WIDE+ (Feminist Transforming Economic Development) network launched the initiative #womensvoices_2018: Strengthening Innovative Solutions to protect Female Migrant and Refugee Rights. Within this initiative, NGO Atina (Belgrade, Serbia) organized a conference in Belgrade on December 10, 2018 entitled WOMEN ON THE MOVE – Position of women and girls among refugee and migrant population in the context of wider European response. This event marked the International Human Rights Day, as well as the end of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, which is dedicated to suppressing violence against women. Given the name and the purpose of the WIDE+ initiative, this conference gathered around 50 partners (Annex 7 – List of attenders) of NGO Atina, representatives of civil society organizations, international organizations, state institutions and media active in protecting and promoting human rights and rights of particularly vulnerable groups in Serbia: women and children, human trafficking victims and migrants and refugees. Attached to this report are pictures from the event in Annex 1.

The aim of the conference was to facilitate a dialogue of relevant stakeholders (women refugees, women’s organizations, international experts and institutional representatives) on current state of the affairs regarding the position of women and girls among migrant and refugee population in Serbia, in the context of wider European response. It was also envisaged for this conference to emphasize the best practices aimed at increasing the agency of refugee women and girls regarding their participation in decision-making processes. The event was further designed to increase capacities of relevant stakeholders to understand and adequately respond to the needs of refugee women and girls, especially regarding violence against women and girls. Finally, the idea was also to initiate development of a framework document setting the priorities for future advocating activities aimed to improve the position of refugee women and girls. For these purposes, NGO Atina invited honorable and relevant speakers from abroad and set three panels entitled as follows: Women’s voices are to be heard! (Panel I), Challenges and risks women are exposed to in the context of migrations: international paths and comparative remarks (Panel II) and Gender perspective of migrations.
and the violence against refugee and migrant women: the view from Serbia (Panel III). Agenda of the conference is attached to this report in Annex 2.

Panel I was realized in the form of interview with Ms. Marieme Jamme, a Senegalese businesswoman and one of BBC's 100 Women, to which she was entitled twice. She was honored as a young global leader by the World Economic Forum for her activist work in empowering and investing in young girls in Africa, Middle East and Asia, through creating entrepreneurship, science, technology, and design opportunities for them. She also developed accurate Africa a platform used by various stakeholders to measure the achievements under the sustainable development goals; Ms. Jamme also stands behind the organization I am the code, aimed at supporting one million young girls and women in order to progress in different areas (science, technologies, design etc.) by 2030. Marieme Jamme, therefore, has enormous experience in activism, in designing various solutions for women and girls, but she also has a deep and touching personal story which she shared with the participants of the conference through the course of the Panel I. In light of this, Marieme Jamme in the beginning spoke about her childhood, about traumatic experiences of being a victim of exploitation which she survived as a girl and a young woman, and about her experience of being a migrant woman. All that, in fact, gave her courage and strength to struggle, fight, win, and to go beyond – to start supporting other women and girls who are in vulnerable situations. In this regard, she emphasized that it is very important for these women to have a safe space where they can speak about their experiences, where they can be heard, and that her current work is mainly directed toward this, to provide these women and girls with such an opportunity. Thereof, Ms. Jamme also mentioned the work of NGO Atina, praising its activities with women and girls and underlining the importance of having such an organization within the community. In conclusion, she emphasized that her motto is – I am now in the position of power, so what can I do to put this in sort of a message to others – to ask themselves what they can do to help those who are in a vulnerable situation. Her passionate speech gathered a lot of attention of the audience, who had numerous questions following the story she shared.

Panel II was dedicated to the wider European perspective of women in migration and particular experiences from Sweden and Spain. The speakers to the second panel were representatives of Swedish organization Terrafem, Renas Hussein and Ahlin Mohammed, as well as Silvina Gabriela Monteros, social anthropologist from Granada, Spain. All three colleagues also have personal migratory experiences which they referred to during their presentations. The colleagues from Sweden presented the work of Terrafem, an organization founded and operating in order to support refugee women of all ages, offering advice and national helpline in more than 60 languages for refugee and migrant women all over the
country. The organization is particularly focused on supporting women and girls who have been exposed to sexual violence and the risk of forced marriage, who are repressed in their personal lives, or who have in some other way experienced abuse by family members or other persons. Additionally, and as a part of the legal advice and helpline, Terrafem offers safe shelter and other types of support, due to particular needs of refugee women. They also explained the formal process of registration which refugees in Sweden must pass in order to receive the permanent residence permit. There were some questions in respect of the refugee children in Sweden and particularly the unaccompanied minors, thus representatives of Terrafem spoke about the system of protection of these children, and their inclusion in the educational system, stating that all children get enrolled in schools and start learning the language shortly after they arrive to Sweden. Swedish colleagues also presented the migration figures in their country in the last three years. According to their data, in the 2015-2017 period, there were over 200,000 people arriving to Sweden, out of whom around 90,000 were children and 70,000 women. Attached to this report is a Power Point presentation in Annex 3.

Spanish professor, Silvina Gabriela Monteros, continued with the presentation of figures from Spain and the brief history of migrations to this country, as well as the present situation. According to the data, Spain experienced rapid increase in migrants and refugees from 2005 to 2010, mainly from Latin America, Caribbean and West African countries (many of which were Spanish colonies where Spanish language is still in official use), with a slight decrease from 2015 on. This means that the great refugee crisis from 2015 did not affect Spain in the way it affected other European countries, as this country was not on the main migratory route, nor the desired destination for the majority of people arriving to Europe. Professor Monteros also explained the possibilities and legal procedures refugees and migrants have in order to regulate their stay in Spain. One of the main points was that they have more work opportunities than in other European countries, as Spain is in need of workers (thus employers are not asked to provide any formal contracts!), as it was gravely affected by the economic crisis from 2008 on, and lost some labor force. The problem with migrant women is that they often end up in agriculture or in prostitution with almost no protection. In respect of the latest European refugee crisis, Spain also does not have an adequate asylum system nor sufficient capacities (only 22 people work in the Asylum Office) to deal with possible increase in the asylum applications. Attached are Annexes 4, 5 and 6 which refer to Spain’s examples in protection of migrant women’s rights.

During the discussion that followed, panelists compared the situation in Sweden and Spain, but also mentioned the one in Serbia, concluding that majority of refugees do not want to stay in Serbia, that the situation is the best in Sweden, as there are better protection mechanisms,
integration policies and general life perspectives, while in Spain the government is in a way misusing irregular status of refugees and migrants, as it is lacking labor force. However, the panelists agreed that previous experience has helped them a lot and helped other actors dealing with migrations and providing support to refugee and migration women, in order to improve the situation in the future and respond to possible new challenges.

Panel III was dedicated to the situation in Serbia and therefore the speakers were Serbian professionals dealing with migrations, but active in different fields: Bojana Belević from Danish Refugee Centre, Mirjana Nešić from NGO Praxis, Mirko Medenica from Women in Black and Žarka Radoja, a Kontrapress journalist. Žarka Radoja spoke about the media situation in respect of refugee situation in Serbia, comparing the situation in previous years with the one today, stating that during 2015 the media coverage was more populist and propagandistic than it is today, pointing that the similar situation is nowadays in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is experiencing large influxes of people, similarly to Serbia in 2015. She stressed that the media change in Serbia in regard to refugees happened after the moment Aleksandar Vučić, who at that time was Serbian prime minister, visited the park near the bus station in Belgrade. The media changed the attitude toward the issue and started reporting about real life problems of refugees and migrants, and their humanitarian situation. However, the problem is that journalists in Serbia do not have enough space for independent and investigative journalism, and that they depend on their editors, who are often in line with ruling political views. She nevertheless concluded that migration is a global issue and that it will shape political agenda in the future both in European context and in Serbia, and will have to be presented in the media as well.

Mirko Medenica spoke about the experiences of his organization in respect of the refugee situation, underlining that Women in Black were facing a lot of challenges in the communication with the government and with certain media and in their views of organization’s activities. He mentioned a particular case of a pro-governmental tabloid which on the front page stated that Women in Black received over a million euros to ‘work against the state’, which was a direct attempt of discrediting the organization and the activities aimed at making the government act accountably. Additionally, he spoke of a mechanism politicians are using in order to run away from responsibility and to make other actors, in this particular case NGOs, ‘guilty’, responsible, and the ones who should act. He also mentioned that his organization was present at places where reception centers for refugees and migrants were opened, trying to inter-connect and support other organizations in the field, but frequently facing obstacles by authorities to enter these state-run centers.
Bojana Balević also spoke about the media coverage of migrations and the specific refugee situation in Serbia, bringing attention to the issue of data protection, and the sensitivity of personal information of refugees (particularly refugee women), which, unfortunately, from time to time appears in Serbian media. She pointed out that this practice leads to the general question of protection, or to the question of who is working with refugees and therefore how is it possible that sensitive data reaches the media? She reminded everyone present about two main principles to be applied in the work with vulnerable individuals: do no harm, and confidentiality. She also agreed that the situation on the ground directed the shifts in media coverage and the topics present in public – for instance, gender-based violence or violence against refugee women was not the topic during late 2015 and beginning of 2016, but once the refugees started staying for longer periods of time in Serbia (after March 2016), this became an issue. She concluded that the visibility of a topic is also linked to particular political need, and illustrated this with an example that sometimes media reports that there are migrants present, and sometimes that there are no migrants whatsoever.

Mirjana Nešić spoke about the situation in Miksalište and their relations to the media, to state and other actors active in the field and present near the bus station in Belgrade. She also said that the media coverage in regard to the place she represents changes from time to time, also due to political needs and to the change of the state’s approach toward refugees and migrants. She, however, stressed that the real situation today is not much different than it was before, that it is more-or-less the same all the time, that there are people from different countries coming and staying for a while, and then leaving, mostly from Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Asian and African countries. She also mentioned that the structure of the refugees partially depends on the inter-state deals (for instance the visa free regime between Serbia and Iran which lasted until recently), but concluded that she does not believe these deals might affect the majority of those who are coming and staying in Miksalište in the future (answering the question on Serbia-Pakistan state agreement foreseen for 2019).

After the discussion initiated by the content of the Panel III, participants of the conference had the opportunity to watch a film *The beginning of some better stories*, which was realized in 2018 by NGO Atina, and which speaks about one young migrant girl and her life in Serbia. Meanwhile, and through the entire course of the event, participants in the conference room could also see the exhibition of paintings of another migrant woman who is residing in Serbia and who is involved in different empowerment activities of NGO Atina. The conference was a day-long event, and lasted from 9:30 a.m. to 17 p.m. It showed and proved the necessity of celebrating women’s work and sharing good and positive stories which give strength to
everyone to continue with their efforts in supporting vulnerable individuals and creating some better environments, environments of equal chances for all.

The Conference was covered on social media with 1490 views, 131 likes, and 7 shares. Also, newspapers reported about the event: https://sowa-media.org/svetski-poznata-aktivistkinja-marieme-jamme-na-konferenciji-zene-u-pokretu/