



RAJFIRE is a feminist action and solidarity group working with migrant and exiled women. It was founded in 1998 and is composed exclusively of volunteers and interns who work with women living in Paris and the Ile-de-France region.

Our commitment starts at the heart of two challenges: women's rights and equality between men and women on one side and rights, and rights and integration of foreigners, migrants or exiled people on the other.

Our action is built on concrete grassroots work : information, welcoming and accompanying women multiple days a week and, when appropriate, working in partnership with other associations and stakeholders to advance women's rights. This includes the rights of foreign women (migrant or immigrant), asylum seekers and refugees, the fight against violence towards women and upholding the respect of fundamental human rights without discrimination.

Over one hundred women come to us every year. Most of them are originally from Africa. **We accompany them in their administrative procedures and notably :**

- Asylum applications : we help them complete their application for the OFPRA (French Office for Refugees and Stateless People), prepare their interview and help them with their appeal to the CNDA (National Court for asylum right) in case of an initial rejection.
- Access to their rights for those who have obtained asylum in France, and for parents of minor children who have obtained asylum.
- Requests related to residence permit : undocumented migrant women who reclaim a resident permit, issues related to the renewal of their documents.
- Administrative procedures, which are complex and ever changing with more and more of them having to be done online (sending applications via internet, booking meetings with the relevant authorities...)
- We can also inform women about their social and employment rights, procedures in case of sexist and sexual violence, discriminations...

We carry out legal monitoring on legislative and case law developments and administrative procedures in the different governmental departments of Ile-de-France. We also compile documentation and keep it up to date.

Our activity enables us, thanks to what women tell us and the interactions we have with them, to observe and analyze legislation, asylum and immigration policies, the oppressions women have faced in their countries of origin, the ones that they face here, by identifying, for example, important issues to which a solution has not yet been found or for which progress is necessary.

We work within the framework of « La Maison des Femmes de Paris » (Paris Women's Center), a space for feminist initiatives and solidarity, which, in addition to welcoming all women that come, organize group activities in multiple domains : workshops, debates, cultural events, professional insertion etc.

We have decided that this space is for women only. Victims of gender related violence or persecutions or those confronted with various difficult situations as women need these conditions to speak up and gain autonomy and agency in accessing their rights. They also need it to rebuild their lives and their futures. It is important to take women into consideration as they constitute half of foreigners or immigrants and are too often invisible.

Women constitute about half (51%) of immigrants living in France (here "immigrant" – in french "immigrés" – means people born foreigners in a foreign country even if they acquired French nationality). According to the 2018 census the immigrants were about 6.49 millions, and foreign people 4.73 millions. However, the French home office's statistics are a bit different : according to them, 3.6 millions residence permits are currently valid and 270,000 first residence permits have been awarded.

The proportion of women amongst immigrants has increased since the 60s, as the first waves of migration often were initially male. **Today, amongst foreign people who are awarded a first residence permit, 49% are women.** However, this statistic does not take into account EU citizens who are not obliged to carry a residence permit. We can neither estimate the number of undocumented migrants (maybe 400,000 ?) nor the proportion of women amongst them.

This women come from many countries : some are EU citizens, but the majority come from countries outside the EU, notably from North and sub-Saharan Africa, European countries outside of the EU, Turkey, central and oriental Asia and the Americas.

Their migration or exile journeys and their current situation (administrative, family, social, professional...) are extremely diverse. There are students, women who have arrived within the framework of family migration or admitted on a family basis (6 out of 10 of first residence permits « private and family life » were awarded to women in 2018), asylum seekers (33% are women), and international protection beneficiaries (40% are women). Some women arrive in France within the framework of legal migration, others with a tourist visa who then attempt to obtain a residence permit and some travelling long distances in very dangerous conditions.

Migrant women are vulnerable to sexist and sexual violence : like all women within a relationship or family, and in other contexts, notably when they live in precarious situations or undocumented. Women in situations of prostitution are in a large majority foreign women (at least 90%). Women who have a residence permit because of their marriage (to a French man for example) run great risks of losing it in case of violence or couple breakup, despite the legislative provisions which guarantee the right of stay for victims of violence, but which are very rarely applied.

Right to asylum for persons who are victims of or threatened by persecutions linked to their gender or their sexual orientation is explicitly recognized in France within the application of the Geneva Convention (refugee status) and the prohibition of inhumane and degrading treatment in the European Convention of Human rights (subsidiary protection). Violence and persecution by non-state actors are recognized, but it must be shown that these authorities cannot protect women from them. These women can therefore be victims of forced marriage, domestic violence, sexual violence, persecution because of their homosexuality, threat of genital mutilation, or victims of human trafficking. They can of course also be victims of political, racist, or religious persecutions and violence or indiscriminate violence in the case of a conflict. However, these oppressions often take on a specific form because of gender (rape, sexual slavery...). Here again, between the law and its application there is a gap, and many asylum requests are rejected because of difficulties related to remembering or expressing with precision and coherence extremely traumatizing and complex acts, which often, the asylum seeker has personally lived - those are at least the reasons highlighted in asylum request rejections.

Immigrant women are less **often employed than immigrant men and are often in part-time, low paid and insecure « feminized » jobs** like cleaning, retail, are domestic workers, or work in small family or community businesses. The labor market is highly gendered (and ethicized...). Like all women, they have more responsibility than men for children and household chores, which is also an obstacle to their professional activity. Their employment opportunities depend also on their knowledge of French, their diplomas, their previous professional experience. Some diplomas cannot be recognized in France (teachers, nurses...) and certain experiences cannot easily be transposed.

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