dynamics mean the OIC, to be

successful in its mission, deploys the unifying characteristics of Muslim communities and societies across various cultures. A wide and comprehensive approach may help manage the sensitive relationships between the OIC member states, especially given the complex religious dynamics in major conflict zones that lead to displacement. Notwithstanding, faith values and religion appear as meaningful factors that condition OIC's approach to women in displacement. These values can develop compelling narratives to mobilise resources for displaced populations, maintaining power dynamics and ideology of refugee protection.

Evidence indicates that the OIC's response to displaced women is patchy. The organization has not yet developed any complementary refugee management mechanism or entity, indicating an externalisation of duty for refugees to the UN and member states. Within the UN-based framework that monopolises the management of some global issues (Betts 2014, 367), where UNHCR is responsible for refugee management, the OIC has a choice whether to complement and contribute to these efforts. Arguably, the current order, with limited UN Security Council's efficiency, perpetuates armed violence against some Muslim states.

There is a noticeable disconnect between OIC policy commitments, their moral value and their implementation, due to their non-binding nature not translating into national policies. The growing number of crises, limited access to refugee protection and strained resources indicate that displaced women's protection is insufficiently high on the OIC agenda. A responsible capacity-building and monitoring body within the OIC system to implement commitments such as OPAAW and relevant resolutions to better support refugees is missing. Concurrently, the OIC's reliance on UNHCR in refugee management necessitates an alignment with the OIC's approach to displaced women, ensuring sensitivity to faith while bridging secular and faith values to ensure that women's protection and empowerment resonate with OIC values. Local UNHCR staff from Muslim-majority contexts may be better positioned than international staff to facilitate a faith-sensitive approach to refugee protection based on their local knowledge and contextual sensitivity.

On one hand, the UNHCR–OIC relationship might remind the hegemony of Northern institutions extracting resources from the Southern institutions in order to reallocate them to Southern states and communities, albeit here for vital humanitarian cause. While fundraising from the South to the North happens after absorbing significant over-head costs, it ultimately spreads the responsibility sharing for the displaced. On the other hand, UNHCR–OIC collaborations might signal a move towards joint efforts to advance responses to displacement. Undoubtedly, further consolidation of the OIC–UNHCR partnership is crucial to mobilising resources to meet critical humanitarian needs of displaced people. However, it is vital the OIC and UNHCR put protection of displaced women from violence and exploitation on their joint action agenda. At the same time, it is important to remember the risk of instrumentalising Southern actors in order to shift responsibility from the UN and

Northern states without delivering promised resources to former colonies (Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2022, 79). A better data management to capture direct processes of South-to-South refugee support is needed to monitor refugee support flows. While the OIC may be perceived as an important mobiliser of funds, it is important to consider what other moral and intellectual resources the OIC can leverage to promote forced migrant protection.

While the OIC may have insufficient capacity to promote rich Islamic tradition of women's protection over contexts and centuries, documenting how this tradition is enacted is key for the advancement of policy and practical responses in politics and on the ground. Utilising Islamic values and language in a way that is restrained yet universal enough to call for solidarity and compassion across Muslim states could be an important entry point to advance humanitarian assistance.

This paper raises several key recommendations. First, the OIC might consider developing an internal mechanism or integrated framework on refugees, including on burden-sharing, to complement and contribute to the UNHCR-led refugee regime. The Ashgabat Declaration requires revitalising and including a women-specific dimension; similarly, the OPAAW requires a specific responsible body for driving its implementation with regard to displaced women. With centrality of faith values in OIC's vision for global governance, a faith-sensitive approach matters to enhance displaced women's protection in Muslim-majority contexts. Recognising the vital role of civil society organizations in responding to refugee emergencies is essential to facilitate stronger coordination. A new research agenda is needed to develop evidence and new approaches to an ever-increasing displacement. Future research might consider the impact of the OIC resolutions and faith values on the member states and how the OIC soft political commitments are translated in national social/migration policy making. Finally, there appear opportunities for stronger accountability and uptake of the OIC commitments by the international community and civil society to ensure displaced women's and girls' interests are put high on the humanitarian policy/diplomacy agenda.

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Сандра Перек

## Заштита расељених жена у мусиманском свету: анализа деловања Организације исламске сарадње

**Сажетак:** Овај чланак критички анализира улогу Организације исламске сарадње (ОИС) у пружању помоћи женама у контексту сукоба и расељавања, са фокусом на њене политичке обавезе и институционалне капацитете. Уместо европцентричних модела управљања избегличким питањима, пажња се усмерава на актера Глобалног југа — ОИС, међурегионалну институцију која окупља 57 држава. Истраживање користи више метода, укључујући интердисциплинарне полуструктуре прегледе литературе о роду, расељавању и деловању ОИС-а, као и анализу политика хуманитарних, културних и друштвених резолуција ОИС-а усвојених на годишњим седницама Савета министара спољних послова (1979–2022) и Министарским конференцијама ОИС-а о женама (2006–2021). Резултати показују да је, иако је ОИС формулисала политичке обавезе и увела институционалне мере у сарадњи са међународним организацијама попут УН-а, њен допринос углавном симболичан због одсуства координисаног механизма подршке избеглицама унутар сопственог система. Ипак, „меке“, необавезујуће обавезе ОИС-а, утемељене у исламским начелима, носе етичку и моралну вредност у унапређивању подршке расељеним женама. Ове вредности могу утицати на реакције држава чланица на расељавање. За јачање регионалних система заштите, ОИС би могла размотрити развој комплементарног оквира и тела задуженог за подршку избеглицама. Са друге стране, међународни актери би могли суштинскије да се ангажују са ОИС-ом у области принципа информисаних вером ради унапређења хуманитарне дипломатије и заштите.

**Кључне речи:** жене, заштита, мусимански свет, ОИС, насиље над женама, управљање принудним миграцијама, светска политика

## Annex 1: Codes history, compilation of codes and themes

Final compiled codes	Themes
<p>Mainstreaming of women's empowerment policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's advancement promoted in the OIC Summits Declarations</li> <li>• OIC 2025 Program of Action and leading role of the OIC's Department of Humanitarian Affairs (ICHAD) in humanitarian coordination</li> <li>• Ministerial conferences on women as the OIC mechanism to hold states accountable for women's advancement</li> <li>• Implementing the OIC Plan of Action for Advancement of Women (OPAAW)</li> <li>• Appointment of the OIC women goodwill Ambassadors</li> <li>• Calling for Covenant on the Rights of Women in Islam</li> </ul>	Policy sphere: Political commitments and policy planning to enhance assistance for displaced populations
<p>A wide approach to empowerment of women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important role of women in advancement of member states</li> <li>• Strengthening family to empower women through Islamic principles</li> <li>• Economic empowerment in camps areas</li> <li>• Empowerment through education</li> <li>• Alleviating the plight of Orphans</li> <li>• Alleviate poverty to shift perceptions about Muslim women</li> <li>• Empowerment through Islamic values</li> <li>• Advance status of women</li> <li>• Empowerment through law</li> <li>• Refugee and IDP places</li> <li>• Strengthen women's inclusion by enhancing their decision making, family and reproductive health, access education, health, employment and protection from violence</li> </ul>	OIC's approach to displaced women is grounded in its wider approach to women's empowerment and social development  Empowerment through family and Islamic values
<p>Protection from violence against women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage member states to pass laws and take measures to combat VAWG and trafficking</li> <li>• Recognising IHL to protect women in armed conflicts</li> <li>• Recognises structural and war violence against vulnerable groups such as women and children</li> <li>• Recognising violence against Palestinian women</li> <li>• Act against violence against displaced children</li> <li>• Protection through Islamic solidarity</li> <li>• Post-conflict reconstruction</li> <li>• Research to dismantle misconceptions of Islam and women</li> <li>• Encourage to take appropriate measures to delink it from Islam</li> </ul>	Protection from all forms of VAWG  Supporting women in armed conflicts  Delink Islam from VAWG
<p>Portrayal of displaced women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As victims of conflicts</li> <li>• Women as most vulnerable</li> <li>• As important agents in driving social development</li> <li>• Most frequently cited groups of women: Palestinian, Afghan, Rohingya, Syrian, Somali, African, Malian, elderly</li> </ul>	Understanding displaced women's diversity and disproportionate vulnerability

<p>Enhance humanitarian protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage equitable burden sharing</li> <li>• Support voluntary repatriation and resettlement</li> <li>• Endorses Global Migration Compact</li> <li>• Empower refugee women and girls in camp areas</li> <li>• Supporting elderly refugee groups with special needs</li> <li>• Follow up the Ashgabat outcomes of the International Conference on Refugees in the Islamic World</li> <li>• Prepare guidance to support women and family in armed conflicts</li> <li>• Call UN for humanitarian assistance to reach women</li> <li>• Leverage Islamic social finance</li> <li>• Initiated Humanitarian Trust Fund to channel aid to Afghanistan</li> <li>• Recognises and values South to South cooperation in supporting refugees</li> <li>• Calls for protection of religious places and heritage</li> </ul>	<p>Providing humanitarian assistance and collaboration with the international humanitarian community</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's advancement embedded in the charter</li> <li>• Establishing Women's Development Organization of the OIC to implement resolutions on women's advancement</li> <li>• The role of International Islamic Fiqh Academy in dismantling misconceptions about Islam</li> <li>• Valuing and encouraging Islamic Development Bank and Islamic Solidarity Fund to support displaced women</li> <li>• Limitations: relegating responsibility for displaced women to UN</li> <li>• Collaboration with Islamic institutions</li> <li>• Calling to collaborate with UN agencies</li> </ul>	<p>Organizational sphere: under-utilised resources and their limited availability</p>
<p>Islamic values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen institution of family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Stances against diverse sexual orientation and gender identities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Solidarity to guide Islamic humanitarian action</li> <li>• Improving children's conditions as an Islamic value</li> <li>• Refugee protection as an Islamic value</li> <li>• Call to counter misconceptions of Islam and women</li> <li>• Recognising women's role in advancing Muslim societies</li> </ul>	<p>Cross-cutting issue: Islamic values (e.g. solidarity) mediate OIC's approach to women and displaced women</p>