



**Frauen helfen Frauen e.V.  
Marburg**



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**Concept for public relations work  
with and for refugee women\* and their  
children**

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## 1. Preface

Since the end of 2019, the registered association Frauen helfen Frauen Marburg has been a project partner in the EU-funded project “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” (Marburg without domestic violence). Jointly with the university town Marburg and the registered association JUKO Marburg, we work on tackling the issue of domestic violence locally in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Under the motto “perceive, prevent and stop domestic violence in Marburg”, we seek to raise awareness for the problem of domestic violence among the city’s population, improve the concepts we employ in practise to reach the people in need of support and to provide them with the latter appropriately. Over the course of the two years of the project, we also share our gained experience on best practises with our partner cities, Sibiu in Romania and Poitiers in France.

Domestic violence is a social problem that occurs in all parts of the population, irrespective of origin, gender or class. Since the opening of the Marburg women’s shelter, we have worked with and for a variety of women\*<sup>1</sup> and continuously try to ensure that all persons affected by domestic violence feel equally welcome and well protected. At the same time, we seek to tailor our support to the specific needs of the affected women\* and their children and improve the kind of informational and material support that we can provide in an innovative and creative fashion, a task that is often challenging given the vital, time-intensive day-to-day work. Against this background, we gratefully acknowledge the support through the EU-project “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt”, which provides us with the resources to explicitly improve our ability to reach affected individuals via improved public relations work and react to the heterogenous needs of victims of domestic violence, specifically those of refugee women\* and their children.

During the first year of the project, we were able to analyse the needs of residents with experiences of displacement and complement our existing offers to explicitly consider their needs. We developed a practical concept<sup>2</sup> for social and pedagogical work that acknowledges the specific vulnerabilities of the women\* and children in our target group. In this process, we gained valuable experience that forms the basis of the practical concepts outlined in this paper. During the second year of the project, we focus on public relation activities that are tailored to provide

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<sup>1</sup> The gender star (\*) is intended to show that gender is not tied to a specific physicality and thus irritates the socio-hegemonic two-sex division.

<sup>2</sup> See Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. Marburg (2020): Praxiskonzept für die sozialpädagogische Arbeit mit geflüchteten Frauen\* und ihren Kindern im Frauenhaus. Erarbeitung einer diversitätssensiblen Praxis.

our target group with unobstructed access to our services. To that end we develop methods with deliberately low entry thresholds. During the process of developing these concepts we were able to entrench and further increase the intercultural opening of the association.

In order to ensure a common understanding of the relevant concepts and terms, the next two sections present considerations regarding our target group and the concept of “intercultural opening”.

## 2. Target Group

The target group of the two practice concepts developed within the framework of the “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” project are refugee women\* and their children. Our aim is not to approach these women\* and children with refugee experience with prejudice nor to identify them as a homogeneous group. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize their specific vulnerability and the resulting need for help and support. The specific vulnerability can be explained by the interlinkages of structural disadvantage through an unclear or insecure residence permit, lack of social relationships, everyday racism, language barriers and flight trauma, including exposure to sexual violence.

Oftentimes terms such as “refugee woman\*” are ascriptions that women\* would not choose themselves, as they stigmatize and homogenise.<sup>3</sup> These terms have a victimizing effect, since the woman\* is portrayed as passive and as the (helpless) “other”. They are collective terms that do not take into account the individual experiences or biographies and construct a seemingly homogeneous group. The term does not do justice to the variety of life plans and the complexity of cultural factors. There is no typical woman\* who has fled. Rather, women\* can live in very different cultural and private contexts. They have individual experiences and backgrounds. Despite the justified and relevant criticism, we speak of the target group “women\* with refugee experience” or “refugee women\*”. The underlying reason is our assumption that many of the refugee women\* share the above-mentioned vulnerabilities and therefore need the support of the women's shelter in a group-specific way. Moreover, they experience similar barriers to entry

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<sup>3</sup> See Goldner, Gloria und Hecht, Dorothea (2019) „Frauenhäuser und geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt im Aufnahmekontext – Frauenhäuser als wichtiger Raum für geflüchtete Frauen\* in: „Wir wollen Sicherheit. Anregungen für eine gender- und fluchtsensible Praxis im Umgang mit geflüchteten Frauen\*“ p.65.

that need to be removed. For this reason, including these individuals in one group seems appropriate within the framework of this project.

The “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” project helps us to explicitly address the specific vulnerability in our work by taking a closer look at the needs and life situations of that particular group. This is crucial in order to react appropriately and to further develop the intercultural opening of the association.

### 3. Intercultural opening

The concept of intercultural opening is a practice-oriented strategy for adapting and further developing the service and personnel structure in view of the social changes caused by migration and flight.<sup>4</sup> Intercultural opening means a process “[...] in which existing structures are examined for mechanisms of exclusion and in which goals and measures to eliminate these mechanisms are developed”.<sup>5</sup> In connection with the concept of “intercultural opening”, the question of the concept of culture arises. In the context of this project, culture is not understood as a static and uniform structure, but rather refers to the fact that cultures are dynamic, can change and are inconsistent. This means that cultural values and norms are the subject of negotiation processes and thus change, adapt and overlap.<sup>6</sup>

Based on this definition, it becomes clear that the concept of intercultural opening is about a general understanding of the processes of inclusion and exclusion. Linked to this is the requirement to recognize the potentials and resources of women\*, to use similarities and differences productively and to learn from each other. But also, to recognize, name and dismantle barriers and exclusion mechanisms. Against this background, the intercultural opening of an association does not describe a final state that is reached at a certain time, but a continuous process of

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<sup>4</sup> The conceptual development of intercultural opening began in the mid 1990s. Wolfgang Hinz-Rommel with his work „Interkulturelle Öffnung Sozialer Dienste“ (1995) ist he protagonist in establishing the concept.

<sup>5</sup> Panesar, Rita (2017): Wie interkulturelle Öffnung gelingt. Leitfaden für Vereine und gemeinnützige Organisationen. p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Melter, Claus (2018): „Soziale Arbeit zwischen zuschreibender Kulturalisierung und einer diskriminierungs- und rassistuskritischen Migrationspädagogik sowie der Orientierung an der Integrität jedes Menschen“ in: Nivedita Prasad (Hrsg.): Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten. p. 226-247.

change. This is a complex process on an individual and structural level with the following goals:<sup>7</sup>

- Integrating an intercultural, anti-discriminatory model
- Increase and qualification of the share of employees with refugee and/or migration experience
- Elimination of (hidden) exclusion mechanisms
- Development of a needs-based and effective service structure
- Qualification of the intercultural competence of all employees through further training
- Orientation of public relations work to the needs of all potential clients in order to guarantee access for all women\* and their children

The association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. Marburg has been pursuing the basic objective of intercultural opening for a long time. Thanks to the EU project “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt”, we once again have the opportunity to expand, deepen and optimize our efforts to this end. In the first year of the project, we were able to develop a concept that expands and improves the effectiveness of our needs-based service structure in the women's shelter. In group discussions with refugee residents of the women's shelter, their needs and life situations were inquired in order to develop appropriate measures and tailor-made services.

In addition, the financial resources made available gave us the opportunity to train interpreters. The aim was to offer advanced training to deepen the participants knowledge and skills in the subject of domestic violence. Another focus was on reflecting on the role of an interpreter and on the possibility of self-care in translation processes. In addition, an employee training course will take place in the near future, which deals with one's own characteristics and the critical questioning of one's own values and norms. In particular, possible stereotypes and attributions should be questioned and power structures as well as one position within the latter should be reflected on. The process that is to be initiated by this training must be understood as ongoing if it is to have a lasting effect.

The second year of the project and the concept presented in this paper focuses on the further development of public relations work. In line with the needs of refugee women\*, we aim to

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<sup>7</sup> See Hinz-Rommel, Wolfgang (1995): Interkulturelle Öffnung Sozialer Dienste / Gaitanides, Stefan (2011): Interkulturelle Öffnung Sozialer Dienste. IN: Thomas Kunz/Rita Puhl „Arbeitsfeld Interkulturalität. Grundlagen, Methoden und Praxisansätze der Sozialen Arbeit in der Zuwanderungsgesellschaft.

provide low threshold and, as far as possible, barrier-free access to our help and support services. In order to work this out systematically, the tasks and functions of public relations are described in a first step. In a second step, we evaluate to what extent refugee women\* have already been reached, how they find their way to the women's shelter or the counselling centre and what access barriers exist. These obstacles can be differentiated and concretized on the basis of our own empirical findings. Based on the results, measures and strategies for public relations work can be derived to better inform, reach and encourage refugee women\* and their children.

#### 4. Public relations

In addition to the main focus of our work, protecting women\* and children in (acute) dangerous situations from violence and accompanying them on their way to a non-violent and self-determined life, public relations are another important aspect of our work. In the technical lexicon for social work, the tasks of public relations are summarized as follows:

“In the social field, public relations work means conscious, planned and ongoing endeavours to develop and maintain understanding and trust in the public for social issues. It wants to reach as large a part of society as possible, inform and involve it, spread certain facts or opinions, introduce certain tendencies, information or controversies into public communication. In the process of public relations, the general public should be informed about the needs and difficulties of individuals or entire groups; the affected individual should find out whether and what kind of help he can expect from whom.”  
(FACHLEXIKON DER SOZIALEN ARBEIT, p. 681, own translation)

For our work with and for women\* and their children affected by violence, this means that structural violence against women\* is demonstrated with the aim of creating social awareness of the problem and changing structures. In Article 13 of the Istanbul Convention<sup>8</sup>, “the general public must be aware and understand the different manifestations of violence, its effects on children and the need to prevent such violence“. The subject must be relieved of taboos, the population must be made aware and prejudices against women\* affected by violence must be broken down. Relatives, friends and neighbours should be encouraged to intervene and take responsibility in the event of domestic violence. Public relations therefore offer the opportunity to draw attention to grievances, to position oneself publicly and to act preventively.

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<sup>8</sup> The Istanbul Convention, or „the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence“, entered into legally binding force in Germany in 2018.

Another and particularly important task of public relations work is to inform all affected women\* and their children and to encourage them to take advantage of advice or to find their way to the women's shelter in (acute) need. Article 19 of the Istanbul Convention also stipulates that those affected "[...] are adequately and promptly informed about available auxiliary services and legal measures in a language they understand".

A challenge in the implementation of the task is that the women\* who are looking for help are very heterogeneous. They are different in terms of their age, origin, religiosity, language, body and living environment. The approach and the ways in which support and assistance are effectively conveyed therefore differ in nature. Moreover, public relations work is also facing new and additional tasks and functions as a result of social change and social upheaval: it has to be methodical and strategically developed and refined in order to perceive, address and inform women\* and their children in their diversity and differences.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.1 Reaching the target group**

Refugee women\* with children that are affected by violence use the opportunity to find protection and support in the women's shelter and the counselling centre.<sup>10</sup> It has been known for years that there are many women\* with refugee experiences among the shelter residents.<sup>11</sup> However, this cannot be explained by increased experiences of violence, but rather by the fact that for these women\* the women's shelter is often the only option to escape a situation of violence.

Even if the general accessibility of women's shelters for women\* with a refugee experience can be rated positively, available evidence shows that there still exist barriers for many women\* with refugee experiences to find their way to a women's shelter or to a counselling centre.<sup>12</sup> The reasons for the difficult access to help and support services are diverse and can often be explained by structural disadvantage. This can be seen, for example, in an unclear or insecure

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<sup>9</sup> See Bader, Cornelia (2005): Was kann Öffentlichkeitsarbeit angesichts der sozialen Umbrüche und des gesellschaftlichen Wandels zur Gemeinwesenentwicklung beitragen? p.7.

<sup>10</sup> See Bericht der Bundesregierung zur Situation der Frauenhäuser, Fachberatungsstellen und anderer Unterstützungsangebote für gewaltbetroffene Frauen und deren Kinder for the year 2012.

<sup>11</sup> See Bewohner\*innen-Statistik der Frauenhauskoordinierung e.V. for the year 2019

<sup>12</sup> See Atmaca, Delal und Fried, Michiyo (2019): Vorbehalt ist Hinterhalt – Die Istanbul-Konvention in Deutschland aus Perspektive von Frauen\* mit Flucht- und Migrationsgeschichte. FHK-Fachinformation (=1/2019). p. 23.

residence permit, a lack of social relationships, experiences of discrimination, language barriers and flight trauma.

These multi-complex and structural problems must be addressed in a political and social framework. Even if we do not claim to be able to solve these difficulties comprehensively, it is always a matter of great concern to us to reach all women\* in their heterogeneity and diversity by working on cooperation and networks and designing our services in a life-oriented way. We are therefore particularly pleased that the “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” project gives us the opportunity to explicitly deal with the question of how we can methodically and strategically develop our public relations work to reach, inform and encourage refugee women\* and their children better in their everyday lives.

## **4.2 Empirical findings**

In order to conceptualize public relations work that is intended to ensure improved access to our support and assistance services, precise knowledge of the needs and requirements of the target group is a fundamental prerequisite. That way, access barriers - but also resources - can be differentiated for the target group, which can then be taken into account when planning and implementing services and measures. It was important to us not to base our knowledge solely on literature, but to complement it with the wealth of experience of experts from migration and refugee work as well as the perspectives of refugee women in Marburg.

### **4.2.1 Methodology**

The social space analysis is ideal for differentiating the access barriers and resources when using help and support services. The focus here lies on the needs of the target group in relation to their specific social spaces, locations, meeting points and institutions.<sup>13</sup> In this way, public relations measures that address women\* personally, works with their strengths, uses their resources and removes obstacles to access can be developed, taking into account their living environment. At the same time, we, as an association, will also be able to check what part we

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<sup>13</sup> See Kattwinkel Simone/Petzi, Moritz/Wein, Christopher (2019): Adaption des Sozialraumes für die Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten. In: Popescu-Willigmann/ Silvester; Ebbeler, Stefanie/ Remmele, Bernd: Erstorientierung für Geflüchtete. Eine Handreichung aus der Praxis Soziale Arbeit. p.231.

contribute to the (re-) production of certain barriers. <sup>14</sup> It turns out that the social space analysis has the potential to promote the intercultural opening of the association and to ensure that women\* with refugee experience are naturally and successfully addressed by our preventive and supportive services.

In order to develop a differentiated picture with respect to access barriers and resources that is based on the living environments, interests and needs of refugee women\*, experts from migration and refugee work were interviewed as a first step. Using a set of guidelines, a total of nine experts were asked in five interviews about their assessment of the living environment of refugee women\*. The construction of the guidelines and the implementation of the expert interviews followed established methodological standards. <sup>15</sup>

In a second step, a workshop with nine refugee women\* was organized in cooperation with the “Lebenswelten” project of the Work and Education e.V. association. In addition to the presentation of the women's shelter and the counselling centre, the workshop included the creation of cognitive city maps or mental maps from refugee women\*. They were presented with a white piece of paper with the request to indicate places that are important to them on a daily basis. After the drawing, the women\* could describe their cards themselves. The aim was to take a closer look at the resources of the women\* in terms of their social spaces, interests, social contacts and locations. The visual tool makes it possible to reconstruct everyday life in relation to rooms, institutions and places from the perspective of women\* and to focus on a medium other than language. In addition, this method already serves as public relations measure by using existing institutional and personal networks to raise awareness about domestic violence.

At this point we would like to thank all participants who shared their perspective with us!

#### **4.2.2 Results: expert interviews**

As already formulated in the introductory section (section 2) on the target group, it is our aim not to portray the group as homogeneous and "the others", but rather to deconstruct a generalizing discourse about refugee women\*. In the expert interviews, it was emphasized that it was

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<sup>14</sup> See Petzi, Moritz/Wein, Christopher (2019): Nutzbarmachung und Aktivierung des Sozialraumes für die Erstorientierung. In: Popescu-Willigmann/ Silvester; Ebbeler, Stefanie/ Remmele, Bernd: Erstorientierung für Geflüchtete. Eine Handreichung aus der Praxis Soziale Arbeit. p.248.

<sup>15</sup> See Bogner, Alexander/Littig, Beate/Menz, Wolfgang (2014): Interviews mit Experten. Eine praxisorientierte Einführung.

not possible to formulate general statements about the needs and living environments of refugee women\*, as their life situations, backgrounds and stories differ from one another.

Nevertheless, it is relevant for a strategic and methodical development and adaptation of public relations to identify and take advantage of obstacles to access and resources that may exist for women\* with refugee experience in relation to services of help. At the same time, these must be carefully interpreted and existing power relations and speaking positions must be critically reflected.

During the evaluation of the expert interviews, six access barriers or resources were identified that are based on the life situations of refugee women\* but can also apply to women\* who have no experience of flight. The following quotes are free translations of statements that were made during the interview process.

### **I. Knowledge:**

Many of the refugee women\* have not yet lived in Germany for long. Because of this, it is difficult to understand in which situations and where support can be found. For some of the women\*, the problem is that they have little or different experience with social work because there are no corresponding supportive or preventive services in their countries of origin. This level of knowledge can mean that no help is sought out in the event of domestic violence.

The experts report that although the vast majority of women\* are familiar with the phenomenon of domestic violence, their knowledge of the facets of domestic violence, their own rights and the rights of children is limited in many cases. This level of knowledge about domestic violence can mean that women \* affected by violence do not seek help or support because they do not identify situations of violence as such and do not sufficiently know their own rights:

*"In Germany women have rights and I can inform the police, but then the subtleties and in general, what is violence and what are the cases, then it becomes totally chaotic [...]."*

*"There are of course other topics where it's about children or corporal punishment, so to speak, where the limits are, [...] so I had several conversations where we first had to talk about it: Okay, what are the rights of children here in Germany? "*

In addition, the level of knowledge about the respective facilities also plays a decisive role for access and use. In the interviews it is described that, due to the level of knowledge, there are unrealistic ideas about the women's shelter and the counselling centre, which can make access to them more difficult:

*"[...] because they often don't know exactly what a women's shelter is and then they feel a bit ashamed and imagine a collection camp where women are with their children."*

*"I just think that because this wrong equation is in people's heads, that when I go to women's counselling, I have one foot in the women's shelter and that's not true at all"*

In addition to the unrealistic ideas about the functions of the women's shelter and the counselling centre, the experts also report that there are ideas about the working methods of the association that may prevent women from visiting it. Some experts report that they are repeatedly confronted with the following questions in their work with refugee women:

*"Will this cause a problem or do you expect anything of me?"*

*"Will they not leave me alone once they have my number?"*

## **II. Fear of authorities:**

As a further result it can be summarized that aspects such as structural disadvantage, (multiple) discrimination, stigmatization and experiences of exclusion often lead to fears of the authorities. These fears, in turn, can be an obstacle to seeking help and support in the event of domestic violence. Above all, the immigration authorities and the youth welfare office are named by the experts as authorities that are prone to fear.

The structural disadvantage caused by the legal residence situation was particularly emphasized. Asylum regulations and the resulting fears with regard to the immigration authorities can lead to women\* suffering from violent situations and not looking for help:<sup>16</sup>

*"So first of all, registration of residence, they are afraid. If a woman has been brought to Germany through family reunification, then of course there are problems and they think: »Aha, I will lose my residence permit here and what will happen to my children if I am deported?«*

*"That is something that always sticks to me very impressively, so there are also some misunderstandings, but that women already have in mind » If I leave my husband, I have to leave Germany.«*"

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<sup>16</sup> On this topic the umbrella organization of migrant women\* organizations (DaMigra e.V.) published the report „Schattenbericht zur Umsetzung der Istanbul-Konvention in Deutschland“ (2020). The report shows how the German legal system fails to protect migrant and refugee women\* from violence.

Another obstacle to getting help are considerable fears in relation to the youth welfare office. In many cases, women\* worry that they will be stigmatized as bad mothers and that their custody will be immediately withdrawn:

*"They are always afraid that the children will be taken away and go to German families and stay there."*

### **III. Language:**

For many of the refugee women\* who have not yet lived in Germany for a long time, the life is characterized by certain (linguistic) uncertainties, among other things, according to the experts: They live in a new environment and often have a smaller social infrastructure structure and may not have had the opportunity to learn the German language.

Especially for women\* who are still unsure of the German language, language barriers can mean that help and support services are not used:

*"But with the example of diakonia, Frauen helfen Frauen and the women's shelters: But again I can't speak a language, it will be difficult for me again, then I won't go."*

In addition to linguistic understanding, addressing people when dealing with domestic violence can also play a role in access. It has been reported, for example, that a counselling situation that is explicitly or implicitly aimed at a change in lifestyle can also be perceived as an additional uncertainty and danger:

*"But the women who work there [...] are very hard, so now they know their way around, they have a lot of experience, but in their language and in their style, [...] they are very hard, very direct. I mean okay, they show the way ahead, so they know what to expect and that first shocks the women. Let me put it this way, many women first need to be patted a little. And in the women's shelter they say zack, zack, zack, that comes your way and that is sometimes a shock."*

In general, it is important to know the subjective and cultural perspectives and interpretative patterns of refugee women\* in order to know in which way an address is most effective:

*[...] If you now use terms like »violence and women«, nobody would be brave and say: »I experience this« [...] but if you tell it differently, for example [...] »Your husband has cheated twice in a row or he broke the table, he pushed you.«"*

#### **IV. Family:**

Another perception of the experts in relation to the perceived realities of refugee women\* is that their own family is a large part of it. The reasons for this are complex, very different and of course do not only apply to refugee women\*. However, in connection with a lack of social contacts and structural disadvantage, specific access barriers can arise for women\* with refugee experience.

For example, the fear of separation or divorce often presents itself as a hurdle for refugee women\* to accept preventive and supportive services in the event of domestic violence:

*“They have a large family in their home country, they have a circle of acquaintances, they know the language, they know the area. And to come here and not have all of this infrastructure and then lose your partner is a big hurdle.”*

*“In the beginning it is so difficult when you talk to women about domestic violence [...]. The women can also get mad, they can also get angry because: »Do you want to separate us or what? Do you want to destroy my family?«”*

Starting a family can also make it more difficult for refugee women\* to access certain services. The role as a mother is time-consuming and exhausting. For women\* with a refugee experience, there is often the fact that they can at least fall back on a family support network and very few children have access to day-care centres:

*“The hurdles are then often having a lot of small children, they say: »How am I supposed to get from Cappel to here or there with three children?« It is often so difficult for them to do it on their own.”*

Some of the experts report that in certain cases the extended family can also have an influence on access to help and support services. Some women\* worry about being seen by relatives when going to a counselling centre:

*“If the women are from Marburg and have problems with the husband, then they are afraid that the husband’s brothers or buddies might be there and then say: »Hey, your wife was there.«”*

#### **V. Trust:**

It turns out that invitations to events or services are more likely to be taken up if they are sent by a person whom the women\* already know and whom they trust. According to the experts, it is particularly promising when friends or acquaintances point out certain services to women.

Accordingly, trusting relationships (outside) of one's own family structure represent a resource for refugee women\*. If necessary, they make it possible to contact an external person who can then encourage them and pass on.

In the course of the interviews, it was discussed that language, personal encounters as well as time and continuity are elementary for building a relationship of trust:

*"A lot is about personal encounters, sometimes having a coffee, accompanying them somewhere or something, because I have the impression that this interpersonal dimension plays an important role. And it takes a while for them to trust me."*

*"After five years I managed to get them to ask me where do I have to go, what can I do [...]. But you first have to build up trust before you can do it, and of course that takes a lot of time."*

*"There are many women who can speak German well, but still build trust in their mother tongue, or someone who comes from the same culture, then things are really different."*

#### **VI. Spatial and social connectivity:**

As a further result of the expert interviews, it can be described that the spatial and social connectivity of refugee women \* has a significant influence on the use of certain services.

For example, it is often more difficult for women\* who live outside the city centre in their own apartments due to the tense housing market to turn to the appropriate help and support systems:

*"I always find it very difficult to reach women from the county, for example, because they have poor bus or train connections. Because you can offer as much as you want, but if they don't have the opportunity to get there by bus, that's pretty much it."*

However, not only the spatial connection plays a role, but also the social connection. Some of the women\* are already connected to associations and institutions and like to visit certain places. It turns out that services are more likely to be used if they take place in places that are easily accessible or where the women\* and their children are already socially and spatially connected:

*"New people [come] more easily to a place [...] that is more centrally accessible, perhaps best connected somewhere, to a place where the women are already."*

*"I didn't always find it easy to reach the women so that they could just come to the events. [...] So now, for example, through a flyer or something, it was totally difficult to reach them. Most*

*of the time they didn't come, it was easier if, for example, an event was already there and you went there."*

### **4.2.3 Results: mental maps**

The results of the mental maps, which were created in the course of the workshop, serve as an extension and deepen our understanding of the access barriers and resources developed through the expert interviews.

At the beginning of the workshop, the tasks and functions of the women's shelter and the counselling and intervention centre were presented. The problem of domestic violence was discussed in the group setting. It became apparent here as well that questions regarding the forms of domestic violence and legal residence conditions were the main issue for many of the women\* present. Reservations and unrealistic ideas with regard to the women's shelter and the counselling centre also became clear during the workshop.

Through the stories and perspectives of a participant who has lived in a women's shelter herself, insecurities and fears with regard to the women's shelter could be reduced.

Subsequently, the mental maps were drawn. By analysing the places that are important in the everyday life of the refugee women\*, synergy effects can be used: The transfer of information can take place in certain places and in cooperation with certain people and associations.

In the quantitative examination of the results of the places mentioned, the women\* often seem to be tied to places of education such as language schools and German learning groups. In addition, many of the mental maps show and describe places that can be visited with children. These include places such as playgrounds, kindergartens and the stadium.

In addition, open spaces or parks are an essential point in almost all maps. The Lahn, the Lahn stairs and the Upper Town are particularly popular with all those surveyed. Some of the women\* like to visit places like hairdressing salons, nail and laser studios and feel at home there. Especially these places offer a high protection potential for women\*, because they can be there with their friends and are often exclusively among women\*. Official authorities such as the immigration office, job centre, youth welfare office or city administration do not appear on any of the cards.

### **4.3 Measures**

In order to ensure a methodical and strategic advancements of our public relations work, barriers to access and resources for refugee women\* with regard to the use of our help and support services were presented in a differentiated manner and expanded by the perspectives of the refugee women\*. It is our aim to take the results of the concept seriously and to develop concrete measures.

The process that is initiated by the developed measures must, however, be understood as an ongoing process that requires human resources even after the end of the project period. In the following, the derived measures for the public relations work of the association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. Marburg are summarized.

#### **4.3.1 Target group specific transfer of information**

The expert interviews and the workshop made it clear that many refugee women\* lack information about domestic violence, their own rights, those of their children and the existing support system. For this reason, it is important that we match the transfer of information to the specific state of knowledge in order to reduce uncertainties and unrealistic ideas about the women's shelter or the advice centre. In addition, conveying their own rights and claims to support in a life-oriented manner is crucial for the self-empowerment of refugee women\* and children:

- As part of the project, an additional flyer has already been developed, which briefly and specifically makes it clear in several languages in which situations or with which questions you can contact the Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. association. The flyer raises awareness of various forms of sexual violence. It makes it clearer that counselling discussions in the counselling and intervention centre are conducted without any preconceived views as to their outcome and do not have to lead to a women's shelter. In addition, the handy format of the flyer offers the possibility of hiding it if necessary. The flyer can now be distributed in the social environment of refugee women\* to provide information about domestic violence and the support system. Places such as hairdressing salons, nail or laser studios are also suitable for this.

- For a life- oriented communication about own rights and claims to support, we are currently planning to work together with residents of women's shelter to develop empowering projects on children's rights and child protection, women's rights and life in the women's shelter. These are then to be used as public relations work. The aim is to use the perspectives and stories of the residents of the women's shelter to increasingly reduce existing fears and insecurities. In addition, children should also be informed about their rights in a low-threshold way and in their language.

#### **4.3.2 Entry barrier aware access paths**

The interviews showed that language can be considered as a frequent access barrier. Accordingly, it is important to reflect to what extent the access to our help and support services can be made more language and diversity-sensitive:

- It is important that employees with refugee or migration experience not only work on topics in the background, but also represent them publicly. It is our aim to continue to work on depicting the diversity of society and of the residents in the team. We already benefit from the differences in age structure, multi-professionalism and the languages spoken in the team. In addition, the association tries to become more heterogeneous when it comes to new hires: We specifically and actively write in our job advertisements that we would like to encourage women of colour with or without migration or refugee experience, women\* with disabilities and transgender women\* to apply.
- In order to guarantee immediate and unbureaucratic access for all women\*, the cooperation with language mediators is essential: To offer psychosocial advice and support to refugee women\* who have little or no command of the German language in acute crisis situations a language mediation is required. This is the only way we can have a supportive and stabilizing effect, offer psychoeducation and reflect on the dynamics of violence together and develop new perspectives for the affected women\*. Accordingly, we are dependent on good financial resources and close cooperation with interpreting services. At this point we would like to thank the interpreters, especially DolMa, for their important and good work, as well as the city of Marburg for the financial support!

- Furthermore, an important task of the association's employees is to convey the advisory and support services in addition to the protective function in such a way that it corresponds to the subjective realities of refugee women\*. It is important, for example, that in the context of consultations or services, the focus is primarily on conveying security and stability before thinking about developing a new or alternative perspective on life. In addition, it makes sense to communicate topics such as divorce and separation particularly sensitively and with regard to legal and social fears and fears.
- Another aspect for a sensitive approach for women\* with refugee experience is the adjustment of appointments and consultation hours to the living environment of the refugee women\*. For example, in some cases it can be useful if times and appointments are set in such a way that women\* do not have to be afraid of being seen by relatives or friends when they go to the counselling centre. It can be noted here that the advice and intervention centre of the association is located in a doctor's house, which offers an extended protection option for women seeking help: Visiting doctors can be cited as a reason for visiting this location.

### **4.3.3 Networks and disseminator training**

The results again show that networking with associations, institutions and networks is particularly important. On the one hand, because the needs and life situations of women\* and children with refugee experience go beyond the topic of domestic violence and therefore cooperation and connections to the relevant bodies are important. On the other hand, to better reach, inform and encourage refugee women\* through familiar and personal contacts in associations, institutions and networks.

In order to adequately address the complexity of the life situations of refugee women\* and to work with appropriate cooperation partners on a case-by-case basis, we are already networked with various actors:

- Foreigners' Council and legal aid office of the foreigners' council
- Mosques
- Initiative Afghanisches Hilfswerk e.V.
- Project „Seele in Bewegung“
- German language courses at adult education centre (VHS)

- Interpretating service DolMa
- Initiatives of the urban districts
- Asylbegleitung Mittelhessen
- Diakonisches Werk Marburg-Biedenkopf Flüchtlingsberatung
- Portal Mauerstraße
- Project „Lebenswelten“

In the context of the research results, it becomes clear that the development or expansion of cooperative relationships with certain associations and institutions can be useful in order to use the resources that refugee women\* and their children have and to connect the resources to their interests.

- In particular, the expansion of contacts and networks with migrant (self-) organizations can be helpful, as there is a particularly high level of trust in these associations and communities due to shared interests and languages. As part of such cooperation, relatives, friends and acquaintances from the close social environment can be motivated and empowered to support those affected and to encourage them to seek help.
- For some of the refugee women\*, families and starting a family are central points in their living environment. Because of this, cooperation with agencies that keep an eye on the family system and family-related issues is a relevant factor for reaching women\* and children with refugee experience. Family and pregnancy counselling as well as mother-child groups are conceivable examples in this context.
- Another important measure in the course of networking is to train key people who have a familiar and personal relationship with refugee women\* and their children on the subject of domestic violence. In this way, they could function as disseminator and, in turn, contribute to removing the taboo from domestic violence, as well as providing information about the possibilities of the support system and adequately referring those affected.

#### **4.3.4 Outreach Work**

Research has shown that for some of the women\* who have had a refugee experience, access to preventive and supportive services in the event of domestic violence is influenced by spatial and social connections: Services are more likely to be taken up if they take place in places

that are easily accessible or to which the women\* and their children are already tied. As a result, outreach work provides the opportunity to reach women\* wherever they are. Through preventive services such as workshops and on-site consultation hours, resources can be used and obstacles to access removed.

- In the near future, there will be another advisory service offered by the Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. association on Richtsberg. This is tied to a contact office. In particular, women\* from the Richtsberg district, who are relatively immobile due to their family situation or spatial connection, are given low-threshold access to our help and support services. As a result, it makes sense to create advisory services in other parts of the city of Marburg, affiliated to other associations, in order to achieve immediate and direct access.
- In addition, we are planning to offer regular open consultation hours in cooperation with the Mauerstraße portal. The portal is a central point of contact for many refugee women\* and their children. In this way, they can familiarize themselves with the services and the employees of our association at a location they are familiar with and break down their initial inhibitions. If needed, counselling appointments can be made in the counselling and intervention centre of the Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. association.
- In addition, further workshops on the topic of domestic violence are planned as preventive services in cooperation with institutions and associations in the social space of refugee women\*. For example, German language courses and parents' evenings at schools or kindergartens would be ideal. Through this form of outreach work, information can be passed on in places of the social space of refugee women\* in a way that is oriented towards their living environment. In this way, women\* can be informed preventively and empoweringly about their rights and possible support systems. Workshops on topics such as divorce or separation or non-violent upbringing are also available in order to exchange experiences with people you trust, to organize your own thoughts and feelings, to gain inner stability and strength and to care for yourself as well as the children

## 5. Prospects and demands

We are pleased that the project “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” constitutes another important step in order to decisively counter domestic violence as a problem that affects society as a whole.

Due to the resources provided through the project and the personnel capacities made available for it, our association was able to develop effective concepts for the practical work with refugee women\* and their children. These promote the intercultural development of the women's shelter and the counselling centre. Through participatory research with affected women with refugee experience and with experts from refugee and migration work, we were once again able to deal more intensively with the realities of refugee women\* and children.

The aim in the first year of the project was to implement diversity-sensitive measures and life-oriented services in the socio-educational work in the women's shelter. In the second year of the project, we can now further develop our public relations work, based on the needs of refugee women\*, addresses them personally, works with their strengths, uses their resources and removes existing access barriers.

We are very happy about the results of the project so far. We especially want to thank everyone, who took part in the interviews and workshops and thus allowed their perspectives to flow into the project. We have gained valuable experience and can expand our range of support and assistance offers as needed:

- Expansion of an external ombudsman for complaints in the women's shelter
- Expansion of the visibility of diversity in the women's shelter through e.g. multilingual signage
- Development of an additional low-threshold, life-oriented and multilingual flyer
- Conception and implementation of participatory projects with the residents of the women's shelter
- Expansion of cooperation and networks
- Conception and implementation of workshops with refugee women\* in the Marburg area
- Planning of an open consultation
- Conception and implementation of a training course for interpreters on the subject of "domestic violence"

- Employee training on the subject of "Intercultural knowledge and competence"

The process that was initiated by the project “Marburg ohne Partnergewalt” must, however, be understood as an ongoing process: Working methods and offers must be checked and adapted again and again for low thresholds and accessibility. Likewise, discriminatory exclusions must be made visible in order to constantly dismantle them. It is important to us that refugee women\* and children themselves are included in this process of change. Accordingly, after the project period has expired, it is necessary to hire a qualified person who integrates the participatory conceptual ideas into the rules of the women's shelter and implements them over the long term.

In the context of the development of the practical concept for socio-educational work with refugee women, it has been shown during the first year of the project that there is a need for more intensive aftercare. We would very much like to provide further services for aftercare after a stay in a women's shelter. One such example would be a guided self-help, which would include monthly meetings in a café, as well as joint (leisure) activities. In this setting, an in-depth and helpful exchange between the women\* on various topics would be possible. However, we are currently unable to provide such a service, as we will not have the required personnel resources once the project expires.

Furthermore, as outlined in the previous sections, outreach work, in particular the expansion of cooperation relationships and disseminator/multiplier training can be considered strategic advancements in our public relations work. However, since our existing counselling services is primarily based on women actively searching them out, establishing outreach work is resource intensive and time-consuming. In order to offer open consultation hours in cooperation with the Mauerstraße portal and workshops in the social space of refugee women\* in the long term, we need additional financial and human resources.

The continuous expansion of cooperation and networks with specialist offices for refugee and migration as well as migrant (self-) organizations also requires personnel capacities. On the one hand, this is the only way to integrate other more local services in the social space of women\* with refugee experience. On the other hand, the continuous networking provides the opportunity to reach women\* with refugee experience through personal and familiar contacts. An additional resource in the context of networking is the training of key figures who have intimate and personal contact with refugee women\* and their children. In order to be able to offer such multiplier training even after the end of the project without cutting into our previous work, we require additional personnel capacities.

Finally, we as an association cannot comprehensively solve the multi-complex problems of women\* and children with refugee experience. These problems include, among other things, the right of asylum, fears of authorities, the need for childcare, German language courses and (central) apartments. That is why we demand that the political, legal and social framework is made the subject of discussion, scrutinized and changed!

## 6. Quality assurance

The association is a member of the federal association of rape crises centres and women's counselling centres in Germany (Bundesverband der Frauenberatungsstelle und Frauennotrufe Frauen gegen Gewalt e.V., bff) and the central information office of the Group of Autonomous Women's Refuges (Zentralen Informationsstelle Autonomer Frauenhäuser, ZIF) and operates according to their quality standards. The concept quality is evaluated through the collection of annual statistics in the respective facilities of the association.

The association seeks to continuously develop new and improve existing concepts, reflecting the contemporaneous socio-political debate and state-of-the-art scientific knowledge.

*We gratefully acknowledge the support of our work by the City of Marburg  
and the Association JUKO e.V. within the framework of our joint project  
“Marburg ohne Partnergewalt”.*

*We are pleased with the insights and results so far and look forward to continuing our fruitful  
collaboration in the coming six-month period.*