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MUNK students' environmental working group

HartHouse

Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative

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Global Conversations is a student-run digital journal led and written by
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In this special edition, Global Conversations is thrilled to welcome guest contributors from various student-led initiatives across the University of Toronto.

Thank you to our writers from the Munk School Black Students Association, the Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative, the Environmental Working Group, and Hart House Global Commons.

INTRODUCTION

The world is a complicated place. Oftentimes, it may seem like responses to some of the most serious geopolitical and socioeconomic problems come too little and too late. Take for instance the issue of climate change, where despite decades of understanding the severity, the self-made problem has only gotten worse. Instead of decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and pursuing renewable energy, the world is still on track to warm at a dangerous rate. It might also be the case that the promises that are made often end up disregarded. Despite the world agreeing to stringent environmental protocols during the 2015 Paris Agreement, global emissions are in fact on track to substantially increase.

In this issue, we asked student-led initiatives (SLIs) at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, as well as the greater University of Toronto community, to write on a pressing global issue relevant to their causes and survey the possible responses to it. These writers discussed the growing prevalence of online gender based violence; the worrying effects of climate change migration on public health; the harrowing journeys of migrant youth crossing the Western Balkans in search of safe haven; anti-Black racism in Canada and the federal government's response to it; as well the current state of the ESG movement. In each article, you will hear about the issue, and whether the policy responses to them have led to any substantial change (if at all).

We've titled this issue "Fusion," not only to hear perspectives on a wide range of topics from SLIs, but also to see the common links and challenges between some of the world's most pressing problems.

We hope you find these articles as fascinating and thought-provoking as we did.

Sincerely,
Directors of Long-Form Written Content,
Tom Chan & Sarah Klein

Editors-in-Chief,
Sara Duodu & Katie Bennett

FUSION

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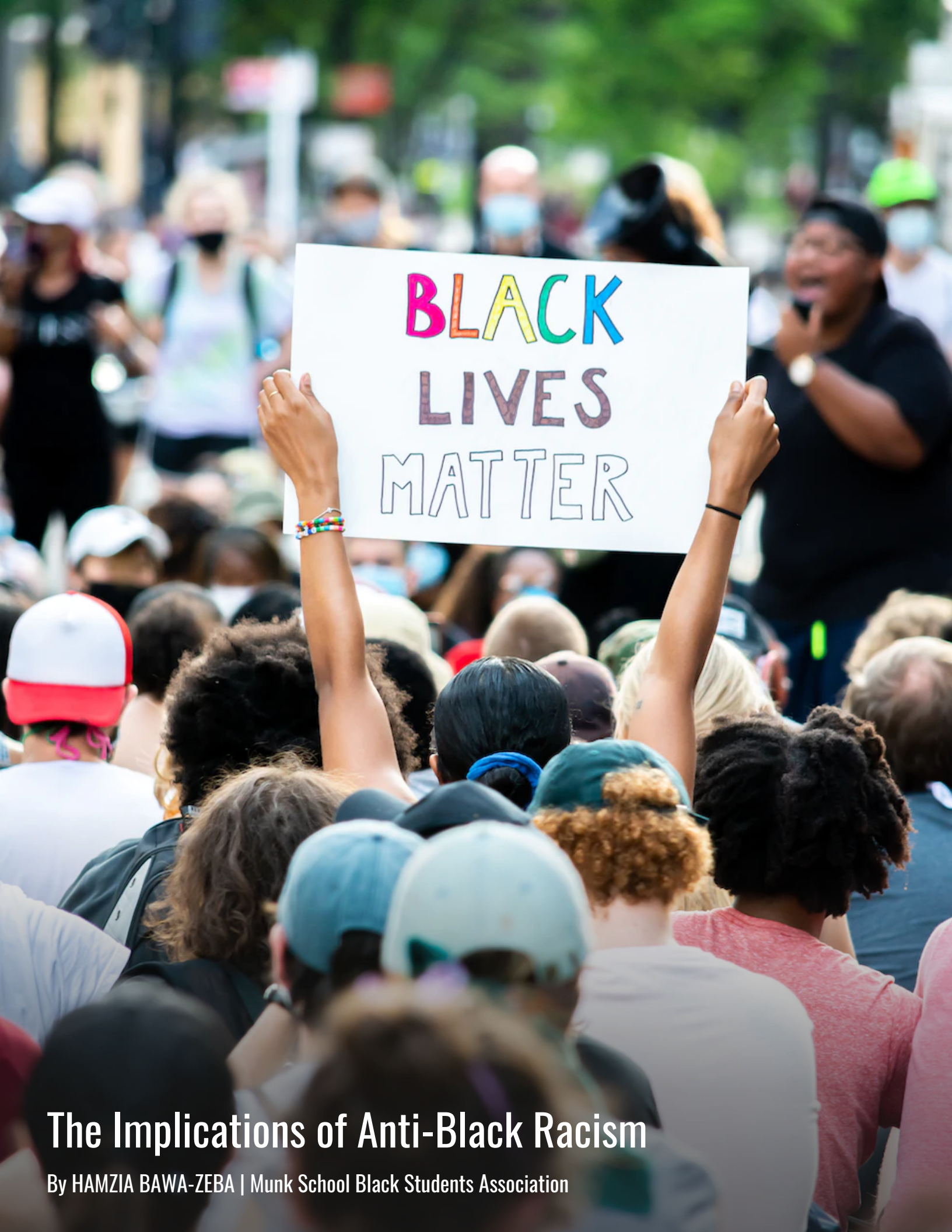

The Implications of Anti-Black Racism

By HAMZIA BAWA-ZEBA | Munk School Black Students Association

It's March 13, 2020. A Louisville, Kentucky police officer shoots and kills an unarmed 26-year-old Breonna Taylor in her home. Two months later, the chilling murder of George Floyd sparks national protests and garners global attention.

Both events, along with countless others, drew attention to the reality of anti-Black racism and reinvigorated the Black Lives Matter movement, which now has chapters globally. The New York Times referred to 2020 protests as possibly the "largest movement in U.S. history."

Anti-Black racism is lethal. Beyond the physical violence against Black and brown bodies, it infringes on basic human rights and reduces the quality of life for Black people in multiple spaces: schools, workplaces, and in everyday social interactions. Even in a field like international relations, scholarship on issues such as climate change, human rights, migration, and development disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC). Yet in the U.S for example, less than five per cent of members in the American Political Science Association identify as Black, Afro-Caribbean or African American. In Canada, it's only 2 per cent.

In various settings, Black people – and people from marginalized backgrounds in general – experience compounded forms of racism. The most widely understood is interpersonal racism, which refers to biased and discriminatory actions between individuals that can range from microaggressions to physical violence. Institutional (or structural) racism is embedded in policies and practices within institutions that perpetuate inequity, which also seeps into the systems and structures of society.

In the Canadian Context

Canada's history of racism, oppression, and discrimination is a badly kept secret. Originating with the ill-treatment of Indigenous people, racism has percolated into multiple facets of society and is present at all levels.

In 2020, Black civil servants filed a class action lawsuit against the federal government for systemic racism and discrimination in the Public Service of Canada dating back to the 1970s. Some of the claims include lack of employment opportunities due to race, failure to promote, deliberate imposition of mental distress, unjust termination and overall employment law, human rights law, and Charter infringements.

Despite existing channels to address discrimination within the public service, they tend to group visible minorities together, which can be viewed as dismissive of the unique experiences of anti-Black racism.

There is a gendered aspect to this as well. According to Amnesty International, 70 per cent of employees who joined the class action were Black women. This brings into question the government's feminist commitment and strengthens the demand for intersectional feminist frameworks.

In an effort to remedy this, and after (as written by Ian Shugart, former Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet) "deep reflection on the unjust treatment of Black people, other racialized groups, and Indigenous peoples in our society," the Canadian government announced a Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion, a set of commitments that aim to achieve measurable changes to inclusive leadership; destigmatizing conversations on racism and systemic barriers; and supporting the recruitment, retention, and advancement of Black people and other racialized groups. The plan also includes internal audits of existing systems, policies, and programs.

The Parliamentary Black Caucus released their 2023 budget which was a combined effort amongst Black-serving organizations. Their asks include creating grant opportunities linked to the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent, the appointment of a Black Equity Commissioner, disaggregated Statistics Canada data, and special attention on youth, women, Francophones, and LGBTQ communities.

There are also real dangers outside the public service as well. COVID-19 and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war threatens a global economic recession, one where racialized workers are worried that they will be disproportionately affected by this hit. A KPMG survey of self-identified Black-Canadians reveals 73 per cent are concerned about a regression in anti-racism progress at workplaces in the face of economic downturn.

On February 8, 2023, The Canadian government invested a historic $200 million in the form of a stewardship of the Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund to the Foundation for Black Communities. This investment will support Black-led, Black-focused and Black-serving non-profit organizations to build, sustain, and expand on transformational ideas and initiatives generated by Black communities.

Broader Global Context

The United Nations' 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) is a commitment from the international community that provides a concrete framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and associated intolerance. The DDPA recognizes the role of colonialism in how pervasive racism is and galvanizes advocacy efforts globally via investments in health systems, education, housing, equal opportunities in employment, technology, and many more.

Building from the DDPA in 2014, the United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/237 designated 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent. The decade has aimed to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of people of African descent around the world while advancing social justice and human rights to create prosperous communities.

In 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau officially recognized the International Decade, committing to developing a Black Canadians Justice Strategy and dedicating $50 million to support affordable housing initiatives for Black households in Canada.

Next Steps

From apartheid-era freedom fighters to abolitionists, conversations around racial equity and anti-oppression frameworks are not new. It would be a misnomer to state that things have not gotten better. They have. But as usual, there is always more to be done.

First, it must not be forgotten that racism is systemic, and that public policy can be biased. As a result, legislative justice is paramount, including upholding the rule of law: obedience to the law, equality before the law, and fairness in its application.

Public policy schools are not off the hook either. Course syllabi should be audited to ensure readings, assignment topics, and class discussions are truly global and include marginalized voices. Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression workshops should be offered to administrative staff, professors as well as students. When racialized students express concerns and share negative experiences, listen to them. Believe them.

To combat racism, we must recognize the environments it thrives in and the factors that allow for its perpetuation. The federal government's action plan, which includes demystifying racism and allowing space for open dialogue, is crucial in this step. By creating safe spaces for conversations around anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression, we remove insidious enabling factors that allow it to flourish. This also encourages the creation of allies who can move beyond the discomfort in these conversations to fight injustice. As an ally, it is important to take on the burden of educating yourself, rather than leaning on your BIPOC colleagues' lived experiences, while being receptive to feedback.

We cannot speak about anti-Black racism without advocating for accountability. From holding companies to their pledges to invest in equity-seeking practices, to financial contributions, and to social justice movements, accountability can take many forms. Accountability can also look like holding those in public office accountable, ensuring that they are committed to their mandates of equity and inclusivity, and not supporting them when they do not meet these requirements.

Race may be a social construct, but it is essential to our understanding of the world. Whether explicitly or implicitly, overt or covert, the impact of racism is clear. There has been enough talk. It is time to act with sincerity.

*The **Munk School Black Students Association** is a student-led initiative that was founded in 2020 to positively impact the development of the Black student community at Munk. It seeks to foster representation, inclusion and create safe spaces for Black and Racialized students while establishing a sustainable vehicle of anti-racism initiatives across the wider Munk School community.*

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Digitalized Gender-Based Violence

By MORGAN LEE, KULJIT KAUR, & ABEER SABZ ALI | Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative

**TW; mentions of GBV, self-harm, and suicide*

The increasing adoption and use of digital technologies around the world has facilitated new forms of gender-based violence (GBV). The term technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) encompasses any behaviour or activity carried out to inflict harm on an individual based on their gender or sexual identity and using internet or mobile technology. The term can refer to abusive language, sexual harassment, stalking, hate speech, defamation, and the distribution of private images, all of which the targets of gendered violence experienced well before the advent of the internet.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the proliferation of TFGBV, as the use of technology increased during the pandemic and therefore exposed women to more threats as they spent more time online. In this way, technology has facilitated, hastened, and intensified their experiences with gendered violence.

TFGBV can be an extension of abuse and violence experienced in the real world, but where physical and spatial bounds could formerly constrain violence, it can now reach and follow the victim regardless of their location. Online and offline violence should not be seen as two separate phenomena, as existing gender-based abuses such as stalking are now facilitated with the use of accessible and widespread digital technologies, which in turn permit new forms of harm such as deepfake pornography.

The Challenge of Global Access

The fourth industrial revolution, characterized by rapid acceleration of digital technologies and spaces, is also well known for dissolving traditional borders. Both in the physical and socio-economic dimensions, the rapid emergence of digital spaces that transcend sovereign jurisdictions and conventional boundaries has aided in the diffusion of ideas, innovations, and connections across groups that would otherwise have little opportunity to interact.

These phenomena are reinventing the way ideas spread; and generating significant transformation in the arsenal of tools available to social movements and activists. In the realm of combatting GBV, digital transformations are creating new avenues, access to new audiences, and platforms for enriched discourse in the fight against GBV. However, they are also simultaneously creating new far-reaching tools, methods, and ranges to the very perpetrators who engender GBV.

A New Type of Violence

Digitalized violence reinforces pre-existing patriarchal oppression against women, perpetuating misogyny on the systemic and individual level. Victims may experience intrusions of privacy, dangers to their autonomy, psychological discomfort, exploitation, anxiety, restrictions on their ability to express themselves, and reputational, professional, and financial repercussions.

In the three decades since the internet emerged as a new public sphere, the issue has only been exacerbated through sexual commentary, sexual exploitation, and revenge porn becoming more prevalent and is downplayed more than ever before. This largely ungoverned public sphere has created a global platform for gender-based violence that amplifies the scales and range of violence in a climate of accepted anarchy.

The consequences of TFGBV are far-reaching, with lasting impacts on the physical and mental health, social, and economic status of the victims. In extreme cases, such as that of Canadian teenager Amanda Todd, is can lead to self-harm and suicide. Because

TFGBV can infringe upon fundamental human rights – such as the right to privacy – women are less likely to participate in platforms where abuse is perpetuated, and consequently, they are deprived and discouraged of exercising their rights and freedoms, such as safe and substantive participation in public and civic spheres.

Digital violence is also more acute towards influential and high-profile women, such as politicians, celebrities, and journalists, the demographics of women most empowered to drive social change and advance women's interests. Women in these positions regularly receive misogynistic and derogatory threats for

advancing gender-based equality, or simply existing as a woman in a leadership position.

One of the more recent examples is of Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, who attributed her burnout in part to the unprecedented gendered violence she faced while in office. The attacks on female journalists, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, are a flagrant violation of both the right to free speech and the right of the general public to participate in society. Such efforts can be interpreted as intimidation and silencing tactics meant to drive women out of the public eye.

In contrast, perpetrators of TFGBV face few legal consequences. Due to the anonymity available on digital platforms and the absence of proper legislation that holds internet service providers and abusers accountable for their activities, impunity is the rule rather than the exception.

Digital Opportunities for Activism

The dissolution of borders and acceleration of digital expansion has created positive impacts for advocates against GBV, as well. The invention of digital spaces has birthed sub-sects of feminism, like digital feminism and cyberfeminism, both of which advance feminism tailored to the modern age and serve as critical facets of fourth-wave feminism.

More specifically, digital feminism is a movement where conventional feminist discourse and philosophy can employ the use of digital spaces and tools to diffuse ideas and generate positive impact. Cyberfeminism is a facet of feminism designed to critique the phenomenon of digital acceleration in the feminist movement. Both are important disciplines to explore in today's digital age.

Beyond academia, the practical applications of digital space, especially for young activists newly equipped with digital proficiency and access like no generation before them, have helped feminism and feminist philosophy reach a new generation faster and with more participation than ever before. By dissolving traditional physical borders (or more accurately, permeating them), global inclusion and accessibility are important steps towards tackling a global problem like GBV.

Attempts at Regulation

Despite the magnitude of the problem, digital platforms have largely failed to control the proliferation of gender-based violence. The complaints of victims are often ignored, while the platforms' own content moderation policies are unsuccessful at preventing harm on their own platforms.

On the other hand, there is a dearth of national and international legislation that define the roles and duties of internet service providers and social media platforms with regard to regulating abusive content. Due to the lack of regulations protecting and preventing women and girls from being harmed online, the victims have no recourse to justice.

Some jurisdictions have enacted laws to hold internet corporations liable for the content posted on their platforms. Germany has enacted the most stringent legislation to make the digital environment safer. In 2017, Germany passed *the Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks,* also known as the NetzDG law. It obliges social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, to delete content deemed unlawful under the 22 provisions of the German Criminal Law within 24 hours of receiving a complaint about the content. For systemic compliance failures, social media platforms can be fined up to 50 million euros.

With the amendments enacted in June 2021, the scope of the law has been expanded to also punish those who publish objectionable content, shifting the target solely from social media providers to users. Enforcement authorities can request access to a user's personal data to launch an investigation into the contested content. Finally, social media platforms must inform the federal criminal police office if any specific illegal content breaches some selected provisions of criminal code such as preparation of a serious violence offence endangering the state, public incitement to crime, and more.

To address online hatred and abusive content, similar legislation is being enacted or is already in force in the

United Kingdom (*Online Safety Bill*), New Zealand (Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015), Australia (Online Safety Act 2021), and the European Union (Digital Services Act Package). The efficacy of the legislation in preventing and reducing hateful content is still debated, however.

Additionally, governments often fail to specifically target TFGVB in their legislation, adopting the broader approach of reducing illegal and harmful content online. Therefore, in an attempt to make the online space for everyone and preserve freedom of expression, governments have neglected to recognize women and girls' specific need for protection from gendered violence, which has resulted in women's reduced participation in online activity and in public life with serious social, financial, and health impacts.

In addition to emphasizing the rights and freedoms of victimized groups, policymakers should be equally focused on designing policies that prevent TFGBV, provide resources and support for the victims, and ensure accountability for the perpetrators.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The growing prevalence of digitalized gender-based violence requires immediate action from governing bodies to regulate and mitigate the proliferation of this new form of violence. While patriarchal oppression permeates all parts of society, its remedy requires a sense of coherence, responsibility, accountability, and cooperation to address the issue.

Social media and technology companies should work in partnership with policymakers to meaningfully address TFGBV, which may require innovation on the part of social media companies to develop new content moderation policies and techniques, such as deploying artificial intelligence, as a means to combat this phenomenon.

Crucially, governments should create specific policies, regulations, and language to specifically account for women's online and offline experiences, rather than neglect the growing prevalence and normalization of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

*The **Equity, Diversity and Public Policy Initiative** (EDPP) is a graduate student-led organization at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. We aim to explore the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policy. We promote the adoption of an intersectional lens in policy analysis and encourage discussions of identity-based inequalities in the realm of public policy. We work in collaboration with Munk student initiatives, faculty and administration and other networks within the University of Toronto landscape.*

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The Dangerous Journey of Refugee Children on the West Balkan Route

By LISANNE KOEHLER | Hart House Global Commons

By the end of 2021, 36.5 million children around the world were displaced from their homes, leaving many unaccompanied. On their way to safety, refugee children risk becoming victims of violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking.

The Western Balkans is one of the most popular migration routes for irregular migrants seeking entry into Europe. It typically begins in Turkey, where refugees have to cross the Aegean Sea to reach Greece and then Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Migrants using this pathway to Northern Europe are mostly refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, or sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to escape war and poverty.

Observing migration on this popular path, Save the Children released a report in the fall of 2022 revealing that the violence and abuse children experience on the Western Balkans route comes primarily from police and border officers. But should officials working at our borders not be the ones that guide children to safety?

Humanitarian organizations worldwide call to improve the conditions of children migrating through the West Balkans to escape the critical situation in their home country. With a 138 per cent increase in illegal border crossings from 2020 to 2021 on the Western Balkans route, it is time for governments to act.

The effects of the Western Balkans route closure on refugees

Since 2016, the Western Balkans route has been officially closed due to a deal between the EU and Turkey which includes pushing migrants that arrive in Greece back to Turkey, but this does not solve the struggle of migration. The EU-Turkey refugee deal has helped to resolve the political dispute that started during the 2015 refugee crisis, and it provides a solution for dealing with an increasing number of refugees.

Still, it has not stopped migration or made the Western Balkans route safer. In reality, the 2016 deal leaves refugees stranded on Greek islands in overcrowded refugee camps.

NGOs have drawn attention to the inhumane conditions in those camps and the few safe pathways that lead the refugees to safer living conditions. Instead of staying in Turkey or Greece, refugee children keep pushing to get to Northern Europe through the Western Balkans route to avoid overcrowded refugee camps and in hopes of reuniting with relatives. However, since the Western Balkans route closure, entering Europe safely has become more difficult than ever.

Violence and abuse experienced by refugees on the Western Balkans route

The refugees that arrive in Greece as illegal immigrants and have only two options: since the Western Balkans route is officially closed, they get pushed back to Turkey or rely on smugglers to reach the mainland and travel the Western Balkans route.

Both options are extremely dangerous for refugees, as most violence and abuse that children experience happen during push backs, when authorities force refugees back to Turkey, or during illegal border crossings. In July 2022, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Greece in a 2014 pushback case. Eleven women and children died at sea because the Greek Coast guard dragged back their boat despite bad weather conditions.

This case is not the only one. Human Rights Watch has accused the Greek government several times of violating human rights on their borders.

Besides pushbacks, refugees' dependence on smugglers and border officers poses a risk to refugees, especially minors traveling alone. In a report published by Save the Children in September 2022, all 48 refugee children interviewed between the age of 13 and 19 indicated that they experienced physical or psychological abuse. This violence was most commonly carried out by smugglers.

Further reported abuses occurred by police officers who harassed the children, beat, or sexually abused them. Police officers taking advantage of the children's situation is especially shocking because they are the closest authority children rely on in their helpless situation. The risk of sexual and physical abuse faced by minors highlights the urgent need for better protection of refugee children to ensure their safety during travel.

Exploring the causes of child migration in the Balkans

From traveling on a boat to living in refugee camps and crossing borders illegally, it becomes apparent that refugee children's migration journey is risky. However, if violence is so common, why do children search for safety in Europe?

Children migrating on the Western Balkans route do not leave their homes voluntarily. Most of them are aware of how dangerous their journey will be but still choose to leave their homes. According to Afshan Khan, the regional director for UNICEF in Europe and Central Asia, "there are far more reasons that push children to leave their homes and fewer pull factors that lure them to Europe.'" War, climate change, and poverty are some of them. Most children arriving in Europe are from crisis zones like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, looking for a better life with wider education opportunities and, most notably, the promise of safety.

The role of humanitarian organizations

In the eyes of humanitarian organizations, the previous response of governments to the situation of children on the Western Balkans route has not been enough to guarantee safe migration. The UN Human Rights Office specifically criticizes the "restrictive laws and policies and the increased use of detention practices, with limited procedural safeguards."

Additionally, Save the Children's director Ylva Sperling condemns the lack of protection on the Western Balkans route and demands access to safe pathways. Instead of ensuring that children are protected, Europe has focussed on deterring refugees, Sperling claims. UNICEF has therefore issued six action points to highlight the measures that need to be taken by governments to prevent violence and abuse against child migrants.

However, humanitarian organizations are heavily dependent on funding. UNICEF requires $37 million USD to be able to provide humanitarian needs for children along the Western Balkans route in 2023. The organization supports local governments, organizes the provision of essential services, and provides health and social workers on the borders. Humanitarian organizations play an essential role in the protection of migrant children as they advocate for action and support children in need. Yet, their actions are limited to advocacy and humanitarian assistance.

Government response to the critical situation of child refugees

Since migration on the Western Balkans route picked up in 2019, the EU and countries on the Western Balkans route have been trying to make travel for refugees safer. However, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been criticized in the past by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for failing to protect children's rights. Thus, steps taken to make migration safer for children are often initiated by NGOs. For example, Save the Children Albania has launched a child protection program assisting the government in ensuring children's rights.

The West Balkan countries are willing to cooperate under pressure from NGOs and international organizations to ensure human rights. Yet, policies that specifically target the problem of child migration are scarce and are a collective effort rather than an individual action. This is also because the effects of migration are felt beyond the West Balkans as refugees continue to seek asylum in Northern Europe.

Policy action is therefore taken mostly on an international level. In 2020, the EU decided on a pact to support each other, improve border management, and speed up the asylum procedure, especially for minors. Similarly, the EU Commission released a 20-point Action Plan before the annual EU-Western Balkans summit last year that promises increasing cooperation.

Most measures remain bureaucratic, like the improvement of the visa procedure and refugee tracking. Yet, it also clearly addresses the safety of migrants by promising to introduce a task force specifically to fight migrant smuggling.

The urgent need for government action

The response of governments to the specific issue of the risk of child migration on the Western Balkans route has been more passive than active. It is one thing to pass laws, but another to actively change the situation of refugees. Cooperation and agreements like the 20-point

Action Plan can be a step in the right direction because they actively change the migration system.

However, governments must understand the vulnerability of children on the road and grab the issue by its roots. It is necessary to prevent violence by police officers, ensure human rights, and fight the causes that force children to leave their homes.

Humanitarian organizations have exhausted their potential by repeatedly calling for action but not being able to act on a legal level. It is now on governments in the West Balkan region to act and protect millions of children's rights.

Hart House Global Commons *explores the myriad of reasons driving refugees, asylum seekers, displaced peoples, and migrants to take significant risks in their search for a new home and consider ways to respond effectively and with empathy and respect for all peoples. Now in its 6th year, the Hart House Global Commons continues to engage students from all three U of T campuses as an interdisciplinary space to connect in real-time dialogue and learning with students from global partner locations at Ashoka University, India; Universidad de los Andes, Colombia; Sciences Po in France; University of Cape Town, South Africa; and Indiana University Bloomington in the U.S.A.*

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The Evolution of ESG

Ethical Investing to Good Business

By MARLY AUGUSTINE & GABRIELLE EVANS | Environmental Working Group

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) refers to a set of factors used by investors to assess a firm's performance beyond traditional financial factors. These factors include a firm's impact on the natural ecosystem, response to climate change, and extent of natural resource use (E); its relationship and interactions with customers, its workforce, local populations, and society at large (S); and corporate governance and management arrangements (G).

ESG investing first came about in the 1960s to encourage responsible or ethical investing and to exclude certain firms or industries (e.g., tobacco producers). The genesis of ESG as a term, and its more recent conceptualization, dates back to 2004, when the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, convened the heads of 50 financial institutions. Together, they created an initiative to promote the incorporation of non-financial considerations (environmental, social, and governance) into capital markets. The logic of this movement was that integrating environmental, social, and governance considerations made for good business as well as positive societal outcomes.

This movement facilitated the development of ESG performance metrics and ratings informed by corporate disclosures. Today, there exist numerous third-party rating agencies such as MSCI, Sustainalytics, and ISS ESG, which provide investors and other clients with ESG performance information about various companies. As of 2022, more than 90 per cent of companies on the S&P 500 and 70 per cent of Russell 1000 companies report on ESG factors to some extent.

ESG investing picked up rapidly in the last five years. From 2018 to 2021, ESG funds grew from $5 billion USD to $70 billion USD. These same funds gained $87 billion USD in the first quarter of 2022 and $33 billion USD in the second quarter. Halfway through 2022, global sustainable assets were valued at about $2.5 trillion USD.

ESG's rise comes from an updated understanding of the relationship between ESG factors, financial performance, and risk management. There is growing evidence that companies with higher ESG scores have reduced capital costs, higher financial valuation (partly driven by greater transparency and positive action), and increased shareholder satisfaction. Moreover, ESG considerations such as climate impact are not considered socially responsible or ethical; rather it is viewed as effectively managing long-term financial risks. Higher ESG ratings have become synonymous with greater resilience long-term.

Mainstreaming ESG integration into investing decisions has not been a straightforward process, however. Challenges in reliably measuring a firm's nonfinancial performance are cause for some ESG resistance. Divergence between ESG ratings and rating agencies reveals differences in the weighting of factors and pillars (e.g., environmental, social, or governance), benchmarks, and sources of data. These inconsistencies have made it difficult for investors and managers to use available ESG metrics to guide decision-making. This phenomenon has also contributed to allegations of ESG misrepresentation, investor fraud, and greenwashing.

Such concerns have led governments and regulatory bodies to move towards mandatory disclosure and measurement standardization. To combat greenwashing, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) announced that it would include funds purporting a focus on ESG in the Commission's 'Names Rule'. This would require funds that use ESG in their name to invest 80 per cent of their assets in accordance with ESG principles and forbid the use of ESG in fund names where it is not the primary evaluation tool. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is set to release and finalize draft rules for evaluating companies on ESG ratings this year.

There has been even greater momentum surrounding climate disclosures. From the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Disclosure, which came into force on January 5, 2023, to the SEC's Mandatory Climate Disclosures set for April 2023, and Canada's Climate Risk Management Guidelines for Federally Regulated Financial Institutions, governments and regulatory bodies are increasingly recognizing the value – and urgency – of climate reporting.

This flurry of mandatory reporting guidelines and the diversity of existing voluntary disclosure frameworks have led to cries for international standardization. In response, the International Sustainability Standards

Board, a subsidiary of the International Financial Reporting Standards, is creating internationally agreed upon, non-mandatory standards that can act as the baseline for national sustainability disclosures. Such standards could make mandatory reporting easier, prevent a "race-to-the-bottom" for climate action, and corporate flight.

Still, this movement is not without its critics, particularly in the US. There are allegations of departmental overreach, echoing the West Virginia v. the EPA Supreme Court Case of Summer 2022 which limited the organization's ability to control GHG emissions. West Virginia's Attorney General, Patrick Morrisey, led formal comments to the SEC on behalf of 21 Republican states, arguing the SEC is attempting to "transform itself from the federal regulator of securities into the regulator of broader social ills."

Senator Joe Manchin voiced concern that the SEC's climate disclosure rule unfairly targets fossil fuel companies – a claim that has led states such as Texas and West Virginia to bar financial firms (e.g. Blackrock) from doing state business. Others argue that the SEC's expansion of the Names Rule will not actually prevent greenwashing because their definition of ESG is too vague.

At the same time, some institutional investors continue to view their mandates as maximizing shareholder values regardless of ESG performance. The idea that environmental, social, and governance factors could improve business outcomes gained momentum only in 2005. Part of this pushback stems from the lack of clarity around whether strong ESG performance translates into fiduciary gains.

A 2015 meta-analysis combining the results of 2,200 primary studies of the impact of ESG factors on corporate financial performance found that 90 per cent of these studies indicate a non-negative relationship between the two variables. Though the study advocates for a viable business case for ESG integration, it highlights the potential significance of other factors (e.g., other systematic and idiosyncratic risks, cost for portfolio implementation) which may affect the relevance of ESG performance.

This year, we know the momentum around ESG will grow. The climate crisis, issues of social justice, and equity concerns are increasingly garnering public attention. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly evident that ignoring them poses serious risks. A growing body of evidence highlights that ESG integration isn't just good for a company's reputation – it's good for the bottom line. 2023 is set to be a big year for ESG and the movement is just getting started.

*The **Environmental Working Group** (EWG) is a student leadership initiative at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy. EWG offers public policy and global affairs students the opportunity to collaborate, learn, and expand their skills together. In particular, EWG is a platform for interested students to explore environmental issues while networking with alumni and industry professionals working in areas such as cleantech, climate policy, ESG finance, and sustainability consulting. Our group hopes to expose students to sustainability-related career paths while also providing the opportunity to practice creating policy-related content on environmental topics. EWG welcomes all MGA and MPP students. Whether you are already passionate about environmental and climate policy or just looking to learn something new, this group is for you.*

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The Impacts of Climate Change and Migration on Health

By HONG RU CHEN | Hart House Global Commons

The Provisional State of the Global Climate 2022 released by the UN presents a current update on the impacts of global extreme events due to increasing global temperatures. Some of the most impactful extreme events, such as droughts and floods, contribute to more than 70 per cent of the global population of refugees and internally displaced population.

The most vulnerable populations, who are already facing resource scarcity due to other geopolitical conflicts, are located in the regions most affected by these events. In Somalia, an ongoing drought which began in January 2021 has displaced 1 million people since the onset of the disaster, which in turn engenders growing risks of food insecurity and water shortages. In the extreme contrary, the severe damage and impacts of floods put vulnerable populations from Bangladesh to Mozambique at risk and internal displacement.

The impacts of climate emergencies on internally displaced populations are also often overlooked. While words like "natural disasters" are frequently used to describe the root of suffering for many internally displaced populations in headlines, the risks and vulnerabilities of these populations are often overlooked and receive insufficient attention and recognition from the general public. In 2021, the total events of internal displacements due to climate disasters reached 23.7 million with rising challenges faced related to exacerbating inequalities.

With such a significant number of migrants and refugees displaced as a result of climate change-related factors, it is vital to examine how migration caused by climate change and natural disasters impacts the health and overall well-being of individuals and communities. The term “health” is commonly understood as the *physical* well-being of individuals. For the migrant and refugee population, communicable diseases in particular are often placed under the spotlight of public attention due to having immediate and visible effects.

However, the effects of non-communicable diseases and mental health diseases can be neglected especially under resource-scarce conditions. According to the definition of the term "health" provided by WHO, health also includes the *mental* and *social* well-being that might not be reflected or apparent in one’s physical conditions and states. Therefore, it would be essential to improve the integration between local healthcare and support systems to achieve improvements in the long-term health and well-being of migrant and refugee populations.

Communicable diseases

The effects of climate change on the spread and emergence of communicable diseases within the migrant and refugee populations are undeniably significant. Climate change, as one of the direct or indirect drivers that results in forced displacements, increases the susceptibility and vulnerability to infectious diseases of both the migrant population and the host population.

The challenge comes from the disruption of pre-established immunity in constantly changing environments with unpredictable pathogens of risks. The host population can also become susceptible to novel pathogens introduced from migration with no systematic prevention measures in place. The disparities and scarcity in resources can further amplify the damage due to limited access to vaccines and other efficient preventive measures.

Non-communicable diseases

In contrast, non-communicable diseases tend to be less prioritized than infectious diseases as their effects are not as visible. Chronic diseases that require consistent monitoring and control contributes to 74 per cent of deaths around the world each year, which exposes the risks and challenges faced by the vulnerable and in-transit migrant and refugee population.

Non-communicable diseases require long-term and systematic efforts to maintain the health, well-being, and productivity of individuals and communities, which is often neglected during the process of migrating as there is no continuous and planned care provided.

One example illustrating the significance of non-communicable diseases is the epidemiological transition from infectious diseases to non-communicable diseases after conflicts and displacements in Syria. This is concerning, as forced displacements due to conflicts and climate change are often interrelated, with similar

challenges and barriers to face, such as scarce resources. This could consequently cause risks such as food insecurity, malnutrition, water shortages, and lack of access to medications for the migrating populations. These factors could exacerbate the burden of non-communicable diseases and decrease the long-term quality of life for many vulnerable populations. Chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, may need consistent medication intake and follow-up monitoring of disease progress that may be demanding to request in resource- constrained contexts.

In addition to the explicitly adverse circumstances to accessing direct healthcare services, the barrier to communications can also be one of the challenges that the migrants and refugee population need to overcome. These risks and challenges demonstrate the importance of preventive measures and mature health and support systems, especially in accompaniment with outbreaks of climate change related crises and emergencies.

Mental health and social aspects

In addition to impacts on physical health, it is also a well-known fact that the mental health and social well-being of migrants and refugees are often put at risk after climate-related crises and emergencies. They would suffer from various stress factors during and after the crisis that may lead them to be more prone to mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, that would heavily affect their well-being and productivity in transit and after forced relocation. Relocation is often associated with disconnected social connections and support, which can be more severe in vulnerable populations like unaccompanied minors or the aging populations. Language and cultural barriers could also be stress factors in circumstances where social and medical support are difficult to access.

Among the severely impacted, the internally displaced populations are often overlooked. The internally displaced populations suffer from the climate crisis as a direct result of destruction of their communities and infrastructures, especially among low-income communities. There could also be risks of stigmatization associated with mental health issues or seeking medical support in general, which further exacerbate the burden.

Existing measures and future directions

It is common to discuss the solutions to mitigate issues surrounding climate change and migration as separate topics with separate approaches, when they are actually intertwined events that affect each other.
It is essential to examine multiple aspects of the health and well-being of migrant and refugee populations with research, policies, and interventions from various stakeholders.

The 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework and the 2010 Global Consultation on Migrant Health are examples of the greater approaches and overarching frameworks that can help to set the direction for efforts and policies to mitigate health burdens arising from process of migration and displacements, as they advocated for raising awareness to identify and cooperation to solve the issues.

Standardized toolkits published by governmental agencies can also be helpful to guide the process to collect health information, such as countries of origin and destination and record of vaccination. Furthermore, health intervention and programs can be established in host countries, which could offer better workshops and support to improve integration into the local environment and access to the health system and support.

The strategies taken to combat climate change should be considered and implemented with awareness of the existing climate crisis and health-related impacts of forced displacements. Research and policies should be focused on the preventive measures before departure, during transit and in the host countries to achieve better results and efficiency.

Hart House Global Commons *explores the myriad of reasons driving refugees, asylum seekers, displaced peoples, and migrants to take significant risks in their search for a new home and consider ways to respond effectively and with empathy and respect for all peoples. Now in its 6th year, the Hart House Global Commons continues to engage students from all three U of T campuses as an interdisciplinary space to connect in real-time dialogue and learning with students from global partner locations at Ashoka University, India; Universidad de los Andes, Colombia; Sciences Po in France; University of Cape Town, South Africa; and Indiana University Bloomington in the U.S.A.*

Hong Ru Chen *is a fourth-year undergraduate student at University of Toronto, majoring in Immunology and Global Health. She is also a work study student at the Hart House Global Commons, which explores the theme of migration and hosts various events to encourage students from all around the world to discuss and examine issues surrounding migration. Hong Ru's academic interests are diverse and include research in global health, migration, health policies, molecular immunology, and nutritional sciences. She enjoys playing the cello and jogging in her free time.*

Meet the Team

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